

RPG REVIEW

Issue #11, March 2011



Different Worlds

***Jonathan Tweet Interview ... A Multitude of Settings:
An RPG Gameworld Typology .. Tarsa Designer's
Notes and Review... Talislanta Scenario ... Athas:
Dark Sun ... Skyrealms of Jorune ... Timeline to 2090
... Blue Planet Aeroforms ... The Allure of Middle-
Earth... Realistic World Design ... FATE for Torg ...
Paul - Movie Review***

1 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Administrivia, Editorial, Letters</i>	<i>many contributors</i>	<i>p2-4</i>
<i>Hot Gossip: Industry News</i>	<i>by Wu Mingshi</i>	<i>p5</i>
<i>Interview with Jonathan Tweet</i>	<i>with Jonathan Tweet</i>	<i>p6-10</i>
<i>A Multitude of Worlds</i>	<i>by Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>p11-15</i>
<i>The Allure of Middle Earth</i>	<i>by Michael Cole</i>	<i>p16-17</i>
<i>Athas: The World of Dark Sun</i>	<i>by Julian Dellar</i>	<i>p18-19</i>
<i>Xanderan The Wizard Slayer: Talislanta</i>	<i>by Brand Robins</i>	<i>p20-24</i>
<i>Skyrealms of Jorune Retrospective</i>	<i>by Matthew Pook</i>	<i>p25-28</i>
<i>Designer's Notes and Review: Tarsa</i>	<i>by James Brian King and Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>p29-31</i>
<i>Krononauts: A History of the Future</i>	<i>by Karl Brown et. al.</i>	<i>p32-37</i>
<i>Areofoms: Blue Planet and GURPS</i>	<i>by Karl Brown</i>	<i>p38-39</i>
<i>The Torg Files: Torg with FATE</i>	<i>by Jeffrey Hosmer</i>	<i>p40-55</i>
<i>Realistic World Design</i>	<i>by Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>p56-61</i>
<i>Movie Review: Paul</i>	<i>by Andrew Moshos</i>	<i>p62-64</i>
<i>Next Issue</i>	<i>by many people</i>	<i>p64</i>

ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL

Is there such a thing as leadership in the RPG industry? Some would argue that there isn't that the industry is too diverse to have what they perceive to be traditional forms of leadership. Others would concepts of individual leadership, "great leaders" who can drive single organisations. The idea of industry-wide leadership seems implausible.

It is perhaps important to distinguish between the different types of leadership of which three can be generally considered. The first is traditional leadership, that which has a source of authority from hereditary position and time. It is difficult to imagine that this exists at all in what remains a relatively young industry which hasn't had the opportunity to develop dynastic empires like the mass media. The other two are more appropriate; transactional leadership, based around the modern theory of management, and transformative leadership, based on Weber's concept of charismatic leaders, those disruptive individuals who change values (and invariably need transactional managers to follow them).

So who have been the industry's transformative leaders? Thanks to Ben Robbins' essay on Braunstein we can identify Major David Wesely as the person who transformed table-top wargames into a roleplaying game, a concept quickly adapted by Dave Arneson, Gary Gygax and independently by Ken St. Andre. One would also have to credit Will Crowther for realising the capacity of programming the instrumental and mechanic features of RPGs with Adventure (1975) which all computer RPGs are ultimately derived from, and on top of that 1978 Roy Trubshaw's MUD (Multi-User Dungeon), from which MMORPGs are derived.. Mark Rein-Hagen certainly also deserves mention, not only for being the co-author of the highly influential *Ars Magica*, but also being primarily responsible of revitalising the industry in the 1990s through the Vampire and White Wolf lines and the association with live-action roleplay. In the

2 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011

same light it would be unfair not to include the enthusiasm and imagination of the many indie game designers who sought not only personal artistic fulfillment but also sought innovation, not the least in publishing.

A much overlooked factor in the conventional wisdom of leadership is that there is a social dialectic in play. Leaders require followers. As a result, leaders must be extremely sensitive to the wants, both stated and unstated, conscious and unconscious, that their followers and would-be followers desire. So being innovative is simply not enough. Courageous action is not enough either. Having enormous dedication and a sense of responsibility is not enough. All of these are necessary, but not sufficient for leadership; it also require insight into the minds of those who would be followers (and let's face it - *most* people would prefer to be followers rather than leaders).

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.RUN ADV11

WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!!  WOULD YOU LIKE INSTRUCTIONS?

YES
SOMEWHERE NEARBY IS COLOSSAL CAVE, WHERE OTHERS HAVE FOUND
FORTUNES IN TREASURE AND GOLD, THOUGH IT IS RUMORED
THAT SOME WHO ENTER ARE NEVER SEEN AGAIN. MAGIC IS SAID
TO WORK IN THE CAVE.  I WILL BE YOUR EYES AND HANDS.  DIRECT
ME WITH COMMANDS OF 1 OR 2 WORDS.
(ERRORS, SUGGESTIONS, COMPLAINTS TO CROWTHER)
(IF STUCK TYPE HELP FOR SOME HINTS)

YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END OF A ROAD BEFORE A SMALL BRICK
BUILDING . AROUND YOU IS A FOREST. A SMALL
STREAM FLOWS OUT OF THE BUILDING AND DOWN A GULLY.

GO IN
YOU ARE INSIDE A BUILDING, A WELL HOUSE FOR A LARGE SPRING.

THERE ARE SOME KEYS ON THE GROUND HERE.

THERE IS A SHINY BRASS LAMP NEARBY.

THERE IS FOOD HERE.

THERE IS A BOTTLE OF WATER HERE.
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So whilst we're pondering on the relationship between leaders and followers, innovation and an obsession with quality (see last editorial) we can gaze our eyes over another issue of RPG Review, a mere fanzine among the industry but with a surprising amount of good fortune. This issue is themed around the idea of different worlds, and top cab off the rank in terms of good fortune and the design and exploration of different worlds this issue Jonathan Tweet, who expresses his views as the designer of Ars Magica, Everway, Over The Edge, Talislanta and D&D. Regular contributors Michael Cole expresses what he thinks Tolkien got right with Middle-Earth and Julian Dellar does the same with Athas, the world of Dark Sun. Karl Brown follows on from last issue's "2090 worldbook" with an extensive timeline that has been composed with some pretty serious probability checking and, on a completely different tangent, delights with a new alien species for Blue Planet, Areoforms. Mention must also be made of the regular contributions of Andrew Moshos who visits Paul, the new alien to grace the silver screen and of course Wu Mingshi who somehow manages to keep track of what is happening in the industry.

Newcomers Brand Robbins and Matthew Pook contribute articles for Talislanta and Skyrealms of Jorune respectively, the former a scenario originally written eight years ago (alas, the original webpage no longer available) and the latter a retrospective review. In terms of design, Jeffrey Hosmer makes a valiant effort of adapting the old classic Torg to the contemporary FATE system. As a more contemporary review James Brian King provides his designer's notes for the BRP monograph fantasy setting, Tarsa and yours truly is given the task of reviewing it. I also contribute two articles, one on realistic world design and its importance in a willing sense of disbelief, along with a typology of the many and various RPG settings.

And that's it for this issue! Please don't forget to write, because you might notice the dearth of letters! Two thousand people read this 'zine.. Some of you *must* have something to say!

Happy gaming! Lev

3 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011

LETTERS

In RPG Review Issue 9 the article biophysics for gamers contains numerous formula. Almost every one of these is incorrect. This is due to the superscripts being lost during transferring the text between formats (my own fault). Generally if the last numeral or fraction in a formula is not preceded by an operator (x,+,- etc.) then it is likely to be a superscripted power. The correct formulae are:

Mass (kg) = $0.013 \times \text{height}^3$

Height/Length (dm) = $4.3 \times \text{mass}^{1/3}$

Surface Area (m²) = $0.13 \times \text{mass}^{2/3}$ Also $0.0069 \times \text{height}^2$

Volume (l) = $0.98 \times \text{mass}$

Strength* = $3.3 \times \text{mass}^{2/3}$

A more detailed formula is = $7.2 \times (\text{Mass}^{2/3} \times F) - \text{mass}$

Body (Wounds, hits etc.) = $3.3 \times \text{mass}^{2/3}$

Metabolic Factor = $0.046 \times \text{mass}^{3/4}$

Reflexes = $(1/\text{metabolic factor}) \times 50$

Longevity = $12 \times \text{mass}^{1/4}$

Yours,

Karl Brown



Thanks Karl for pointing that out. The PDF version has also been modified to reflect these changes. Note, as given above, it is strongly preferable not to use subscript, superscript etc in articles. It's not that modern word processors or PDFs can't deal with such formats but because text editors do not and should not. Given that the emphasis in this 'zine is to conduct everything in the most commonly accessible format, plain-ASCII text is the preferred format over all others.

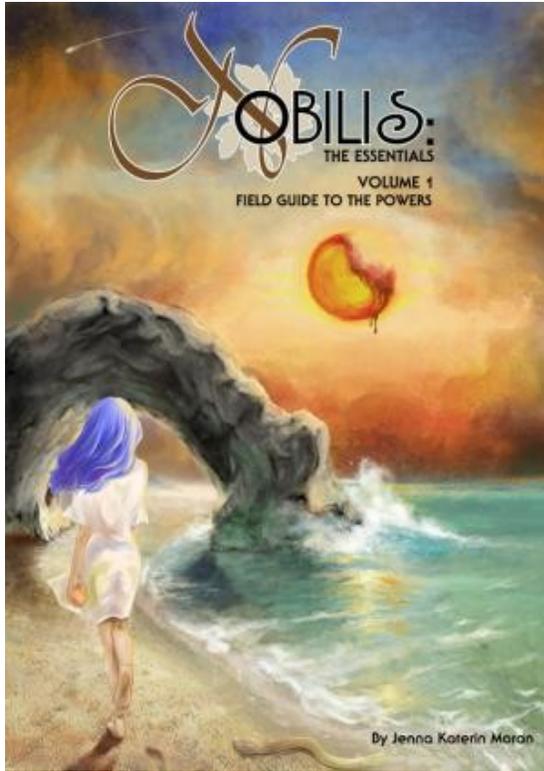
It is just as well we made these modifications. Without them some of the creature scales are.. somewhat incorrect.

HOT GOSSIP: INDUSTRY NEWS

by Wu Mingshi

Hosei bo Mr. Lev,

I see you be bit the late, again so don't act blur. Special editorial last issue, you very clever to arrow people, but ownself never do? When you make "obsession quality" RPG? Then Mingshi really have some fun, corright? Sometime Mingshi think you ai pee, ai chee, ai tua liap nee. You not know? Go get translate, that not-safe-for-work. I know, you have "Akan Datang" as screensaver on computer.



But Mingshi must thank you for showing "International Correspondence" reports [Ed: actually, thank Julian]. They look like good guess of game sales at least for United States, what they say for 2010? They say that "hobby games" increase in sales by 10%! So industry no dead yet, not long shot.

- Q1 D&D, Pathfinder, WHFRPG, Dark Heresy, Dragon Age
- Q2 D&D, Pathfinder, WHFRG, Shadowrun, Dark Heresy
- Q3 D&D, Pathfinder, WHFRPG, Dark Heresy, Dresden Files
- Q4 D&D, Pathfinder, Dark Heresy, Dragon Age, Mutants & Masterminds

So gaming industry D&D 4th edition, D&D 3rd edition, Warhammer and sometimes something else? Maybe you should balik orredy Mr. Lev?

But hope still, the Chaosium announce that classic Cthulhu by Gaslight come back in print soon and expanded too. You know what more scary than Cthulhu by Gaslight, 1890? Cthulhu in Singapore, 1890! Maybe one day Chaosium ask Mingshi for writing. Mingshi notice that Pelgrane Press ask fans for \$1,000 donations to make Character Builder for The Trail of Cthulhu and end up with \$3000. Make sense, you need lots of characters, lah?

Also a new edition of very pretty but strange game Nobilis is published, with title Nobilis: The Essentials, Volume 1 by Eos Press. Does this mean there will be volume II and volume III and volume IV and ... you know Mingshi can count to infinity plus one?

For different enemies but same-same, Alderac Entertainment Group publish Enemies of the Empire which include many monsters, "from demonic hordes from the Shadowlands, to internal threats and conspiracies". It like Monster Manual plus Big List of RPG Plots for Legend of The Five Rings. Also, Fantasy Flight Games now publish Creatures Guide which also have stories, battles and adventures. Perhaps this new style in creature books, with built-in encounter?

Special love to RPGnow.com and all the people who buy bundle packs and donate to raise money for New Zealand and Japan earthquakes. You good people and you know who you are.

Love & kisses, Mingshi! mingshi@rpgreview.net

5 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011

JONATHAN TWEET INTERVIEW

with Johnathan Tweet

*Jonathan Tweet is a significant figure in the game design industry. With the first publication as co-author with Mark Rein*Hagen for the award-winning Ars Magica in 1987, Tweet is also the designer of the surreal Over The Edge (1992) and Everway (1995), two rules-simple narrative-heavy games, the designer of Talislanta Guidebook (3rd edition) also in 1992, and most notably the core rule books for third edition of Dungeons & Dragons. With more than twenty-five other supplements and scenarios there can be no doubt that an indelible mark has been left by Tweet on the industry. A long supporter of this publication, we are very pleased to have an the opportunity to interview Jonathan Tweet.*

Question: Welcome to RPG Review Jonathan and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. We'll start with what is a standard question; how did you get involved in roleplaying games and what are some of the most memorable moments from your early participation?



I started playing D&D in 1977, when I was 12. My dad was a professor, he learned about D&D from his students, and he got me a beginner set. I lived in hot spot that had a lot of roleplaying going on even in the early years.

One memorable event from the early years was the time that the players conspired to kill off the highest-level character (4th) by turning on him in the dungeon. There was some thin in-world explanation for why our characters would turn on our most powerful brother-in-arms, but really it was about the oldest kid in the pack getting the pack to turn on the bottom kid. We betrayed and killed our friend's character, and the player naturally ran off crying. It was ironic, such a brutal and primal act carried out through the disembodied medium of roleplaying.

And here's an old-timer story. Old-fashioned 20-sided dice were printed with the numbers 1 to 0, each number appearing twice. We would roll a six-sider along with the 20-sider: if the six-sider was 1, 2, or 3, then the 20-sider was read as 1 - 10; if the six-sider was 4, 5, or 6, then the 20-sider was read as 11 - 20. When I first ran across a 20-sider that was marked 1 to 20, I actually had trouble reading it.

In my circle of friends, I was the stingiest gamemaster, but also the one the other players liked best.

Question: Ars Magica is recognised as a milestone in roleplaying with a highly thematic and adaptive spell system, strong setting, the use of troupes of characters

and strong social ties with the covenants. What were the influences on Ars Magica's design and how do you think they

have contributed to other RPGs? Why weren't Lion Rampant's earlier production, whimsy cards, included as a core part of the game?

Ars Magica has dozens of influences because I played a lot of different RPGs as a teenager. For example, the concept of a covenant for the characters' home base was inspired by the headquarters rules in Champions. The main influence for Ars Magica was RuneQuest, especially its official game world, Greg Stafford's inimitable Glorantha. RuneQuest grounded its characters in the game world, making both the characters and the world richer. Ars Magica does much of the same. The different Houses that the wizards belong to were pretty much directly ripped off of RuneQuest's Cults of Prax, and those wizard houses later became the vampire clans and similar organizations of many other games.

Ars Magica really seems to have advanced a more story-oriented approach to roleplaying, especially through its influence on Vampire: the Masquerade.

Originally we planned to sell Whimsy Cards as part of Ars Magica, but when our schedule slipped we could no longer release Ars Magica for Gen Con. Rather than sell nothing, we published Whimsy Cards as our first product.

Question: There is an apocryphal story that Lion Rampant spent their first proceeds of sales from Ars Magica on a keg of beer. Is there is any truth to this scurrilous rumour? And if so, may I offer my hearty congratulations for such a fine decision!

We were a bunch of young people hanging out and making games, and you can bet we drank a good bit of our revenue. For that matter, I don't know if I've ever designed a game 100% sober. Game writing is an art, and alcohol has been known to lubricate the artistic process. Not that I would go to work drunk, but I always find time to work on my games while I'm a little buzzed. I guess it shows.

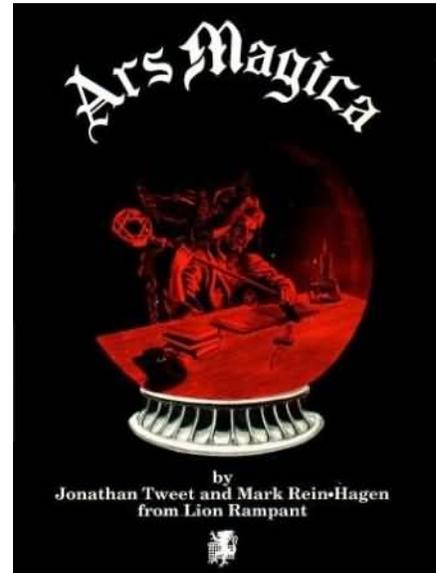
*Question: From Ars Magica, Mark Rein*Hagen went on to work on the White Wolf line; Vampire, Werewolf, Mage etc., using similar mechanics and especially the idea of mutual organisations in conflict. In contrast you went on to have to develop the surreal conspiratorial game of Over The Edge and the variant fantasy RPG, Talislanta, and then mythic and subjective Everway. These are very diverse games. Was there a common thread in your design philosophy at this point, or were you engaging in a high level of experimentation?*

With every RPG I've ever done, I've been trying to do something new and different with it. I suppose if I'd made a ton of money with one sort of game I'd have repeated myself. Instead, it's been one new strategy after another.

I first designed Over the Edge strictly for personal use. It's sort of like the first of the indie games, though it was in turn inspired by an unknown indie game that someone taught me at a con. I wrote Over the Edge when I thought I'd left the game industry, so I wasn't afraid to defy conventions. The goal with that game was that anyone could start playing right away, so it has a flexible, modern setting and minimalist rules.

The Talislanta project sort of fell in my lap. It was an exceptional opportunity to make a colorful setting more accessible, through better presentation and improved rules. It was something of an ideal project, interesting enough to be fun to work on, and simple enough to be straightforward. I had good times playtesting that game.

Everway was sort of an attempt to do Over the Edge but with a bigger budget. Again, it had a flexible setting and



minimalist rules. The big idea was to use images and symbols to inspire players' creativity. Over the Edge was so open-ended that inexperienced players often had trouble coming up with good character concepts. Everway addressed that problem by giving people images to inspire character concepts. It was a really interesting idea that should have gotten a lot more usability testing.

On the plus side, a good number of male gamers have told me that Everway is the only game that their girlfriends and wives are interested in playing. It's the only RPG that my late wife ever played. The joke is that the game sold to all the gamers with girlfriends and was cancelled for lack of sales. More seriously, the art represents a serious attempt to expand the imagery of fantasy characters beyond the standard white male options. A black gamer once told me that the black characters in the Everway art really made him feel empowered to play characters who looked like him, and I'm proud of whatever the game accomplished in terms of promoting a more global and less male-centered esthetic.

Question: More on the topic of these three games: Firstly, the third edition of Talislanta is still under some debate among fans of that gameworld for introducing various orders to the magic system, advancing the gameworld date and adding some contentious detail to the background - although the orders were in fact elaborated in later editions. Could you elaborate on why Talislanta needed these developments?

A lot of strange material had been published for Talislanta, including many sourcebooks that Stephen Michael Sechi hadn't written. Most of this material wasn't up to Sechi's standards, and he wanted to get back to the basics with the world. Changing the year, revising the magic systems, and enacting other changes were part of the effort to re-establish a version of Talislanta that Sechi liked.

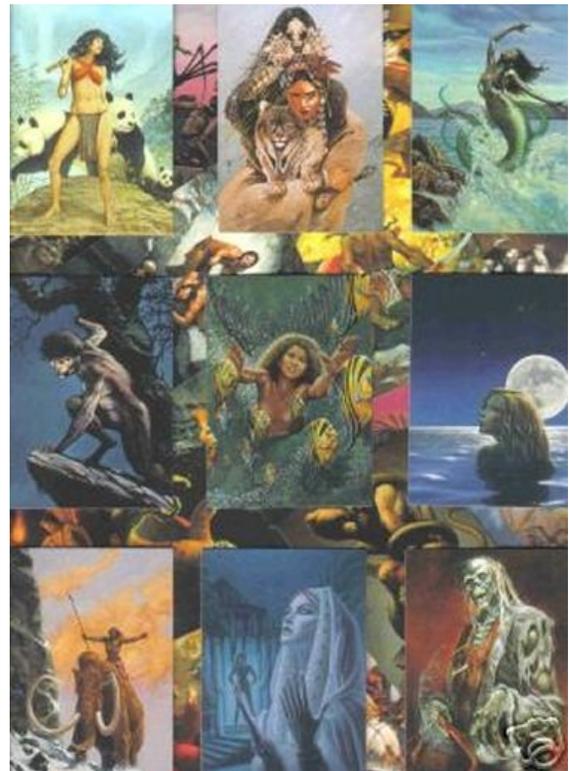
Working on the 3rd edition of Talislanta was sort of like working on the 3rd edition of D&D, which was also returning to its basics after its support material had taken it far from its origins.

Question: Secondly, Everway was big, expensive, colourful ... but not a smashing success in terms of sales. It still has an active fan base, and there is no doubt about the quality of the game or its influence, and the cards are still considered highly collectable. But what went wrong?

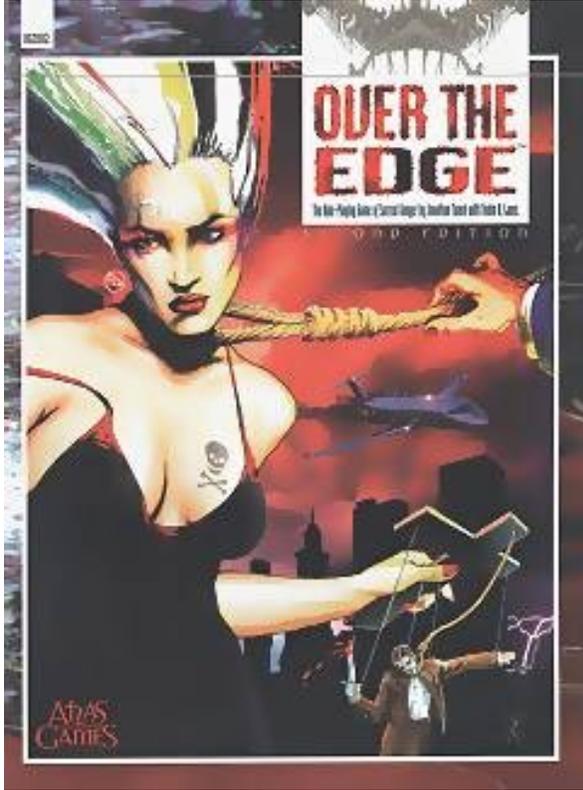
First of all, we never really tested Everway to see if it would get the reaction I hoped it would get. Second, Everway is sort of like the RPG you might imagine people in some sort of utopia playing, or maybe Finland. Its appeal is more artsy than dramatic. It doesn't even support the basic reward mechanism of watching your numbers go up; it has no rules for experience or treasure. Finally, the internal processes at Wizards was so chaotic at that time that the game had a number of strikes against it just in terms of production and expenses.

Question: Thirdly, in comparison Over The Edge was much more successful- a second edition, a number of supplements and scenarios. What went right? And Al Amarja is a surreal parallel reality version of Lampedusa isn't it?

Over the Edge has the considerable advantage of being originally designed for personal use. It could be radical because I wasn't trying to please a market, and it was highly functional because it was designed to be played, not sold.



You're pretty clever to suggest Lampedusa as the real-world Al Amarja, but the truth is more little embarrassing than that. As an American creating a game for other Americans, I was able to invent an island in the Mediterranean with no reference to actual reality. I could rely on American players not to know geography or to really care.



Al Amarja was based on Interzone and other exotic locales in books by William S. Burroughs. Robin Laws turned me onto Burroughs, and I'll be forever grateful.

Question: You also contributed to RuneQuest's Strangers in Prax, Creative Campaigning for AD&D, Black Spine (AD&D's Dark Sun), the Sorcerer's Crusade for Mage, the system design of Star Wars (2000 edition), Unknown Armies, HeroQuest... This is quite a range of of games, on top of the ones that you've been a major designer yourself. Just how much gaming do you do? (Or have done?)

I have done a ton of gaming. I've run lots of different RPGs, and played many more. My high-school D&D campaign featured thoroughly rewritten rules, and I designed a few amateur RPGs before Ars Magica. I've been extraordinarily fortunate to have a career in which I can put all this experience to use. Twenty years ago, it seemed like too many games were invented by people who hadn't learned and played enough different games. The designers were really bad at anticipating what sort of rules and support someone needed to learn and enjoy a new RPG. The whole art of designing RPGs has really advanced since I've been in the field.

Question: And of course, the 800-lb gorilla.. Third edition D&D; one of the most important contributions in the history of gaming, bringing back a classic system from the

brink, revitalising it with more consistent and contemporary mechanics (albeit with plenty of exception cases). What was that process like? How did you, Monte Cook, and Skip Williams work together?

There really isn't much better in life than to undertake a large, important task and to be given the tools, resources, time, and team mates you need to succeed. That was my experience with 3rd Edition. D&D really needed help, and we designers had marching orders to be bold. We had outstanding support from Peter Adkison, the president, and from Ryan Dancey, the brand manager. Monte and Skip were good guys to work with. We all contributed different things to the overall process. There were rocky spots, but all along we could tell that we were making progress and improving the game.

You can imagine that there were some individuals who bitterly opposed changes we were making to their beloved game, but overall we got the support we needed to move the game forward.

The 3rd Edition project also had a special meaning for me because it allowed me to return to the game of my early years and run one of my most remarkable campaigns ever. When the game rules were done, I started a campaign to see if D&D had become the sort of game I could play for fun, and the new system really delivered for me and my friends. The notes for this campaign are on my personal web site, jonathantweet.com.

Question: But you're not involved in fourth edition D&D? What do you think of that edition? What gameplans are there for you?

Fourth Edition solves a major problem that all previous editions of D&D have, which is that the per-day powers of a spellcaster don't function according to the same economy as the fighter's at-will attacks. For good and ill, too much rides on how fast the spellcaster burns through resources. Obviously, players regularly have fun playing the game despite this mismatch, but the mismatch causes needless problems with the pacing of adventures or with balance between character classes. After playing the hell out of 3rd Ed, I really can't run that system any more. The mismatch between spellcasters and non-spellcasters is too much for me.

Fourth Edition also has the virtue of getting rid of corner case rules that messed up play, usually by being too complicated. I can take the blame for some of the more complicated 3rd Ed rules.

That said, Fourth Edition has made the game too predictable. The designers have successfully prevented players from making all sorts of mistakes, but they've also vastly narrowed the range of character options. Characters are too much the same, and combat is too long and predictable.

I do have plans for a game project or two, but none of them are public at this time. Check with me at GenCon. In the mean time, I have campaign notes from past campaigns and a mixed bag of game topics on my vanity web site, if people want to see some of the stuff I've been up to over the years.

Question: Finally for a non-rpg related question - and you saw this one coming - on many occasions you've indicated a strong preference towards evolutionary psychology, the argument that psychological traits follow the principles of biological evolution. How do you respond to claims that evolutionary psychology is insufficient to explain the development of shared symbolic values and prone to over-emphasising the role of biological inclinations in human behaviour?

My father was a professor of English, and he taught me a keen appreciation of culture. I read modern poetry for fun, especially Wallace Stevens and Mary Oliver. I'm also interested in historical problems, such as who the historical Jesus really was and what effect he really had on Western civilization. Evolutionary psychology makes sense of my cultural interests. In my view, Stevens, Oliver, Jesus, Shakespeare, Caesar, and most everyone else in history was contending with a real human nature. By understanding their efforts, I think I gain a better appreciation of real things: human nature and the cultures we have built out of it. I don't see humanity's struggle with itself as an arbitrary social construct, the way I did when I studied sociology and psychology in college.

When I was younger, I believed that social roles, even gender roles, were socially constructed. I was taught that culture was fundamentally autonomous from our genes. In those days, I didn't read much poetry because I thought that art was merely an arbitrary product of culture. In the 80s, most of the evidence seemed to support my social constructionist view. Over the last twenty years, however, a lot of new evidence has come out. To me, the evidence now seems to strongly favor the idea that we have both powerful social instincts and powerful cultural norms.

That said, there is a nasty brand of sexist, racist, genetically deterministic evolutionary psychology out there. I'm against that kind of evolutionary psychology myself. I'm a feminist, an egalitarian, and a liberal.

For more information visit Jonathan's website: <http://www.jonathantweet.com/>

Or on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Jonathan-Tweet/113492368686046>

A MULTITUDE OF SETTINGS

A Typology of RPG Gameworlds

by Lev Lafayette

To think that tens of millions of individuals over the world in the past thirty-five or so years have participated in improvised story telling in the fictional settings created by the roleplaying game hobby is, quite frankly, quite staggering and certainly one that will receive some small mention in cultural history of our time in the future. But how do these various published worlds stack up? There has been, by now, more than sufficient time to generate quite a variety of styles and thematic considerations which can be reviewed with the objective to tell whether there is any particular elements which provide lasting aid in the establishment of such settings. The overall orientation is, as always, constantly seeking improvement and further improvement for the RPG industry.

As an attempt to derive a typology, a simple classification is used which illustrates the key features of a multitude of settings. This is not, of course, an exhaustive study as the sheer quantity of game worlds is beyond the scope of this article. First, is the what can be described as (i) heroic fantasy, (ii) mythic fantasy, (iii) historical fantasy, (iv) modern fantasy, (v) science fantasy, and (vii) science fiction. The emphasis on the word "fantasy" will become apparent. The terms do not necessarily represent just a spatial-temporal location, as this is just the most obvious component of setting, but also setting devices in place which contribute to character generation and which can drive the narrative.

1. Heroic Fantasy

The key characteristics of this conventional fantasy is a very high degree of similarity with well-known fantasy themes and setting, which perhaps can be accurately (albeit somewhat disparagingly) described as a "quasi-medieval Tolkien-feudal-Conan soup". Included in this category are many of the D&D-derived gameworlds such as Blackmoor-Mystara (the former was incorporated into the latter), Greyhawk, Forgotten Realms, and Dragonlance. Almost archetypal, Middle-Earth is also in this category, as is Warhammer FPG's Old World, GURPS's Yrth/Banestorm, Harnmaster's Harn, Earthdawn's Barsaive, Powers & Perils's Perilous Lands and DragonQuest's Frontiers of Alusia. There are, of course, a plethora of other gameworlds which are not mentioned in this context, undoubtedly to the chagrin of some readers who will feel their favourite has been neglected.

The main advantages of these game worlds is their familiarity. Elves, Dwarves, Orcs and Halflings are recognisable fantasy races and are present in all the mentioned gameworlds; we know what these species are. For nearly all intents and purposes the Dwarves of Greyhawk, Middle-Earth and Perilous Lands are identical. The primary setting is analogous to that of the European peninsula from the iron age to the high middle-ages (although the Old World for WHFPG goes into an early modern period), again familiar to those of the main demographic who purchase RPGs. Actually, there was a very interesting market demarcation in fantasy RPGs in the early days of the industry, with D&D being explicitly "steel age" (i.e., medieval), RuneQuest taking the "bronze age", Rolemaster the "iron age" and, as mentioned, Warhammer taking the early modern period.

The world where these games are set are likewise familiar and non-magical. This is not to suggest that they do not contain magic and spell-casters, but they are secondary to normal physical expectations. The world is not magical but there is magic in the world, which can extend or temporarily alter normal physical laws. There are similar climates, seasons, astrological bodies and gravity to what one would expect. Notably most have a year of around 365 days (Harn has 360 days, Greyhawk 364, Banestorm, Middle-Earth have 365, Faerun has 365 days with leap years etc). Despite this there sometimes scant regard is paid to what is acceptable features for geography (rivers flowing over mountains and then on to the other side is a "feature" in Greyhawk and in the Perilous Lands of Powers & Perils).

These conventional fantasy RPGs are typically the most popular, partially due to their literary familiarity and partially due to their lack of exotic metaphysics and ontology. Their disadvantages are usually two-fold; the first is limits to

creative imagination. Fairly quickly it became a case of "yet another Elf, nothing new under the sun". A regular solution is this boundary limit is provide additional detail within those limits, and make minor alterations to the conventional style (e.g., the kender in Dragonlance as an alternative to halflings). Thus quite a multitude of supplements are released for the aforementioned gameworlds. A more distasteful component is that conventional fantasy replicates, uncritically, conventional prejudices, especially in relation to race and skin tone and yet typically has a low level of moral complexity.

A variant of heroic fantasy is to make the setting exotic, but in most other cases still following the conventions of heroic fantasy. This is evident in the D&D supplements SpellJammer and Ravenloft providing a "space fantasy" (but not science fantasy) in the former, and a pocket dimension of horror in the latter. The most consistently exotic example of heroic fantasy is undoubtedly Talislanta where there is next to nothing in terms of flora and fauna that can be said to be familiar; "no elves" was a key phrase to the gameworld and one that ha been followed with some vigour. Even the basic cosmology appeals to the exotically different; two suns, seven moons and a forty-nine week year.

2. Mythic Fantasy

Unlike heroic fantasy, which is largely an invention of the twentieth century, mythic fantasy derives extremely heavily from the more unfamiliar thematic considerations of religious mythology and traditional faerie tales. Included in this category are RuneQuest/HeroQuest's Glorantha and D&D's Planescape. To an large extent the White Wolf games (Vampire, Werewolf, Mage etc), despite their usually contemporary setting also fall very heavily into this category. This small but influential number is indicative of some of the inherent difficulties in designing mythic fantasy gameworlds but also the rewards of doing so when they are successful. Despite the title, *Aria: Canticle of the Monomyth*, is not necessarily an example of mythic fantasy, but rather of heroic fantasy with a strong simulationist orientation.

Familiarity in mythic fantasy is often present, but beyond the surface the more alien characteristics become notable. Glorantha has elves and dwarves for example. Everyone is familiar with what a vampire or a werewolf is. But beyond this some surprises result; the Gloranthan elves are actually walking plants, more akin to Tolkien's ents physically and with a personality closer to that of old-man willow, thoroughly alien, as elves are in real-world mythology but not in Middle Earth. The vampires and werewolves of the White Wolf games are not just monsters, but beings with a very deep sense of identity.

Unlike heroic fantasy, where the setting is primarily normal, the setting in mythic fantasy is primarily magical. In Planescape the recursive rule of three (events happen in threes), the unity of rings (the tendency of the status quo to return) and the centre of all (all is the centre in infinity) are ontological foundations, not additions, to the setting. Likewise, as has been gradually revealed over the course of the gameworld's history, Glorantha is a world where mythology determines reality.

Although not often phrased as such, mythic fantasy in RPGs is also more accessible in terms of analysis of synchronic and diachronic time, as expressed by the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. What is meant by synchronic time is the standard series of events in a narrative, even including matters of narrative flow (exposition, rising action and tension, climax, resolution, denouement). Diachronic time instead refers to the reinforcement of meaning through the reappearance of metaphor. This is particularly notable in Glorantha with the rise and fall of hubric empires (the Nysalor experiment, the Godlearners and the Empire of Wyrms' Friends, the Lunar Empire). Mention is made here of Earthdawn and Shadowrun which certainly have the potential to be mythic fantasy in this sense, but are instead heroic and science fantasy respectively.

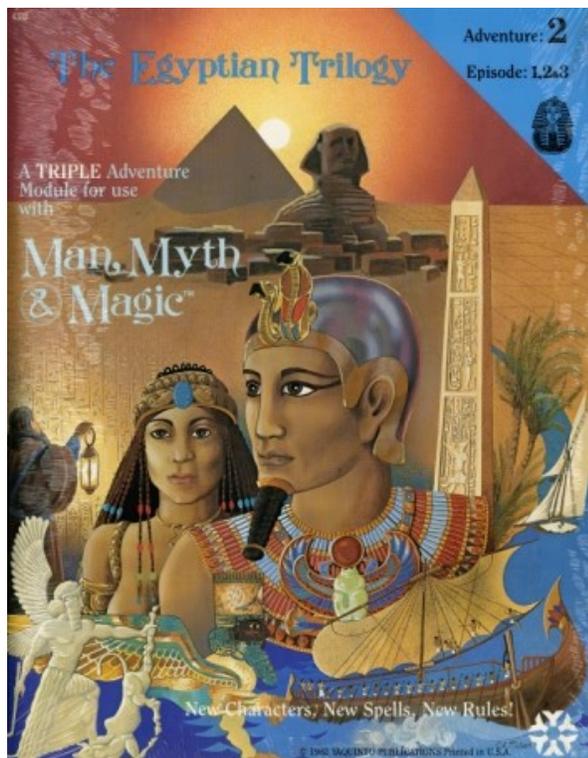
Likewise mythic fantasy has atypical geographical features. Planescape is the otherworldly innards of a clockwork universe, Glorantha a squarish flat world floating on a great ocean, and even the normal reality of White Wolf's line is derived from a systematic destruction of the imagination. The moral themes, contrary to a position of fairly obvious abstract allegiances of "good" v "evil", have more to do with context. Glorantha emphasizes cultural and racial

perspectives embodied in specific myths (the universalistic Godlearners despised by all). The White Wolf line reaches a height in defining shades of grey in *Hunter: The Reckoning*. Planescape takes what is the easily supposed D&D moral alignments and gives them a twist with an emphasis on factions.

3. Historical Fantasy

Historical fantasy has played a minor but consistent part in the various gameworld settings for RPGs, starting with the inclusion of historical pantheons in the original edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* and the use of Celt, Vikings and Mongol in the *Swords & Sorcerers* supplement for *Chivalry & Sorcery* (and the stand-alone version of C&S for feudal Japan, *Land of the Rising Sun*). As a complete game *Squinter's Man, Myth and Magic* bears particular comment as an example of the category. Putting aside the fairly primitive mechanics of the game system, the actual scenarios sought to recreate many fantastic stories of Europe and the Fertile Crescent from c4000 BC to 100 AD. Despite this setting, the stories themselves and even the title of the game, the setting does not constitute "mythic fantasy", the game does not have a mythic metaphysic. Similar comments can also be made of the "Mythic Europe" of *Ares Magic*.

In addition to these are the historical fantasy campaign packs produced for *Rolemaster* and the *Hero System* (Mythic



Egypt, Mythic Greece, Vikings etc), the historical sourcebooks for AD&D (*Charlemagne's Paladins*, *Celts*, *The Crusades* etc), and the enormous collection of historical material for GURPS (*Aztecs*, *Celtic Myth*, *China*, *Egypt*, *Greece*, *Imperial Rome*, *Japan*, *Russia*, *Vikings*). Obviously these are all written with a good consideration of the perspective of the historical participants themselves and invariably come with decent research and source material. A particularly rich source of campaign setting is achieved through various time travel mechanisms (e.g., *GURPS Infinite Worlds*). In this respect the science fiction element, setting-wise, is less significant than the diversity of historical locales, although the use of time-travelling technologies as plot devices is relatively common.

Mention must be made here of the relative lack of strict historical game books, i.e., those without any fantastic content whatsoever. There is a small number of games of historical pirates (*Pirates & Plunder*, *GURPS Swashbuckler*), the 'manifest destiny' ("Western") period of the United States (*Boot Hill*, *Western Hero*, *Aces & Eights*), the range of material for GURPS WWII, and some contemporary espionage settings (e.g., *Top Secret*, *Danger International*). It is evident that when engaging in the process of collaborative improvised story-telling that historical stories that

incorporate a sense of magical realism as appropriate to the characters is the tale have a greater sense of verisimilitude. Consider the notable popularity of even Western RPGs that include just an appropriately small amount of the fantastic (e.g., *Deadlands*, *Dogs in the Vineyard*)

4. Modern Fantasy

A similar caveat to that just stated applies for modern-era games. Although there are some strictly historical examples (e.g., *Top Secret*) with an orientation toward the cinematic (e.g., *Spycraft*) a combination of investigative-horror (*Urban*

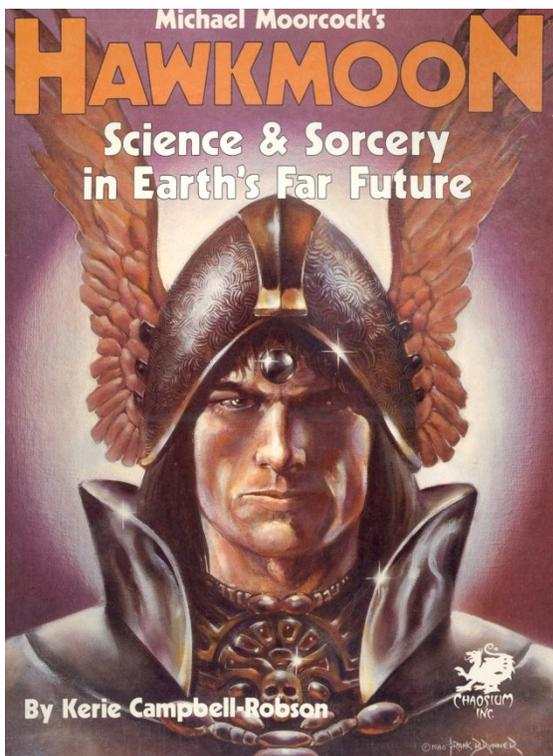
Arcana, Unknown Armies, Conspiracy X, modern Cthulhu, White Wolf games) or surreal and paranormal (e.g., Heaven and Earth, Over The Edge, Engel) seems to have greater appeal. The principle of escapism continues to apply; in pre-modern games the historical change can be sufficient and in the contemporary setting even then the exotic is required: the old joke of "Papers & Paychecks" as an interesting FRPG only works for those in an real environment that is sufficiently removed.

Whilst rarely fulfilling the repetition of theme common in mythic fantasy, requisite for the appellation 'mythic', modern fantasy RPGs often seek alternative ontological foundations for the game-world, the most notable in this regard being White Wolf's Mage, which argues for a consensus reality. Albeit portrayed in a deliberately cinematic fashion the cosmology of Torg also has a mythic cosmology, where initially separate cosms (with varying degrees of magic, technology, social integration etc) have been brought together to one place through unifying devices which provide portal capabilities.

A modern setting provides a high degree of familiarity and accessibility. The opportunity to gradually introduce components that the world is not quite what it seems provides both escapist and imaginative opportunities. Thus the setting component feeds into the narrative creating both a setting that has greater depth and believability, whilst also creating a richer plot.

5. Science Fantasy

Rod Serling defines science fiction in contrast to science fantasy as follows: "[S]cience fiction makes the implausible possible, while science fantasy makes the impossible plausible." The admixture of science and technology with magic and spells within a fiction and often spurious justifications has sometimes made the distinction between science fiction and fantasy problematic. However, as Serling's quote indicates there is minimal justification in science fantasy for the more paranormal elements whereas often science fiction engages in significant explanatory effort.



So it is too in RPG gameworlds. In some cases, such as Rolemaster's Shadow World, there is a some effort to describe how the various fantastic and magical effects occur (a nexus between dimensions, a planet bathed in "magical radiation") with a pseudo-scientific perspective. When this is carried out it is quite common for the gameworld to include devices from both science fiction and fantasy. Another gameworld which certainly fulfils this criteria is Tékumel, from Empire of the Petal Throne. In both these cases there is a definite emphasis on a fantasy world with technological artefacts being items of discovery from a distant past. Skyrealms of Jorune is an exception where the two genres are highly merged from the outset. Perhaps the most well-known example of science fantasy is the Eternal Champion series of RPGs based on the works of Michael Moorcock. Whilst Stormbringer starts at the fantastic and can move towards the technological, Hawkmoon tends in the other direction.

Various superheroic roleplaying gameworld also have this sort of setting as well, despite often having a temporal placement in the modern day. Whether it is the Marvel or DC universe or that of Champions or Mutants & Masterminds, the application of pseudo-scientific justifications for

paranormal powers ("bitten by a radioactive spider") is both diverse and usually implausible - however no more implausible than that presupposed by fantasy. On a similar trajectory one may also include some nominal science fiction games that take similar accounts, such as the mutant powers of Gamma World, or the same in Paranoia.

6. Science Fiction

By a science fiction setting what is meant is those RPGS that include fictional technologies usually in a futuristic setting, and excluding the influence of supernatural forces. With this criteria some games with a modern setting, such as Call of Cthulhu, are actually strictly science fiction games as the setting is primarily about the influence and effect of aliens on earth, a point that is common within associated literature, and even more notable on the more contemporary supplement, Delta Green. Even when thoroughly fantastic elements appear (e.g., Azathoth, the idiot God of the centre of the cosmos, time-travelling Elder Things), although notably the scientific (even speculative) foundations magic and spell-casting as glossed over. Added to this list one may also include Paranoia's Alpha Complex, despite some stylistic elements and a rather

Of course, other science fiction RPG settings are presented in a much less ambiguous manner. Classic RPG settings such as Traveller's Imperium, the Star Wars Empire setting, Spacemaster's Imperium all provide a stricter science-orientated perspective, although in each of these cases the pseudo-science of "psionics" ("The Force" etc) has a notable role. The emphasis on monarchical political systems is sometimes justified from the perspective of communication only being as fast as travel; the concept of democratic federations under the same technology is invariably overlooked, indicating - like heroic fantasy - a replication of conventional prejudices.

In comparison cyberpunk RPGs (Shadowrun being the obvious exception) are even stricter with regards to a "hard science" perspective, with Cyberpunk, Eclipse Phase, GURPS Tranship Space allowing no supernatural or paranormal effects. Notably the settings also take a more realistic approach to political and economic structures as well which suppositions of widespread disenfranchisement through corporate power and often the equivalent of corporate political institutions.

In all these cases however, the strong focus on science and technology as a replacement for magic and spells is well-stated by Arthur C. Clarke's famous dictum that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic". It also correlates, in a narrative sense, to Darko Suvin's claim that that science fiction is the mythology of modernity, by which he meant that it was a replacement for the speculations of traditional society which concentrated on the religious-fantastic.

Conclusions

The settings offered by conventional heroic fantasy are typically the most accessible as they rely on pre-existing knowledge in popular culture consciousness, which includes conventional prejudices and often significant distortions from the real-world fictions from which they are derived. Heroic fantasy with exotic settings is less accessible but provides ample opportunity for exploration and elaboration. Historical fantasy has the advantages of being both accessible and providing the opportunity for participants to engage in one of the most empowering aspects of roleplaying, the capacity to see the world through another character's eyes. If players manage to learn some history and cultural fiction as well, then this is further beneficial.

Whilst a high degree of accessibility is initially necessary to introduce a setting it does not have to remain as such. With an initial small scope, increasingly exotic, mythic or technological (for science fiction) elements can be introduced gradually and with significant outcomes. Indeed, this should be the case to help develop depth of setting. Most heroic fantasy and science fiction, when highly elaborated, becomes broad, but not deep. There is certainly no need for this, and it speaks poorly of gameworld designers who do not wish to address some of their own more problematic attitudes.

The Allure of Middle Earth

by Michael Cole

This is the third part of a series on the use of Middle-Earth as a roleplaying setting. Interestingly, this article should be considered *the first of the three*, the second and third being published in *RPG Review* issues 2 (The Spirit of Middle Earth) and 3 (Lake Town Campaign for Classic AD&D), respectively.

Why Middle Earth? Or, how the Professor got it right.

The first major advantage of setting adventures in Middle Earth is that it is already written. Creating a world for yourself is very hard and time-consuming work. It requires geography, geology, linguistics, anthropology, archeology, economics, history..., the list goes on. Whilst the players may not pick up on all of these, you can almost guarantee that the first time you slip up in maintaining the wall, someone will comment. Very few other worlds on the market offer the breadth of vision that the Professor offered. Why not take advantage of it?

The strength of Middle Earth is in its consistency. Things just work. In all of the history listed, there is a general level of saneness. The Professor spent a lot of time in making sure that things all hung together, and whilst he did make some mistakes^[1], generally he got things right. Spend some time reading "HoME" or "The Letters of JRR Tolkien", and his thoroughness will become apparent. A copy of books like Robert Foster's "The Complete Guide to Middle Earth", David Day's "A Tolkien Bestiary" and Karen Wynn Fonstad's "The Atlas of Middle Earth" just make things eaier.

As a result of this work, and more recently the films, his world is already very well known. Everyone knows what Hobbits are, and what the Shire is, and although they may not no the full detail of the world, they can pick it up so much more easily. This means less time explaining things, or "what the player character should know". This is a great advantage in speeding up game time.

The greatest advantage of Middle Earth is however, the vast level of possibilities that it offers. Many different cultures are available, and many different lands. Many different types of adventures can be had, ranging from open warfare to exploration to court intrigue to romance, and Middle Earth offers all of those and more.

Why Third Age 1640? -- Or, how Iron Crown Enterprises got it right.

There are currently three typical methods of entering Middle Earth: -

- Through Iron Crown Enterprise's publications, set in 1640 in The Third Age, fifteen hundred years prior to the War of the Ring
- Through Decipher's publications, set during the War of the Ring
- Through one of the minor variants (e.g., Eä at <http://www.earpg.com/>) or through creating your own variant (e.g., GURPS Middle-Earth).

Here, I would thoroughly recommend using ICE's baseline of Third Age 1640. The reasons are as follows.

1) It provides a reason for the PCs to go adventuring. Generally, most folks like comfort and ease, and it will normally take an event to cause adventures. Something externally must happen. TA1640 is set four years after the great plague, and such a globally catastrophic event will upset the natural order, and cause massive changes in the status quo. This provides many opportunities for adventures and reasons as to why people would have to make their own way in the world.

2) It provides a wide variety of opportunities. The world at this time is very unsettled. The major realms of Arnor and Gondor, whilst still at least partially in existence, are in decline to various extents, and have nowhere near as much influence. The Shadow, in the forms of Angmar and Dol Guldur, is certainly prevalent but is definitely not all-encompassing. In short, it is a time of relatively even conflict, and that encourages aspirations.

3) Most importantly, it is new, and allows the players to create their own story of greatness, rather than either repeating the story of the books, or even worse, acting as mere bit-players in the story of the War of the Ring. Everyone wants to take centre stage, and to either restrict players to taking part in an already-written story, or merely to support such a story to its natural already-dictated solution would be annoying. TA1640 is far enough before the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* that the players can have a major effect on the world without stopping the events of the close of the age from occurring.

I might also add the ICE materials are extremely good, and whilst many are now rare and expensive, are well worth obtaining and using. Each of the campaign packs has enough material for several months of solid gaming, and choosing contiguous areas just makes the GMs task easier (e.g., Northern and Southern Mirkwood, Cardolan and Agmar etc). For those who want to try something that is outside the norm, modules like *The Court of Ardor* and *Shadow in The South* cater for this. *Far Harad* and *Umbar* are examples on the edge of the normal scope of the world from a player's perspective. Finally, there are also still quite a number of people who are dedicated to keeping Middle Earth, and in particular, the ICE vision of Middle Earth alive as a gaming resource. It would make sense to make use of this.

A System, A System for My World -- Or, how everyone seems to get it wrong.

There are many criticisms of ICE's games, *Rolemaster* and *Middle-Earth Roleplaying* concerning their suitability to the world. Personally, I do not mind the system that much and in any case the world is more important to me than the game system, as long as it is not so bad to be unplayable. The two main criticisms of the ICE systems is that the combat system is unheroic, with lots of detailed gore and deadly critical hits, and the spell system is too flashy, even if it is well organised. Both these are very different to the style that Professor Tolkien presented.

In contrast my experience of the *Decipher Lord of the Rings RPG* is that the magic system is disorganised but the presentation of magic is subtle. However I found that that the combat system took up far too much time in actual play. An interesting recommendation I have received is to use most of *Decipher's* game (character generation, skills, magic) and the combat system of *The Riddle of Steel*. Combat in *The Riddle of Steel* is based on weapon-limited maneuvers and therefore tactical choices matter, which makes combat meaningful to the story. It is also quick and deadly without being overly descriptive with the detail, which suits the sensibilities of the Professor.



I am looking forward to seeing the *Cubicle7* roleplaying game set in Middle-Earth due for release this year. Perhaps it will be the case of third time lucky and there will be an interesting character generation system, a combat system that rewards tactical choices and is deadly without being gory, and a magic system that is both organised and subtle..

[1] The dwarves allowing an insult to them to be carved on the western doors to Khazud Dum (i.e., describing the entrance to "Moria" or "Black Pit") being the most noticeable example of this.

ATHAS: THE WORLD OF DARK SUN

by Julian Dellar

“Grimacing under the heavy weight of the stone, the slave pushed on. Beads of sweat covered his brow and his tongue lolled heavily from his mouth, thick with thirst. Mercilessly the sun beat down upon him and many of his fellow slaves back’s as the overseer’s lashed out with their cruel and stinging whips across their already bloodied backs. As the drops of thick blood touched the sand, it was hungrily devoured by the thirsty sands. Cursing to himself as the man in front of him staggered and tripped, he tried to move past him but only managed to put himself off balance. Less than heartbeat passed before the stinging bite of the whip slashed evilly across his back and upon his fellow ahead. Cursing his lot, he pushed past trying to ignore the fallen man. Behind him, pitiful screams of pain echoed in his ears.”

- Day in the life of an Athasian slave worker

The DarkSun world, called Athas, is a step in a significantly different direction than the normal High Fantasy realms. No longer is Athas a verdant blue planet teeming with life, it has been reduced to a desert world ravaged by the use of defiling magic and the decay of its sun. Magic now has a cost that needs to be paid by drawing life energy from natural plant life and most users of magic are treated with outright hostility from the general public. It is also amusing to note that death from old age is a great achievement because it is rare this occurs.

It was during the cleansing wars led by Rajaat that turned Athas into the desert world that it is now, during which races like the Orcs and Pixies were made extinct. As most magic defiles the land, the rise of Psychic powers and Clerical powers has become more widespread. Clerics cannot gain their power from Gods as the Gods having long since forsaken this realm – they gain their powers from the elemental forces.

With the natural resources of the lands depleted, the lack of any major source of metal has long since also gone. Alternative tool materials like wood, obsidian and even bone is common amongst the residents. Water is the lifeblood of the world and it can often cost a man his freedom.\

Geographically, Athas is not covered by any vast oceans of water. In its stead, due to the defiling nature of magic, the world now has a vast sea comprised of silt. Travel on the silt is lethal for most creatures, as they generally sink into it and due to its soft and fluid nature suffocate. Only the massive Giants can wade through the silt sea. From anywhere around 2-3 metres under the surface the silt, it becomes harder and more compacted – but this is of little use to most creatures who simply sink and vanish from memory.

In terms of civilisation, the Tyr region (where campaigns are typically based) is made up of a series of city-states that are ruled by the iron fist of a Sorcerer King or Queen. Secretly, these Sorcerer kings are actually Dragons in various stages of metamorphosis. These main city states are Balic, Draji, Gulg, Nibenay, Raam, Tyr and Urik. Tyr was recently ruled by the Sorcerer King Kalak, but when his attempts to accelerate the Dragon metamorphosis were halted by his death, the city has now become a free city including the banning of slavery (this of course, depends on the time line of any given campaign). Other cities and places exist further out depending on the brevity of a hardy adventurer team, few return to ever speak of them.

Other realms often talk about planar travel and the various planes of existence. Athas’ has a different configuration of these planes. Surrounding Athas is “The Gray” which is a buffer zone between the Prime Material Plane and the Ethereal and Astral Planes. Trying to move into the Astral plane is further hampered by an impenetrable crystal layer. The dead of Athas find their spirits within the gray and over time they eventually decay and wither away to nothing. There is another dimension called “The Black” which is a shadow dimension that exists within everything. Shadow people reside within The Black who were once descendants of Rajaat’s Halfling servants. Halflings being the first race born on the world many millennia ago. Underneath The Black is a simple void referred to as The Hollow and this is where Rajaat is or was currently imprisoned.

18 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011

The main races that inhabit Athas include the normal High-Fantasy types but also include the Aarakocra (winged birdmen), Half-Giants, Mul (crossbreed from a human and dwarf parent), Pterran (reptilian humanoid) and Thr-kreen (giant sized mantis humanoids). Elves differ substantially as there are no real forests on Athas – so they have become leaner, very much taller and are reknown for their ability to run, they are also viewed as marauders and thieves by many. Dwarves have lost the hair they so many other worlds normally have them with; in fact they prefer to go bald especially with the constant desert heat.

“The man reached down and called upon the energy of the land to flow into him. He could feel the magical energy being pulled from the surrounding vegetation and with disregard for his actions, the plants began to wither and die. A circle of dull gray ash began spreading out from him as the very life was sucked out of the ground. It would be hundreds of years before any living plant would ever grow in this place again. The defiler cared little for his actions, he wanted only the energy to fuel his magic and blast his enemies into a fine pink mist.”

- defiler's anonymous

Paladins, Monks, Sorcerers have no place within the world of DarkSun and hence have no direct equivalent class, but all other classes have representation within Athas. Priests devote themselves either to an Element or a Para-Element and derive their power from these sources to fuel their magic abilities. Druids draw their power from the very land itself and the land spirits that inhabit it. Templars gain their magical powers by calling upon their Sorcerer-King. Wizards are split into two distinct groups – the defiler and the preserver. While the preserver seeks to keep nature untouched draw

their energy slowly to preserve life, but defilers simply grab what they can with no regard to the destruction they cause. Many people view wizardly magic as evil regardless of the type of person calling upon the power.



What appeals the most about the DarkSun campaign setting is the side step it takes when comparing it to other settings. Athas is a harsh and unforgiving world lacking in water and many other resources taken for granted in other worlds. Not only is the world about surviving against the various exotic creatures, some of which have never been seen in other settings, but it is also about surviving the elements. Slavery is an accepted form of merchandise and few will ever reach past being workers bled until

they can no longer stand from the whip. Poverty is rampant and the divide between the rich and poor is so significant that rising above ones station is impossible. This makes Athas into a harsh and exotic world. The visceral and unforgiving nature of the setting is similar to the gladiatorial pits of ancient Rome, where no quarter was given or taken. Combined this makes the experience of either playing or DMing a challenging one as it is not just the monsters that pose a threat, but the very land itself.

Further Reading: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Sun

My views of DarkSun are based around the version 3.5 edition of D&D. The version 3.5 rules for the world can be freely downloaded from <http://www.athas.org/>. DarkSun is a registered trademark of WotC.

XANDERAN THE WIZARD SLAYER

An Adventure for Talislanta

by Brand Robins

Here is the old version of the series write-up, along with the "production script" of the first episode. I've since changed format for laying out the episodes a bit, and a lot of the details are absent in the writeups, as they're basically notes to remind me which ideas to use. However, it may demonstrate the basic methods.

Formula: Xanderan strives to have a life of his own while being the instrument of vengeance for his ancestors. He gathers a group of friends about him in his travels, who act as his Scooby gang -- doing investigation and face work that he can't do while the Calling is upon him. The basic setup revolves around Xanderan tracking and fighting a Reincarnate, one of the immortal Necromancers that nearly completed genocide against his people, while his friends try to control the destruction that the battles always bring.

Theme: The series theme is that the past isn't behind us, it isn't even past. Ancient grudges, sins of the fathers, and the legacy of the Great Disaster all refuse to stay in the past, but wake to control the present. The theme also deals with what of the past can, and should, be let go and what cannot be let go without doing worse damage. Secondary themes include the unifying and healing of friendship vs. the destruction of mistrust and factionalism, the necessity of building something in the present, and the nature of family.

The first season's specific theme is that of finding one's own identity. What is it that makes us ourselves: our ancestors, our upbringing, our circumstances, our choices? Xanderan and the rest of the scoobies will all have to decide who they are.

Production Quality: Heroic Swords and Sorcery with a combination of gothic and exotic looks. The Wizard Hunter picture is, obviously, the central archetype. Most of the darker art in Talislanta is also good. In addition Conan pulps, old Swords and Sorcery pictures, and Elric works would all be good. The setting is less baroque than Exalted, with less over the top florid description, but is much more alien, with hundreds of intelligent species with their own looks and agendas.

Motifs: Old mentor/guide figures and ruins of ancient buildings will represent the influence of the past. The birdmen, losing their power of flight, show how things change and can be neither better nor worse. Ghosts represent when the past is out of balance with the present. Cemeteries show people coming to grips with leaving the past behind them, and mass graves will represent wrongs of the past. People with amnesia and/or no sense of their past will represent what happens when the past is lost as well as the search for identity. Gangs, tribes, guilds show what people do to build communities and feel like they belong. Children on the edge of coming of age, birthdays, obituaries, and works of art will represent sense of self. The road represents the journey of self-discovery.

Character Types and Drama Points: Drama Points are taken right out of Buffy: The Vampire Slayer RPG and work in much the same way as in that game. The only real difference is that Plot Twists cost a variable amount depending on what you want to do, and work like Dramatic Editing in Adventure!.

20 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011

Gaining DP in play is also as in Buffy – but with a S&S amoral twist. Heroic action is about “Great things” things beyond normal human accomplishment, rather than “good things” that are nice and sweet. Quotes that get rewarded are less glib and pop-culture and more baroque and pulpy. Getting screwed by the plot still works the same, as does supporting the Wizard Slayer when he gets all catatonic and murder-machiney. Finally, I give DPs when players come up with good ideas for sub-plots, interesting kickers for the start of a game, or toss out a good bang when I’m getting stuck on what the plot should do next. (I can hear Ron Edwards screaming at my mangling his terminology right now....) That dovetails nicely with the Dramatic Editing aspect, as players can sometimes get an essentially “free” Dramatic Edit if what they edit becomes cool enough to generate a subplot of its own.

Character creation is based on type. Heroes are made according to the “Heroic Fantasy” rules on pages 428-429 of the Tal book, Cudgels are done as standard archetypes. Heroes get 5 DPs, Cudgels get 10. Heroes buy them with XP at 2 to 1, Cudgels at 1 to 1 (because you get more XP in Tal than Buffy).

Mooks never have DPs. Minor Villians have 1 to 3. Big Bads can have 10+. Big Bads have one extra advantage in that they don’t have to be present to spend a Drama Point, nor does it have to effect only themselves. Anything that is in their domain can be effected, with the DP boosting the trait opposing the character by 10. So sneaking into a castle might normally be easy for the PCs, but when they sneak into the Big Bad’s castle things seem to go wrong, and everything gets more difficult.

Episode Guide

Type -- Premise

1. Premier (double long) -- After being beaten by Thrall bullies, Xanderan gets a vision summoning him to Omen
2. Continuity -- Xanderan and Echs go to Cymril to find clues about their parent's murderer and to Omen.
3. Stand Alone -- In Kasmir, Xanderan is caught up in a plot pitting two brothers against each other.
4. Continuity -- In one of the Foreign Legion's outposts, Xanderan finds the man who ordered his parent's murder.
5. Change of Pace -- Xanderan and Echs draw the eyes of a Virago who won't take no for an answer and a jealous muse who doesn't want to share.
6. Continuity -- Heading into the Wastelands, Xanderan saves Trag's life, Trag joins him as a sworn companion.
7. Continuity -- The trio is attacked by assassins, who claim they got their orders from the man Xanderan killed in episode 4.
8. Change of Pace -- When Trag and Echs brother get roaring drunk, they end up in jail set to be hung.
9. Continuity -- Xanderan comes to Omen, relives the lives of two of his ancestors, and finds his destiny.
10. Stand Alone -- Thieves steal Xander's newly acquired Spirit Blade, prompting a man hunt through rat-warrens.
11. Change of Pace -- Desperate for food, water, and money, Xanderan and company take on a bounty hunting gig that isn't what is appears at first.
12. Continuity -- While fighting Rajan raiders, who know something of Xander's parent's fate, Xanderan is called back to Omen. He then is called to slay a Reincarnator who is currently setting up a kingdom in the Shadowlands.
13. Continuity -- Xanderan clashes with the sorcerer minions of the Reincarnator, fights the master but is driven back, and finds out that his real parents (as well as his adopted ones) were killed by the same fiend.
14. Finale (2 part) -- In an epic battle, Xanderan, Echs and company destroy the reincarnator that killed both sets of

Xanderan's parents once and for all.

Episode Details

Episode 1: Welcome to Talislanta

Summary: Xanderan, a Xambrian, was adopted by Thrall parents and raised as their own. After a rough coming of age, he is beaten and told to leave. While dealing with the bullies, his parents are murdered, plunging him into a more dangerous quest. After nearly being killed, he had visions of a mountain of skulls, and decides he must leave his home to find his true identity, as well as the murderer of his family.

Thematic Usage: Xanderan's inability to fit into Thrall life is a result of two past actions -- his parents abandoning him, and the way the Thralls were created. Everyone blames parents for Xanderan's inability to fit in. OTOH, Eche's complete loyalty to Xanderan is a sign of the strength of family. The two interact in the murder of Xanderan's adopted parents -- when the past takes over family and crushes it. Or does it? Can Eche's and Xanderan's brotherly love save the family, overcoming the sins of the past?

Teaser: Xanderan is shown growing up, dealing with the difficulties of being a slow growing human in Thrall society. His adopted parents and brother are introduced. On the eve of his coming of age, a bug-hunt is called and Xanderan is asked to go along on this dangerous combat mission. (Motifs: Birthday and coming of age ceremony.)

First Conflict: A group of Thrall bullies gets Xanderan away from the rest of the group. They then beat him and tell him to leave, before he weakens their people. Xanderan must then deal with his brother, and his reaction to the situation. Just as things are heating up, word comes that Xanderan's adopted parents have been murdered. (Motifs: Gangs)

Second Conflict: Suspicion for the murder falls on a rat-like merchant who came into town that day. Xanderan must track the merchant, who has fled, by interrogating his servants, tracking him, and dealing with his brother's rage. (Motifs: Cemetery, ruins where the merchants are)

Twist: The merchant is innocent, but one of his slaves attacks Xanderan with a poisoned knife. He falls to the points, but is saved when a vision that summons him to Omen. Meanwhile Echs must choose between chasing his parents murderer, or trying to help his adopted brother. (Motifs: Ghosts and visions)

Final Scene: The murderer brought to justice, Xanderan and his brother leave together, determined to find out who ordered their parent's murder, and where this "Omen" is. (Motifs: The road)

Episode 2: Never Trust a Wizard

Summary: Looking to have a rare artifact, found on the body of the assassin in episode 1, identified, Eches and Xanderan come to Cymril. There they gain the services of a wizard-scholar by promising to help his student deliver a potent magical artifact from a find site to the capital, where it can be properly studied. On the way air pirates attack, and Xanderan must defend student and artifact alike.

Teaser: Xanderan and Eches talk to a merchant guard about Cymril's mastery of magic, and how wizards always want to get their hands on magical artifacts. They hear a story about powerful magical engines of the Time Before, and

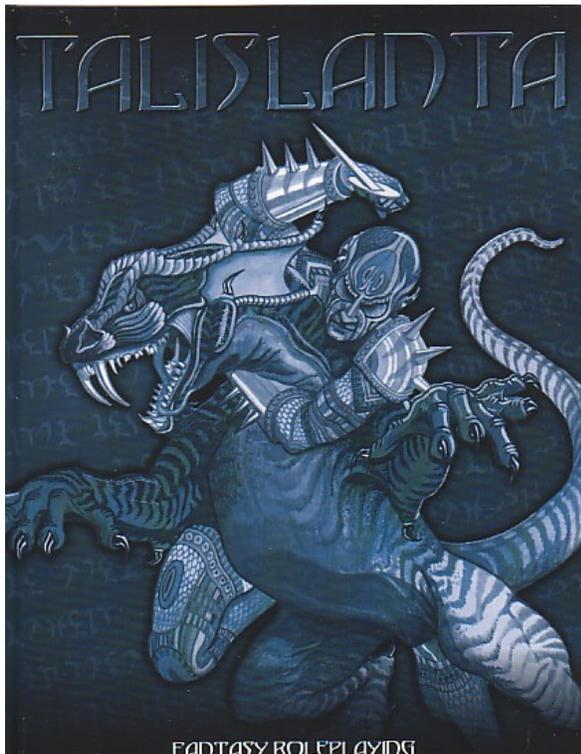
people dream about what they could do with that power. (Motifs: Road, ancient ruins)

First Conflict: After getting a series of dead ends, the brothers are sent to a Wizard who works at the Academy of Magic. They go to find him, but meet his student-assistant instead. While they talk someone tries to steal a mcguffin from the office, and tries to kill the PCs when he's spotted. After defeating him, the PCs make a deal with the student – he'll get the Wiz to identify the artifact if they go help him bring an important artifact to a safe location, as she fears it may be stolen. (Motifs: Guilds, both of wizards and assassins)

Second Conflict: After meeting the Wizard, a charming and personable older fellow, the PCs guard the treasure as it is put on an airship. On the short flight to the city they are attacked by two air-pirate ships and a group of bird men. The PCs have to fight an exciting aerial battle. Just as they are starting to win, an explosion rocks the ship and sets it on fire. The PCs save the ship, but the artifact is gone by the time they are done. (Motifs: Ancient ruins, flightless birdmen)

Third Conflict: Finding the student injured by the blast that started the ship on fire, the PCs first think the Wizard was killed, but when they save the student's life they find out that the Wizard caused the blast then fled. The student begs them to get the artifact back, assuring them if they do she will get someone else to identify the artifact. The PCs must then do leg work to find that the Wizard has a remote cabin in the woods, a place perfect to meet pirates. The PCs rush there and find the Wizard negotiating with the air pirates. If the PCs attack everyone thinks the other side betrayed them, and a three way fight breaks out. If the PCs don't attack, things go poorly and the air-pirates and the Wizard start a fight that sweeps the PCs up. Either way, the Wizard casts a drowning spell on the house and grounds, leading to the PCs fighting their way through a mansion suddenly on the bottom of a lake. (Motifs: Gangs)

Final Scene: The PCs catch up with the Wizard, and after a magical battle through a midnight wood, take him, the stolen artifact, and their information out of him. The student takes him to the authorities (if he's alive), and tells the brothers to head through Kasmir to get to the trade route into the desert. (Motifs: The Road)



Episode 3: All In the Family

Summary: The brothers get caught up in a shadow feud between two Kasmirian brothers who are trying to kill each other to take over the family business. Echs is accused of a murder, and is thrown in jail and due to be executed. Desperate to save his brother, Xanderan has to track down the real murder. His search leads him to a mob-like organization of thugs and dons, and leaves him unsure of who to trust. In the end he brings one brother's duplicity to light, and has to survive the gang war that erupts so that he can clear Echs.

(This Episode was cut because the PCs didn't find it interesting, and so it got skipped over and was referred to in the next session -- so that it could be played as a flashback at some future date when it could be used to highlight the drama in the situation.)

Episode 4: A Line In the Sand

Summary: In one of the Foreign Legion's outposts, Xanderan finds the man who ordered his parent's murder. As he seeks his vengeance, a large group of nomadic warriors attacks, and Xanderan must help the 10 to 1

outnumbered defenders. When the murderer, desperate to save his own life, tries to betray the garrison it leads to a

climatic final battle amid the ruins of the siege and a rising sandstorm, where Xanderan fights the murderer to the death.

Teaser: A group of Danelek desert nomads riding two-legged lizards that look like raptors sits watching an approaching sand-storm. The second in command speaks to the leader, asking if he is sure the plan will work. The leader laughs and says “The one we deal with, he does not break his word. He said the garrison will fall, and so it will. He said if we did not attack he would tear us screaming to shreds. What do you think our choices are?”

First Bang: Xanderan and Eches get caught between a sandstorm and a group of Danelek raiders, and have to flee to the safety of the Legion Outpost. It’s a running battle, with harsh conditions, screaming barbarian warriors, rough terrain, and with the Outpost semi-hidden by the storm. When they get to the Outpost they learn that a huge coalition of Danelek is going to attack the Outpost as soon as the stand-storm passes.

Second Bang: While the sandstorm rages, men start turning up dead in parts of the Outpost. They were always alone when they died, and seem to have died of natural causes – save that their eyes are black and lusterless. A panic starts up among the soldiers as word spreads, and suspicious eyes and rumors of plague start up. The culprit is a Mirajan (pg 291) that has been summoned to haunt the Outpost. Anyone with Arcane Lore knows that this should not be possible, unless a powerful sorcerer is involved – from within the Outpost.

Third Bang: As the Danelek horde attacks, Commander Maul asks Xanderan to find the sorcerer while Eches goes to man the walls. Xanderan is left in the middle of a fortress at war, trying to find the traitorous sorcerer inside the walls. At the same time the sorcerer summons a demon to attack Xanderan and then open the gate – the demon carries a blade almost identical to the one the assassin carried. The Enim (337) can be made to wager that it will tell all it knows of its summoner if it is beaten in some way.

Final Scene: Xanderan fights Aathoth as he opens the gates of the fortress. In the middle of a storm Xanderan must fight the man who ordered his parent’s death while trying to stop the rush of Danelek warriors and save the fortress.

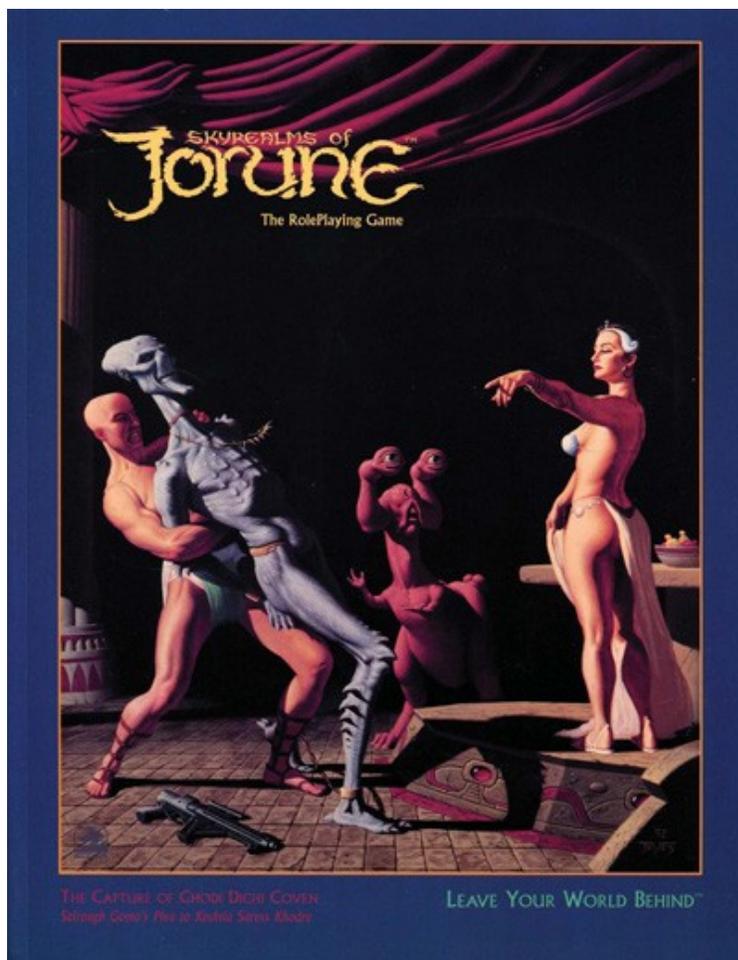


RETROSPECTIVE: SKYREALMS OF JORUNE

by Matthew Pook

My gaming group first encountered this RPG on a cold, dry day in October 1986 when SkyRealms Publishing came to London and held their own trade stand at Games Day '86. The game, with its large eye-catching box, mystifying slogan of "leave your world behind" and captivating art proved popular and sold out. I was there and wish now that I had bought a copy of the game then and there; instead I bought a much treasured *SkyRealms of Jorune* tee shirt. Not long after though, I did purchase a copy of that boxed set.

"Leave your world behind" sums up everything about *SkyRealms of Jorune*: a totally alien world with strange creatures and stranger abilities where you adventured to do daring deeds and fight for the common good in an effort to attain citizenship. Whole mountains floated across the sky, and around the planet flowed a stream of ambient energy that could be harnessed to your will. At the time it was so unlike all the other games I had seen or played with their Earth-like settings, cultures and so on. Well, that's not entirely true, for there is one game to which *SkyRealms of Jorune* bears some similarities and that is *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*.



Their first similarity is that both *SkyRealms of Jorune* and *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* are games with cult status. The fact that neither has ever remained on the shelves at your local gaming store for very long has not hindered that, as the publishing fortunes of each game has waxed and waned over time. There are similarities in their settings too. *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* describes the planet Tékumel, which lost contact with the rest of humanity in its ancient history, but far in our future. Likewise, the planet of Jorune is an Earth colony, which also has lost contact with the home world. Whereas Tékumel has had to survive tens of thousands of years, Jorune has a human history only lasting three millennia or so. In both games there are strange alien creatures and access to ancient technologies, though in *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*, such devices are treated as magic, not Earth technology as they are *SkyRealms of Jorune*.

Their histories are markedly different though. *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* began life not as a game but as an experiment in languages, to which rules were added later on, though it would take three decades for the setting to acquire a decent set of rules with the publication of *Tékumel: Empire of the*

Petal Throne from Guardians of Order in 2005. Even though that book is out of print, the setting and world remains the

creation and brainchild of M. A. R. Barker, a professor of languages.

SkyRealms of Jorune began life as a personal campaign run by the game's creator, Andrew Leker, using the game system from TSR's *Metamorphosis Alpha*. This thirty two page book described how players could explore the "Warden," a lost colony ship travelling at sub-light speeds, the population of which had degenerated into tribes of humans, and mutated humans and animals. *Metamorphosis Alpha* would later form the basis for TSR's *Gamma World*, an RPG that would go through various incarnations and influence the design of *Dungeons & Dragons, Third Edition* from Wizards of the Coast before returning to publication itself last year with a seventh edition, also from Wizards of the Coast. Meanwhile, *Metamorphosis Alpha* would return in 2006 with its own Fourth Edition from Mudpuppy Games, as an interesting, but poorly realised setting.

Meanwhile, back in 1981, Andrew Leker took his campaign from *Metamorphosis Alpha* back to Earth and then onto onto a planet of its own, a planet called Jorune. Together with his sister Amy, he formed SkyRealms Publishing in 1983 and the company launched the first edition of *SkyRealms of Jorune* at Gen-Con in 1984. This consisted of a single book, which would later be broken up into four books for the second edition which came out in 1986, and then be brought into a single book for the third edition from Chessex. Many gamers though were fascinated by the adverts for the game that ran in *Dragon* magazine in the mid 1980s.

The game itself described an alien world over three and a half thousand years into our future. Long ago man had developed the ability to travel to distant stars and Jorune was the first suitable colony that they found, but it was already inhabited: Shanthas, tall eyeless natives of the world able to master the ambient energy of Isho winds that flow across the surface of the planet. They allowed the foundation of a colony, which prospered with the support provided from home. Yet without this support, the colony could not be viable. The colonists were forced to expand into lands sacred to the Shantha when communication with Earth ceased after what was presumed to be a war. This initiated a war that destroyed the colony. Shanthic use of isho allowed them to strike through the colony's shields with devastating destruction. The colonists found themselves on the losing side and desperation developed and released a plague that all but wiped out the Shantha population.

In the three millennia since the war there have been many changes. Humanity has endured many hardships to form its own place of safety in the realm of Burdoth. They also have evolved—alongside and sometimes against humans are the Boccord—bigger and stronger, able to disrupt the use of isho; and the Muadra, smaller and weaker, but like the Shanthas, capable of mastering the use of isho in order to cast dyshas (a cross between spells and psionics). Only humans though, can operate the powerful weapons and equipment found in the caches of "Earth-tec" hidden by fleeing colonists.

Stranger still were the other races found on Jorune: the fearful and xenophobic Ramian; the Thriddle, fig shaped bipeds that control vast knowledge in their libraries; and the Iscin races. A scientist once part of the original colony, Iscin was a bio-engineer who did not want the Earth's transported flora and fauna, which found most Joruni native plant and animal life poisonous, to die. He developed stronger and more intelligent strains of various Earth animals to survive on Jorune. Some of these, such as the bear-like Bronth, cat-like Crugar and wolf-like Woffen, as well as the human races, are available to play as characters in the third edition. Although the inclusion of these races make the game seem part of the "pets-in-space" RPG genre (typified by the *Justifiers RPG* from StarChilde and FGU's *Other Suns RPG*), there is more to the game than this, with the designers having made the effort for the Iscin races to have developed strong individual cultures and societies of their own.

Character generation was quite a lengthy process in *SkyRealms of Jorune* with a player needing to roll for twelve attributes and then using points derived from his Education statistic to buy career packages, practical knowledge, and personal interests. Careers are quite varied from the typical soldier or thief, through to the scientists and innkeepers. Muadra also must purchase the dyshas that they know, although some careers offer them the chance to gain a limited number.

Although the generation of the characters changed little in the transition from the second to the third editions of *SkyRealms of Jorune*, the game system did. In the second you rolled character attribute checks and combat damage on six-sided dice; skill checks on percentile dice; and combat manoeuvres and dysa use on a twenty sided die. All this meant that the character record sheet consisted of four sides of paper, which like many things for the third edition was streamlined. The sheet became a standard double-sided sheet and a twenty-sided die was used for all rolls except for determining combat damage and the initial attributes.

The notion of similarities between *SkyRealms of Jorune* and *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* rears its head once again when considering the classic campaign for each game. In *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*, the players were simple foreign fishermen, arriving at the docks in the city of Jakalla. They must not only survive in the city, but also work to gain acceptance and possible recognition in the eyes of the native population. In *SkyRealms of Jorune*, the players are natives of the human realm of Burdoth, who have decided to travel from their homes to the capital, Ardoth. There they decide to register their application for citizenship or “drenn” status, for only then will they have the right to own land, to vote and ask for the use of Earth-tec. Once registered, they are known as “Tauther” and through their future deeds may gain the respect of individual drenn who might then support their continued application. Humans have the least difficulty in attaining drennship, with Boccord and muadra finding it harder, and the Iscin races having the hardest time of all— the feline Crugar in particular.

In both these campaigns the aim is not for the players to focus their attention on the acquisition of wealth, bigger and better weapons or other resources, but primarily on attaining both social recognition and status, and how to live up to the standards of that status. Loss of face and honour can have a potentially devastating effect on your standing with others and in extreme cases can be dangerous to your health.

Just as important as being able to protect yourself in a fight, if not more so in some cases, is the ability to interact with others in the correct manner and to respect their cultures. So, remember that Thriddle only sit in friendly company (they are slow runners and they lose a few seconds in having to stand up), to always look a Bronth in the eye and never, ever mispronounce “Chaun-Tse” the language of the Crugar. In *SkyRealms of Jorune* there are language, etiquette and interaction skills for all of the intelligent races found on the planet and it is useful to know at least one or two. With Jorune being so potentially hostile because of the number of volatile races, the failure to observe such rules can be a matter of life or death.

There are plenty of other options in both games for adventure other than that of gaining social recognition, though in *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* it remains the major focus of the game. In *SkyRealms of Jorune*, you can investigate the ancient underground ruins of the Shanthas with their strange technologies; explore the floating SkyRealms full of hidden secrets or home to a band of the feared Ramian; cross through the East Trinnu Jungle Lands, once again infested by raiding parties of the uncommunicative Cleash; or travel in style to your destination, sailing through the skies on a Jaspian crystal schooner.

Jorune is a world with seven moons; it is so unlike our home planet of Earth, lost long ago. A place of mystery, wonder and intrigue. It literally is a chance to, “leave your world behind.” One thing that strikes everyone upon seeing *SkyRealms of Jorune* for the first time is the art, done by Miles Teves, a high school friend of Andrew Leker. His work graced all three editions of the game, but would later be supplemented by the efforts of other industry stalwarts. Some of his art for Jorune, as well as his current work in the Hollywood film industry can be seen on Miles Teves’ own web site (<http://www.milesteves.com>).

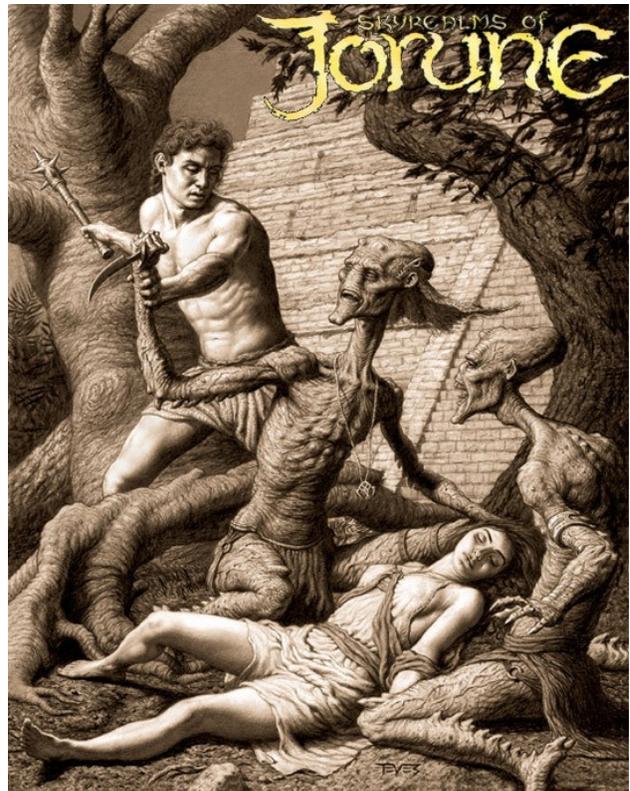
Another similarity between *SkyRealms of Jorune* and *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* is that of language. Both settings require a certain approach by both players and GM alike, since they use a great number of unfamiliar words, more so than most RPGs, and certainly, the point of this heavy use of different and alien sounding words is enforce the alien nature of each world. Yet each setting is very different in its approach to language. Not surprisingly, *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* is the more mature given its academic origins, with five fully developed human languages of its own, complete with grammar books – some of which have been available for purchase. Indeed many of the

words, phrases, and concepts to be found in *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* are taken from human history, though not our occidental one. The roots for *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* lie in the ancient cultures of Central America, ancient Egypt, India, and South East Asia. When playing *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne* it helps to have an understanding of many of these words and to be able to pronounce a few, and the same can be said of *SkyRealms of Jorune*. Yet that game lacks the verisimilitude to be found in *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*, the terms and phrases, such as “Sholari” for the GM, often suffering from a degree of artificiality. In both games the issue of language and the various terms and phrases are a barrier to play, more so in *SkyRealms of Jorune* than *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*.

Throughout its publishing history, only a handful of books were released for *SkyRealms of Jorune*. The First Edition is now impossible to find, while the Second Edition’s boxed set and its supplements, Companion: Ardoth, Companion: Burdoth, and in particular, Earth-tec Jorune, are more difficult to find and more expensive to buy. Chessex’s Third Edition is the most accessible, with the most useful beyond the core book is The Sholari Pack, a combined sourcebook, adventure and screen. Particularly, the errata, glossary, gazetteer, and timeline are all very useful. Beyond this, The Gire of Silipus is a better scenario than Innocents of Gauss and The Sobayid Atlas is a useful supplement detailing the southern region of the human nation of Burdoth.

Unfortunately, The Gire of Silipus was the last book to be released by Chessex. That was in 1993, and the game has remained in a limbo ever since, part of the reason being a clash over who owned the rights after Alien Logic, the computer game from SSI was released in 1994. Chessex’s website still claims to have the game in stock, while the writer and editor of the third edition, Joe Addams, has done much to keep the game alive in the years since. The internet enabled the fan base to keep in touch, with fans creating their own sites and adaptations to other game systems, including HERO, GURPS and Trinity, and just as with *Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne*, the game has seen its fans provide support and a point of contact with various fanzines. Some of these adaptations can be found at the game’s previous web site (<http://www.Jorune.org>), while the publisher of fan driven material, Oak & Lotus Publications also has its own site [<http://jorune.oakandlotus.com/>].

So fifteen years on, the future of SkyRealms of Jorune remains uncertain, perhaps destined to be no more than a relic of the gaming past. This is a pity, as there still remains a core of fans and potential for more if the game were to receive the support it deserves. Perhaps there is a future in the fan driven supplements from Oak & Lotus, but that is a question to be answered another time. In the meantime, SkyRealms of Jorune is a rich world awaiting your exploration and worth your time tracking down a copy.



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TARSA DESIGNER'S NOTES AND REVIEW

WRITING TARSA

by James Brian King

If you, the reader, were somehow able to view a history of my 27 years administrating roleplaying games, you would see a long list of games from a plethora of publishers; what you would not see, with the exception of one campaign run 25 years ago, is fantasy (and that one game was not D&D). You might conclude that I don't care for fantasy. But that's not true! I much enjoy a good fantasy novel—the late David Gemell's works are currently among my favorites list. It is true, however, that I don't care to run a fantasy rpg.

Why? Magic. Unless done extremely well, the element of magic tends to interfere with my suspension of disbelief. Fantasy game settings are worse than genre novels; the existence and origin of magic is frequently poorly explained and there are often too many spells—many of which border on the point of absurdity; some spells are often so powerful that they easily upset game balance and interfere with the telling of a good tale.

Fantasy games tended to stay on my “Just say NO” list until Decipher's *The Lord of the Rings RPG* was released. This was a setting in which magic made sense to me; it was subtle, subdued, woven into the very fabric of the land. I participated in two campaigns as a player. I liked it. Cursed, as many gamers are, with the need to create, I set out to create my own fantasy world setting, to be played using Decipher's core rulebook, and the world of Tarsa was born.

When I was close to finishing Tarsa my game group played Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* and shortly thereafter I was introduced to *Basic Roleplaying*, Chaosium's generic core book. The system was percentile-based, something I had enjoyed with Iron Crown Enterprises' *Middle-Earth Role Playing*. The Chaosium system also avoided the use of character levels (another peeve). And, in a moment of imaginative ambition, *Lords of Tarsa* went from a home-grown setting to introduce to my game group to a fantasy setting destined to be shared with fans of *Basic Roleplaying* everywhere.

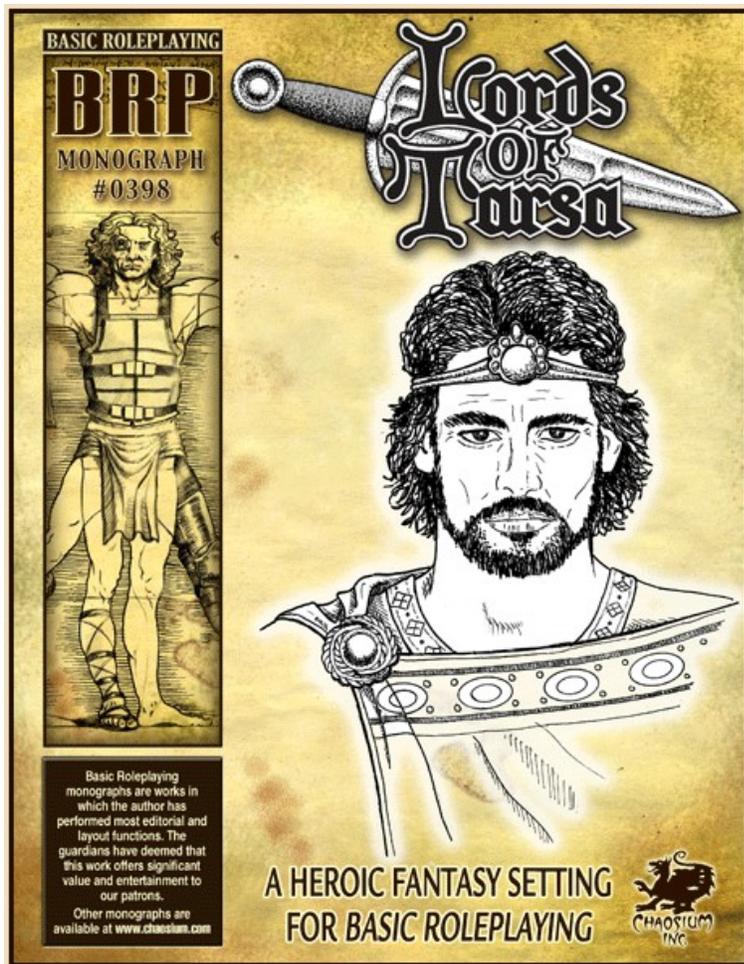
Basic Roleplaying is very much a component-based system, so I was able to customize the Tarsa magic system to conform to my ideology of magic; the first to go was the grimoire and with it language spell components—magic triggered by spoken mumbo-jumbo has always made me wince. Instead, magic in Tarsa has more to do with the mind. Perhaps it's more like psionics—but Tarsa is a pre-modern world so anything that unusual would be perceived as, well, magic.

There were other issues I was careful to address in Tarsa, the first of which was religion. Throughout humanity's existence, religion stands preeminent among the elements that have swayed human history and culture. I wanted the world of Tarsa to be seemingly real—fantasy certainly, yet as real as I could reasonably make it when compared to our world. So, religions exist—and create contention—in Tarsa and have deep significance in the lives of believers... yet, belief systems do not interfere in actual game play, though a lucky die roll might be construed differently by a PC.

Languages and names: often, too little creative work is invested in this element of fantasy settings. Fantasy often presents a number of kingdoms, peoples, and languages, yet the names of places and people all have the same familiarity. For Tarsa I sought inspiration in our world. For instance, names of people in the nine kingdoms are taken from name lists of medieval Italy; place names are inspired by a map of Italy. Similarly, other regions of Tarsa are inspired by Russian, Turkish, Polish, African, and Indian languages and places. Perhaps I cheated, but it works.

Races and peoples: the one fantasy game I ran 25 years ago included over forty races and racial sub-types. You can probably guess my problem with this: suspension of disbelief. Tarsa has very few races, and some of those few find their origin in ancient magic.

29 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011



Lastly, I remind you, the good reader, that the inspirations and assessments of fantasy games mentioned above are simply my opinions. If you like games with seemingly unlimited magic, character levels, and myriad races, that's great—and you're lucky that there are a number of games that provide what you are looking for. But, if you happen to view fantasy through the same lens that I do, you may find the world of Tarsa to your liking.

REVIEW: SOLID FANTASY
by Lev Lafayette

With an excellent "back cover blurb" *Lords of Tarsa* dives right in with a tale of intrigue, questionable character and challenge as a loose collection of squabbling kingdoms are pressed by barbarians with the ominous threat of an even greater enemy. One is thrown right into the action, as an excellent narrative should do.

Produced with two-column justified with a serif font, there is a smattering of fairly competent artwork throughout with context. The book is structured loosely; chapters (of sorts) consist of The Lands and History of

Tarsa, Creating a Heroic Persona, Powers, various supplementary material, a detailed setting (the Free City of Orvietta) and three sample scenarios. The map of the region is good, the author having paid attention to the basic principles of geology and political geography; mountains are parallel to coastlines, rivers flow appropriately and kingdoms are oft-bounded by natural borders. Unfortunately the text itself does not elaborate sufficiently in the geologic, climatic and ecological features to my liking, concentrating heavily on the social setting.

History begins at a sensible time; a mere two-and-a-half thousand years of written record (vastly preferable to those who give timelines in tens of thousands of years without technological development). The fleeing of the people of the region from the east to their new home is shrouded in mystery, true to a mythic past. Also within the heroic storyline is the appearance of a warrior chief-king, who unites the people to defeat local "drakon", founds the Itanian Kingdom, but who is tragically assassinated by fearful allies. From this initial charismatic leadership, subsequent kings proved to be capable managers and gradual expansionists, overcoming plague, and invaders, with a golden age lasted for five centuries. This was broken however by the murder of a weak high-king followed by a hundred-year savage civil war between the princes, resulting in the nine kingdoms.

The kingdoms and their neighbours are described in some detail, especially in history and contemporary society. There is a high degree of grim realism applied to these lands; one of the major kings is appropriately known as Girart The Oppressor, slavery is common and most of the societies are strictly patriarchal. Emphasis is placed, of course, on the

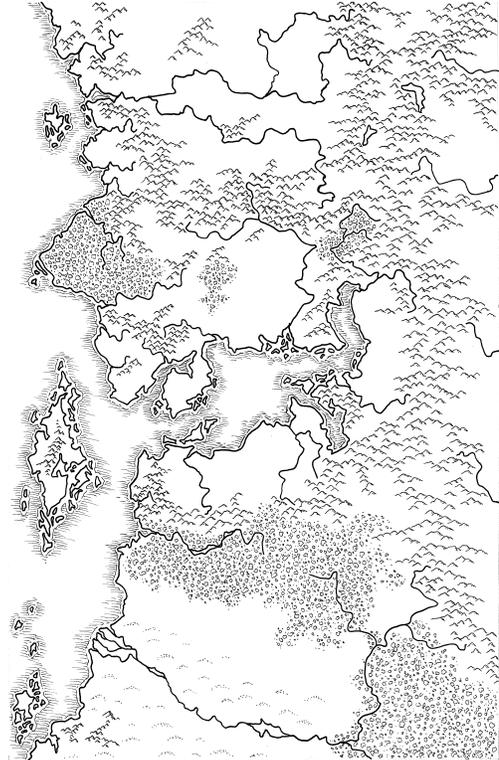
Italian kingdoms but detail is also given on the neighbouring tribes and kingdoms that live on the borderlands. There are also two para-human species, the krek and the vashaniin, both pointy-eared, one barbaric, one graceful - yep, there's the orcs and elves of this world. Although to give the author credit, the krek are no simple barbarians with a notable love of music and the vashaniin show no indication of being some special immortal species, merely secretive, highly interested in the magical arts, and somewhat long-lived.

This is clearly the meat-and-potatoes of the product with each kingdom having notable features, and almost invariably a story of war, and intrigues. This is sometimes at a loss of more prosaic interests which provide grounding for such locations. For example, the small kingdom of Onesta is described in terms of its love for gladiatorial combat, a mad king, a revolution and an invasion by more powerful neighbour and rebels hiding in the mountains, but from the text provided there is a little that hints at subsistence patterns, arts and crafts, beliefs etc. This is not unusual; there are some seventeen half-page columns dedicated to the most powerful kingdom, Minersa, and over half if this is dedicated to an the story and stats of NPC who happens to a slave to the king.

Character generation follows the rules from BRP with recommendations on the numerous options available in that game. Physical appearance, characteristic modifiers (including sexual dimorphism in some cases) and names are in broad cultural groups; the names suggest earth-like cultural equivalents from which one can draw. One notable option is that heroic characters are provided the Total Hit Points (SIZ+CON) option rather than the usual method (avg SIZ and CON). Characters are created at the heroic level of experience and recommended professions are derived from BRP with a number modified to fit the fantasy-medieval setting. In addition there are minor modifications to the martial arts and missile weapon skills. There is a handful of prohibited spells and a small number of altered spells from the standard BRP powers; "sorcery", in BRP terms, is not allowed. There is a also a small number of new spells are interesting and balanced in game terms.

A small collection of specific magic items and a collection of nasty monsters that makes fairly interesting reading. It is in the latter that one finds the drakon, described as a flying mammal predator with a lifespan in the hundreds of years. The creatures have very similar statistics to the standard dragons in BRP for their adult form, which gives some perspective of the strength. A small number of "instant NPCs" are also provided to make the GMs life a little easier. This is followed by a short chapter on the "secrets" of Tarsa, meaning ancient history that has been largely lost or hidden of which ancient civilisations and the drakon feature prominently. Several pages are dedicated to the Free City of Orvietta, a negotiated space between two powerful kingdoms, rather like Andorra, however most of these are descriptions of major NPCs. The book concludes with sample scenarios, both rescue missions; the more interesting of the two being a courtesan rescue that goes seriously wrong.

Overall this is another quality BRP monograph, in both style and substance, for high adventure. The GM should make some effort with a deeper grounding of the environs however there is certainly plenty of opportunity for storytelling from the social interactions; indeed given the richness of the many and varied plot elements scattered throughout I would have preferred a few more sample scenarios and perhaps even several threaded into a common story, even in preference to some of the detail given to the lands and kingdoms.



KRONONAUTS: A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

by Karl D. Brown

with assistance from Lev Lafayette, Michael Cole, Elizabeth Bowman, Jay Patterson, Rick Barker and Owen Smith

In coming issues we will serialise a complete time travel campaign setting for GURPS. In this first article the timeline of this future is presented. The skeleton of this timeline was a collection of predictions made by scientists, engineers and academics collated in the 1990's. As such some items may already be out of date and timeline is a very '90's future. It is also devoid of apocalyptic disasters or highly radical departures from current trends. We wanted a believable and understandable world and as a group were not interested in a post-apocalypse.

This future history and most of the core background were conceived in the most collaborative fashion. A great deal of discussion was generated on the groups email list regarding these topics and careful consultation with the group members was undertaken before the final draft. This procedure has produced a richer world than any one of us could of created alone. It also generates compromises as we try to include ideas from different contributors into a 'whole cloth' we all could live with. In particular the mean streets of Russia 2092, uplifted ravens, and the 'physics of consciousness' generated a lot of discussion. In these discussions 'what would enhance game play?' was often more important than 'what is likely?'.

Terminology

There are some terms used in the history below that will be unfamiliar to some:

AUD and NZD: the Australian Dollar and New Zealand dollar. Archaic units of currency.

Cassimir Effect: energy produced by quantum fluctuations.

EU: European Union, predecessor to today's United States of Europe.

Corvid: a biological category including crows and ravens et al.

GM: genetically modified

ESA: European Space Agency

European: of Europa the moon of Jupiter.

AIM drives: Antiproton initiated micro-fusion drives used in current interplanetary craft.

The timeline contains several types of machine intelligence: AE, AI and AC. By including these varieties of intelligent machines, a range of social statuses and competencies can be incorporated within the game.

- AE: Artificial Expert. A machine that is as competent as a human within a limited field. Some even out-perform human experts. A sub-type is the AP (Artificial Personality), an AE programmed to mimic a human personality. These simulations can be very convincing but there is no-one behind the camera eyes, the machine senses and reacts but does not 'experience' any more than a rock or a toaster.
- AI: Artificial Intelligence. A machine with adaptable intelligence capable of learning and dealing with novel situations. Advanced AI could have come close to obtaining rights if consciousness detectors had not shown these machines are nothing but 'clockwork'. Despite intelligent behaviour AI's are no more alive than the old animatronics in Disney's 'Pirates of the Caribbean' ride.
- AC: Artificial Consciousness. Our 'physics of consciousness' enables us to build machines with some level of consciousness. Unlike other kinds of machine 'brains' these computers really do contain a mind.

History

2011 Solar maxima, increased sun activity irradiates space stations and satellites but at this time most stations are government run and well organised; no significant incidents. Mouse level AE available commercially.

2012 Despite the advances in medicine and fears of engineered super-plagues the most common diseases are mostly those common fifteen years ago. So far, so good. First working cell-like nanomachines, too fragile to be very useful. Orang-utans extinct in the wild. Oxygen atmosphere detected on a world of the Proxima system. Wealthy nations achieve a 5% drop in greenhouse gas emissions.

32 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011

2013 Prototype monkey level AE. Major earthquake devastates Los Angeles. 90% drop in white collar work since 2000 in US. The presence or absence of planetary companions to the nearest 100 stars has been determined. Genetically prescribed preventative cancer drugs appear on the market.

2014 Sleeping sickness of animals *Trypanisome evansi* introduced to Australia spreads to pigs, dogs, horses, and marsupials. Software and hardware advances produce more flexible computers who go beyond their programs with lizard AI. Second NASA soil retrieval mission to Mars. Heyday of sustainable agriculture in the developing world, using weeds, fish etc. to kill pests, doing away with monocultures, and out producing GM crops. However the productivity of GM agriculture is steadily improving.

2015 US experiences a 73% increase in the cost of aged health care since 2000, mostly due an aging population. First Cassimir Effect battery used in space probe. Construction of Hilton Orbital from shuttle fuel tanks begins. Private robot moon base built by a number of companies organized by the Lunar Explorers Society. Turkey joins the EU.

2015-2042 The USA becomes increasingly libertarian. As the government shrinks and the laws favour hyper-capitalism the corporations grow in power

2016 Resistance renders many anti-parasitic drugs ineffective. Commercial Monkey AE in homes and small businesses. Cost transfer to orbit 10% of 2000 cost and planetary flight times have halved. Poor WTO members now obliged to recognize the patents of all members, the last loopholes for cheap generic drugs are closed.

2017 Morocco joins the EU. Commercial release of lizard AI usually as an add-on to monkey AE machines. Human germline therapy to cure genetic diseases and confer resistance genes common. Australian farmers paid by government to reduce pollution by fertilisers, methane, and pesticides etc.

2018 Moore's Law can no longer be maintained by silicon based technology but is sustained by molecular methods. Computer technology development slows.

2019 Malaria is now established in Northern Queensland. The computer Ergo passes 10000h of Turing tests. The machine uses a monkey level AE programmed to mimic human responses called an AP, and a lizard level AI to deal with the unexpected. US begins large scale production of the plutonium spheres that form the core of nuclear weapons, end of nuclear disarmament. India/Pakistan - Border war breaks out with heaviest fighting in Kashmir.

2020's India becomes a major power in the Indian Ocean region. It develops major alliances with East African States and the Malay Federation. Corvids become a favoured model for studying the biology of cognition.

2020 World population reaches 8 billion the world demand for grains as feed for humans and animals is 150% that of 2000 levels. Staffed moon base organized by the Luna Explorers Society. The atmosphere of Pluto freezes. Proposed UN global ban on fishing fails, major fish stocks never recover. 'Pig flu' human pandemic. Currency unification of the AUD and NZD.

2021 WHO figures indicate that 73% of deaths worldwide are caused by non-communicable diseases while infectious diseases account for only 15% of deaths. World food stocks plummet as major aquifers run almost dry including the Punjab, Northern China, and Ogallala in North America. Cost of food and feed increases. Commercial release of human level AE, many experts join welfare lines.

2022 ESA announces that it has developed a sealed human supporting ecosystem suitable for space colonies in their biosphere in the south of France. Experimental adaptable mouse level AI added to human level AE systems. With increased air-traffic airline accidents are a weekly occurrence. Airlines begin to advertise improved safety features to attract customers. Australian agriculture crippled by salinity, drinking water in Adelaide exceeds WHO salinity limits 2 days in every 5.

2023 Advanced computer modelling of the socio-economic factors of the 'Earth' system.

2024 US has replaced half of its traffic lights with energy efficient LED systems

2025 A third of the population of the UK is now over 65. World wide 2.5 billion people do not have enough water. Switzerland finally joins the EU.

2026 Humans land on Mars, discovery of what appears to be Martian microfossils. First of the 'water wars' the Blue Nile Catchment War, Egypt secures this water source after Ethiopia proposes to dam the river. Commercial release of mouse level AI.

2027 Jackson completes the Natural Systems Agriculture project, a 8000ha engineered perennial prairie that produces commercial quantities of human food. World grain shortage with animal raisers buying up grain, food prices triple,

widespread famine. Moldavia joins the EU. Relations between Russia and Europe sour.

2028 The Ukraine joins the EU. Russia amasses troops in Belarus. There is much posturing and the spread east of the EU stops. Mission to the Martian north pole finds biochemicals thought to be decomposed bacteria from 3.5 billion years ago found under tens of meters of permafrost. Experimental Monkey level AI.

2029 Israel conquers Jordan to secure Negev aquifer. Texas cedes from the Union.

2030's The gradual destruction of Israel. By 2040 the state is peacefully dismantled. This occurs against the background of the Islamic states modernising. Full TL8 achieved

2030 WHO data indicates that world wide instances of Heart attacks has dramatically increased, linked to an increase in the average standard of living. World population passes 7 billion 6/7 in developing countries.

2031 Commercial release of monkey level AI many. APs are now very convincing and will only be tripped up in very unusual situations. The protracted USA-Mexican war begins.

2032 Iran - Internal democratic revolution - become shining light in region. Powercells invented

2033 First permanent base on Mars. Germany has built 4000 wind turbines in the North Sea almost as many on land. These replace 60% of the electricity formerly provided by nuclear power stations. Experimental human level AI

2034: Navarre gains independence. The first complete ecosystem supporting a space station.

2035: Kosovo joins Albania. Ben Johnson's gold medal for the 100m, confiscated after drug testing, reinstated as the inconsistent rules of the Olympics are taken to court. The cost of detecting doping has risen greatly and so the 'war on drugs in sport' is lost.

2036: Commercial release of human level AI, radical changes in society continue and the future of staffed space flight brought into question since machines are capable and cheap, however intense political pressure from those already in orbit, on luna and Mars secures a future for humans in space. Natural systems agriculture, designed ecosystems, based on Jacksons 'prairie' work and sustainable agriculture become the dominant forms of agriculture world wide except in the GM wary EU.

2037: DNA chip screening of IVF embryos routine. In poorly regulated nations even aesthetic traits can be selected. Eradication of genetic disease from the middle class. Palestine/Jordan - Treaty reached and Palestinian Confederation formed.

2038: A tiny submarine begins to explore the European ocean. Simple microbial life with DNA variant discovered near thermal vents and photosynthesizing in cracks near the icy surface. The microbes are carbon-based but do not use DNA. EU drops its ban on GM crops to try to overcome already degraded soils.

2039 Launch of the first NASA Antiproton initiated fission-fusion space drives. Called Antiproton initiated microfusion or AIM. The round trip to Jupiter by this craft will take one year. Near complete model of a cell used for cancer diagnosis and treatment based on gene expression.

2040's United Central American States (UCAS) formed by Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica, West Indies, and Panama.

2040 Discovery probe returns from Jupiter. Flu pandemic.

2041 New Zealand becomes two states of the Australian Federation the combined nation of Australasia. The spiralling economic and social collapse of Russia draws in much of central Asia. China sends in aid and troops to quell unrest in Mongolia then never quite withdraws.

2042 The USA finally pulls out of the Mexican war, a loss by attrition. The War has been slow poison for the current USA government. The weak government enters a period of intense political infighting. China leads the world economy with a GDP greater than that of the USA.

2043 Launch of Heliopause AIM probe. Southern California and the southern half of Arizona and New Mexico cede from the troubled Union.

2044 A highly conservative/restrictive government comes to power in the USA. To the present there is a power struggle between the government and the corporations that grew so powerful in previous decades. Only in the USA are corporations so powerful. First automated asteroid mine begins production. Completion of the Lunar Village the first full colony on the moon.

2045 Stock market impact of asteroid metals. Tanks obsolete due to the power of modern weapons and smart missiles. Succession of the Tamil Republic.

2046 Orbital research station established over Venus. AIM drives have opened up the inner solar system. Mongolia officially becomes a province of China.

2047 World record for one mile sprint by an unmodified human 3m29.84s.

2048 NASA AIM mission to heliopause arrives trip time 5 years.

2049 Sustainable fusion power achieved.

2050's TL9 reached. The UN gains control of the World Bank, GATT/WTO and WIPO, and ICAAN.

2050 Optical imaging technologies are advanced enough that work to understand how the brain produces consciousness begins. A final answer is years away. The same technologies are used in research to help the worlds 60 million Alzheimer's sufferers.

2051 The EU becomes a single nation including the Balkans and Turkey. The new nation is the United States of Europe. World population reaches 8 billion 7/8 in developing nations. 14 million Alzheimer's suffers in the US. Base on Europa. Egypt/Ethiopia and Sudan populations have doubled since 2000 and food and water shortages in the region continue.

2052 First conference of extra solar climatology debates the continents, oceans, weather climate of Earth like worlds based on flimsy extrapolations. Indonesia and Malaysia unify into the Malay Republic. Timor-Leste and Brunei join the Malay Federation.

2053 China's slow political change reaches a break-point. There is unrest and nearly revolution in some provinces. The final outcome is a freer nation and greater autonomy for Tibet. Humans land on Eros and set up instruments for the close approach to the Sun. Black Death Virus pandemic, the virus has the same carrier period and symptoms as the black death as described by X and Y in 2001. At the same time black wheat bunt reemerges, the bunt attacks the photosynthetic mechanism which in most of the world's wheat is now the same high performance GM gene, world food prices soar again.

2054 The breakup of Iraq (top third goes to Kurdistan as does eastern Turkey). A sliver of eastern part of Iraq is integrated into Iran. The west and central remain Iraq. Sea levels have risen by 1m 15% of Bangladesh is under water affecting 10 million people, the Maldives, Tuvalu and Kiribati have all but vanished. Regeneration of lost limbs on a laboratory rat. American farmers adopt plough-free agriculture utilizing GM crops.

2055 All barriers and controls between Hong Kong and mainland China removed. Hotel Luna completed. A massive structure with indoor low g sports facilities including a flight suit drome.

2056 The artificial country of Afghanistan breaks up, with the southern and eastern sections eventually joining Pakistan, sections of the north joining Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and remainder of Afghanistan (mainly an east Persian people) eventually federating with Iran. World population reaches 9 billion. Construction of Ganymede base. By this time most of the world's electricity is generated by home units, mostly fuel cells but also old natural gas turbines and solar arrays. Fuel cell cars can be plugged into the grid when not in use to generate more power. Remote and developing communities now have reliable electricity. In Germany renewable powers ascendance sees the shutdown of the countries last nuclear power plant.

2057 Although a variety of brain implants are available most people don't bother since a network permeating almost every synthetic object gives humans almost instant access to data, memory, and expert advice.

2058 First image of the disk of a Earth sized world passing before it's star obtained by an orbital array. Common use of biological agents in mining operation and pollution reduction strategies. The long lasting global famine escalates with the rise of top soil dust storms. Even wealthy nations resort to rationing. North America is saved by its earlier adoption of plough free agriculture.

2059 Mass production of modified elephants in Indonesia, as smart as a chimp with opposing trunk fingers. Regeneration of limbs and organs in humans widely available. Flu pandemic. Luna now has the second largest economy of any world in the Sol system industries include oxygen rocket fuel, water export, mass driver, and astronomy. Tibetan Independence. Enough time since the unrest of '53 that China can save face by making a great show of how it is graciously giving Tibet freedom.

2060's The improvements in medical technology allow more stable nations in Africa to prosper after removing much of the burden of disease. South Africa in particular undergoes great economic development. National borders also slowly realign with ethnicity of populations casting of the legacy of colonialist boundaries.

2060 An explanation of Consciousness comes from molecular biology, biological engineering, medical scanning technology, evolution, quantum physics and neuroscience. Titan base established. Black wheat bunt has destroyed most of the worlds wheat crops. Solar power satellites provide additional power to modern decentralized grids.

2061 Emancipation of uplifted ravens. Lizard level artificial consciousness. Molecular biology and biological engineering reach maturity. Many potential diseases are cured at the molecular level before they emerge and the body plan of an organism can be predicted from its genome.

2062 Haley's comet intercepted by several sophisticated probes. Construction of the first space elevator on Earth completed. The cable car to the sky touches down on the top of a massive ocean tower in Libreville Gabon. Among the technologies used in construction are biological cements. Considerable human exploration and stations on Mars. 1st space elevator built in Gabon.

2063 Pacific Alliance formed. UN gains minimal naval and space forces for logistical purposes. Average lifespan in the US reaches 100. Significant postponement of aging available to those under 50. First antimatter-matter annihilation space drive providing 500x thrust than similar sized fusion engines. First AI mine on Mercury.

2064 Construction of the IMS International Martian Settlement to house several hundred permanent residents. Genetic modification common among the settlers and their children.

2065 An improved African elephant with features similar to the latest Asiatic models released but fails to gain acceptance in Africa for cultural reasons. Bioluminescence for lighting in households and industry.

2066 A half Tunguska sized impact with the Earth narrowly prevented. International funding to prevent a repeat is easy to muster. Orbital station established above Neptune. 'Monkey pox' outbreaks in North America.

2067 West Antarctic Ice Sheet collapses into water that has seeped below it. The global sea level rises several meters flooding many cities. Biological batteries used in many devices. Robert's haemorrhagic virus devastates Europe

2068 Synthetic xenobiology creates models of possible alien biochemistries in the lab.

2069 The thriving Luna civilisation opens the Saha Crater radio telescope on the dark side of the moon.

2070's In Africa the effects of TL9 medicine add to the improvements of under TL8 medicine. Infectious cures for malaria and trypanosomes and similar medical advances result in a population boom and an economic transformation. A rich elite and increasing urban poor result.

2070 Mouse level AC produced. Fossil fuels banned world wide. World population reaches 8'75 billion only 1 billion in developed countries. Release of 202 uplifted ravens.

2071 Orbital station established over Pluto. Biological living waste disposal for buildings. Ozone pollution in the lower atmosphere derived from organic sources and nitrogen oxides reaches 25ppb, trees damaged and the few remaining wheat crops suffer wilt. UN absorbs Interpol and forms ICC Commandoes.

2072: Several rodent models show significantly raised intelligence and other mental advantages but none are truly uplifted.

2073 A partially uplifted breed of large dog created. Though the brightest are of human intelligence most have the intellect of children. Creation of a whole species of fully uplifted canines is beyond TL9

2074 First successful uplift program: Beta Pharmaceuticals reveals uplifted bonobos created in its consciousness research laboratories. The apes contain chimp, bonobo, human and reconstructed australopithecine genes in their makeup. Due to negligible risk and inconvenience of installation nanotech and biotech implants in humans and other animals are now common. These implants interface with both the nervous system and chemicals within the body.

2075-2076 North polar wars. A three sided conflict between Russia, Canada, and a Scandinavian/USA alliance. The wars are a territorial dispute over resource rich lands. This destabilises the whole arctic region. Russia maintains its mainland territory but loses some islands. War between these major powers was a great risk and after only 8 months all parties got 'cold feet' and a truce was declared.

2075 Monkey level AC. Typhus outbreaks worldwide particularly in the overcrowded cities. Alex the first uplifted Raven revealed. Start Arctic War

2076 Suspended animation finds some uses in space and military applications despite the risk of brain and nerve damage. Modified cells act as experimental and fragile molecular level assembly devices. Human adapted foot and mouth disease emerges. End Arctic war

2077 Suspended animation techniques are safe enough for civilian use by risk takers. Some health problems occur in a

few percent of patients. Canadian province of Nunavut secedes and joins Greenland.

2078 Separatist pressure in NW Territories and Alaska. To date these northern regions have yet to cede.

Commercial release of monkey AC.
2079 Flu Pandemic, Iceland joins the USE

2080 First interstellar probe launched to Proxima Centauri. Average speed 20% c. After this time new probes are planned to be launched about every 20 years.

2081 Human level artificial consciousness secretly created by Meyer Stuttgart GMBH. Nanotechnological production of proteins, a technology good for medicines but too expensive for food production because of the limited conditions assemblers can survive in. Norway joins the USE

2082 US navy human level intelligence dolphins discovered in a major PR headache for the government.

2083 Low resolution memory recording can replay some memories but is of insufficient resolution to recreate a personality

2085 Martian 'beanstalk' completed, although Mars is a better candidate for a cable the population and industry have only now grown to make one feasible, the cable was also delayed by the plight of Earth's drain on the System economics.

2086 Uplifted orang-utans. Nanotechnological photosynthesis, still expensive compared to using plants and non-economical except in some space applications.

2087 Uplifted African elephants

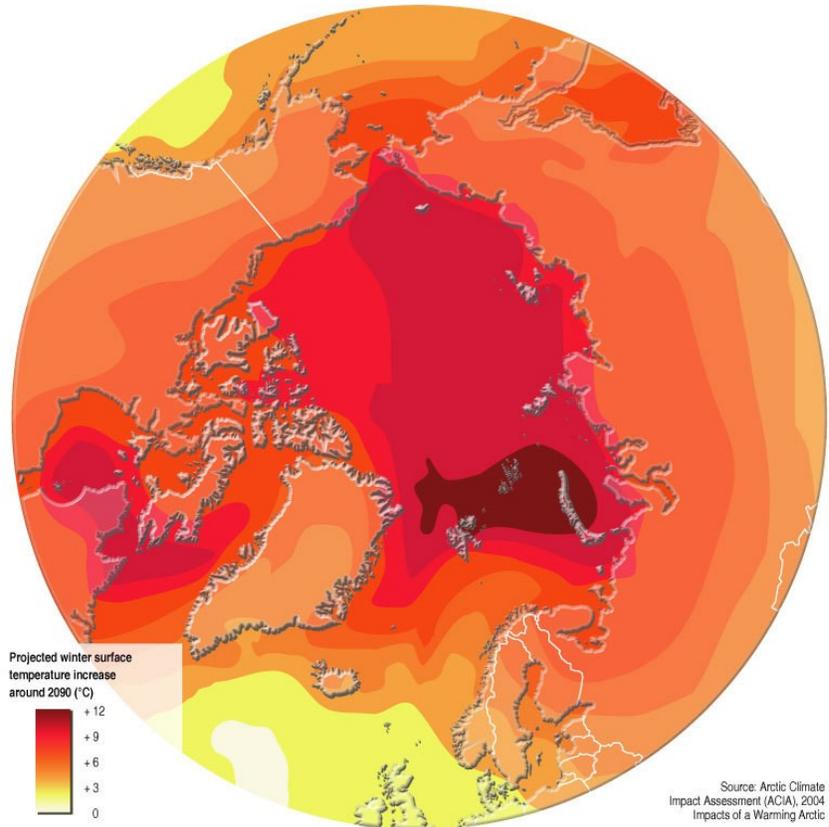
2088 Uplifted lowland gorillas

2089 Uplifted animal citizenship

2090 UN grants colonists the right to terraform Mars. Earth's population reaches 9.2 billion, 89% of which live in developing nations.

2091 Educators (Deep Learning GURPS Biotech p20) machines that implant skills directly into the brain. Despite solar shades and other measures global warming has reached a 2°C increase.

2092 Full resolution memory recordings can capture an entire personality in the hope that future technology could revive them. Uplifted raven population reaches 10 million, about one per 10 000 humans but most of the birds are concentrated in Australia. Campaign Starting Year



AREOFORMS

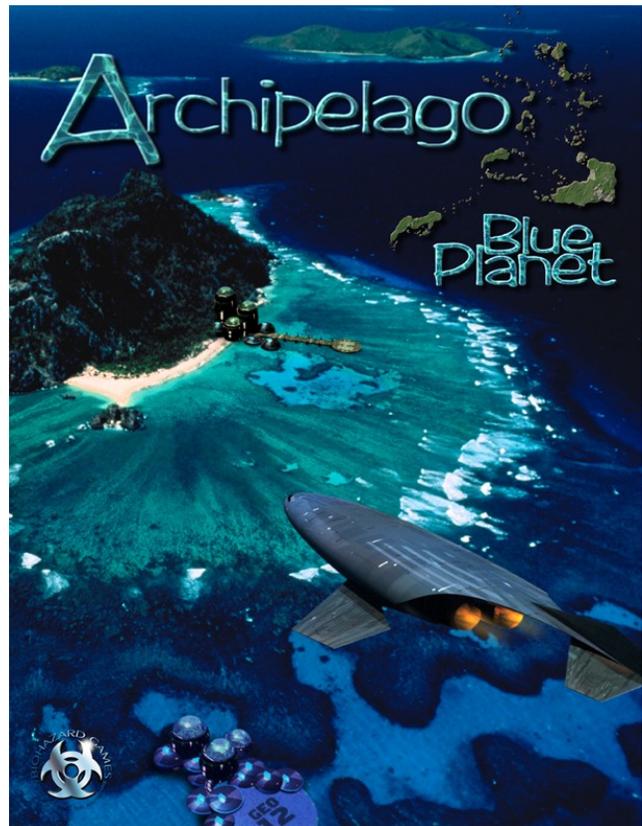
A Species for Blue Planet and GURPS Blue Planet

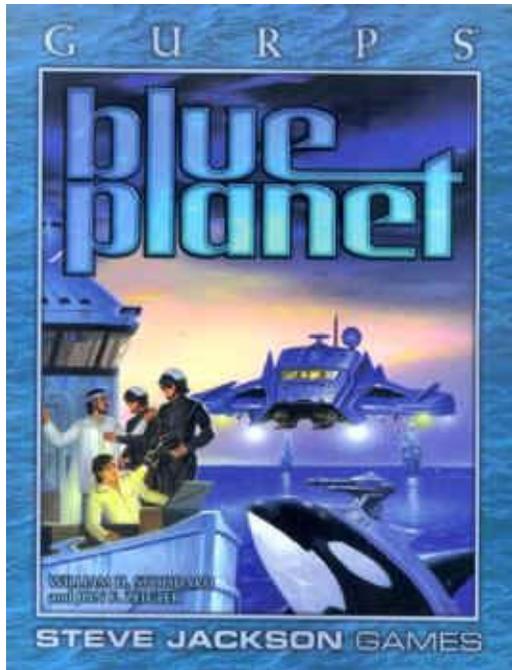
by Karl Brown

In the Blue Planet setting by 2199 Mars has been partially terraformed; still arid and barren the world now has a 0.33bar 90% CO₂, 10% nitrogen atmosphere. The McDouglas Family secretly contracted Gendiver to create humans designed for survival on the Martian frontier. Areoforms were finally revealed to the public in 2198. The design fell short of total adaptation to the Martian environment but allows a human to survive exposed on Mars for a longer period. The adaptations of the design draw upon the knowledge developed for Gendiver's aquaforms and the Martian Spacer Project but also include new state of the art technologies.

Most important are the adaptations to deal with the Martian atmosphere. The oxygen carrying capacity of the blood and muscles has been increased allowing them to hold their breath for almost an hour. Unlike Divers however they do not have collapsing respiratory systems so are limited to normal human ranges for diving depth. Areoforms are barrel chested to adapt to lower pressures and immune to altitude sickness. The most unusual feature of the areoform is the aerotolerant anaerobic symbiote. This is a colony of single celled organisms that scavenge carbon dioxide from the blood and tissues and release some oxygen and biochemical factors that slow metabolism when carbon dioxide levels are high. This slows poisoning in the Martian air. When the areoform can no longer hold her breath she falls unconscious, heart rate slows, and breathing becomes very shallow. In this state dehydration, in about ten days, will kill an areoform before carbon dioxide poisoning will. If an emergency I.V. is inserted then life will be sustained for ten days after the fluid runs out or starvation, which proceeds at one third the usual rate, takes its toll. Development of a symbiote that would cross from the mother and adapt to the genetically similar child during pregnancy was a major breakthrough. The symbiote is not transferable under any other circumstance.

The other features of the areoform are also adaptations to the arid, low gravity, high radiation environment of Mars. Hips and legs are modified to provide a more comfortable gait in the low gravity of Mars without affecting performance under Earth gravity. Sealing nostrils, tough blue-black skin, modified kidneys, and tinted nictating membranes provide protection against the radiation, glare, cold, and sand storms of Mars. Areoforms tolerate temperatures between 5oC and 45oC. Areoforms also have an equivalent of the salt tolerance biomod.





Game rules

Sprinting rate +1m/action in Martian/Nereus gravity.
 Only needs a third of the normal water requirements for humans.
 Hold breath for minutes equal to 2/3x Endurance then slowed metabolism (negligible oxygen and nutrition requirements, dehydration is limiting).

+10 to Agility +20 to Constitution +20 to Endurance -10 to Strength

Cost to obtain as a modi: 32,000cs

The truly rich can afford an advanced version of the redesign that has the features of the Alpha redesign not already within the areoform design. These are summarized below.

+10 Appearance +10 Awareness

Innate immunity to most diseases and medical conditions. Double healing rate without scarring. Only 4-6 hours of sleep per night. No genetic defects. Lifespan 120+ unaided, 160 with modern medicine.

Cost to obtain as a modi: 52 000cs.

GURPS 3rd Ed. Rules

+2 (20) to Dexterity +2 (20) to Health -2 (-20) to Strength

Decreased Life support 1 (10, Only needs a third of the normal water requirements for humans), Oxygen Storage (14), Very Fit (15, TL10), Enhanced Move +20% (at Martian/Nereus gravity only -50% final cost 1pt)

The truly rich can afford a advanced version of the redesign that has the features of the Alpha redesign not already within the areoform design. These are summarized below.

Attractive (5), +1 Alertness (5), Disease Resistant (5), Less Sleep 2 (6), Longevity (5) Rapid Healing (5), No genetic defects (0), No vestigial organs (0), Heal without scars (0).

Total +31pts

THE TORG FILES

Roleplaying the Possibility Wars with FATE

by Jeffrey Hosmer

Back in the late 90s, a friend of mine introduced me to a strange roleplaying game called "TORG" and my life was changed forever. Well, maybe not, but the quirky little RPG from West End Games captured my imagination in a way that no other roleplaying game ever has. Not for its rules, but for its setting. Where else could you have dinosaur-riding lizardmen fighting evil alongside elves with M-16 machine guns? Where else could a priest of the horror realm of Orrorsh attempt to heal a Texan Baptist with a miracle only for the Baptist to spontaneously combust?

But I was never really happy with the system. TORG tried to be a lot of things, and it was not always consistent in how it applied its rules. Also, some products were far superior (the Orrorsh Sourcebook) than others (the War's End module). Then the long-awaited Dresden Files RPG came out. Never since TORG, perhaps, have I so fallen in love with a ruleset. I decided that this would be the system I would use to run any future TORG game.

First, sit down with your players and discuss what sort of game you want to play, where your Storm Knights will be based, etc. Decide which realities have attacked Core Earth. Maybe you want to play through the original invasion, or maybe you want to switch things up a bit. Perhaps Tharkold managed to invade after all in your campaign, or the Living Land invaded the Amazon Rain Forest instead of North America.

Next, come up with themes, threats, and faces for each Realm. Perhaps your players have a particularly vengeful Cyber-Inquisitor hunting them down, or have incurred the wrath of a techno-demon. Or maybe you befriended a tribe of Edeinos (lizard men in the Living Land). It's good to have specific faces for each Realm. You might also want to have a face for Core Earth, to represent either allies or enemies you face there (such as the Delphi Council.) The Realms replace "Locations" in the DFRPG City Creation, though you can have some actual locations if you want as well. I would suggest that you let each player be responsible for one or more of the invading realities and have some influence on the meta-game of the Possibility Wars. They should probably be "in charge" of the reality their character comes from. I will go into more detail on this in my section of Running the Possibility Wars.

Character creation mostly follows the rules of the DFRPG, with a few minor changes. First, every character is a Storm Knight, capable of holding on to their personal reality, so they must have the Reality skill at Average (+1) or greater. The use of this skill will be explored later.

Second, the character's High Concept must include a mention of their native reality, either literally or through inference, such as "CORE EARTH PSYCHIC" or "CYBERPRIEST." In addition to the character's High Concept, Trouble, and Aspects, they are also bound by the Aspects of their home reality and whatever reality they happen to be in. The TORG Files has several additional skills, which will be explained in the Skills Section: Arcane, Faith, Psionics, Reality, Weird Science

Below are a list of Templates for the TORG Files. They are split into two sections, "Race" Templates and "Power" Templates. Each costs a certain amount of Refresh.

RACE TEMPLATES

CORE EARTHER

The Core Earther is these rules' equivalent of DFRPG's Pure Mortal. Due to Core Earth's World Laws, any native of Core Earth has +2 Refresh.

Musts: Unlike the Pure Mortal, the Core Earther may take Powers. However, in many cases these powers will

contradict the Core Earther's reality and leave them prone to disconnection. Core Earth does not support most Magic, Miracles, or Cyberware. It does support Psychic Powers and Martial Arts.

Options: Core Earthers can take any powers or stunts they want, but they should be wary of four-case contradictions. On the other hand, their native reality is the largest, so it should be easiest for them to reconnect.

Important Skills: None (or Any). Minimum Refresh Cost: 0 (add +2 to your Refresh).

Dwarf

Musts: High Concept must include Dwarf. Wizard's Constitution (-0) - Dwarves are tough (though not inhumanly so) and long-lived, so they get this ability. They must originally be from Aysle, though they may have transformed.

Options: Dwarves can be warriors and mages. They must have originally come from Aysle, though they may have transformed to any reality. They tend not to be priests of any god, as they believe that Aysle's creators left that world long ago.

Important Skills: None (or Any).

Minimum Refresh Cost: 0

Edeinos

Musts: High Concept must include Edeinos. Claws (-1) - This covers the Edeinos' claws, teeth, and tail. They must originally be from the Living Land, though they may have transformed.

Options: With the Living Land's high Spiritual Axiom, Edeinos are well-disposed to be Miracle Workers.

Skills: Faith (Edeinos usually use a lot of on Miracles)

Minimum Refresh Cost: -1

Elf

Musts: High Concept must include Elf. Wizard's Constitution (-0) - Elves are tough (though not inhumanly so) and long-lived, so they get this ability. Inhuman Speed (-2) OR Inhuman Strength (-2) - Elves get a choice of which, or may take both. The Silent Death (+1) - If an elf disconnects for over a day in a reality with a low Magic Axiom (Core Earth, Living Land, or Nippon Tech), they automatically get a sticky aspect for the disease SILENT DEATH. The Game Master may compel this aspect once a day for a 10 strength attack against the character's Endurance. Any shifts are applied as damage. The aspect (and any consequences earned from the daily attacks) remain until the character manages to reconnect. SILENT DEATH can also be invoked in play by others to represent the character's weakness. A character Taken Out by the Silent Death will become comatose and will die within a week unless returned to Aysle and treated by a cleric.

Options: An elf can take the stunt Animal Handling (Dragon) and the Survival Skill to become a Dragon Rider. The Dragon is an NPC run by the Game Master

Skills: Survival (if a Dragon Rider)

Minimum Refresh Cost: -1

Giant

Musts: High Concept must include Giant Hulking Size (-2) Inhuman Strength (-2) Inhuman Toughness (-2) The Catch (+3) (Magic Weapons and Magic). The Silent Death (+1) - If a giant disconnects for over a day in a reality with a low Magic Axiom (Core Earth, Living Land, or Nippon Tech), they automatically get a sticky aspect for the disease SILENT DEATH. The Game Master may compel this aspect once a day for a 10 strength attack against the character's Endurance. Any shifts are applied as damage. The aspect (and any consequences earned from the daily attacks) remain until the character manages to reconnect. SILENT DEATH can also be invoked in play by others to represent the character's weakness. A character Taken Out by the Silent Death will become comatose and will die within a week unless returned to Aysle and treated by a cleric.

Options:

Skills: None

Minimum Refresh Cost: -3

Mutant

Technology and magic can damage a being's genetic code, producing a mutant. Most mutants have only negative traits, but a few got "lucky." You can use this template to pick any powers you want, with your Game Master's approval. Tharkold and Nippon Tech are the only realms with mutants.

Musts: High Concept must include Mutant Have an negative aspect that is a result of the mutation. A power or powers that costs at least 2 Refresh Wasting Disease (+1) - If a mutant disconnects for over a day in any realm other than Nippon Tech, Tharkold, or the Cyberpapacy, they automatically get the sticky aspect WASTING DISEASE. The Game Master may compel this aspect once a day for a 10 strength attack against the character's Endurance. Any shifts are applied as damage. The aspect (and any consequences earned from the daily attacks) remain until the character manages to reconnect. WASTING DISEASE can also be invoked in play by others to represent the character's weakness. A character Taken Out by the Wasting Disease will become comatose and will die within a week unless returned to Tharkold and treated by a medic.

Options: Anything goes with mutants. You can take Creature Features or take Channeling to have energy blasts. Speed, Toughness, and Strength enhancements are also popular. You might want to look at the Psychic Template as well. Mutants are the only creatures in Tharkold and Nippon Tech that might take the Psychic Template. (In the original rules, Psionics was limited to Core Earth and the Space Gods realm. However, it seems reasonable to me that mutants might possess them, and Tharkold and Nippon Tech were only one axiom point off from meeting the requirements for psionics.

Skills: None.

Minimum Refresh Cost: -1

Stalenger

Flying starfish shaped creatures from the Living Land. They do not have eyes, but instead "see" using a form of sonar.

Musts: High Concept must include Stalenger. Wings (-1) - Actually, inflated bladders and compressed air, but mechanically it's the same Claws (-1) - A stalenger's natural weapon is its tentacles. Supernatural Sense (-1) - Sonar

Options: Being from the Living Land, Stalengers are prime candidates for Miracles.

Skills: Athletics (for flying), Awareness (for Sonar), Faith

Refresh Cost: -3

Technodemon

One of the two dominant races of Tharkold, Technodemons are incredibly tough and nasty. Their entire culture is based around pain and domination, and they have waged a war with the human Race for millennia.

Musts: High Concept must include; Technodemon. Must take the Cyborg Template (+1). Technodemons must state which of their powers stem from cyberware. LifeCyber (-1) - Grants Armor:1 vs. Cyberpsychosis stress. Demons only. Prevents the Silent Death. Wings (-1). Claws (-1). Supernatural Senses (-1) - Nightvision. Inhuman Strength (-2). Inhuman Toughness (-2). Inhuman Recovery (-2). The Catch (Magic) (+3). Channeling/Evocation and/or Ritual/Thaumaturgy (varies)

Options: Most technodemons use Pain Weapons (Weapon:2, mental damage instead of physical.)

Skills: Discipline, Conviction, Lore, Fists

Minimum Refresh Cost: -8

Vampyre

Technically Horrors of Orrorsh, some few Vampyres manage to retain their souls against the Gaunt Man's Corruption.

Musts: High Concept must include Vampyre. Inhuman Toughness (-2). Inhuman Recovery (-2). The Catch (+3) - Typical Bram Stroker Weaknesses. Blood Drinker (-1). Claws (-1). Feeding Dependency (+1). Beast Change (-1). Gaseous Form (-3) Echoes of the Beast (-1) - Senses. Cloak of Shadows (-1)

Corruption (-1) - The Lawbreaker power. +1 per Corruption power to rolls when committing a Wicked act. (See the section on Orrorsh below.)

Options: As a Vampyre gains Refresh, he can add Inhuman Speed and Strength and gain Domination or more beast change powers. Note that drinking blood from a human is a Wicked act, which will add more Corruption powers.

Skills: Discipline
Minimum Refresh Cost: -9

Werewolf

Musts: High Concept must include Werewolf. Beast Change (-1). Human Form (+1) affecting. Claws (-1). Inhuman Strength (-2). Inhuman Speed (-2). Pack Instincts (-1)

Options: Other werebeasts are definitely possible, as well as beastweres.

Skills: Varies

Minimum Refresh Cost: -6

Power Templates

Cyborg

A cyborg is someone who has added machinery to their body to either overcome natural deficiencies or to gain some benefit. Only Tharkold, the Cyberpapcy, and the Space Gods have the necessary Technological axioms for Cyberware. Cyberware is pretty flexible. You can buy almost any stunt or power as long as you can justify it as Cyberware. For example, if you want a built-in gun, you could simply take a weapon rating and claim it's built in. This would probably be a -1 Refresh power, like Claws, or it could be higher if it's Weapon:3 or greater. You could take Refinement to get "enchanted item" slots that you could use for single effect cyberware.

Cyborgs cannot take any Spellcraft powers (except Refinement for "enchanted item" slots as stated above) as Cyberware unless they are from Tharkold. The Tharkoldu created Occultech, which allows them magical cyberware, but it is linked to their Law of Domination. (The Cyberpapcy's "Law of Heretical Magic" would preclude them from developing Occultech, and the Space Gods lack a high enough magical axiom for it.) Occultech lets you have cyberware focus items built into your body. Rote spells are kept on "Spell Chips."

Musts: Must take an aspect related to Cyberware. Cyberpsychosis (+1) - This works just like a Vampire's Feeding Dependency, except that it uses the Social stress track. A Cyborg must take other powers (at least -2 Refresh worth) that come from Cybernetic enhancements. Whenever they use their cyberware in a scene, they take an social attack with a strength equal to the Refresh value of the powers they used. This can inflict consequences on them or even take them out. Cyborgs must make a Discipline roll vs. the attack. If they succeed, they take no damage. If they fail, they take stress as though they suffered an attack. Consequences and stress from Cyberpsychosis cannot go away unless the Cyborg is treated by someone with the Doctor (Psychologist) Stunt. This will clear stress and begin the recovery of Consequences.

Options: The sky's the limit. (Or your Refresh value)

Skills: Discipline

Minimum Refresh Cost:

Mage

Wielders of magic, Mages differ from DFRPG wizards by using the Arcane skill instead of Conviction to summon power. Also, magic in TORG does not Hex technology and has different "elements:" Alteration, Apportation, Conjunction, and Divination. Thaumaturgy focus specialties remain unchanged. Focus items do not specialize in the "elements" under the TORG Files. Instead, they specialize in Arcane Knowledges:

The Essences; Death, Life, Time, True Knowledge

The Principles; Darkness, Light, Magic

The Mixed Forces; Inanimate Forces, Living Forces

The Elements; Air, Earth, Fire, Metal, Plant, Water

The Kindred; Aquatic, Avian, Earthly, Elemental, Enchanted, Entity, Folk

Because there are more Arcane Knowledges, and they are narrower than the DFRPG specialties, you don't have to make the "offensive/defensive" distinction of DFRPG. Magic can only be used without contradiction in Aysle, the Cyberpapcy, the Nile Empire, and Tharkold. (Note that the Cyberpapcy's Law of Heretical Magic will have some effect on your spells there.) Some minor effects might be possible without contradiction in Core Earth or the Space

Gods realm* at your GM's discretion. Orrorsh's magic axiom uses the Occult power, as dictated by the Power of Corruption. Nippon Tech and the Living Land have practically no magic.

** There seems to be no reason for the Space Gods to have as high a Magic Axiom as they do in the canonical rules, as they seem to be rational to a fault (one of their many faults). Some on the TORG Mailing List have argued that they should be lower, such as 0, like the Living Land. Given that the TORG Files doesn't use numerical axioms, I would suggest that, if you use the Space Gods, give them a much lower Magic Axiom.*

Musts: Channeling and/or Ritual (-2 to -4). The Sight (-1)

Options: A Mage can take full Evocation and/or Thaumaturgy, if they can spare the refresh

Skills: Arcane, Discipline, Lore

Minimum Refresh Cost: -3

Martial Artist

Martial Artists are those who have mastered the power of their "Ki." It is not just someone who has studied judo or aikido. This application of Ki is only possible without contradiction in Core Earth, the Nile Empire,* and Nippon Tech.

** In the original game, the Nile Empire didn't have Martial Arts, but they later came up with the skill "Nile Martial Arts," which was just like regular martial arts, only "flashier and more 'B-movie' style." I've decided to remove the distinction*

Musts: Must have an aspect related to Martial Arts. Must have the Fists Skill and take some Fist stunts related to Martial Arts (such as Armed Arts) Martial Arts (-2) - This is Spirit Channeling.

Options: Ninja can take "Cloak of Shadows" power as well.

Skills: Fists, Athletics, Stealth, Weapon, Conviction, Discipline

Minimum Refresh Cost: -3

Miracle Worker

Believers in a god are granted special powers that they can use to further their god's agenda. In TORG Files, we use Sponsored Magic to simulate this. You must choose a god and discuss your god's agenda with your Game Master. Usually, you can only worship one deity. Miracles are possible in Aysle, the Cyberpapacy, the Nile Empire, Orrorsh, the Space Gods*, Tharkold, and especially the Living Land. They can occur, but tend to be subtle and mostly enhance the abilities of believers, in Core Earth and Nippon Tech.

** Like its Magic Axiom, the canonical Spirit Axiom of the Space Gods seems rather high for what is a mostly rational realm. I would suggest lowering it to something more along the lines of Core Earth and Nippon Tech. Psionics could take over any miracles (such as create reality tree) that are absolutely necessary.*

Of special notice here is that you while you use Conviction to summon power, as in the DFRPG, you use the Faith skill instead of Discipline. Also, the miracle worker is not necessarily the supplier of the Faith skill. Instead, whomever benefits from the Miracle must make the Faith roll. Failure can result in Backlash or Fallout.

Casting a miracle on someone of another Faith is another matter all together. In that case, both the miracle worker and the recipient engage in a one-round spiritual struggle. They both roll Faith and compare. The loser takes stress and/or consequences. The loser can avoid all stress, however, by choosing to convert to the winner's faith.

Musts: You must take an aspect related to your god. Focus (-4) - Sponsored magic, covering your god's agenda. It might be able to do certain effects "with evocation's methods and speed" if they are in keeping with your god's agenda, or give a boost for some effects.

Options: Unlike DFRPG, you don't get a discount for taking Thaumaturgy and Evocation. They are totally different powers here and use different skills.

Skills: Conviction, Faith, Lore

Minimum Refresh Cost: -4

Occultist

The Occult is a special magical skill that the Gaunt Man has made available, mainly to corrupt people through the Power of Corruption. In TORG Files terms, it is the Rituals skill, specializing in the Occult. The Occult skill is often the only way to find a Horror's weakness and send it to its True Death, but the Power of Corruption fills its very heart. You could also consider the Occult power to be a Sponsored Power, as nothing involving it happens without meeting the

Power of Corruption's (and the Gaunt Man's) agenda.

Basically, you are creating a thaumaturgical ritual, trying to meet a Complexity number as normal. However, the Power of Corruption will lower the complexity by five for each Wicked act you perform. Wicked acts are actions of unnecessary evil. Killing an enemy in combat where he's shooting at you isn't Wicked, but killing a guard when escape seems certain, or torturing the guard for information, would be Wicked. Performing a Wicked Act gives you a Fate point and a Corruption power, which lowers your Refresh by one and gives you a +1 to all future Wicked Acts. (Consider it a compel by the Power of Corruption.)

Accepting the Corruption, however, might lower the complexity enough to allow you to cast it instantly, whereupon it is treated more like an evocation. Normal magical spells are contradicted by the Power of Corruption (and the Occult is a contradiction everywhere except Orrosh). However, if your Lore is high enough to cast an Occult ritual without further preparation, then it can be cast almost like an evocation.

Musts: Have an aspect related to the Occult. Occult (-2) - Ritual power, specializing in the Occult. Due to its similarities to magical Thaumaturgy (and the Power of Corruption's desire to make the Occult available to corrupt people) you can buy the Occult for only one Refresh if you already have Thaumaturgy.

Options: Occultists may want to take The Sight (-1), which is very useful for telling what is really going on in Orrosh.

Skills: Lore, Conviction, Discipline

Minimum Refresh Cost: -2

Psychic

Using the power of your mind to achieve something, that is psionics. In the canonical TORG rules, only Core Earth and the Space Gods realm had psionics, but your GM might allow mutants from Tharkold and Nippon Tech to possess this. Psionics works like DFRPG magic, except it uses the Psionics skill.

The specializations for Psionics are: Biofeedback (control of your own body), Defense (defending yourself against psionic attacks), Kinesis (manipulating objects), Psychic Senses (Divination), Telepathy (Psychomancy). Psychic focus items tend to be special crystals or sentimental items that provide a "crutch" for the psychic. Psychics can, with your Game Master's permission, imbue objects with psychic energy (creating Enchanted Items and Potions, per the DFRPG). *Musts:* Have an aspect related to psionics Psionics (-4) - Basically, this is Channeling and Ritual, though you can do Psychomancy and Divination "with evocation's methods and speed," per the rules under Sponsored Magic.

Options: For an additional refresh, you can master another Psionic specialization (like using Refinement in DFRPG to learn another element.) The Powers from the Psychic Ability section are all appropriate for a Psychic, and so are some of the Minor abilities, like Ghost Speaker. If you want to be a pyrokinetic, cryokinetic, or some other flavor, your psychic aspect can relate to that.

Skills: Psionics, Discipline, Lore

Minimum Refresh Cost: -4

Pulp Hero

In the Nile Empire, some men and women are gifted with powers beyond mortal ken. Perhaps they are the result of long years of study, or they come from some mystical/technological item the hero carries, or they were born with them, or they come from some accident. In any event, when these men and women use their powers, for good or for evil, others take notice.

Pulp Powers come from the Nile Empire's world laws (the Laws of Drama and Action), so they are contradiction anywhere else. Characters of other realities can gain Pulp Powers, but they will be four-case contradictions outside the Nile Empire and one-case contradictions inside it (but they are usable without fear of contradiction in a Nile Pure Zone.)

Musts: Have an aspect related to your pulp powers Marked by Power (-1) - Mystery Men get respect wherever they go.

Options: You can take Power or Stunts for your Pulp Powers. For instance, if you wanted to make a gunslinger hero with power over shadows, you could take the Cloak of Shadows power and some Guns stunts.

Skills: Fists, Guns, Athletics (the life of a Mystery Man is always exciting.)

Minimum Refresh Cost: -2

Weird Scientist

In the Nile Empire, Weird Science can produce effects far beyond its Tech Axiom (the Laws of Drama and Action are at work again.) In the TORG Files, the effects of Weird Science are mostly explained through Items of Power, Enchanted Items, and Potions.

Generally, Items of Power and Enchanted Items must be defined before a session begins, while "Potions" can be produced in play (or, if the Weird Scientist has some unassigned slots, he can pay a Fate Point to say that he has just the gizmo he needs). With regard to Weird Science, a potion is a one-shot device or "gizmo." A good Weird Scientist should take several Refinement powers so as to have extra slots on hand. The skill Weird Science replaces Lore, Scholarship replaces Conviction, and Craftsmanship replaces Discipline if it becomes necessary in the standard Thaumaturgy rules.

Musts: Take an aspect that includes Weird Science. Weird Science (-2) - This is Ritual (Crafting), which allows the Weird Scientist to make his gizmos. It cannot be upgraded to Thaumaturgy, as it is actually a totally different discipline.

Options: Refinement

Skills: Weird Science, Scholarship, Craftsmanship

Minimum Refresh Cost: -2

Reality and the Possibility Wars

Reality

Reality is the key concept to playing TORG. Each cosm/realm has its own reality, and each Storm Knight carries their native reality with them, unless they are in a Pure Zone. Even there, they can access their reality through the creation of a Reality Bubble. Because they retain their connection to their native reality, Storm Knights can create contradictions, but they run the risk of disconnection. Disconnection removes a Storm Knight's ability to create contradiction. In these rules, a Storm Knight will tend to disconnect because of a Compel on the relevant axioms/aspects, or as the result of a Consequence.

To reconnect to their native reality, a Storm Knight must either return there, where reconnection is automatic, or roll their Reality Skill against a difficulty of 3-6, depending on how different the realities are. A character from Tharkold, a reality of cyberware and magic, will have a hard time reconnecting in the Living Land, a primitive reality of miracles. Note that if you disconnected as a result of a Consequence, you must remain disconnected for as long as the rules for recovering from a Consequence require. Recovery from a disconnection consequence does not begin until a character returns to their native reality.

For example, Jim, a Core Earth psychic, chooses to accept a Mild Consequence of "Disconnected" while in the Living Land. Afterward, his party takes him back to Core Earth. Recovery begins, but Jim cannot remove the consequence for at least one more scene. Disconnection should probably not be taken as a moderate or severe consequence, unless the player really wants to play a character who cannot create contradictions for a session or more.

Four Casing: In the original TORG rules, characters always disconnected on a roll of "1" on a d20 if they were contradicting their native reality OR the local reality. If they were contradicting both, such as an Elf from Aysle trying to use an M-16 in the Living Land, then they could disconnect on a roll of 1-4. Hence, this was called "Four Casing." In the TORG Files, any character attempting to Four Case will automatically disconnect if they fail their roll.

Long-Range Contradiction: Normally, a Storm Knight's ability to create a contradiction only works when they are present and, if applicable, touching the tool they are using. However, once an item leaves the Storm Knight's immediate presence, it can no longer contradict the local reality unless the Storm Knight creates a long-range contradiction.

For example, firing a gun in the Living Land is no problem (for a Storm Knight or a non-disconnected Ord). Once the

bullet leaves the gun it is just a chunk of metal moving really fast. No contradiction there. Throwing a grenade, however, is a problem in the Living Land, as the grenade has to function, whether mechanically, chemically, or electronically, once it's left the Storm Knight's hand.

When creating a long-range contradiction, a Storm Knight uses his or her Reality skill instead of the original skill. The original skill modifies the Reality skill (if the original skill is higher than the Reality skill, add one to the roll; if it's lower, subtract one).

So, if you are throwing a grenade in the Living Land, you would use Reality instead of your Weapons skill. If you have a Reality of +5 and a Weapons of +3, then you would subtract one from your roll. So, if you roll a "+++" on the dice, you'd get a total of +6 on your attempt to use the grenade.

Zones: Stelae zones come in three types; Pure, Dominant, and Mixed. In a Pure Zone, there is only one reality, and even Storm Knights cannot create a contradiction without expending possibility energy (in these rules by spending a Fate Point). In a Dominant Zone, one reality is dominant over another but contradictions can exist. In a Mixed Zone, both realities exist. In that case, the highest axioms of the realities are used, as well as all applicable World Laws.

Hardpoints: Some objects, known as hardpoints, have a strong connection to the reality in which they were created. Hardpoints can retain and project their native reality, even when surrounded by a foreign reality. The size of the Hardpoint's zone depends on its mass and how much possibility energy it has absorbed over time. Hardpoints project a Pure Zone immediately around them, and a Dominant Zone further out. In the original TORG game, Silicon Valley, the Eiffel Tower, the Liberty Bell, and the Statue of Liberty were all hardpoints of Core Earth reality.

Moving a hardpoint removes its connection to its reality, and its power quickly fades. A member of an invading reality can also try to destroy a hardpoint by invoking a reality storm against it.

Storm Knights and High Lords can create hardpoints, though of limited duration, through a Group Power or Darkness Device.

Talismans: Talismans are mobile hardpoints that can be recharged. They can be created by a Group Power or by a Darkness Device. Like hardpoints, the size of the talisman's reality field is determined by its mass. Talismans that weigh one kilogram or less only affect their bearer.

Reality Bubble: If you are in a Pure Zone, you cannot create a contradiction unless you spend a FATE Point to create a Reality Bubble. A Reality Bubble is a skin-tight zone of your native reality that lasts for 15 minutes. It counts as a Dominant Zone, so you can use it in a Pure Zone of your own reality to allow you to create contradictions again.

Reality Storm: Storm Knights can invoke their powers of Reality against other Possibility-rated characters. They call upon their connection to their home realities to reject the reality of the other character. This causes a Reality Storm. Only two characters may be involved in an invoked Reality Storm, which seals them off from any help or hindrance. The storm forms midway between the two characters and fills one zone. The characters begin to make opposed Reality skill checks against each other. The winner inflicts the difference as shifts of damage against the loser. The damage can be applied to either the Physical or Mental Stress Track, at the loser's preference. They can also take consequences to reduce the stress.

Combatants can only compel or invoke their opponent's aspects. The storm keeps any other aspects from entering play. Any time that the winner creates at least three shifts of damage, the storm grows larger by one zone. Anyone and anything inside the Storm can also take damage from it, though they cannot inflict damage on either combatant. At any point, the winner of a roll may declare that the storm has become a maelstrom. A maelstrom will not increase in size any longer, and the winner of the conflict cannot transform the loser. When the loser is Taken Out, the winner can

choose to transform the loser to their reality. (If the loser is a player and doesn't want to transform, they can negotiate for another result.) Transformation automatically changes the loser's High Concept to reflect their new reality and strips them of all FATE Points. Note that a Core Earth character loses their +2 to Refresh if they transform. This could reduce them below 1 Refresh and make them an NPC.

Eternity Shards: Eternity shards are items made of pure possibility energy. They are each associated with a certain reality and they can teach Storm Knights Group Powers. Group Powers are special abilities that only Storm Knights may have and that they can only use in concert with at least one other Storm Knight.

In the TORG Files, the actual Eternity Shards are Items of Power. Their actual abilities will vary, depending on their form and purpose. For instance, the Heart of Coyote could act as a powerful focus item for performing miracles, adding bonuses to both Conviction and Faith. Excalibur, on the other hand, is a magical sword that probably can, with the expenditure of a Fate Point, satisfy the "Catch" of any creature it is wielded against. Eternity Shards are also like Sponsored Magic, however, in that they have an agenda and will only work in the furtherance of that agenda. The Heart of Coyote will only aid those who try to awaken spiritual power within humankind, while Excalibur will only work when wielded to defend Britain.

Group Powers: Group Powers are a bit trickier, but it helps that most of them are plot devices. In order to learn or use a Group Power, each Storm Knight must spend a FATE Point. Group Powers can only be used in concert with other Storm Knights, and use the Thaumaturgy rules, substituting Reality for Lore. They have limited use in combat because of the time it takes to use them.

Group Powers

Block - Deadens the connection between a stela and its Darkness Device, making it easier to remove.

Create Hardpoint - Changes an object into a short-lived hardpoint.

Create Talisman - Changes an object into a talisman.

Gate - Creates a portal between two places or realities.

Herald - Sends information from one reality to another.

Insight - Allows the Storm Knights to ask one question of the GM.

Judgment - Allows Storm Knights to view the "inner being" of another.

Life Thread - Sustains a mortally wounded character who cannot be kept alive by any other means.

Mind Expansion - Increases a non-physical skill of one character.

Send - Sends the soul of a dying Storm Knight to reincarnate in another reality.

Shift Possibility - When attempting a skill check, each participant rolls the dice and they can choose which roll to use.

Sense Stelae - Determine the location of a stela

Transcendence - Transforms a worthy Ord into a Storm Knight.

Removing Stelae: Unfortunately, defeating the High Lords is not just about tearing up the stelae and letting the native reality retake the land. If this is done, the transformed people will all die, as they lost almost all their possibility energy in the first transformation. Storm Knights must reignite their possibility energy by performing great deeds that fill them with hope. Once they feel that hope, the Storm Knights can try to find and remove the stelae without risking the lives of the transformed.

In the original TORG game, these great deeds were called Glory Deeds, and players gained them by producing a really spectacular result AND a Glory Card from TORG's Drama Deck. It was a rare occurrence. Some modules also had events where they said, "This counts as an automatic Glory." For the TORG Files, I suggest that you mainly use the latter rule. Build some actions in your adventures that can count as automatic Glories if the Storm Knights accomplish them. Also, if your party surprises you with a truly heroic and impressive act, call it a Glory. Once the Storm Knights have a Glory, they must tell the story of their deeds. In the TORG Files, this would be a Performance roll. You are placing an aspect on the stela zone that can later be tagged when attempting to remove a stela. The difficulty of such

a maneuver is usually 3, but could be higher or lower depending on the specific circumstances. Generally, the closer to a maelstrom.

The Realities

Each reality in TORG is defined by four Axioms (Magic, Social, Spiritual, and Technological) and (generally) three World Laws. In converting TORG to FATE, I have made all of these aspects, so each is defined by seven aspects. I will give some explanation of how they may be invoked or compelled in each case. In some cases, I have changed the World Laws to something that works better in FATE. Most World Laws are written as "The Law of X," but a few are "The Power of X." A Power is stronger and subtler than a Law. It can affect Storm Knights wherever they are in its reality, even when the Storm Knight has invoked a Reality Bubble.

I am also including aspects for the High Lords and their Darkness Devices. I have not included stats for them, however, as High Lords are practically plot devices and not characters, per se. Player characters will not be able to fight them directly until much later in any campaign. At that point, individual Game Masters can come up with stats that suit their world.

Aysle, the Magical Reality

Magic Axiom: AYSLE IS MAGIC, MAGIC IS AYSLE

Social Axiom: INDEPENDENT PEOPLES UNDER THE DELEGATE LAGACY

Spirit Axiom: GODS OF HONOR, BALANCE, AND CORRUPTION

Tech Axiom: STEAM AND WHEEL-LOCKS

The Law of Magic - Everyone has magic in Aysle. Most people can only do minor things with it, but they all have some bit of magical talent.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked when casting or defending against magic.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to trigger a magical effect or make someone solve a problem with magic.

The Law of Honor - Honor cannot be hidden in Aysle; it shows in a being's appearance and bearing.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to perform an honorable act, one of faith, loyalty, respect or valor.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make an Honorable hero act when faced with Corruption.

The Law of Corruption - Corruption cannot be hidden in Aysle; it shows in a being's appearance and bearing. Uthorion perverted this law, allowing Corrupt beings to defer their evil into the land, turning it barren and dark.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to perform a Corrupt act, one of immorality, betrayal, lying, cheating, stealing, and other acts of evil. It can also be invoked in Dark lands, to hinder your opponent.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make a Corrupt character act in accordance with their nature, or to fall afoul of a dark land or corrupted beast.

Notes: I removed the Law of Observation here because I couldn't see any way in which it would be useful in a game. It mainly existed in the game to justify Aysle being a disk world and for certain applications of the magic system.

Consider it to be combined with the Law of Magic if it becomes necessary in your game.

High Lord: Uthorion

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF AYSLE

Trouble: TOLWYN HAUNTS ME

Aspects: FORMER LIEUTENANT OF THE GAUNT MAN, SUNDERED FROM DRAKACANUS, ALLIED WITH THE CYBERPOPE, IN THE BODY OF THORFINN BJANNI, FOLLOWER OF CORBA'AL

High Lord: Warrior of the Dark

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF AYSLE

Trouble: CREATION OF SALBANE

Aspects: BRUTAL TACTICIAN, CHOSEN OF DRAKACANUS, BEARER OF THE DARK SHARD, DARKNESS PLUCKED FROM LIMBO, KELVUN, MY DRAGON STEED

Darkness Device: Drakacanus

Aspects: ONLY THE BEST SHALL WIELD ME

Core Earth, the Invaded Reality

Magic Axiom: RELATIVELY POOR IN MAGIC

Social Axiom: A MULTITUDE OF ORGANIZATIONS FIGHTING THE INVADERS AND EACH OTHER

Spirit Axiom: DIVINE AGENCY DEPENDS ON THE WORSHIPPER

Tech Axiom: SPACE STATIONS, GENETIC ENGINEERING, AND ON THE CUSP OF MORE

THE POWER OF POSSIBILITY - Core Earth is full of possibility energy, which has caused the High Lords no end of grief. Core Earthers are intrinsically hard to transform to another reality.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to whenever a character makes a profound choice (for good or for evil) when dealing with other realities or to fight reality storms.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make someone choose a side, or to make someone transform to Core Earth reality as the result of a reality storm.

THE POWER OF HOPE - Core Earthers never give up, which makes them dangerous foes. This World Law is responsible for Core Earthers getting +2 Refresh.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to help others overcome fear or despair, or to reconnect.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make people act when faced with despair or fear.

THE POWER OF GLORY - The inhabitants of Core Earth have an easier time of reigniting others with possibility energy.

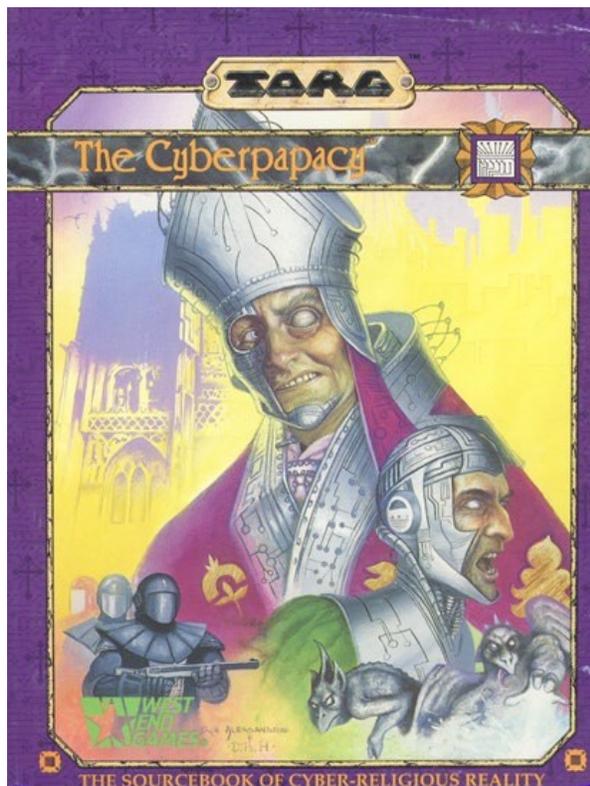
Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to help refill others with possibility energy or to fight the forces of the High Lords

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make someone take dramatic action against the High Lords

Notes: These world laws are different from the original ones. I made the Core Earth world laws Powers so that they would function whenever a character is in Core Earth, regardless of reality bubbles. The Law of Prodigy seemed redundant once I gave all Core Earth Storm Knights +2 to Refresh, so I replaced it with the Power of Possibility.

High Lord: None

Darkness Device: None



The Cyberpapacy, the Cyber-Religious Reality

Magic Axiom: ANGELS AND DEMONS WALK THE LAND

Social Axiom: UNBENDING THEOCRATIC TOTALITARIAN STATE UNDER SIEGE

Spirit Axiom: GOD GUIDES OUR HANDS

Tech Axiom: CYBERWARE AND THE GODNET THE LAW OF THE ONE TRUE GOD - The Cyberpapal god is seen as the only god in the Cyberpapacy. All other faiths have a harder time of it.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to call upon the Cyberpapal god for miracles, or to defend against miracles of another faith.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make a miracle of a non-Cyberpapal faith fail.

THE LAW OF HERETICAL MAGIC - Magic is seen to be of the devil in the Cyberpapacy. It is harder to use but produces more powerful effects. Demons can also try to possess casters. Anytime a mage takes a mental consequence as a result of spellcasting, it could have a demonic twist. Fallout can, at the GM's discretion, be treated as a mental attack against the spellcaster by demon.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked when defending against magic with faith, or when making a Discipline roll

to control the magic.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make a demon appear to attack the mage or to cause their magic to fail.

THE LAW OF SUSPICION - individuals within the Cyberpapacy are suspicious of anyone they do not know.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you in social attacks or to cast suspicion on another

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make someone suspicious of another.

THE LAW OF ORDEAL - Trial by Ordeal is a common means of determining guilt in the Cyberpapacy. Typically, the accused, who must submit to the trial or been automatically judged guilty, is subjected to one of four Ordeals: the Ordeal of Boiling Water, the Ordeal of Cold Water, the Ordeal of Fire, or Trial by Combat.

In the TORG Files, anyone undergoing these Ordeals must make a Faith (Cyberpapacy) roll to succeed against a difficulty set by the GM. Success means that they survive the Ordeal and are adjudged innocent. Failure means they are guilty (and are usually either dead or will soon be put to death). The truly innocent usually receive a bonus to this roll, while the truly guilty receive a penalty.

In Trial by Combat, the accused must face a champion of the Church in mortal combat. The accused combat rolls receive a bonus if they are innocent, and a penalty if guilty. The Church's Champion receives neither a bonus or a penalty.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you in an Ordeal if you are truly innocent.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to have a priest accuse you of some crime you may or may not have committed and force you to submit to an Ordeal.

High Lord: CyberPope Jean Malraux I

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF THE CYBERPAPACY

Trouble: NEW TO CYBERWARE

Aspects: SANG ET SANG (BLOOD AND MORE BLOOD); PÈRE JEAN; CYBERNETICS ARE A GIFT FROM GOD; HERETICS SHALL FUEL EBENUSCRUX; WITH THE GODNET AS MY ALLY

Darkness Device: Ebenuscrux

Aspects: COEXISTING IN THE HEART OF THE GODNET; THE TRUE "GOD" OF THE CYBERPAPACY

Land Below, the Subterranean Reality

Magic Axiom: MAGICAL CREATURES AND ANCIENT ARTIFACTS

Social Axiom: THE BEGINNINGS OF CITY-STATES

Spirit Axiom: MIRACLES ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF LIFE

Tech Axiom: ENTERING THE IRON AGE THE LAW OF SAVAGERY - The Land Below is a savage, primal place, and its inhabitants can express that savagery at any time.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you commit to an all out frontal assault or when you pursue your animal passions.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make some attack you suddenly and directly, or to encourage the attention of a potential mate.

THE LAW OF ACTION - The Land Below is a place of heroic action

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when trying to accomplish a nearly impossible act.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to get you into situations where such acts are the only way to move forward.

THE LAW OF WONDERS - The Land Below has some ancient engineering wonders left over from a previous time that exceed its Tech Axiom

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to create an edifice that normally would not be possible through the use of magic and/or miracles, or to aid in finding or navigating such a place.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to require that magical or spiritual powers be invoked to create a wonder, or to place a wonder in the path of the heroes.

High Lord: None

Darkness Device: None

Living Land, the Primitive Reality

Magic Axiom: THERE IS NO MAGIC, ONLY LANALA

Social Axiom: THE TRIBE IS ALL

Spirit Axiom: LANALA'S LOVE OF LIFE

Tech Axiom: SIMPLE TOOLS

THE LAW OF LIFE - Dead things rot quickly and completely in the Living Land, and visitors often find themselves losing non-living items.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you in hunting for sustenance or otherwise making Survival rolls in the Living Land.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to leave you short on rations or other organic substances, or to separate you from non-living valuables.

THE LAW OF SAVAGERY - The Living Land Below is a savage, primal place, and its inhabitants can express that savagery at any time.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you commit to an all out frontal assault or when you pursue your animal passions.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make some attack you suddenly and directly, or to encourage the attention of a potential mate.

THE LAW OF THE DEEP MIST - A heavy and surprisingly warm mist covers the reality of the Living Land.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to help you lose pursuers in the Deep Mist or to increase your stealth

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to get you lost in the Deep Mist, or leave you open to an ambush.

High Lord: Baruk Kaah, Saar of the Edeinos

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF TAKTA KER

Trouble: DESPERATE FOR DIVINITY

Aspects: SAAR OF THE EDEINOS, THE ONLY VAIN EDEINOS, REC PAKKEN HAS PROMISED I SHALL BE TORG!, BRASH STRATEGIST, MY WORD IS NOTHING BEFORE MY POWER

Darkness Device: Rec Pakken

Aspects: GRANTER OF GOTAK MIRACLES, SUBVERTER OF KETA KALLES, SEEKING A NEW HIGH LORD, CO-CREATOR OF THELAND BELOW

Notes: I combined the official "Lanala's Love of Life" and the "Law of Lost Valuables" into one law, and copied the Land Below's Law of Savagery for this version of the Living Land.

The Nile Empire, the Pulp Reality

Magic Axiom: EGYPTIAN MATHEMATICS AND ASTRONOMY

Social Axiom: HUGE BUREAUCRACY OVERSEEN BY A WARPED INDIVIDUAL

Spirit Axiom: CLOSE TO THE POWER OF THE TRUE EGYPTIAN MYTHOS

Tech Axiom: PULP ERA TECH

THE LAW OF MORALITY - Everyone in the Nile Empire is either good or evil. This is called their inclination.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to try and determine the inclination of another, or when acting in accordance with your inclination.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to attempt to seduce an individual of the other inclination over to your side or to make them act in accordance with their inclination (such as leaving you in a death trap rather than killing you.)

THE LAW OF DRAMA - Nothing ever comes easy in the Nile. You could find a machinegun, then get trapped by shocktroopers, find the machinegun doesn't work, beat the shocktroopers only to face their captain, who throws you out an airship...

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked for effect to create obstacles that complicate your opponents lives (and possibly your own.)

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to create obstacles in your life (and possibly your enemies.)

THE LAW OF ACTION - The Nile Empire favors those who act decisively.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you're taking a heroic action, such as getting into a gunfight with shocktroopers or jumping onto a moving tank.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make you take action rather than wait.

High Lord: Pharaoh Mobius

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF THE NILE EMPIRE

Trouble: THE CURSE OF AMAT-RA

Aspects: I SHALL CONQUER ETERNITY, RESURRECTED EGYPTIAN PRINCE, MASTER OF WEIRD SCIENCE, DEATH IS TOO GOOD FOR MY ENEMIES, BEARER OF THE KEFERTIRI IDOL

Darkness Device: The Kefertiri Idol

Aspects: CO-CREATOR OF THE LAND BELOW, MY HIGH LORD IS A MAD MAN

Nippon Tech, the Mega-Corporate Reality

Magic Axiom: COLD RATIONALITY REIGNS SUPREME

Social Axiom: SUPRANATIONAL MEGACORPORATIONS AND GLOBAL PRODUCTION

Spirit Axiom: LITTLE ROOM FOR SPIRIT COMPARED TO PROFIT AND LOSS

Tech Axiom: FUSION POWER, SUPERCONDUCTORS, AND CLONES THE LAW OF INTRIGUE - It is easier to deceive, bribe, and hide from others in Nippon Tech, and traitors are everywhere.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to help you hide, deceive, or bribe another person. It can also be invoked to help you find a traitor in another organization.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to have someone betray you, or to reveal that something you were told is actually a lie.

THE LAW OF PROFIT - Things cost less for the wealthy in Nippon Tech.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid in a Resources roll, provided you possess the skill.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make you find a contact who has the goods "for the right price."

THE LAW OF VENGEANCE - Nippon Tech favors those who seek vengeance.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid any action that attacks your betrayer, provided it doesn't happen in the same scene as the betrayal. Revenge is a dish best served cold.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to have someone come seeking vengeance against you for a past wrong.

High Lord: 3327 aka Ryuichi Kanawa

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF NIPPON TECH

Trouble: UNAFFECTED BY ANY EMOTIONS SAVE GREED

Aspects: GREAT PROFIT IS WORTH A BIT OF PAIN; SEND IN THE CLONES; EVERYTHING IS PROFIT OR LOSS; LESSOR OF DAIKOKU; "RYUICHI KANAWA"

Darkness Device: Daikoku

Aspects: "LEASING" MY POWER TO 3327 IN RETURN FOR POSSIBILITY ENERGY

Orrorsh, the Horror Reality

Magic Axiom: HORRORS AND THE OCCULT

Social Axiom: A PLACE FOR EVERYONE AND EVERYONE IN THEIR PLACE

Spirit Axiom: SACELLUM AND MYSTICS

Tech Axiom: RAILROADS AND TELEGRAPHS

THE POWER OF CORRUPTION - Orrorsh rewards characters who perform evil acts. Sometimes an evil act is necessary, such as killing someone who is trying to kill you. But when the act is unnecessary, it is called a Wicked act. Performing a Wicked act automatically gives the character a FATE point (see Compelled below) and the Corruption Power (basically the Lawbreaker power), which reduces a character's Refresh but gives you a cumulative +1 to future Wicked acts. I suggest that you rarely try and compel a character to perform a Wicked act. The Gaunt Man and Heketon prefer their victims to come to them willingly.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you perform a Wicked act, such as torture or killing an innocent bystander.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make you perform a Wicked act, but it is far more likely to be used as a "Self-compel." Whenever you choose to perform a Wicked act, you get a FATE point.

THE POWER OF FEAR - The Gaunt Man's entire reality revolves around fear. Fear makes his monsters more powerful. Basically, Horrors will use the Power of Fear to gain FATE points for themselves and limit the Storm Knight's ability to use reality storms. Basically, the GM can use the Power of Fear as a Compel whenever the Storm

Knights:

Encounter a Horror of Orrorsh; See the power of the Occult at work, even if they are the ones doing it; Whenever something really bad happens or they encounter something grisly.

If the Storm Knights buy off the compel, the FATE point goes directly to the main Horror of the adventure.

The Horror can continue to gain FATE Points for itself until the party manages to overcome the Power of Fear. To do this, we use the complexity rules for Thaumaturgy to determine the party's Perseverance. Set a difficulty number for your Horror. A good starting point is their Refresh value. A monster with a -10 Refresh would have a Perseverance number of 10. Storm Knights start with a Perseverance Number equal to the lowest Convictionscore in the group. Over time, the Storm Knights can add to their Perseverance Total by the following means: Invoking Aspects for a +2.

Making Declarations to place aspects, such as using Investigation to find its True Death and/or Weakness. Taking Consequences when fighting a Horror (only takes effect once the Recovery begins.) (If a Storm Knight is killed by a Horror, this counts as +20 to the Perseverance Number, but only after a scene of mourning, where the Storm Knight reaffirm their commitment to kill the Horror.) Seeing something horrific or grisly for a +2(only after a scene has passed.) Once the Storm Knights equal or exceed the Horror's Perseverance Number, it can no longer gain FATE Points from them and they can invoke reality storms again.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked by a Horror as long as the Storm Knights have not overcome the Power of Fear.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make Storm Knights cower, flee, or otherwise react in fear.

THE LAW OF ETERNAL CORRUPTION - Horrors in Orrorsh do not truly die until they meet their True Death. If they die by any other means, they are simply brought back to life by Heketon and the Gaunt Man. Horrors also have a Weakness, like the Gaunt Man's weakness to Eternity Shards.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked when using a Horror's Weakness or means of True Death against them.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to have the Storm Knights encounter a Horror that they defeated but did not inflict a True Death on.

High Lord: The Gaunt Man

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF ORRORSH

Trouble: SEVERE WEAKNESS TO ETERNITY SHARDS

Aspects: "LORD BYRON SALISBURY;" MASTER OF HEKETON; LORD OF OCCULT TERROR; I WILL BE TORG!; CARREDON-HEADED CANE

Darkness Device: Heketon

Aspects: SAVAGE AND PROUD; DEFEATER OF TAGHARRA

Space Gods, the Science Fiction Reality

Magic Axiom: LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF MAGIC

Social Axiom: GOVERNMENT FOR ALL AND ALIEN RACES

Spirit Axiom: ALL DEITIES ARE FACETS OF APEIROS OR THE NAMELESS ONE

Tech Axiom: BIOTECH AND FTL

THE LAW OF RELIGIOUS COMPATIBILITY - In Akasha, religions can work together harmoniously. There are no spiritual struggles (see Miracle Worker) in Akasha

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked when believers of different faiths work together.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to prevent conflict between different faiths.

THE LAW OF ACCEPTANCE - In Akasha, a character can operate under their own World Laws without fear of contradiction

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked when dealing with people from other worlds and realities.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make people accept the ways of others.

THE WAY OF ZINATT - Akashans have a three-fold belief system: Aka, Coar, and Zinnatt. Aka-aligned characters tend to be introspective and self-controlled. Core-aligned characters are extroverted and action-oriented. The followers of Zinnatt believe in harmony and community.

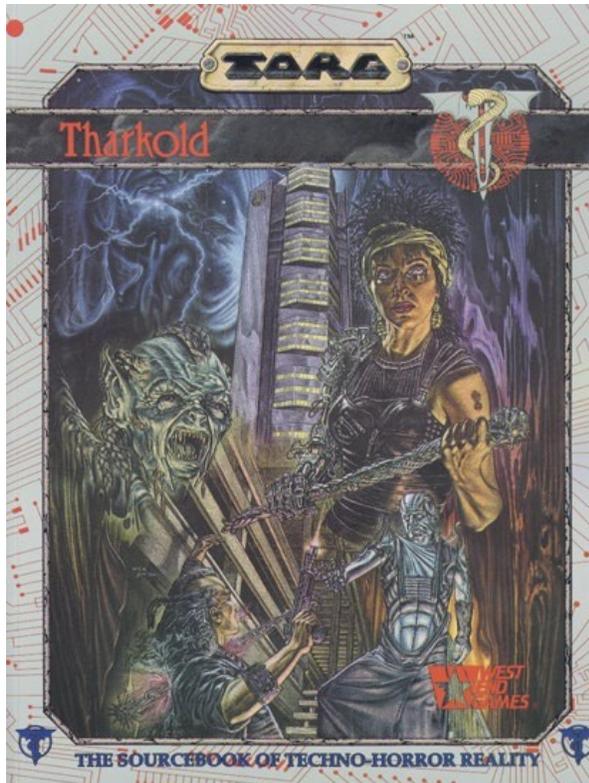
Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you are acting in accordance with your alignment: Aka, Coar, or Zinnatt.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make an Aka take a defensive posture or favor their own interests

over others; to make a Core-aligned character take action or work to destroy something; or to make a Zinnatt-aligned character act in the best interests of the group.

High Lord: None

Darkness Device: None



Tharkold, the Techno-Horror Reality

Magic Axiom: DEMONS AND CYBERMAGIC

Social Axiom: BOUND BY THE CONSTANT DEMANDS OF THE WAR

Spirit Axiom: TORN BETWEEN THE CULT OF THE DOMINANT AND THE WAY OF THE RACE

Tech Axiom: CYBERWARE AND OCCULTECH THE LAW OF FEROCITY - Tharkold thrives on all-out attacks. It benefits those who fight without mercy.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you commit to an attack without any restraint (a Taken Out result is always death, in physical combat, or severe emotional wounds in psychic. Social combat only ends in the total humiliation of a foe.)

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make a character attack without mercy.

THE LAW OF PAIN - Both the Tharkoldu and the Race are great believers in pain as a teacher.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you are inflicting pain on another, whether through a maneuver or an attack.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make someone inflict pain on another.

THE LAW OF DOMINATION - In Tharkold, you either dominate or submit. Both the Tharkoldu and, to a lesser extent, the Race have societies built around who dominates who. Demon Princes dominate Demon Lords who dominate

Great Alphas, who dominate Alphas, who dominate Technodemons. The demons also enslave the Race under the Law of Domination.

Invoked: This World Law can be invoked to aid you when you are interacting with a submissive.

Compelled: This World Law can be compelled to make a submissive obey their Dominant, or to cause a character to attempt to dominate another.

High Lord: Kranod

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF THARKOLD

Trouble: TOO MANY SETBACKS

Aspects: DOMINATOR OF THE DEMON PRINCES, SERVANT OF THE GAUNT MAN, WARLORD OF THE THARKOLDU, POSSESSOR OF MALGEST, MONKEYS ARE NO THREAT TO ME

High Lord: Jezrael

High Concept: HIGH LORD OF THARKOLD

Trouble: SEEN AS A DEMON BY THE RACE AND AS A MONKEY BY THE DEMONS

Aspects: BORN A SLAVE, DEMON IN ALL BUT BIOLOGY, I MUST CONQUER EARTH OR DIE, 3327 MUST PAY, DOMINANT- INSEMINATOR OF KRELAKH

Darkness Device: Malgest

Aspects: OLD IN SPIRIT, JEZRAEL PLEASES ME... FOR NOW

REALISTIC WORLD DESIGN

by Lev Lafayette

Whilst more common in fantasy, one also finds in science fiction worlds which are quite contrary to what we know about basic principles of planetary science, geology, climatology, environmental science etc. Such breaches can be acceptable, but only when explained in the context of the world which can be used to add to story development. Unfortunately such potential plot devices are often unexplained, mainly because the author is unaware that they are engaging in such a breach or of its significance. Of course, realistic world design is only part of a setting, and that is only part of an overall story with character, narrative, theme, and style also contributing. However an unexplained and unrealistic game world is extremely jarring as it can have enormous effects on the believability of the other components.

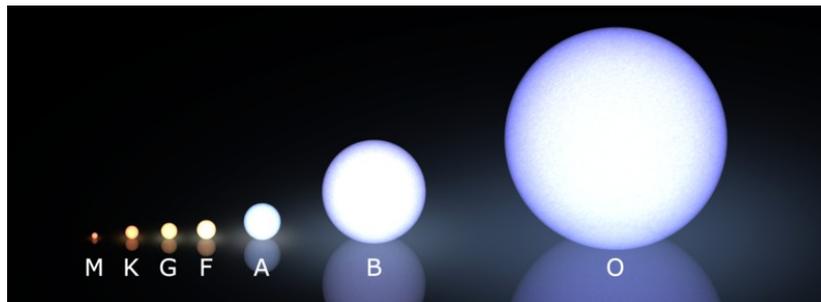
The following is but a brief outline which makes some very basic suggestions on world design and how to avoid some very common mistakes. It is designed from a "top-down" perspective in terms of world design, however in terms of revelation of the world during the actual narrative it is experienced from a "bottom-up" perspective. Indeed it can easily be the climatic point of the narrative for the player-characters to discover the "basic rules" of the world.

Excluded from discussion are those worlds that are completely magical in design; flat worlds, flying on the back of giant turtles, suns that are lanterns in the sky or flaming chariots etc. The application of the following guidelines for part of such settings is undoubtedly useful in terms of familiarity, but the guidelines have no internal requirement as a consistent feature. Once you've decided your world is flat, on the back of a giant turtle, and supported by elephants, anything goes (and it's turtles all the way down).

Planetology

An astronomical unit, the average distance between earth and the sun, is roughly 150 million kilometres; that will be the working unit of measurement. Main sequence, also known as class V size, stars are those that fall on a continuous plot of colour versus brightness, known as a Hertzsprung-Russell diagram. Outside of this sequence are giants (subgiants; class IV, giants; class III, bright giants; class II and supergiants; class I) and dwarfs (white dwarfs, yellow dwarfs, red dwarfs, brown dwarfs; class VI). Life is really only plausible on class V and some class VI stars. For simplicity's sake the article will stick mainly to single star systems; multiple star systems are significantly rarer than single star systems, but with a lot of additional complexity, especially in regards to gravitational effects. This task becomes easier if one decides to include the second (or third, or fourth!) star as being a great deal smaller than the primary star - effectively treating them as planets for most purposes. Due to gravitational effects similar sized stars may rotate around each other, and trying to work out the prospect of planetary formation, let alone planetary orbits, is beyond the scope of this article.

Stars are classified by colour; O (blue), B (blue-white), A (white), F (yellow-white), G (yellow), K (orange) and M (red), the Morgan-Keegan classification system. The smaller, cooler, type M stars make up about half of the stars in the sequence. The massive O, B and A stars are burning brightly and quickly; the chance for planets, let alone life, forming in such systems is very slim. F type stars emit more radiation than Sol, our sun, but life can evolve on planets (rarely) that have a strong magnetic field (through



high density) or thick atmospheres. K and M class stars emit less radiation, are dimmer, older, and have older life as a result. About three-quarters of the main sequence stars are type M, about one in eight are class K, one in type are class G (including Sol and Alpha Centuri A), and one in thirty-three are type F.

Biological life on a planet depends on the size of the star, it's brightness, and as a result the distance from the sun. It presupposes the existence of liquid water. Liquid water is considered important because carbon compounds dissolved in water form the basis of all Earthly life, so watery planets are good candidates to support similar carbon-based biochemistries (other speculations on other biochemistries are screened from this essay due to space and improbability). This produces a "goldilocks" requirement. If the planet is too hot the water will evaporate, if it is too cold it will suffer glaciation. Among type F, class V stars with a stellar mass of 1.9 of Sol, this means a distance of at least 1.6 to 2.4 AU and rarely at that. More probable is type G, class V (mass 1.1) and VI (0.8) with a habitable zone of 0.8 to 1.2 AU (e.g., earth) in the former case or 0.5 to 0.8 AU in the latter. There is a rare chance among this type that even class IV (mass 1.8) at a distance of 1.0 to 1.5 AU. Even more massive, with a marginal prospect of life, are class IV type K stars (stellar mass of 2.3, again 1.0 to 1.5 AU) or class III type M stars (mass 4.0, distance 5.0 - 7.5 AU). Also of these types life has a good chance on main-sequence type K stars (mass 0.9, distance 0.5 - 0.6 AU) and dwarfs (mass 0.5, distance 0.2 - 0.3 AU), and among main-sequence type M stars (mass 0.3, distance 0.1 to 0.2) and dwarfs (mass 0.2, distance 0.1 AU).

With these zones life can exist; whether it exists is another matter. A great deal will have to do with the three related characteristics of the density, size and gravity of the planet in question. Density usually varies from 7+ to around 2.5 (earth is 5.5, water is 1.0); any less than that and the planet is probably going to be a gas giant. Low density planets - less than 4 - have trouble with being life supporting because the low magnetic fields let more harmful radiation through to the atmosphere; density is a direct factor of the quantity of metals available on the planet. Low density planets are more silicate, whereas a planet of iron would be density 8! High density planets also tend to be warmer due to internal volcanic heat, have greater atmospheric pressure and have a higher gravity, relative to size. Human-acceptable gravity is between 0.75 and 1.25 G in the long-term, and can survive up to 3G in the short-term. Use density (5.5) and diameter (12,750 km) relative to earth's to calculate gravity. For example, a high density (7.5), but smaller (8,500 km) world will have a gravity of $1.36 * .66 = .9$ G. There are significant biomechanical differences for fauna with variant gravity; creatures can leap further, fly easier etc in low gravity and tend to be lighter of frame. The reverse applies for high gravity.

The orbital period (call it a year, although that is technically an Earth-only term) can be derived from Kepler's Third Law, "*The square of the orbital period of a planet is directly proportional to the cube of the semi-major axis of its orbit*", or $\text{Year} = \sqrt{\text{AU}^3 / \text{Sun's Mass}}$. For the lazy an online calculator does the hard work for you at http://www.calctool.org/CALC/phys/astronomy/planet_orbit. Using a large class IV type K star mass 2.3 at 1.5 AU, at 0.9 overall mass results in a year of around 442.37 earth-days. As for rotational period, this mostly comes from conservation of angular momentum; if there was no angular momentum in original solar nebula, then there would be no planets. Planets will have the same rotational direction as their sun (Venus and Uranus are exceptions, probably due to asteroid collisions early in their formation). Overall however, one is pretty much at liberty to pick their own with a degree of whimsy. A large moon or moons will slow down rotation, as will an aged planet. A fast rotation will generate more cyclonic weather conditions due to greater atmospheric Coriolis effects. Needless to say (and Earth is an example), not many planets neatly fit their "days" into their "years", requiring leap-days, leap-seconds etc, although such neatness certainly seems to be a feature of fiction authors. Finally, on the topic of planetary movement, planets often have an axial tilt, leading to seasons; less than thirty degrees is normal (Earth has 23 deg.). Extreme axial tilts reduce the probability for the formation of life.

The final requirements for "Natural Satellite Habitability" (as NASA calls it) is a breathable atmosphere. A thick atmosphere both shields a planet from solar radiation and both increases and moderates temperature. Atmospheric pressure should be proportional to gravity, but usually isn't for a variety of reasons. The sheer quantity of atmospheric gases may cause this vary (e.g., Venus, which has ninety-times Earth's pressure, but 0.9 G) or the same gases may be trapped (e.g., Mars, 0.4 G, atmospheric pressure of around 0.01 Atm). Atmospheric pressure should be around 0.8 to 1.5 of earth normal, although above 1.2 the air will be uncomfortable, and feel like "breathing soup". The presence of

life will correlate with an oxygen atmosphere (indeed, initiated by photosynthesis), but too much oxygen (over 30%) is poisonous; the Earth normal values of 77% nitrogen, 21% oxygen and inert gases is preferable; reduce the nitrogen value in high pressure atmospheres (removing "the bends"), or vary with other inert gases. Modest increases in water vapour or carbon dioxide are tolerable (although both are greenhouse gases and therefore surface temperature will increase). Extra quantities of hydrogen will make the atmosphere more explosive. If you want large flying creatures, reduce the gravity and increase atmospheric pressure.

Geography and Geology

The outer layers of the Earth are divided into a lithosphere and an asthenosphere. The lithosphere exists as separate and distinct tectonic plates, which ride on the hotter, elastic and fluid-like asthenosphere. Where plates meet, a plate boundary, is associated with earthquakes and geographic features such as mountains, islands, volcanoes and oceanic ridges and trenches. As a result, mountain ranges often appear near and parallel to the coast, which a sheer side usually facing away from the ocean or with a plateau beyond the range. Plate tectonics is typical on terrestrial planets larger than Earth and significantly rarer on those smaller; the presence of oceans increase the probability. The location of continents has significant influence on natural evolution and sapient development. For the former, the continent provides a locale where natural competition is very pronounced, whereas on the latter the positioning on Earth across the along latitudes limited the initialisation of global trade and cultural exchange.

Mountains occur typically through (i) folding, when compression on an initial flat crust is deformed due to pressure from the collision of two plates (e.g., Himalayas), (ii) faults, where two plates slide along fault-lines (e.g., Sierra Nevada), (iii) volcanic mountains, formed by the pressure of magma near the surface of the earth (e.g., Mount Fuji, or Olympus Mons on Mars, three times the height of Mt. Everest, 25km), and (iv) dome mountains, where the magma lifts the sedimentary layer but does not erupt (e.g., Richat Structure). Sometimes mountains are formed through a combination of factors. Folds and faults are more prone to forming ranges, whereas volcanoes and domes are more likely to be free-standing. With significant variation due to erosion and glacial movements, relatively younger mountains tend to have taller and jagged protrusions. Plateaus are an interesting case as they are highlands, but flat. They can be formed by similar processes as mountains and are sometimes classified as "pseudo-mountains". The highest are intermontane plateaus, those which are bordered by mountains (e.g., the Tibetan plateau).

Lowlands can be distinguished by several types, the two broadest categories being flatlands and hilly regions. As the distinction between hills and mountains is ambiguous and they obviously form a middle point between mountains and low-lying flatlands, they are discussed first. Hilly regions are formed in the same process as mountains, but are less in their severity. Hills will often be on the less severe side of a mountain range, or will be (effectively) a less severe range, of which escarpments are an example. Some specific geographic features that are also classified as hills include drumlins, elongated regions formed by glacial action, buttes, mesas and hoodoos, formed when erosion leaves behind a hard core, and puy, being hills formed by volcanoes.

From the former there are plains defined as having a gentle rolling relief at most, and excluding swamplands and ice sheets. The main types are coastal and alluvial; coastal plain is typically separated from the interior by a range and often formed from shallow sea whilst alluvial plains are those formed by and alongside rivers or lakes, including floodplains. One major feature of plains is the quantity of sediment often making such locations ideal for grasslands, forests, agriculture or grazing. Less typical plain types, including those formed by lava flows, glacial movement or salt lakes. In contrast swamplands and marsh are areas of wetland with shallow bodies of water, either fresh, salt or brackish, either as a lake or slow moving water. A marsh is distinguished from a swamp by a lack of woody vegetation. Swamps almost always are near sea-level. Ice-sheets consist of a mass of glacial ice on land; the two on Earth are the Antarctic and the Greenland sheets.

Oceans are a major geographic feature whose characteristics simply cannot be overlooked; on Earth oceans constitute 71% of the surface and over half of this area is more than 3,000 meters deep, and with a salinity of 3.5%. Life first appeared in the oceans, and the effect on such a body of water on the life cycle remain significant, through water

circulation with evaporation in warmer areas and precipitation in cooler. Oceans also regulate temperature through thermal transfer and inertia. Ocean currents in particular have an enormous effect in this regard, with the Gulf Stream's effect on warming north-western Europe being the most well known. The general flow (clockwise or counter-clockwise) will be the same as prevailing winds with the the opposite hemisphere. Currents obviously change direction when they encounter land-masses; strong currents channelled through a relatively small area will create extremely rough seas (e.g., Drake Passage). A planet's most dramatic weather will occur over ocean areas (e.g., cyclones, tsunami).

Rivers and lakes typically make up only a small portion of the total water mass of a life-bearing planet. Lakes are typically found in the valleys of mountainous areas and may feed into (and from) rivers and streams. Lakes are typically fresh-water, formed from glacial runoff, with salt-water lakes forming where there is no outlet and rapid evaporation (e.g., Lake Eyre in Australia). Rivers are also usually freshwater, formed from surface run-off, springs, groundwater etc and may flow above or below ground. Rivers will follow the land-scape flowing from high points towards sea level along the path of least resistance, with speed depending on the volume of the water and the angle of decline. Fast moving rivers have the capacity to substantially erode the landscape they are travelling through; they tend to be deep rather than wide. Where slow-moving, wide rivers meet the ocean (the estuary) brackish water results. Both lakes and rivers can be intermittent if the conditions suggest this.

Affecting all bodies of water (and indeed, all areas, although to a very small extent), tides are caused by the combined effects of the gravitational forces exerted by moons, suns and planetary rotation. Most places have two high tides and two low tides each day (semidiurnal tide). At a point of syzygy (when the suns, moons and planet are aligned) tides will be at their strongest, a "spring" tide. When the moons and the sun's gravitational effects counter each other the tides will be at their lowest, a neap tide. On Earth these have a seven day interval; the most significant tidal difference is 16m.

Climatology and Ecology

Overall planetary climate depends on a variety of factors, the most important being the degree that the planet is effected by solar radiation. 'Climate' incorporates temperature, humidity and precipitation, atmospheric currents etc. In broad terms, cooler and temperate zone have greater variation in temperature over a year, with precipitation occurring strongest during the winter months. Coastal regions have more moderate temperatures compared to inland regions, and will also receive more precipitation and water-bearing winds will rain as they cross mountain ranges. In warmer, more equatorial regions, the temperature curve is flatter and with rainfall usually occurring during the warmer months ("wet" season). As mentioned, prevailing winds depend on hemisphere, however this differs at the poles where winds tend towards warmer regions and on the equatorial regions where trade winds tend towards the opposite hemisphere. Wind speed is mainly influenced by the pressure gradient as wind flows from high pressure to low pressure. Strong winds begin at about 50kmh, a gale at 70kmh (sufficient to make walking difficult), a storm at 100kmh (trees uprooted), and a hurricane at 120kmh (sufficient to damage light buildings).

The Köppen-Geiger climate classification system is the generally accepted standard for climate geography. There are six broad groups which starts with native vegetation as the best expression of general climatic conditions, then combined with average rainfall and seasonality. The broad groups are Tropical/Megathermic (Group A), Dry (Group B), Temperate/Mesothermal (Group C), Continental/Microthermal (Group D), Polar (Group E), and Alpine (Group H, properly, a subset of H). When allocating climatic codes however more care should be taken to ensure continuity more than anything else. Neither temperature nor rainfall usually drops or increases with extremes between neighbouring regions, and the most extreme changes will be with the most significant intervening geographical features.

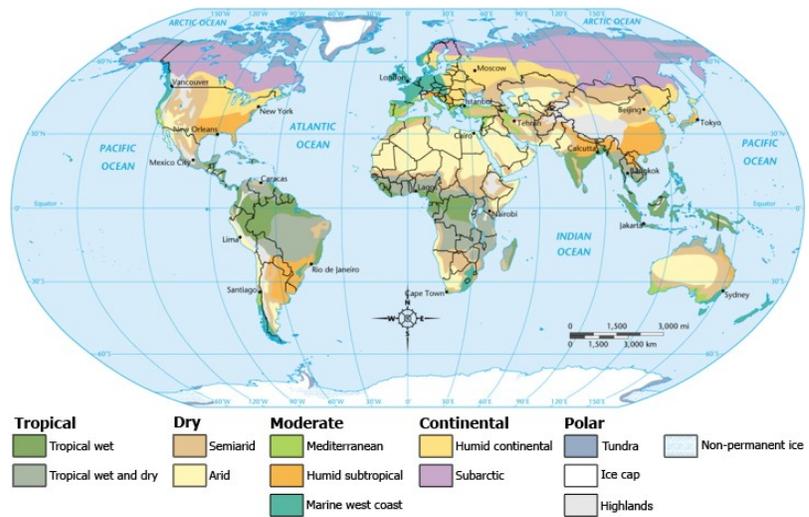
Flora is responsible for the overwhelming majority of biomass on a planet and as such is at least deserving of the initial discussion. The aforementioned climate classification system begins with categories founded on native vegetation and as a result one can directly transpose the climate system to a vegetation system in a manner that makes sense. In Group A, tropical plants are predominantly broad-leaved evergreens, with extensive forests and undergrowth and a canopy reaching up to fifty metres as thin, lush, trees seek new heights. In stark contrast in Group B, there is nothing in the way of forests, although some desert coastal regions will have scattered broad-leaved deciduous shrubs with isolated trees.

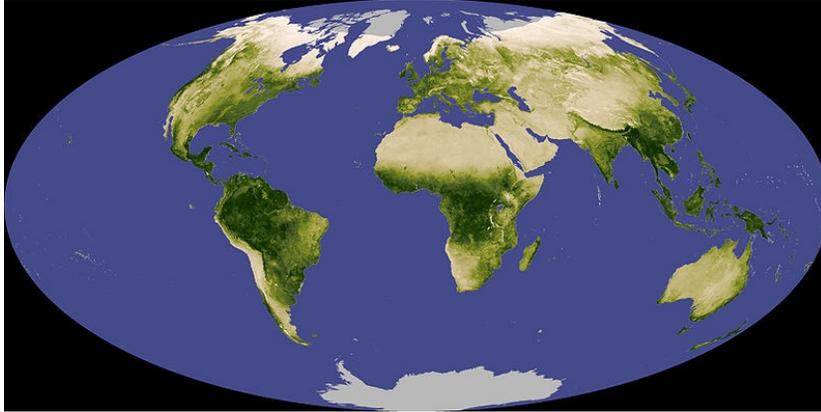
Grasslands will be patchy, and brown. Further, in true arid regions, inland plants are often characterised with lengthy periods of dormancy followed by a spurt of growth when heavy rains fall.

In the moderate Groups C and D a wider range of flora is available. In Group C regions moderate undergrowth is matched with a combination of broad-leaved deciduous and needle-leaved evergreens with a typical maximum height of 30m. Grasslands will be green in winter months and often brown in summer. In the cooler Group D regions, the needle-leaved deciduous and needle-leaved evergreens dominate, with the tallest trees reaching heights of over 70m. There is typically little undergrowth to speak of in these forests, although grasslands will be rich and very green. In Group E there can be broad-leaved evergreen shrubs and patchy grasslands, giving way to lichens and mosses and eventually to a cold barren landscape.

Fauna, not surprisingly, follows similar characteristics to flora in terms of climatic presence. Group A areas have larger and more diverse populations of wild animals, both hot and cold blooded. Although species are fewer and populations fewer in number in colder regions, the invariable warm-blooded animals that inhabit such regions - like plants - tend to be larger as a greater proportion of fat is required. In all regions, herd animals tend to be nomadic as they tend to deplete resources fairly quickly. The general rule for the presence of an animal within a climate is the same as that for plants - the relative fitness of the species to the environment. Thus there are very few cold-blooded creatures in cold areas, desert animals have evolved a variety of ways to engage in water conservation, polar animals have strategies to keep warm, fish have adapted to become excellent swimmers and so forth. On large land masses the competition between species is intensified; two species competing for the same resources cannot coexist if other ecological factors are constant. However on isolated island environments the presence of unfilled niches increases speciation.

As life requires life for subsistence, food webs provide a relationship of consumption. Food energy flows according to trophic levels, the number of links from the primary producer. The usual levels are (1) for plants and algae, (2) for herbivores, (3) for carnivores (4) tertiary consumers, with a helpful role carried out by decomposers which feed upon dead plant and animal matter. Biomass is lost at each level with about a 10% transfer. Thus, in very rough terms, for every kilogram of herbivore there needs to be around ten kilograms of digestible plant material and for every kilogram of predator there needs to be around ten kilograms of herbivore. The total biomass of the planet is equally split between terrestrial and oceanic locations, although per square kilometer, there is more on land. A general overview of terrestrial plant-life from the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index gives a good overview of the distribution of flora and fauna populations.





For both flora and fauna the primary classification follows groupings of common descent. All current life has forebearer and is related - however distantly - to all other life with common ancestors. The contemporary taxonomic system is Life, Domain, Kingdom, Phylum (zoology) or Division (botany), Class, Order, Family, Genus and Species. The top-level Domain consists of archea, bacteria and eukaroyte, all micro-organisms,

the Kingdoms consist of five (Animalia, Plantae, Fungi, Protista, and Prokaryota) and so forth. Humans belong to the animalia kingdom, the chordata phylum, the mammalia class, the primate order, the hominiadae family, the homo genus and the species homo sapiens. The more usual concern however is the the lowest or species level, popularly described as group capable of interbreeding and producing fertile offspring. Closely related species may breed but have infertile offspring (mules being a classic example). In rare cases interbreeding is intransitive ("ring species"), where A can breed with B, and B with C, but not A with C.

Brief consideration is also given to intelligent species. Only passing remarks are given here to such beings and only in context of their evolutionary and ecological position. A future article will discuss the principles of social development. Firstly, according to the ecological exclusion principle, there is likely to be only one intelligence species per environment. If multiple intelligent species are desired or required, then in all probability they will be highly isolated from one another. Secondly, and this somewhat contradicts the first point, a core evolutionary advantage of intelligence species is a high level of adaptability to various environments and the capacity to alter those environments. No other species of the hominid family is so widespread as humans, and there is no reason to assume that other intelligent species would not do the same. Finally, any intelligent species must also be a highly social species. Through complex communication a species gains access to a network of knowledge across multiple members of the species and the capacity to gain improved productivity through specialisation.

Concluding Remarks

World design should seek believability and emphasise the unusual within the bounds of possibility. The preceding comments should prevent the most significant errors that plague science fiction, or at the very least be aware of exceptional cases and provide exceptional justifications for their presence. Stars should be of the right type to justify the presence of life and planets should be in a habitable zone. The gravity of a planet should be correct for its size and density. The atmosphere should be of benign gases and an appropriate pressure. Mountain ranges and volcanoes should follow fault lines. Rivers will flow according to the laws of gravity and momentum, and wind curenents and ocean surface currents will match. Flora and fauna will match climatic conditions, will subsist according to the niche, food webs and trophic levels, will have species differentiation according to common descent.

Some of these may seem to be obvious, but it is surprising how many science fiction and fantasy authors miss these basic principles. Do not presume earth-normal gravity, earth-normal days, earth-normal years, human-alien interbreeding, or a multitude of nasty carnivorous bug-eyed monsters without a food source. Do not draw maps of the world with randomly placed mountains, jungles next to deserts etc. The ungrounded presence of such events and beings do not enhance world, they detract from it. Design of interesting worlds does not require the presence of ridiculous features.

MOVIE REVIEW: PAUL

by Andrew Moshos

dir: Greg Mottola

Aliens walk among us. And they're very rude .

This flick is a perfect storm of nerd signposts and signifiers so nerdish in their nerdishness that it's akin to watching a table full of Comic-Book Guys playing with their Magic the Gathering cards, drinking Pepsi Max straight from the bottle for an hour and a half.

However, before you suspect that I'm going to go for cheap and easy laughs mocking the indefensible, and an easy pop cultural target at that, let me just say that I am a fairly nerdy person myself (as are all people who obsessively watch movies and complain about them on the tubes of the internets, let's be honest about it), so the question for me is whether Paul is a tolerable movie because of its nerdiness or in spite of it.

Well, the two are inseparable, really. Since its two lead characters are nerds playing nerds (quite deftly, I might add), and it's a homage to the science fiction flicks of the 1980s (mostly, though Close Encounters was earlier), and one of its main characters is a CGI alien, you can't really grade it on its Shakespearean qualities or its Byronic pathos.

Clive and Graeme (Nick Frost and Simon Pegg) are two British nerds who've achieved the dream of a lifetime by travelling to the States and going to the Comic-Con event in San Diego. Some people aim high in their dreams, others aim low, but the important thing is to have a dream, I guess, no matter how achievable.

The script keeps throwing up scenes and misunderstandings where people assume Clive and Graeme are gay, and who would be the butch and who would be the bitch, but they deny it, despite the fact that circumstances keep thrusting them together, and the fact that they carry on like a bit of an old married gay couple.

The point is, I guess, that, taking out the gay panic aspect, a lot of longtime nerd friends do sometimes seem like co-dependent little couples, since most women, at least on the big screen, seem to not be able to tolerate the smell of them, at least until the end of the movie. So these desperate, enabling and isolating relationships can kind of exclude other people, and experiences.

Despite the science fiction trappings and comedic references, it seems like that is also the theme of the flick, giving the main characters a good reason to seek relationships beyond solely the company of each other.

They're shamelessly nerdy. They're the kind of nerds that other nerds would beat up on if only they possessed any upper body strength. But I'm sure they're sweet guys.

After the convention, they elect to embark on that hoariest of cinematic clichés being the road trip across certain parts of America. They intend to visit 'famous' sites and sights along the way, being the alleged locations of UFO sightings that have become lore amongst the True Believers. So, yes, Area 51 and Roswell get mentions.

Along the way they bump into an actual alien, who calls himself Paul (voiced by Seth Rogen). This would perhaps be, you'd think, the nerd equivalent of nirvana, but the path of such things can't be too smooth.

Paul is the living, everloving equivalent of every alien image and cliché of the last however many years. The movie's tongue-in-cheek claim is that Paul has been the basis for all the hysteria and sci-fi ideas that bled into the popular

consciousness over the last sixty years. He's even chatted with certain directors on the phone to give them ideas as to how to make their movies starring ugly aliens with glowing fingers and home phoning tendencies.

Having Paul tell Steven Fucking Spielberg to go subtle and that he should adhere to the dictum "show, don't tell" was probably the most inspired nerd moment in the last two hundred years of human history.

For a purely CGI creation, Paul is pretty great. It depends on your tolerance for fully CGI creations (like Jar Jar Binks, Gollum or Scarlett Johansson) as to whether your eyes and brain can accept them. This is probably one of the most physically weighty looking ones I've ever seen. I don't know how much my nerdish leanings impact on my ability to suspend disbelief enough to accept him, but I'd say he's one of the better examples of this kind of character.

And, despite the fact that, in the back of my mind, I couldn't entirely get rid of the echo of an idea that he should have been called Poochie, Seth Rogen's irritable and irritating take on the character really works well. I can't stand Seth Rogen that much at the moment, but I thought he was a good match for the character, who is mostly a foul-mouthed dope-smoking smartarse.

Of course the flick needs antagonists, and supplies them heartily. There's the woman voiced by Sigourney Weaver, who orders the Men in Black chasing Paul around, lead coolly by Jason Bateman (whose character's name is the least funny and oddest joke in the flick, though odd enough to remark upon), a bible basher pursuing his daughter who he thinks has been kidnapped by demons (John Carrol Lynch), and some token rednecks.

The flick actually takes time out to try to settle the whole science versus religion argument, when a woman they meet who they eventually befriend wears a t-shirt showing Jesus blowing Charles Darwin's brains out with a gun, with the words "Evolve This!" above the image. I am sure there are plenty of places in the States where similar sentiments are probably expressed and applauded, but it seemed strange to take time out to have a virtual re-enactment of the Scopes Monkey Trial in a comedy.

Ruth (Kristen Wiig) is a one-eyed clueless woman who comes to realise what bullshit religion and such really are once Paul slaps his grey, slimy hand atop her bonce, sharing his knowledge of life, the universe and everything in a few seconds of mind-melding. She goes from a prim, oppressed wall flower to a profane hyperslut in the blink of a goddamn eye.

That's worth mentioning: though nearly all of the flick's this flick homages were PG-13 (except Aliens, I'd think), this is a gleefully profane movie. In the spirit of revelation, or breaking free of ignorance, Ruth's character gets to unleash whatever awkward swearing she's kept repressed for most of her life, which is funny only insofar as swearing itself is inherently funny even when you're not five, apparently. She does get some good phrases in, that's for sure.

Clive's discomfort with the presence of Paul and Ruth of course is going to give way eventually, but it points to what I was referring to earlier as to the way nerd friendships are depicted as being fairly exclusionary by default, not design. It's not played for the sexual angle, as in, it's not a sexual jealousy that bothers Clive, it's the fact that there are other people (or beings, what have you, diverting Graeme's attention from what should be quality time spent arguing about which action figures are the best, or which series and captain in Star Trek is superior to the others.

The irony, of course, is meant to be that Clive, who's whole existence seems to hinge around thinking and talking about science fiction, is less than impressed when an actual alien appears, proving the existence of extraterrestrial life once and for all. You'd think he'd be grateful having finally grasped the nerd Holy Grail, but whatever.

It's a comedy, first and foremost, so the action does start to seem a bit arbitrary, but is well staged all the same. It spends enough time mocking the propensities of nerds that it doesn't seem like it's pandering to us too much (as in, it takes shots at the nerd habit of paying exorbitant prices for worthlessly shit merchandising, and furies, and the general fecklessness of nerds outside of their narrow comfort zones). I enjoyed it, and saw it at a screening surrounded by the

very pinnacle and epitome of the demographic represented, and they seemed to lap it up. They're the ones, on the other hand, that didn't laugh when they heard lines like "Boring conversation anyway" or "Get away from her you bitch" despite knowing exactly where and when, down probably to the very timecode to the second where they appear in their respective movies. So there are a few gags that miss the mark by a substantial degree, eliciting groans instead of guffaws.

The one line that made me gag in disbelief involved Clive explaining to Paul how he'd always wanted to meet aliens ever since watching Mac and Me as a child. That freaked me the fuck out, considering Mac and Me is an absolute abomination of a ripoff flick made to capitalise on ET where the alien, called Mac, eats McDonalds and drinks Coke nonstop to stay alive, in a film proudly funded by McDonalds and Coke. It's one of the nadirs of humanity mentioned in a flick applauding our better natures. I guess that's the kind of thing Simon Pegg and Nick Frost, who I've loved in everything they've done from Spaced to Shaun of the Dead and Hot Fuzz, are great at, mashed together with their very nerdy natures. They're charming and good natured enough to get away with all sorts of excesses I'd find intolerable from lesser beings.

I liked it, a lot. You might not. You are probably a more well-rounded person with a more balanced life than I. So what are you doing reading about such geeky pursuits? Shouldn't you be closing property deals and playing racquetball? Go on, get.

8 times flicks like this also make nerds feel superior in their nerdiness by thinking "at least I'm not as nerdy as those costume-wearing nerds" out of 10

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"How come I can understand you? Are you using some neural language router?"
- "Actually I'm speaking English you fucking idiot!" – speak English or pie, Paul

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

***HISTORICAL RPGS SPECIAL EDITION ...
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Historical Review ... Man, Myth and Magic
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64 RPG REVIEW ISSUE ELEVEN March 2011
