

RPG REVIEW

Issue #22, December 2013



The Great Survivors

***Chivalry & Sorcery 1st edition Review ... Traveller5 Review ...
Tunnels & Trolls Character Generation Update and Trolls! ...
People of Legend/RuneQuest ... Narrative and Simulation in the
Dungeon ... Orcish Moeties ... Making Magic Interesting ...
Spellcasting as a Skill ... In-Character Action ... Dracula 3000
and Thor Movie Reviews***

1 RPG REVIEW ISSUE TWENTY TWO December 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Administrivia, Editorial, Letters</i>	<i>many contributors</i>	<i>p2-3</i>
<i>Hot Gossip: Industry News</i>	<i>by Wu Mingshi</i>	<i>p4</i>
<i>Dinosaurs, Survival, and Speciation</i>	<i>by Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>p5-8</i>
<i>Chivalry & Sorcery 1st Edition Review</i>	<i>by Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>9-11</i>
<i>Traveller5 Review</i>	<i>by Karl Brown</i>	<i>p12-20</i>
<i>Updating Tunnels and Trolls Character Generation</i>	<i>by Karl Brown</i>	<i>p21-26</i>
<i>Tunnels and Trolls Bestiary: Troll Special</i>	<i>by Karl Brown</i>	<i>p27-29</i>
<i>People of Legend/RuneQuest2</i>	<i>by Karl Brown</i>	<i>p30-34</i>
<i>Moieties of the Pig Island Orcs</i>	<i>by B. Thorn</i>	<i>p35-37</i>
<i>Making Magic More Interesting</i>	<i>by Jim Vassilakos</i>	<i>p38-48</i>
<i>Spellcasting As A Skill</i>	<i>by Patrick Henry Downs</i>	<i>p49-52</i>
<i>In-Character Action and In-Character Consequences</i>	<i>by Christopher LaHaise</i>	<i>p53-54</i>
<i>The Dungeon as Narrative and Simulation</i>	<i>by Lev Lafayette</i>	<i>p55-56</i>
<i>Movie Review: Dracula 3000</i>	<i>by Zenicurean</i>	<i>p57-60</i>
<i>Movie Review: Thor The Dark World</i>	<i>by Andrew Moshos</i>	<i>p61-63</i>
<i>Next Issue</i>	<i>by many people</i>	<i>p64</i>

ADMINISTRIVIA

RPG Review is a quarterly online magazine which will be available in print version at some stage. All material remains copyright to the authors except for the reprinting as noted in the first sentence. Various trademarks and images have been used in this magazine of review and criticism. This includes Dungeons & Dragons, by Wizards of the Coast, Tunnels & Trolls by Flying Buffalo, Legend/RuneQuest2 by Mongoose Publishing, Traveller5 by Mark Miller, Chivalry & Sorcery originally by Fantasy Games Unlimited. Dracula 3000 is distributed by Lions Gate, and Thor : The Dark World by Disney. Artwork includes *The Fomorians*, as depicted by John Duncan (1912), Cover image is of a Indonesian coelecanth, from the Smithsonian Institute. Any use of images, material etc, is not to be construed as a challenge to any intellectual property and is under "fair use" as review. Any use of images, material etc, is not to be construed as a challenge to any intellectual property and is used under "fair use". Text is in Nimbus Roman, headings in Nimbus Sans, front page in Utopia. Any errors or omissions are unintentional.

Cover image is a Coelecanth, thought to have been extinct 66 million years ago until it was rediscovered in 1938.

LETTERS

I was wondering how I could submit content, if this is an open source kind of thing, what the deal is? I am a huge fan of tabletop/p&p/PC rpgs, and have DMed multiple systems for the last 20 years. I would love to write something for this. Also, how do I subscribe? :)

Brian Babineau

(We often get letters like this, so the following is part of our response to Brian)

Subscriptions and article information is available at the following URL

<http://www.rpgreview.net/journal>

You really should put RPG review up on Drive thru rpg. I'm sure that the majority of issues would be by free download

2 RPG REVIEW ISSUE TWENTY TWO December 2013

but a few nuts like me would actually purchase a print on demand issue of the zine.

Thomas Verreault

*That's a really good idea. I think I might do that.
(Starting from the next issue!)*

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the (quite late) 22nd edition of RPG Review. This issue covers the idea of survivors and, rather like early White Dwarf magazines (that is, around issues 1 to 50, remember them?) it has a particular concentration on D&D, Traveller, and RuneQuest, with a couple of extras – in our case Tunnels & Trolls and Chivalry & Sorcery. This issue is quite openly “retrospective”, looking at those games that have been with us since the very early days of the hobby – although not all of them, of course. Nor are the articles only orientated towards those game systems as they were writ at the time; Karl Brown's articles include *updating* Tunnels & Trolls character generation, and the people of Legend/RuneQuest2 is clearly designed for more contemporary versions of that classic game.

An interest is initially raised on what constitutes a “first generation” game and why have some survived – and so many failed. Yours truly does a modest investigation of various metrics which are often cited as the reason that certain games have succeeded and failed, some of which may surprise – and which should generate further discussion on the same.

There is also a number of articles which are quite generic. Moieties of the Pig Island Orcs, Spell-Casting As A Skill, Making Magic More Interesting, and Simulation-Narrative View of the Dungeon and are quite clearly orientated with games like Dungeons & Dragons in mind, but at the same time can be adapted to a wider-range of game systems. On a more system independent and theoretical approach is Chris La Haise's insightful exploration of in-game actions and in-game consequences.

Something that is quite notable about this issue – and it is entirely by accident rather than design – is that it's particularly text heavy. It is just that a number of lengthy articles were received and – despite using a format that can be released with any page count desired - for the purposes of old-fashioned consistency RPG Review remains as a 64 page quarterly.

Finally, we have two movie reviews from highly divergent budgets; guest reviewer Zenicurean engages in a useful public service by giving warning of the straight-to-video release Dracula 3000 whilst regular Andrew Moshos looks at the latest Thor movie.

The next edition of RPG Review is entitled “Different Worlds” which, of course, was a classic gaming magazine from the early to mid 80s which ran for a magnificent forty seven issues, which was particularly notable for its many reviews. The next issue of RPG Review is taking more, however, from the title – an exploration of various game worlds with an emphasis on those which have received a little less “airplay” than what is normally expected.

Until then, enjoy the trip down memory lane.

Lev Lafayette (lev@rpgreview.net)

3 RPG REVIEW ISSUE TWENTY TWO December 2013

HOT GOSSIP: INDUSTRY NEWS

by Wu Mingshi

Hosei bo, Mr. Lev...

Hey, you bit the late again, lah? Just like old days. OK2 you not quite up the lorry yet, but sometime Minshi, she has big scare that maybe RPG Review not publish anymore and that thought untahantable.

Wah, qin bo sai "D&D Next" launch date announce, "Summer 2014". My side of equator, not you! Mingshi think this mean GenCon. They better not be late, or much sia suay! Wonder if all 175,000 playtesters get credit, or maybe new book of names?

Will this mean Dungeons & Dragons finally come back to number 1? Internal Correspondence say it now slip to number 3, with Pathfinder number 1 and Star Wars number 2, Iron Kingdoms number 4 and Fate number 5.

Also in that quartering, Dark Heresy drop from top 5. Then Fantasy Flight game do beta for Dark Heresy second edition. Maybe if they do good first edition, they not need second edition so soon, lah?

On track completely different, Pelgrane Press now say Gumshoe system, for Esoterrorists, Trail of Cthulhu, and more now available in two open licenes; Open Gaming License and Creative Commons. Which to choose? The one that you like best!

You say this old school special issue? Did you see argument on Facebook between Bruce Heard who say Tracey Alley novels based on Mystara and Bruce Heard? Tracey Alley use maps that look very much the same as D&D Mystara and have some same place name. Some cover art look very similar to others as well. Alley say she no plagiarist, she say guilty of "literary laziness" and take down novels from Amazon.

Mingshi, she very naughty this time and reveal her special source.

<http://www.highprogrammer.com/alan/rants/tracey-alley-plagiarism/>

That's all from me this quartering!

Mingshi! xox (mingshi@rpgreview.net)

DINOSAURS, SURVIVAL, AND SPECIATION

by Lev Lafayette

This article is about how some of the earliest roleplaying games survived to contemporary times, how others became extinct, and how others, whilst becoming extinct, saw their ideas reborn in new game systems. The evolutionary metaphor is somewhat overdone of course, because when discussing products of the mind there is more development, rather than evolution with its unconscious naturalistic unfolding occurring. But the metaphor of dinosaur roleplaying games is sufficiently evocative to keep.

The initial question is, of course, what constitutes "one of the earliest" roleplaying game. It is no easy task to describe the history of roleplaying games in terms of qualitative change in game systems. Making an appeal to innovative contributions (e.g., explicitly narrativist components) will require some distinction between the game systems and actual play. For example, Ron Edwards makes reference to Tunnels and Trolls and Marvel Super Heroes as examples of narrativist play, when only the latter really provided in the system-mechanic (Karma points) for the player to take some control over the game's narrative. The other method involves selecting a particular date that is inevitably arbitrary, as it is difficult to discern industry-wide qualitative changes narrowed down to specific years.

Combining the two approaches a working definition for this essay is early roleplaying games that were built around the playability vs realism continuum, that did not have a major narrativist system mechanic, and were published prior to 1984 (i.e., the first ten years from the publication of original Dungeons & Dragons). From this list - and it is quite extensive - this would include a number of games that are still in active publication and development.

Who's In The Zoo?

Obvious examples of first generation games that have survived and sometimes prospered include Dungeons and Dragons (1974), Empire of the Petal Throne (1975), Tunnels and Trolls (1975), Chivalry and Sorcery (1977), Traveller (1977), Gamma World (1978), RuneQuest (1978), Rolemaster (1980), Call of Cthulhu (1981), Champions/Hero System (1981), Dragon Warriors (1982), Palladium (1983), and Paranoia (1984). The phrase "active publication and development" is deliberately chosen; it excludes games like Metamorphosis Alpha (1976) which has the original rules available through print-on-demand, but has not been in active development for many years.

It obviously excludes games which have suffered extinction or sorts for a variety of reasons; Superhero 2044 (1977), The Fantasy Trip (1977), High Fantasy (1978), Realm of Yolmi (1978), Adventures in Fantasy (1979), Bushido (1980), DragonQuest (1980), Fringeworthy (1981), Man, Myth, and Magic (1982), Swordbearer (1982), Powers and Perils (1983), and many, many others. Some games, like Bunnies & Burrows (1976) are still played and remembered fondly, but are not in active development.

Evaluating why some games have survived and others have not requires a careful review. Obviously individuals have a pet theory on why this is the case which often equates to "my favourite (first generation) game survived and yours did not therefore my theory is right". Even a slightly more empirical analysis can do better than mere assertion. An evaluation based on some actual data is better than an evaluation based on none.

System Superiority

It is possible to evaluate games according to their game system along at least two axes. The first is the capacity of the system to show internal coherence, and the second is the flexibility in the game system, the degree that it can satisfy a variety of creative agendas from its players. A game that does not have internal coherence contains contradictory rules. A game that does not have flexibility illustrates a paucity of design complexity. A game system becomes 'broken' when it is possible to exploit the rules in such a fashion that, as writ, the game becomes unplayable.

Even from the games listed, it should be clear that system design is not a significant factor in the survival of a game. Games with excellent game systems, such as *The Fantasy Trip*, *DragonQuest*, and *Swordbearer*, have fallen on the wayside, whereas the most successful game of all time, *Dungeons & Dragons*, is notorious among gamers for large variety of system flaws and inconsistencies; one only has to do a review of "Pun-Pun The Super Kobold", "Chain Gate Solars", "the Nanomunchkin", "A.D.D.I.C.T" (<http://knights-n-knaves.com/dmprata/ADDICT.pdf>), or some of the surprise rule conflicts to illustrate some well-known examples - and no, this is not a case of "all rules have flaws". They do, but not as significant as this.

This is not to entirely discount system design as a metric. All other things being equal, if game A has a better system than game B, then over time people will gravitate to it. *RuneQuest* survived (just) and *Powers and Perils* despite both receiving equal promotion from Avalon Hill, at least initially (to P&P's credit, there are still some die-hard fans). Overall however the roleplaying game market, like many others, shows very little indication of representing anything close to perfect competition.

First-Mover Advantage

First-mover advantage is a well known feature of business success. Typically it refers to a situation where a technological innovator is able to capture a large initial market and control the resources to reduce the capacity of newcomers to engage competitively. There is an argument that whilst the first mover is able to reap monopolistic profits, at least for a while, this is balanced by their requirement to engage in risky research in the first instance.

It is certainly true that Tactical Studies Rules, Inc., achieved first-mover advantage with *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1974. Efforts from the company to promote "official" products to the exclusion of others (c.f., the admonishments in the *AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide*) or to deny even the existence of other companies (e.g., printing changes in Deities and Demigods) were a modest contribution in maintenance of this position.

What many fail to recognise however is that TSR did establish a level of cultural superiority as a first-mover. For decades after the establishment of the hobby when explaining a particular game to non-roleplayers the phrase "it's like *Dungeons & Dragons*" would be typical. Roleplaying games, as a whole, were synonymous with *Dungeons & Dragons*, and as a result, TSR could claim a first-mover advantage and, importantly, a new customer advantage.

As long as TSR retained a high market position with a production and distribution chain, this positional advantage continued. However, and this lesson applies for other industries as well, once a generation had past with this cultural experience it was no longer novel and the synonymous relationship wore off. By the mid-1990s there was no point in saying "it is like *Dungeons & Dragons*" - by this stage, everyone in the target market was familiar with existence of

roleplaying games. It is no accident that this is the time when D&D was seriously challenged by White Wolf's games (Vampire, Werewolf, Mage, etc), which offered a significantly different rulesystem, core setting, and a play-style which tapped into subcultural mores.

Monopolistic Advantage

There are other forms of monopolistic advantage which is worthy of a quick overview. The term "monopolistic advantage" is offered in contradistinction to that of "competitive advantage" offered by Michael Porter, who willingly lumps various barriers to competition (as well as productivity improvements) as a type of "competitive advantage", despite the damage monopolistic behaviour has to aggregate wealth. From the perspective of an individual business however, both monopolistic and competitive advantage are sources of survival, even if the former can lead to "last man standing in a wasteland" situation.

In terms of monopolistic advantage the most important in the roleplaying game market was maintenance of distribution control and cash reserves, two interrelated components. A games company required wide market reach, and enough money to continue operations whilst waiting for returns from sales. For many companies this proves to be a significant barrier to entry; either they remain a small producer, or they suffer devastating shortfall of money, the latter affecting even large companies, such as TSR in 1995.

The survival of a roleplaying game after such a corporate calamity depends on those who purchase the surviving assets of the company. Rolemaster has survived despite Iron Crown Enterprises going into bankruptcy in 2000, because the assets were purchased and the company revived. SPI's DragonQuest was not so fortunate, even though arguably it was a somewhat better game. With a small but continuing support base, Empire of the Petal Throne has been published by five different companies (TSR 1975, Gamescience 1983, Different Worlds Publications in 1987, Theatre of the Mind 1994, Guardians of Order 2005). Another very well-known example is the original RuneQuest (The Chaosium 1978, Chaosium/Avalon Hill 1984, Mongoose 2006, The Design Mechanism 2012).

Notably like first-move advantage, monopolistic advantages are very much time-dependent. Whilst a large company with monopolistic advantage can crush a smaller one in the short term (e.g., using loss leading, control of distribution lines etc), in the information goods market the arrival of the Internet has severely disrupted traditional distribution-chain management. This has proven to be advantageous for small-press publishers, and has also led to some RPG manufacturers to develop game systems that contain additional necessary components which are not easily subject to copying (e.g., Warhammer FRPG 3rd editions).

Speciation

In contrast to game systems which have gone extinct attention should also be given to divergent forms of speciation which a game system may become extinct but either the system or the setting and title is taken up into a new system. This includes games which have undergone several editions of recognisable similarity, as well as systems which have combined major elements from other games. Some games such as are more understandable as a variant of a game system, a supplement, rather than an effective speciation (e.g., Monsters! Monsters! to Tunnels & Trolls).

Whilst there is no suggesting of attempting a genealogy of roleplaying games (at least not at this time), there are some

very obvious examples - for example how much of the The Fantasy Trip was incorporated into GURPS (1986) after the former ceased publication with the demise of Metagaming (it also included a great deal of the concepts from Champions, but that's another matter). On a different approach, a speciation of setting and game concept, examples can be given with Bunnies & Burrows which was republished as a GURPS supplement and whose rules had no similarity with the original. GURPS Traveller can also be mentioned in this context along with Traveller: The New Era. A more extreme version of this is Traveller 2300 which wasn't even in the same game-universe as Traveller - which at least partially explains why the second edition was renamed 2300AD.

New editions are a form of speciation as well, at least those which have undergone a significant rules revision. It is arguable that all roleplaying games are a speciation, to some degree, from Dungeons & Dragons. More direct lineages however are evident from the original Dungeons & Dragons, to Advanced Dungeons & Dragons and the D&D BECMI series, to Dungeons & Dragons third and fourth editions, although third edition also (as one of the designers noted) has a fair bit of influence from RuneQuest as well. Rolemaster has had at least one major revision; Rolemaster 1st and 2nd edition (aka "classic") to Rolemaster Standard System/Fantasy Roleplay, along with tangential developments such as MERP and HARP. Paranoia had significant rule changes in the first, second, "third" (entitled "fifth"), and fourth (entitled XP) editions; as an interesting twist current developers do not consider the "third" edition to exist; it has become a "nonperson" in the eyes of the ultraviolet.

Two notable examples exist of games that speciated and then merged (which, as far as I know, doesn't happen in biology). The first is RuneQuest, which began the development of a range of systems from Chaosium with similar mechanics entitled Basic Role-Playing ; Call of Cthulhu, Stormbringer, Superworld, Ringworld, ElfQuest, Superworld, Hawkmoon and, arguably, Pendragon. Non-Chaosium games which can included in the list include Other Suns, and the Swedish Drakar och Demoner. An early attempt to show the commonalities of these systems occurred in the publication of the Basic Role-Playing booklet. A more advanced version was Worlds of Wonder. Almost thirty years later Deluxe Basic Role-Playing would offer a unified system in an much-expanded publication. The other is Palladium Fantasy Roleplaying, with its numerous spin-off games and eventual merger into Rifts etc.

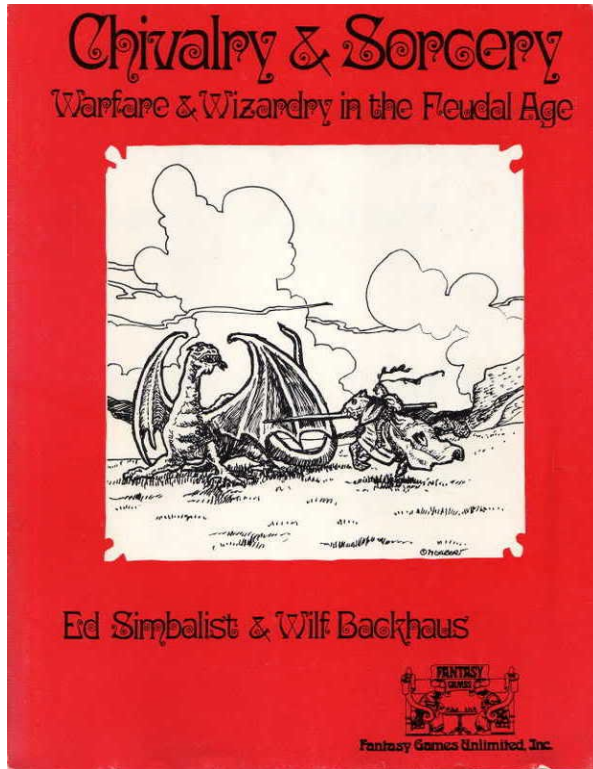
Who Survives? Who Prospers?

A review of the various metrics involved in the survivability of first-generation roleplaying games leads to the following two major tentative conclusions. Firstly, the survival of a roleplaying system is primarily dependent on the organisation backing the production. Whether large (Dungeons & Dragons) or small scale (Chivalry & Sorcery) as long as there is a core group involved in promoting, producing, and distributing a game system with regular updates, supplements etc, its survival is ensured. Note that all components are required; a game company that simply offers reprints of an old game does not aid to survival of the game. Some games can even be resurrected as a result - the most prominent example is Dragon Warriors which saw initial release in 1985, and a new edition in 2008. The second component is the contribution of new mechanics, setting, or style to the roleplaying game market. This is as essential as the first requirement, but rather aids a continuing interest to develop a community around the game.

It is arguable that this examination also has relevance for new game systems as well as a historical review of survivors. Either a game is being developed for a short-term interest for several sessions and then to be discarded for the next innovative independent publication, or it is attempting to carve a small and continuing market share. There is an enormous range of clever and interesting mechanics and settings in a large number of more contemporary independent games, but without ongoing support it is likely that they will also fall into the category of extinction. As mentioned, system (or setting) superiority was not sufficient for the survival of first generation games. There is no reason to assume that this is not the case also for contemporary games systems.

CHIVALRY & SORCERY 1ST ED REVIEW

by Lev Lafayette



Introduction and Product

Chivalry & Sorcery is one of the ground old role-playing systems for the early days of the hobby that still attracts a small, but loyal, following – surpassing the life of the two authors. The first edition dates from 1977 and comes in a red soft-cover (now entitled “the red book” with subsequent editions), with a two-column typed font ragged-right throughout. The binding of my copy has held up remarkably well, but that’s at least because I handle this particular book with a great deal of care – it strikes me as rather weakly bound and it is fortunate I have a copy in a condition as good as it is. The page count, at a mere 130 pages, is deceptive, as the font is impossibly small. There is several pages for the table of contents but no index. The writing is mostly game-formalism, but there is numerous quite informal moments when the authors become particularly enthusiastic about an item of interest (usually in condemning design decisions of other games). The interior black-and-white line art is mostly fair and is contextually appropriate to the text.

The game argues from first principles the importance of setting, and the importance of the feudal high middle ages in particular: “*Authenticity is the hallmark of Chivalry & Sorcery*” is their deeply setting-simulationist orientation.

The game opens with a “Grand Campaign” chapter, followed by two chapters on Castles & Warfare, a chapter on Thieves, one on Clerics, two on Magick (note the “k”) Users, one on Sorcery, followed by “The Fantasy Campaign”, “Levels and Experience” and finally “Men and Monsters”. The contents do illustrate the limitations of scope and the difficulty of navigating the text. The chapters, it should be pointed out, are in the same font and size as non-chapter headings and without page breaks.

Characters and Setting

The game proper opens with character generation for a race, class, and level-based system. It begins with available fantasy races (Men, Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves) and the requisites for each with the non-human species being their own vocation. Only Men are available automatically; if any other is desired a random die-roll is required, which could result in the character being a lycanthrope or monster instead. Starting age is (optionally, effectively) $13 + 1d10$, sex is (optionally) randomly determined as well and weighted towards the male, except for female *players*. This is followed by size, height, etc., and then the usual abstract characteristics rated from 1d20; Dexterity, Strength, Constitution, Appearance, Bardic Voice, Intelligence, Charisma, and Alignment – yes, alignment is *randomly* determined. Finally there are a range of derived values, such as Personal Combat Factor, Carrying Capacity, Body and Fatigue etc.

Everything about Chivalry & Sorcery is about the setting. Even if one never plays the game, it makes a good sourcebook on that level alone, at least in terms of locating player-character types (fighter, magic-user, cleric, thief) in a

particular social environment where there is an strict feudal hierarchy. Player characters are not exempt from these rules. Social class, sibling rank, guild rank, etc, are also all part of randomised character generation. These ranks determine the character's social status, which – along with Charisma - determines their Base Influence Factor, which contributes in making friends, alliances, and gaining a position in the royal bureaucracy. Income levels are provided for a variety of professions and with costs for food, shelter, and clothing and various forms of weaponry. The former should be affordable, the latter is challenging. For example, a master armourer will received 15sp per day; a good meal at an inn will cost 1sp, but a sword will cost 100sp and a chain shirt 150sp.

The rest of the first chapter is grounding in the principles of knighthood and chivalry, making up approximately half of the page count for that chapter. With illustrative examples and system rules, matters such as the fief, feudal obligations, high and low justice, canon law, the ceremony of knighthood, courtly love (which differentiates winning a lady's favour by consent or by force of arms!), and tournaments are all described, along with a listing of heralds and orders with the game bonuses for the latter.

Castles, Warfare and Combat

This is actually two chapters; a short, three-page “Castles and Warfare” and an extensive twenty-six page “Warfare in the Age of Chivalry” chapter, the latter which covers battle, siege, and personal combat. The first chapter includes construction costs down to the the square foot of wall or roof, along with general categories for castles according to size, fortification, and peripherals, along with rules for entering the realm and engaging in bribery.

The next chapter merges seamlessly into feudal battles, run on a day-long scale. Troop types include the aforementioned player-character races plus goblins, trolls, giants, and uruk-hai (there is quite a few direct Tolkien references), differentiated by experience. Social class even effects combat die rolls with dwarves, elves, and feudal regulars having more predictable results for determining commander scale. Battle games are expressed in scales for miniature wargaming with a complete set of rules, designed also to fit with the roleplaying game version, for various issues such as unit integrity, morale, etc. Various siege weapons are also included, with specific rules for damage to structures.

Personal combat is resolved through a determination of surprise, first blow based on weapon length etc., a hit probability modified by defensive actions and armour. Base damage is based on the armour class of the defendant multiplied by the attacker's Weapon Damage Factor with a different table according to the class of attacker (military elite, infantry, non-fighters etc). There are also rules for critical hits, a variety of situational modifiers (especially foot vs horse), and maneuvers. There are two combat rounds per five minute game turn, during which there are a few opportunities to land a blow against an opponent.

Other Characters and Sorcery

Other player-character vocations in Chivalry & Sorcery includes thieves and their kin (i.e., brigands and assassins), various monastic (friars, fighting clerics, priests), and magicians (natural and trained). Such characters have the sort of skills and abilities that can be expected. Thieves, can pick locks, disarm traps, pick pockets, move silently, hide in shadows, engage in muggings, and have enhanced hearing. They typically belong to a Guild along with beggars and prostitutes. In contrast the various monastics have some fighting ability, the social status to perform various religious rites, the capacity to call for divine intervention, and the ability to generate miracles from a fair selection.

Magicians have divergent class origins and type of magic that they are born with, determined randomly, with intelligence prerequisites, and a second characteristic to partially determine their Personal Magick Factor. Spellcasting has a spell level that roughly correlates with character experience level. Magicians, at least of the learning variety, will spend inordinate amounts of time engaging in studying and enchantments. It is still a hotly debated topic on whether this level of “realism” is appropriate for the game, even given the amount of down-time that is offered. What is not under much dispute is that magic users who cloister themselves away for an extended period of time can come out their

studies armed to the teeth. To gamist oriented players who find notions of balance and challenge preferential to realism such a design will not be their liking.

Learned magick comes in the form of Arcane Arts, of which a dozen or so are specified each with their own level-based powers; alchemists, artificers, astrologers, diviners, witches, conjurers, enchanters, necromancers, thaumaturgists, along with various mystics (cabbalists, power words etc). Natural magick users are in a different situation. In broad terms their powers tend to reflect powers, rather than spells that have learned over time. These are, interestingly, modified by character background so that a Yeoman will have talents such as Find Direction, whereas a Noble will have Know Alignment. Other natural magick users will generate their talents through a channelling method, whether through drug induced trances or achieving mystical states through dance or chanting.

As with many other aspects of this game, the magick resolution system is cumbersome, with different probabilities of a casting against a target depending on the relative experience of the caster compared to the target, the type of spell being cast, and the species or vocation of the target. This can be modified by various magical and natural defenses and spells that miss the target can end up, by random determination, striking other targets instead. In particularly bad circumstances, a spell can backfire.

The Campaign, Character Development, and Creatures

The final three chapters of the book can be summarised as campaign development. The first covers the various activities engaged in the adventuring or (more likely) mission-based service professions, effectively time and movement and travelling encounters. One feature of the game is that it deliberately avoids the inclusion of “dungeons” as being particularly unrealistic, although they gave themselves an escape route by having them as rare “places of mystery”, their location protected by magick from the usual roaming eyes of church and state.

The experience point system contains the innovations of awarding experience based on race or experience correlated with the activity carried out. The gold piece value of loot is relatively unimportant to fighters, clerics, magicians, and elves, but has full value to dwarves and others. For other examples, fighters receive experience points for fighting, knights for engaging in courtly love, clerics for carrying out rites, and so forth. Level gains from experience points give bonuses to Body, Fatigue, PCF, along with various skills and actions previously described in the text.

The final pages review various types of potential opponents with a paragraph or so to individual creatures, but with broader and longer descriptions for classified groups (e.g., giant races, goblins, dragons). Tables are provided to illustrated capability changes according to level for the sapient and player-character kinfolk, and age for the monsters. Animals are included in table form which includes statistics as a combat opponent, but only notes at best in terms of description. The section includes giant versions of normal beasts.

Overall

First edition Chivalry & Sorcery includes a lot of innovative ideas, quite a lot of colour (especially in the twin aspects of chivalry and sorcery) and comes across with a good level of content per page (even given the pages in question). It has critical flaws however in presentation, organisation, and a fairly cumbersome case-by-case method of resolving actions and makes significant losses in the fun quotient both due to the complexity and the randomness in character generation.

Further editions were a notable improvement on the game in these aspects, as long as they retained the innovations and colour, which accounts for its continued support. By itself however, most people would be put off actually playing first edition C&S, even if there is some historical and reference value in having such a book on one's gaming shelf.

Style: 1 + .0 (layout) + .6 (art) + .6 (coolness) + .3 (readability) + .2 (product) = 2.8

Substance: 1 + .7 (content) + .7 (text) + .1 (fun) + .2 (workmanship) + .1 (system) = 2.8

TRAVELLER5 REVIEW

by Karl Brown

FarhomeSector

ReviewandPlaytest

Part 1: Marquis Joohraah, Interstellar Backpacker

Imperial Secret: The Deep Galaxy 5 mission has detected EM transmission emanating from approximately 8.2 kiloparsecs from Charted Space. The Transmissions are of a mixed human/sophant culture. While such a discovery may be considered a scientific curiosity there may be extreme political and strategic implications of information gleaned about this distant region of space even if that information is a centuries out of date. Transmissions indicate that this distant branch of humaniti has not had contact with the 'Denizens' but such contact is inevitable. Therefore in the interest of protecting the Imperium contacting this culture is strictly prohibited.

This is the first in a series of articles for Traveller 5 (T5). Since there is good back-compatibility between this edition Classic Traveller (T1), Traveller 4, and to a lesser extent Megatraveller and Mongoose Traveller, the materials generated could be used with those editions. The purpose of this series of articles is threefold:

First and foremost the series will be a trial of all the various generation systems in T5 the outputs of which will be new characters, worlds, guns, armour, vehicles, starships, aliens, robots, animals, and gadgets for T5.

Secondly, the series will review T5. Reviews of T5 exist, some are more positive than others (<http://www.penultimateharn.com/blog/?p=122>). A review in Freelance Traveller July 2013 was particularly harsh rating T5 2/5 (available free here: <http://www.freelancetraveller.com/magazine/FT043-201307-ISO-A4.pdf>). Having worked through character generation, I feel he makes some valid criticisms, however his overall assessment of 'unplayable' and 'not a roleplaying game' is in my opinion very far off the mark. I get the impression that that review was based on hasty read-through. Here I will try out the various systems and review what I found during my test drive.

Finally, a new setting for Traveller will be detailed. Still within the same galaxy as the canonical Third Imperium but many light years distant from Charted Space this new setting will recognizably within the Traveller universe; consistent with, but largely independent of the history of Charted Space presented in canon materials. A miss-jump could place characters from the Imperium into this distant region of space or characters could be locals with no knowledge of the Third Imperium's existence.

The first edition of Traveller was originally conceived as generic rules set for science fiction adventure, the Imperium was developed later. Now in its 5th edition I will discuss how well Traveller still allows for exploration of new worlds outside of the canon setting of Charted Space.

What you get

T5 is a 654 page rugged hardbound book or a pdf. As an object it is very impressive looking and satisfying to hold but I wonder how practical it is. The binding looks like it's going to be pretty durable despite the huge page count. The pages are thick good quality paper. Contents are largely black and white with a few colour plates added at the end. The pdf comes on a CD rom containing the core rulebooks for most previous editions of Traveller (as simple scans) except the GURPS, T20, and Mongoose editions. You also get some nice colour wallpapers and other goodies. Given the bulk of the dead tree version this game lends itself to the convenience of an electronic edition. It is a pity that the pdf is without any bookmarks so you have to rely on thumbnails or page numbers for navigation (which are out of sync because of the covers et al.).

The cover art is a variation on the simple elegant covers of the first edition, black field with bold red and white writing and a red stripe. I like it but it might only appeal to those old fans who were going to buy the book anyway. Using one of the ships from the colour plates at the end might have drawn in new punters. The interior art includes black and

12 RPG REVIEW ISSUE TWENTY TWO December 2013

white illustrations harvested from old GDW Traveller books or simplistic new line art sometimes mixed together, passable but often lacking any sense of drama. There is some muted colour in these illustrations in the pdf. The colour plates at the back of the book are glorious. Flicking through two things become apparent. There are a lot of tables and diagrams so despite the huge page count you should be able to read the thing in a reasonable amount of time. Secondly, despite the words 'Core Book' the cover and a big '1' on the spine this is not just a core rulebook. It is an entire game line bound in a single cover. The page count is similar to GURPS 3rd edition core book plus GURPS Space, High Tech, Vehicles, Robots, Ultratech, Ultratech 2, Aliens, and Psionics. T5 covers roughly the same kind of scope as this collection of GURPS books. T5 also has plenty of pre-generated weapons, armour, gear etc.

The book is split into seven broad chapters each of which is more like an entire book in scope. These chapters are Introductions, Basic Information, Characters and Life, Combat, Starports and Starships, Stars and Worlds, and Adventures. There is also an appendix of colour pictures of starships. I will rate each chapter separately then find the mean of all the chapter ratings to rate the book at the end of this series of articles.

Introductions

This chapter begins with an appropriate tribute to those who have influenced the development of Traveller but sadly did not live to see this latest incarnation.

After this the chapter launches into some rather inspirational writing about what Traveller is all about supported by



Science-Fiction Adventure in the Far Future

13 RPG REVIEW ISSUE TWENTY TWO December 2013

well-chosen quotes. When I read this I couldn't help but get excited about the new book and the possibilities it held. After this is a succinct description of what a roleplaying game is. We are then given 'A *Brief* History of the Universe' (three pages!) that sketches out a setting filled with adventurous opportunities.

The next section 'The Foundations of the Traveller Universe' (p18+) discusses the assumptions made and the rationale behind them as elements to enhance play.

"T5 (T5). The fifth of the direct line of editions of the Traveller game system, ambitiously intended as the ultimate science fiction role-playing system covering nearly everything in role-playing, and capable of managing situations across a variety of eras and technology levels."

So how well does T5 measure up against its own goals?

As noted above Traveller (all editions) makes assumptions. T5 is not a fully generic system with a setting tacked on; it does not cover all possible science fiction settings. If you want that try GURPS 3rd ed. Space. T5 has a lot of assumptions built into its numerous charts and tables. For example FTL works in a particular way, gravitic technology is developed, life-bearing worlds with human compatible biospheres are common, etc. All pretty standard stuff for rather old-fashioned science fiction, much of which is incompatible with current science but familiar from old novels of the 70's and current pop-culture. There is nothing wrong with this; I just want you to know what you are getting. The new setting will embrace T5's assumptions. I might tweak a little around the fringes but more than that is going to be too hard.

Overall, this chapter is the one I enjoyed reading the most so far (I'm about half way through the book as I write this). It does a good job of introducing Traveller and getting this reader enthused about the game.

Basic Information

After the inspiring writing of the *Introductions*, the *Basic Information* chapter is thoroughly mind numbingly dull. What a contrast! Despite being told why the chapter is necessary from the get-go I can't shake the feeling that the bulk of this material should have been an appendix at the back. This stuff *is* important but putting it here ruins the pacing of the book. Unusual units could then be given on a single page near the start of the book. After this, one page about how dice are used *and* a description of the effect on chances of success would have been justified. The rest could have been an appendix cross-referenced as necessary. The authors and editors really dropped the ball inflicting this on readers so close to the start.

Kludges and Tweaks

I'm going to suggest some kludges and tweaks. Tweaks are not a judgment on the game they are just suggestions to adjust minor details to taste. Kludges are to patch over where T5 fails to give you needed information. Kludges are few and minor but should not exist.

Characters and Life

This chapter covers a lot of ground. Most importantly it includes character generation. Aliens use the same procedures and tables but with a few changes described later in the book. We are told character generation has five broad steps.

1 Birthworld and Homeworld

The first step in character generation is to choose or generate a homeworld where your character grew up. When generating homeworlds 'close' and 'far' refer to moons requiring a roll for the orbit around the primary whereas 'worlds' do not. The homeworld tables do not include Tech level or Law level. Tech level is not used in character generation and apparently deliberately left out. Law level is less clear. Without a Law level some trade classifications cannot be determined. You can't tell if your character grew up as a stone-age gatherer or with godlike technology. The tables discuss native sophants (aliens) and determine if the population evolved on the world or not. It would have been

nice if the other characteristics for the homeworlds were defined here. What does Atmosphere 8 mean? There is not even a cross-reference to a later section.

Tweak: I want my sector to be one where jump drive has only come into use about two centuries ago therefore I'm going to impose a -1 to both population, Government, law and technology rolls (treat negative results as zero).

Kludge: assume law level=government level

I generated a birthworld and homeworld for my character. The birthworld is just background. The homeworld provided a skill based on trade classification.

Glor 567344 star:G9V Lo (characters with Glor as a homeworld gain the Flyer-1 skill, I chose this as a birthworld only)
A temperate world with a tiny transient population.

Imbar 758422 star:K6V2 Ni (Characters with Imbar as a homeworld gain Driver-1 skill)
A temperate world with a tiny population of settlers.

Hidden Pasts

Eras and Loa are two rather dull worlds within the Farhome sector frequently used as polite cover for hidden pasts.

Eras= E876432-1 Ni Pa G0V Failed colony of iron-age primitives

Loa= D345556-8 Ni Ag G0V Thoroughly unremarkable world with nothing to recommend it.

Future articles will (ok, might) include a random homeworld table for the sector (like that on p82).

Date of Birth

The civilization of the Farhome Sector is completely unaware of the Third Imperium and its calendar. Here the current calendar dates to the discovery of jump drive just over two centuries ago, the default starting year is 210SF (starfaring). The Standard Year is assumed to be near enough to that used in T5 as to make no difference. A Far Home character's date of birth is a day number between 1 and 364. The year is based on the orbit of the capital world adjusted to exactly 26 standard 'jumps' of 14 days each. There are two jumps to a 'journey'. The capital world has no moon and therefore natives have no months.

2 Personal Characteristics

This section is really straightforward. Perhaps a little too much for current taste. Your personal characteristics (attributes) are determined completely randomly, for humans 2d6 for each in the order rolled.

For my character I rolled: 78B45B

Characteristics for humans are Strength (Str), Dexterity (Dex), Endurance (End), Intelligence (Int), Education (Edu), and Social Standing (Soc). Aliens might have alternate characteristics so sometime characteristics are referred to by position, C1 is Str. My character is physically average except for high endurance (B) possibly because he's too stupid to know when to stop (Int4). He is from the upper Social Standing (SocB) but poorly educated. In short idle rich. Sir Jaim Joohrah is born.

What's with the B's? Like previous editions of Traveller, T5 substitutes letters for numerals over 9, B=11.

I also recorded the first die of each of the first four my characters in-game 'genetics' 3661. This is optional but can be used later to create offspring, parents, and clones. You can create Traveller campaigns that cover a lot of game time. You could create a campaign on a slower than light generation ship epic with one new solar system visited every generation.

Tweak: You might let players roll six pairs of dice then assign them as pairs as they wish.

3 Pre-Career Education (and Training)

Like any good member of the upper classes Jaim applies for Naval Academy. It is a little unclear but you use the college table for this (I think). Rolled '5', equal to education to get in, just made it. As in Classic Traveller there are

major random elements to character creation. Just because you envision playing a dashing Space Navy Officer does not mean that is the character you end up with. Personally, I really enjoy rolling Traveller characters but think that not letting players design the character they envision is a downside of the game.

*Tweak: you might let players begin with the following list of results: 1,1,2,2,3,3,4,4,5,5,6,6. At any point where a roll is called for the player may substitute (and cross off) one of these preordained results instead **before** rolling the dice. Careful use of preordained results will guide the generation process producing a result close to the player's character concept.*

Anyway I kept rolling. Jaim passes on his first year but fails his second. Fortunately, being of the upper classes has benefits and Jaim receives a waiver (p72) by rolling under Soc. The same thing happens on his third year. When Jaim fails his fourth year the Naval College has had enough and kicks his upper class behind out of their school. Jaim does not leave empty handed his one pass gets him a major in 'Leader'. For a minor the list says I can choose "any Starship skill". A page reference to the list of Starship skills would have been nice (p142) but instead I spent five minutes flicking through the book (no index). Jaim chooses Pilot.

4 Career

T5 character generation is dominated by career choice. Unlike the core book of some previous Traveller editions both military and civilian careers are covered. Also unlike earlier editions, you are allowed to switch careers during character generation. I really like the thinking behind the careers. Every career is a little different and each captures a main theme of that life well. Scholars strive for publications and tenure, marines risk injury and are rewarded for courage, entertainers seek fame etc. To use the tables you really need to read the section carefully first. The checklists for each career on p78-78 are essential to make sense of the career tables. It would have been nice if the one page of tables per career were more self-contained, perhaps as a double page spread.

Jaim decides to give up his boyhood dream, stop wasting time, and follow his parents into politics. Having Soc A (10) he is automatically accepted. In other careers a failed roll to start ages the character a year. He can use his high endurance for the intrigue roll giving him a good chance of advancement. Jaim works long hours outmaneuvering other noble's schemes, has patience, and is known for filibustering. His chances of elevation to higher Soc are good. I spend all my skill rolls for the first three terms on characteristics hoping to raise Jaim's abysmal Int and Edu. Interestingly, you can improve Soc via skill rolls as well as elevation. Aware of his poor education Jaim embarks on a program of self-improvement spending time in the gym and at the net terminal

Term 1

99D55c Age 26 1 Intrigue, Elevated, Land Grant, no change to skills: Driver-1, Pilot-1, Leader-1.

Here's a trip be careful with increases to Social Standing, some levels are subdivided e.g. 'c' and 'C'.

Term 2

A9D66C Age 30 Intrigues:2, Land Grants:2, Skills: Driver-1, Pilot-1, Leadership-1.

Term 3

Before aging:

B9E68D Age 30 Intrigues:3, Elevated (I use up his once-in-a-lifetime flux (1d6-1d6) roll), Land Grants:4, Skills: Driver-1, Pilot-1, Leader-1.

After aging: A9D68D

Term 4

Jaim realizes his pursuit of general improvement has left him with few marketable skills. He works over the next four years to change this. He also begins to understand that he has reached the highest social position he is ever likely to attain.

Intrigues 4, Land Grants 3, Skills: Programmer-1, Leader-2, Liason-1, Pilot-2, Driver-1

After aging: Age 34, 98C68D

5 Mustering out

This is the last step of the 5 steps for character generation.

Mustering out: Life Insurance 2, C4+1, StarPass (this is like an interstellar 'round the world plane ticket).

Jaim has received some benefits for his years of service to the realm but has failed to adequately plan for his early retirement; thus finds himself embarrassingly short of liquidity. It's quite possible for a character to start with nothing but (presumably) the clothes on his back and no cash. Fortunately he can afford to take risks to earn money, life insurance-2 means that he can be restored to life in a clone body if killed twice. The mustering out benefits assume a particular kind of interstellar economy, that particular kinds of organizations exist (like the providers of a StarPass), that at least some worlds in your campaign have pretty high technology, and that things like growing a clone body and downloading your personality into it are legal. Traveller really assumes a lot and this limits the kind of setting it can portray easily.

Tweak: PCs who gain no cash during mustering out are awarded C6x100 credits. In humans C6 is Social Standing. With the tweak Jaim has 1200 credits to his name.

I decide to determine the optional Fame rating for Jaim. First I have to find the table (no index). Not having earned any fame during his career Jaim has a Fame of zero, the lowest possible. With nothing to lose I use up his once-in-a-lifetime flux (1d6-1d6) roll to adjust fame. I roll -2, Jaim still has the minimum of Fame-0.

He also has land grants. Like aging, these seem like a bit of a mystery at first but as you continue to read through you find a page on Noble Lands (p96). Jaim has:

2 hexes on homeworld

2 hexes on a Pre-Ag(ricultural) or Pre-Ri(ch) world in his home system

4 hexes elsewhere on his homeworld.

4 hexes on an Ag or Ri world in his home system.

8 more hexes on his homeworld.

8 hexes on a Pre-Ind(ustrial) world elsewhere in the subsector.

At the end of the year these generate an income. It is not clear if Jaim starts with any land grant income from previous years but I would guess not. The exact value of this income depends on the world trade classifications. These vary greatly and players might game the system to get more valuable estates. No system is given to determine which world non-homeworld land grants are on. *Kludge: I'd recommend player choice with referee veto. I'll generate Jaim's Land Grant worlds later.*

As part of mustering out some careers can get shares in a starship. The idea that characters can pool shares to get a better ship will give game backing to a shared history for some characters. I really like this. However the details of ship shares are unclear. If characters pool shares do they all need to meet the eligibility criteria for the ship or only one of them? We are told some ship's are actually loaned while others are owned by the characters but not which ships. It would seem obvious that military corvette is a loan and a yacht is owned but what about a lab ship? Might it be owned by an university or government?

Kludge: any 'Naval' or 'Scout' ship is a loan. All others are owned.

Jaim Joohrah

Frustrated by the prospect of not being able to advance further Jaim Joohrah makes any early retirement to 'get out and see the galaxy'. With his StarPass but few credits and little in the way of marketable skills Marquis Jaim Joohrah is something of an interstellar backpacker.

98C78D

Skills: Programmer-1, Leader-2, Liason-1, Pilot-2, Driver-1

Gear: Life Insurance 2, C4+1, StarPass.

Life Events

These tables are not discussed in the main text or character generation checklists. It is pretty obvious though that they

just generate 'fluff' to fill out the character's back-story. I like that there is a table for each profession. For Jaim I determine he was involved in the following intrigues:

The Browlmont Commission
Vortloom's Palace
The Grashant Commission
Harlron's Misconduct

Secrets

After life events there are two tables of Secrets by Career. Most careers might gain secrets during mustering out. I can't find anywhere in the Noble career where the character acquires a secret.

Kludge: When a Wafer Jack is acquired during mustering out Nobles may optionally choose a Secret instead.

Thoughts on character generation

Characters are complete with a sketch of their back-story full of hooks for roleplaying. However, because generation is largely random there is little chance of reproducing a desired concept as a PC. It is annoying that you have no idea what level of technology is available on their homeworld.

At this point I thought my character was finished.

Reading Ahead

Character generation is part of the chapter 'Characters and Life'. The section dealing with character generation is entitled 'Characters'. On a first-read-through it is not really clear where character generation ends. This section should have been called 'Character Generation'. The sections that follow cover experience, then other material related to characters (genetics, clones, and synthetic humanoids) that would have been better put in a separate chapter (as was done for robots and aliens). As things stand the layout is a little confusing on a casual read-through but the logic does become clear soon after you start to use the rules.

Life Pursuits and Experience

This section begins with players defining life pursuits for their characters. This feels like a character generation activity; another source of confusion for those reading through the book. Life Pursuits grant a +1 for related activities. Life pursuits are not used in the experience system as I expected making their placement in a separate section to character generation more of a mystery. For Jaim Joohra I design new life pursuits:

Life Pursuit

Flaneur: An idle rich interstellar explorer of streets and cultures
Streetwise. Social Standing. C+S=12

Even though Jaim has no Streetwise skill his SocD (13) qualifies him for this pursuit. T5 advises "*Most characters should have three or four life pursuits*" (p110) so lets make a couple more.

Life Pursuit

Distance Runner

Athlete. Endurance C+S=12

As a second life pursuit the C+S=13 for Jaim so I need to switch the order here so that Flaneur C+S=13 and Distance Runner C+S=12.

Life Pursuit

Travel Writer

Knowledge Travel Destinations <Subsector>. Education . C+S=12 (actually 14 for Jaim)

Secondary Skill: Author.

This last life pursuit is worth discussing a little more. Firstly, I could not find a skill to cover the pursuit, there is an Author skill but this wasn't quite right. Fortunately, T5 has knowledges that can be created to cover this kind of thing. Given that an example is Knowledge in a specific world I felt I needed something more focused than Knowledge <Subsector>, hence Travel Destinations. The rules also say that optional secondary skills can be added but what effect these have, if any, is not stated. Jaim does not meet the requirement for this, as his second pursuit the requirement is actually 13 not twelve. Jaim has Int7 and no ranks in the knowledge. Fortunately, the system allows you to choose one Life Pursuit you are not qualified for as a hobby. Jaim maintains a thoroughly mediocre travel blog.

It's at this point I get a nagging feeling that I have not seen any opportunities to gain knowledges. Again the lack of an index slows down my hunt. I eventually find instructions for determining a character's knowledges in the *Skills* section. This information really should have been somewhere near the front of the instructions for generating characters. In fact there are several items added to characters in the *Skills* section that should have been included in the character generation section:

- 1) Knowledges *instead* of low levels of some specific skills (p144).
- 2) Hobby: a skill not normally a default at zero (p143). (Jaim has Seafarer-0).
- 3) Knowledge <Career> equal to number of terms in career.
- 4) World Knowledges equal to (years lived there)/4.

I already know that Jaim was born on the world of Glor but grew up on Imbar. In his last term Jaim was awarded land on a Pre-Industrial world (Lanth) elsewhere in the subsector. I decide to divide up Jaim's 8 levels of World knowledges among these. Note that the maximum for any knowledge is 6.

Some knowledges are subskills, you can use them like a skill but within a narrower focus. Not all skills have knowledges but where they do the initial ranks in those skills only grant the skill at zero and ranks in a narrower knowledge. Again this is something that should be explained near the beginning of character generation. I have to go back and alter my character Jaim Joohraah, two of Jaim's skills (Pilot and Drive) have knowledges. This use of knowledges gives characters specializations, a knowledge is additive to the skill where it applies. For example Jaim has Drive-0 to drive a tracked tank his skill is 0, not great but better than unskilled. However to drive a wheeled truck Jaim adds his Wheeled-1, $0+1=1$.

After this tinkering Jaim looks like this:

98C78D

Skills: Programmer-1, Leader-2, Liason-1, Spacecraft ACS-2, Wheeled-1, Pilot-0, Drive-0, Seafarer-0, Career Noble-4, Glor-1, Imbar-6, Lanth-1.

Gear: Life Insurance 2, C4+1, StarPass.

Having completed the diversion to the skills section I return to *Life Pursuits and Experience*. Next up in this section are 'Certificates' which are a game mechanic covering qualifications. I really don't think this rather complicated rule this adds much to the game. The example use given is when PCs interview to hire an NPC. A better way to do this would be a simple Flux (d6-d6) roll applied to the NPC's skill to represent 'paper' qualifications and go from there. For PCs just assuming that PCs have appropriate certification for their skill levels would be sufficient for most gaming groups. Finally, we reach Experience. This is a departure from Classic Traveller which was notable for not having an experience system. I was hoping for something like the experience system from Megatraveller that encouraged groups to give PCs with lower skill levels the opportunity to make critical rolls. I expected the experience system to use Life Pursuits, it doesn't. The 'system' is simply granting a skill level every year.

Assessment to date.

T5 begins with a great chapter introducing the game. However, the authors do not seem to appreciate the importance of

maintaining enthusiasm in their readers. The writing is mostly logical, concise, but cold making it hard to keep up the momentum if I'm tired. Perhaps this is why early reviewers have been less than enthused about T5. However, I'm very impressed by the scope of the material. A science fiction universe has more diversity than a typical rpg fantasy setting. You need some clear way of defining all those aliens, gadgets, vehicles, worlds, and spaceships in game terms; you need help when inspiration runs dry. A good science fiction game needs generation rules. T5 has all the generation rules you will ever need. You could buy this *one* book then play T5 every weekend of your life and not exhaust the possibilities. This looks like value for money.

Overall I'm both excited and disappointed in this game. I'm excited about the possibilities and completeness of this very complete science fiction rpg. I like how character generation works when you actually use it, rather than just read it. I hope the other systems in the book are also a joy to use when I come to try them out. I am excited about the scope of this book and the years of entertainment it might offer *if* you can endure reading it. I wish that most of the writing did not read like a mathematics textbook. They also should have taken a little more time and ironed out the few holes that make house rule kludges necessary. Should you buy a copy? At this point I'd give a *guarded* 'yes'. I'll hold off on a firm answer until I've played with the game more.

Chapter scores out of 5:

The Thing, Hardcover: 3 (would be 4 if they had put in an index)

The Thing, PDF file: 2

Introductions: 5

Basic Information: 2

Characters and Life: see next article.

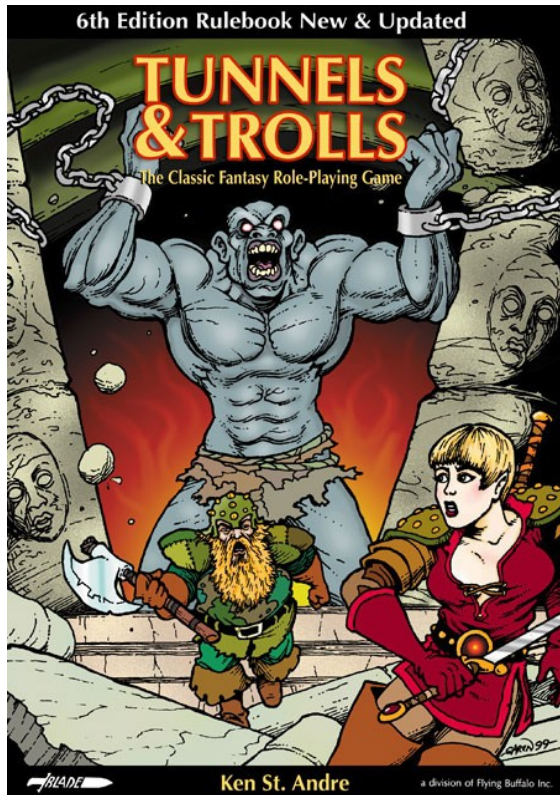
Coming up

Items you might see in upcoming articles include:

1. Generate full details for the worlds named and on which Jaim has land grants.
2. Play-testing of all the other generation systems.
3. Further development of the Farhome setting.
4. Take it to the table and play!
5. Final evaluation.

UPDATING TUNNELS AND TROLLS CHARACTER GENERATION

by *Karl Brown*



Tunnels and Trolls (T&T) has at its core a simple fast scalable mechanic that in many ways foreshadowed many modern 'pool of dice' games like World of Darkness and Ubiquity. Despite being ahead of its time in some ways, T&T was created during the '70's when RPG was a new and developing hobby many of the assumptions built into T&T are different to those that gamers currently expect. In T&T characters for the game are created in a predominantly random manner, each player is assumed to have 3 or 4 characters in play at a time, low level characters are very easily killed, and characters are primarily defined by their combat abilities. In this article I introduce small tweaks to help players build the one character they want and add more depth to how characters are defined. A future article revamping combat will increase low-level PC survivability and support further tactical depth to the combat system.

This article is to be used alongside the skills system presented in RPG Review 12 and the T&T core rules version 5.5 by Ken St Andre published by Flying Buffalo. Information in this document is numbered and presented in the same order as in that rules set. Other T&T articles in RPG Review issues past and future are referred to but are not required to use this article. Most of this material will be compatible with other versions of T&T including the Corgi edition (1986) and the free cut down version (2007) still available online from Drive Thru RPG. This article can be used with the solo adventures

published by Flying Buffalo and Corgi. I have not viewed T&T versions 6 and 7 and cannot comment on the compatibility with these newer versions of the game.

Italics: quotes from Tunnels and Trolls edition 5.5 unless indicated otherwise.

1.3 Creating Characters

Overview

The layout for T&T introduces creating human warriors first then later adds other types and kindred (fantasy races). This splits the information you need to make a character across several chapters. This is a quick list to guide you through the process of creating a character. Be sure to check the sections in the core rules and the notes for those sections in this article.

First choose a kin (2.12), type (2.11), and concept (notes for 2.1 in this article).

Next generate attributes (1.3) and determine how much gold you have to spend (1.3).

Then note down your type (2.11) and kin (2.12) abilities including a wizard's spells (2.22).

Next determine your weight, height (2.13) and age (3.9). These may be chosen from within the roll-able ranges.

Now choose your skills and languages (3.4) guided by concept, kin and type.

Determine your weight possible (1.3) and effects of loads on your movement (2.36).

Buy your equipment (1.51, 1.52, 1.53). Be sure to note down all the details of your weapons and armour. For non-humans don't forget to think about scaling your gear (see notes for 1.5).

Now determine how loaded down you actually are (2.36).

Finally give your character a name.

During play you can make up details about the character's background and personality as inspiration comes. If your character is joining an existing party the character may be awarded levels up to one level less than the lowest existing party member (see 2.14 core rules and this article).

1.3 Generating Attributes

Wizards need at least IQ10 and DEX8 after kin adjustment. Warrior-wizards need at least 12 in all attributes before kin adjustment. In my world elves are perceptive, graceful and blessed; LK must be at least 14 for a character to be an elf.

If you are a non-human, want to speak your native language, know the common tongue, and know a trade or other skill you will need to take the civilian type, no type, or have at least IQ14 after kin adjustment.

Humans roll 26 dice then assign 3 to 5 whole dice to each prime attribute, including speed, and three dice to gold.

Multiply the gold dice total by ten.

Other kin roll 24 dice then assign 3 whole dice to each prime attribute, including speed, (see 2.1 for more on other kin) and three dice to gold. Adjust these attributes for your kin (2.12) and multiply the gold dice by ten.

Record your adds (1.3)

Why? Humans get extra dice to make up for the slight advantage non-humans have through their attribute multipliers.

Gold is determined in this manner because some concepts require more wealth. This system just barely allows armoured knights with ring-joined plate or scale, helms, shields, and weapons. Be aware that the trade off for higher starting wealth is lower attributes that are less transient than poverty. This method also makes warrior-wizards more likely to be available but at a cost of few attributes over 12 and poverty. There is no guarantee that a warrior-wizard can be created, a good second option is a rogue with the same character concept planned for a warrior-wizard.

Speed is considered a prime attribute (see 2.36). Saving rolls that depend on reaction time (rather than say agility) are made against SP. Note: SP never improves with experience.

How good are my attributes? Based on the charisma chart attributes rated 1-2 are very poor, 3-7 poor, 8-13 average, 14-25 good, 26-50 excellent, and 50+ heroic. One of the good things about the T&T system is that the attributes are close to linear so, for example, a ST20 character can carry twice as much as a ST10 one. This makes comparison of attributes easy.

Maximum Strength is initial STx2. Experience may never raise a character above this. This prevents experienced humans from lifting 8' bronze statues or the like. Trolls, dragons, and other kindred that grow in size throughout adult life do not have a maximum ST.

Dexterity is manual dexterity under this update. For agility, use luck.

IQ: represents raw intelligence, experience, and general education.

Luck also covers agility, balance, and perception as well as blind luck. Archetypal rogues have high luck, as do cats.

Charisma: see RPG Review 15 for more on charisma, negative values, and monsters.

1.5 Provisions and Equipment

See issue 12 for a few more items.

Scaled Gear: Firstly, elves and dwarves are similar enough to humans in size that they can find armour that fits in any large human market. Elves and dwarves can ignore these rules if they wish. If you have sufficient ST and DEX you can use an item regardless of scale (except armour and worn gear). At character creation scaled gear is only available to kindred of that scale.

To scale gear multiply ST needed and weight by the kindred's weight modifier. Use the highest of a kin's weight and size modifier to modify the items cost. Elf goods are of slightly better quality than those of humans but cost a little more. Leave DEX requirements as is. Multiply length, range, damage, and armour protection by the size modifier. Min. 1 for ST, dice, and hits taken, round down everything except: treat fraction of ½ dice or greater for weapons as +3 adds

and fractions of dice less than $\frac{1}{2}$ as zero. The weights of fairy items are rounded to the nearest tenth (0.1), and costs should include gp, sp and cp amounts but not amounts less than 1cp. A future article will include examples of scaled gear.

Exceptions: Hobbit provisions and meals are x1 cost and mass. As armourers of exceptional merit dwarf scaled armour made by dwarfs has protection modified by weight (7/8) not size (2/3). The cost of magical or rare objects, such as wizard's staves, is never decreased.

2.1 Characters (Other Kin and Types)

2.11 Types

Rather than tens of specialised classes T&T uses just a few types to describe any possible character. All character types are based on a universal of the world; to what degree the character can use magic. Warriors are at one end of the continuum then rogues, warrior-wizards, and finally wizards. Character Types can also be rated by the extent of their martial training. Warriors are able to use most weapons and are trained in getting the most from armour. At the other end of the spectrum wizards are limited in the weapons they can use and are untrained in armour use. The graph below summarises the abilities of the various types. A new type, Civilian, has been added to cover those not trained for adventuring. Civilians are represented by a shaded area on the graph because they vary in the degree to which they are magic blind and in fighting skill. Also described here are characters that have No Type.

Warriors gain double protection from armour. While a warrior's type ability does not improve with levels, a warrior need not raise IQ and DEX to meet the requirements of higher level spells as rogues and wizards do. This allows warriors to build ST, DEX, LK and CON in a manner that further enhances their survivability in combat with each new level. Adjusting the warrior ability to improve with levels is redundant. The double protection of armour makes warriors tough but in a functional party they are the characters who are in the thick of the danger to protect the others. Wizards the rules for wizards demand that a powerful Wizards' Guild exists. Wizards take the cost of spell casting from CON not ST (rogues and warrior wizards still use ST). Keep track of CON lost from spell casting since it returns as per the rules for lost ST (1 per full turn, faster than wounds). Wizards are taught to draw energies from deeper within themselves than untrained spell casters use. Wizards don't appear to be fatigued by spell casting, as are rogues, and can fight on at full ST. However, after spell casting wizard bodies are weakened at the core and are more susceptible to shock, blood loss, poisoning, and other insults. A wizard with only 1 or 2 CON left will appear pale and drained. At zero or lower they die.

A good many wizards of legend and literature wield swords and other weapons to allow T&T wizards the same stylistic choices assume a wizard's lack of training prevents them from receiving more than two dice regardless of the number of dice a weapon normally gets, the other dice are converted into weapon adds. After converting extra dice, weapon adds may not exceed +5. For example the famous Gandalf wields a broad sword normally 3d+4, in the wizard's hands the weapon does 2d+5. Another example: a great axe (5d+3) in a wizard's hands does 2d+5 not 2d+6.

Rogues will find that casting spells lowers ST and this may cause the loss of personal adds until they recover.

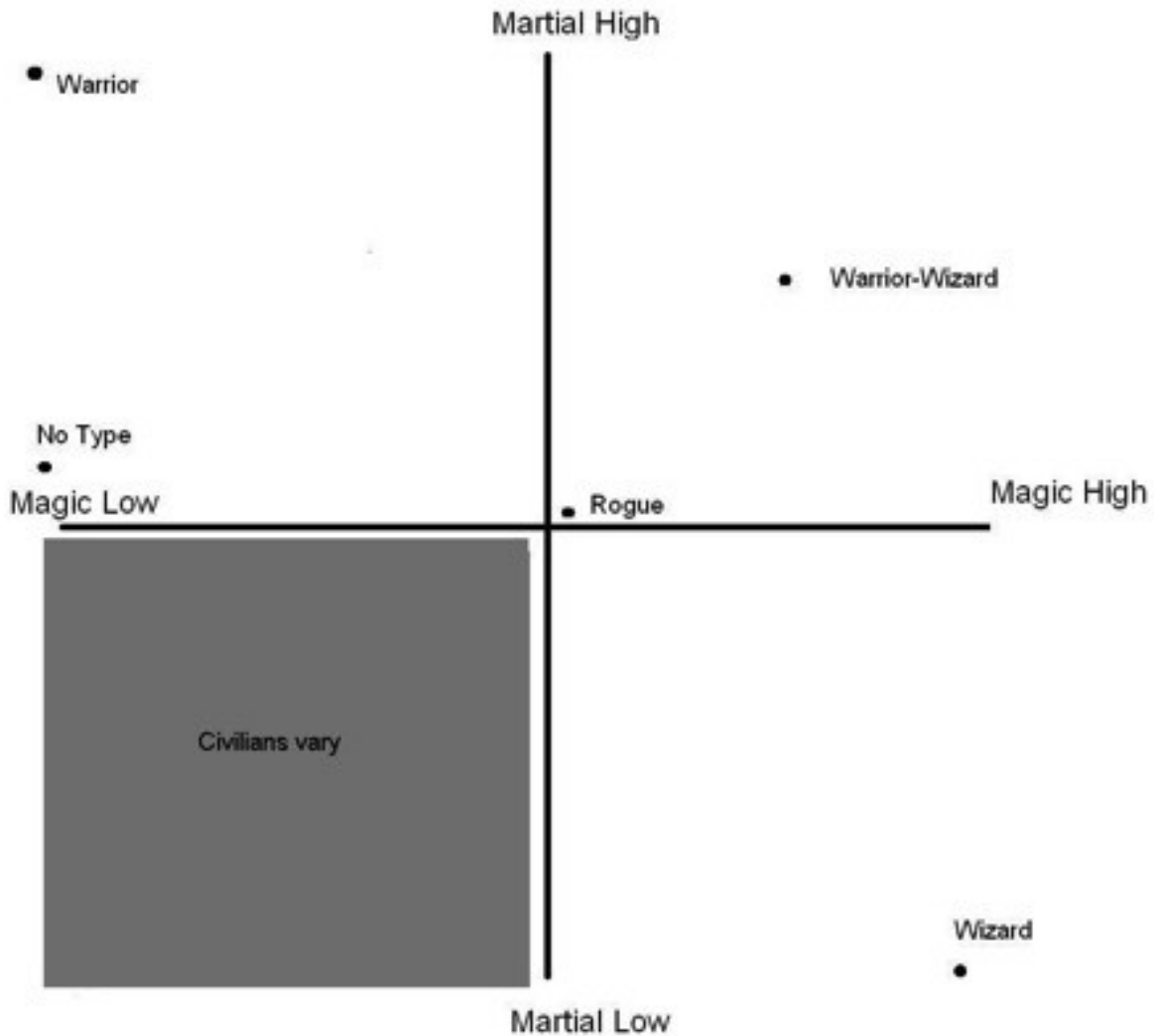
Warrior-Wizards SP must be 12 or more as well. Casting spells lowers ST; this may reduce personal adds until they recover.

Civilians are a new type representing those whose previous experience and training has not prepared them for adventuring and danger. Civilians have little or no arcane or martial training. Peasants, trades-people, merchants, most hobbits, competent nobles, are typical civilians. In game terms treat as a rogues except that the character may not begin with any martial skills* then add one or more of the following limitations (player's choice):

- Weapon choice limited as per a wizard.

- Magic blind and like a warrior, may never learn spells.

- May never learn any martial skills*.



For each limitation chosen the character may take a bonus skill or language to represent training or experience in lieu of martial or arcane education.

*A martial skill is one that provides a familiarity bonus to any of these: parry, dodge, acrobatic dodge attack, missile attacks; or allows knock out attacks.

No Type: A character with little formal training can have No Type. Unskilled labourers, most goblins, and idle nobles are typical No Types. Also represented are people with 'natural talent', represented a high attribute, that has caused them to neglect training. A thief who gets by on very high DEX or a guard who relies on massive ST are good examples. All No Types are as magic blind as a warrior and can never learn spells. They have no armour training, and do not get additional skills as does the civilian. Unlike civilians, they may begin with martial skills. As compensation at first level No Type characters have 2pt to spend as if they had attained a level (2.14). When these poorly trained individuals advance a level add one to the number of points they have to spend as per 2.14 (as usual they may choose as skill instead), e.g. on attaining second level a No Type has three points to spend not two. No Types need not raise IQ and DEX to meet the requirements of higher-level spells. This allows them to build ST, DEX, LK and CON in a

manner that enhances combat capability with each new level. No Types are a good choice for unarmoured and undisciplined fighting characters such as barbarian fighters and 'monster' humanoids. Despite this No Types will never have the martial prowess of true warriors because they lack double protection from armour.

Concept

The character Types are very broad groups. To create more specific concepts new types are not needed. Each player should jot down a 1-3 word concept. Examples: Warriors: ranger, knight, salty sea dog; Rogues: burglar, 'likeable rogue', minstrel; Wizards: academic, mysterious stranger, necromancer; Warrior-wizard: renaissance man, archetypal hero, megalomaniac; Civilian: burly blacksmith, shepherd, trader; No Type: idle noble, vagabond, typical goblin, massively strong fighter. Concepts are an aid to roleplaying, there are no hard rules for such concepts. They are used as guides for choosing languages, skills, height, weight, age, equipment, and spells.

2.12 Kindred

Where ST is altered by kindred maximum ST is altered as well.

Rules for Firbolgs, Weres, Awakened Beasts, Monsters, and other kindreds as PCs appear RPG Review 15, 18, and 20. Dwarf abilities as given in T&T and they mine or dig at double normal rates (based on notes for pick axe 1.52).

Elves' hearing grants them a hearing saves at one level lower.

Hobbits make stealth (eg. hiding or sneaking) saves at one level lower.

Leprechauns cast spells using CON not ST.

2.13 Height and Weight

Height and Weight can be chosen rather than rolled. As a guide compare ST to the chart to find the typical size of someone of your ST.

2.14 Character Levels

Character Levels: on gaining a level a character may instead of the options A-G given choose a new skill or language based on activities up to that point in consultation with the referee. The number of skills a character has is designed to be limited; taking a skill is economical only at low levels. Characters can use option F two ways. Firstly, they can add to charisma. Alternatively, subtract CHR as merciless behaviour and sheer power spreads a reputation of fear.

Characters with negative charisma can build good reputations and learn to mimic the social behaviour of the good kin until eventually their CHR will reach positive values.

Those used to D&D 3.5 and AD&D should note that each T&T level is a smaller increase in power than an increased level in that more popular level based game. A D&D level is worth about 2.67 T&T levels; a 53rd level T&T hero is roughly a match for a 20th level in D&D.

Creating higher level characters. A referee may allow a new character to begin one level lower than the lowest level in an experienced party. The new character also has no AP so must earn all the points necessary to advance a level from scratch. An easy fix for the low survivability of starting T&T characters is to allow all characters to begin at a higher level chosen by the referee, 3rd to 7th is recommended.

Such characters multiply gold by level. A new wizard must purchase spells as usual, a warrior-wizard always begins with only first level spells, and a rogue with none. Every level a wizard or warrior-wizard is created with after the first adds 2 years to her age. For example if a 4th level wizard is created, 6 years are added to the characters starting age. A character with the optional Favoured skill created at higher level begins with the save level for this skill equal to the character's level to represent previous lucky breaks.

3.9 Time and Ageing

You can choose an age within the range you could roll. During play ageing can be handled as follows: every birthday after the maximum starting age (humans 28, elves/fairies/dwarves/trolls 68, hobbits/leprechauns 48) 'permanently' subtract 1pt from all seven prime attributes. After the age listed as the start of old age in 3.9, subtract one die worth

from each prime attribute each birthday instead. At any time you may choose to penalise CON instead of another attribute. No other substitutions are allowed. Early on the losses can be more than made up for by rising in level (you need to work at keeping fit) but as time goes on this gets harder. Reduced levels in attributes are interpreted in the usual way: zero or less ST results in permanent unconsciousness, zero CON from aging results in death. Interestingly, under these alternate rules wizards will tend to pump up CON so perhaps this explains why powerful wizards tend to live to very old ages.

Languages and Skills

See RPG Review 12 for the skills system.

Character Sheets

Two character sheets are provided on the RPG Review website. One included here is a generic guard that can be used as a NPC or given to players visiting your table.

Tunnels and Trolls											
Name		Type Warrior			Kin Human		Level 1	AP			
		Concept Guard			Kin abilities Nil						
Type Abilities Double protection from armour and shields											
Description Guards are everywhere; at castle gates and in merchant houses, escorting caravans, acting as body guards, or drinking at inns between jobs											
Current CON					Current ST						
ST 17		IQ 8		LK 9		CON 15		DEX 12		CHR 8	SP 11
Max St=2xinitial 34		Adds +5		Ht 6'9"		Wt 330		Age 23			
Wt possible 1700			Condition Move/if careful			Languages and skills					
½ Wt possible 850			Dim light over ½ max wt 110/55			Common					
Wt carried 158			Dim light ½ max wt or less 220/110			Orcish					
Gold 0			Full light unladen 330/165								
Silver 28											
Copper 10											
Gems etc. (value/wt)	Weapon	Dice+adds	ST	DEX	WT	Value	Range				
	Spear	3+1	8	8	50	22	40				
	Armour	Hits taken	ST	WT	Value	Other items	Wt	Value			
	leather					Clothing &					
	Jerkin	1x2=2	1	15	15	pack	10	5			
	Steel					Calf high					
	cap	1x2=2	1	25	10	boots	10	5			
						Torch	10	1sp			
	Total	4									
Magic items	Wt	Value	Effects								
Spell	Level	ST	Range	Effects							

TUNNELS AND TROLLS BESTIARY: TROLL SPECIAL

by Karl Brown

For use with Tunnels and Trolls (T&T) core rules version 5.5 by Ken St Andre published by Flying Buffalo and Tunnels & Trolls Bestiary Part I in RPG Review 15. Most of this material will be compatible with other versions of T&T including the Corgi edition (1986) and the free cut down version (2007) still available online from Drive Thru RPG. I have not viewed T&T versions 6 and 7 and cannot comment on the compatibility with these newer versions of the game.

Troll Player Characters

Trolls as described in *The City of Terrors* (Stackpole 1985) have ST and CON x3 and all other attributes at x1 except CHR. In this article troll CHR is x-2 (i.e. negative) and size and weight are x2 and x4 respectively (as per 2.41.2 of T&T). The maximum ST rule does not apply to trolls. The effects of negative CHR are discussed in RPG Review 15. Trolls grow sporadically even after reaching adulthood apparently in response to the rigors of their environment. If using the updated character generation rules in this issue, trolls do not have a maximum ST. These rules for troll growth are designed so that players need not worry about them during initial character generation. At second level divide starting height by 5" and starting weight by 1360Lb note these numbers down they are your 'build modifiers'. When a trolls ST is permanently raised check height and weight meet new minimums as follows: a troll's height in inches must be at least the square root of ST multiplied by the height build modifier. Similarly mass in pounds must be at least ST squared multiplied by the weight build modifier.

To find the multipliers for equipping the troll with scaled gear after height or weight are raised for the first time divide height by 66 inches and mass by 170 pounds (round both off). The minimum multipliers for height and weight are x2 and x4 respectively, if below this raise to these minimums. Trolls age as per dwarves (see 3.9) and in my games have natural weapons: two clawed hands 1d each, bite 2d. Every time a troll's ST is raised another 5pt above their first level ST they gain another die to add to one of their natural weapons.

For example a troll begins with 25 ST then gains several levels and reaches 50 ST. Starting height was 10'8 (128") and mass was 760. Therefore build modifiers for height and weight were 0.56 and 25.6 respectively. Height therefore should be at least square root of 50, (7.07) x25.6 = 181 inches (over 15') and mass would be (50x50=2500) x 0.56 = 1400Lb. The character gains another 5d to add to her natural weapons, this troll grows claws to 3d each and can now bite for 3d also. The dice could have been distributed differently.

In the *After the Fall* campaign (RPG Review 19) the spread of trolls as slaves during the era of Dwarf Empire is the reason why trolls are more common than other monsters and can be found working for other kindred. However, most cities are reluctant to let armed, 'untamed' looking, or unsupervised trolls within their gates.

Troll NPCs

Trolls are tall but long limbed and so mass less than other creatures of the same height. Older larger trolls have much higher MR's and most of the additional Adds are devoted to STR. Trolls are a highly variable kin and the extra dice from higher MR's can be added to any of the natural weapons, one may have enormous tusks and other massive fists etc. Height of older trolls will be at least inches equal to square root of STR times 25, and mass at least ST squared divided by two.

Troll, Young
MR 36, Dice 4, Adds 18

Natural Weapons: Tough clawed hands 1d each, bite 2d

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 30 (x3), IQ 10 (x1), LK 10 (x1), CON 30 (x3), DEX 10 (x1), CHR -20 (x-2), SP10 (x1), Height (11') x2, Weight (680) x4, Starting Age: 3d+50, Old at: 200

A young troll is still a threat to an armoured human soldier.

Troll, Young Slave

MR 26, Dice 3, Adds 13

Natural Weapons: Tough clawed hands 1d each, bite 1d

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 30 (x3), IQ 5 (-), LK 5 (-), CON 26 (x3), DEX 10 (x1), CHR 0 (-), SP 10 (x1), Height (11') x2, Weight (680) x4, Starting Age: 3d+50, Old at: 200

The attributes above describe a troll youth born and bred into slavery and ready for market. A troll slave is meek, servile creature compared to the freedom and savagery of 'wild' trolls. Such a troll slave is a valuable commodity bringing about 710gp at auction (see auxiliary characters 3.7 of T&T 5.5).

Troll, Large

MR 110, Dice 12, Adds 55

Natural Weapons: Tough clawed hands 4d each, bite 4d. Distribution of dice between claws and bite can vary.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 62 (x6), IQ 10 (x1), LK 14 (x1.5), CON 110 (x11), DEX 14 (x1.5), CHR -30 (x-3), SP 10 (x1), Height (16'5") x3, Weight (1922) x11, Starting Age: 3d+50, Old at: 200

Full grown and fierce, this troll is a serious threat.

Troll, Huge

MR 150, Dice 16, Adds 75

Natural Weapons: Tough clawed hands 6d each, bite 4d. Distribution of dice between claws and bite can vary.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 80 (x8), IQ 10 (x1), LK 15 (x1.5), CON 150 (x12.5), DEX 16 (x1.5), CHR -40 (x-4), SP 10 (x1), Height (18'8") x3.5, Weight (3200) x19, Starting Age: 3d+50, Old at: 200

An older larger and meaner troll.

Troll, Gigantic

MR 250, Dice 26, Adds 125

Natural Weapons: Tough clawed hands 8d each, bite 10d. Distribution of dice between claws and bite can vary.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 130 (x13), IQ 10 (x1), LK 15 (x1.5), CON 250 (x25), DEX 16 (x1.5), CHR -70 (x-7), SP 12 (x1), Height (23'8") x4.25, Weight (8450) x50, Starting Age: 3d+50, Old at: 200

Trolls grow in response to their environment, a life of unending warfare in harsh lands have made this creature a terrifying foe.

Troll, Wizard

MR 90 Dice 9, Adds 45

Natural Weapons: Tough clawed hands 3d each, bite 3d. Distribution of dice between claws and bite can vary.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks: Spells as per a Wizard. All 1st level spells and a few spells at every level to 8th chosen by the referee.

Special Defences nil

ST 52 (x5), IQ 25 (x2.5), LK 14 (x1.5), CON 90 (x9), DEX 15 (x1.5), CHR -30 (x-3), SP 10 (x1), Height (16'5") x3, Weight (1922) x11, Starting Age: 3d+50, Old at: 200

One of the more terrifying facts about trolls is that they are sufficiently intelligent that some of their number become wizards. Steadfastly neutral, the Wizard's Guild will train trolls.

Merrows & Fomorians

Merrows and Fomorians are aquatic and marine trolls respectively. Both are able breathe air and water. They are also fearsome and ugly (raise CHR by a further x-1, for example a typical Large Merrow is CHR-40 (x-4)). Otherwise they have the same characteristics as trolls.

Merrows are savage brutes (IQ 8, x4/5) that most often become a problem when they threaten trade routes across lakes, or along rivers. Where a busy road bridges a navigable river is a particularly tempting location for merrow bandits.

Fomorians are cunning and as skilled in warfare and magic as humans (IQ10 x1). Clans of fomorian raiders range the coasts during warmer months and in some cases have even subjugated whole island communities. Though marine themselves the fomorians keep swift longships with monstrous figureheads to transport themselves, weapons, and loot quickly along the coast. A cunning fomorian sorcerer leads most raiding parties.

Fomorians have their own tradition of magic independent of the Wizard's Guild. These sorcerers pay for spells with their own spilt blood (spells cost twice the usual amount but can be drawn from CON or STR, keep track of CON lost from spell casting since it returns as per the rules for lost ST (1 per full turn, faster than wounds)). Fomorian sorcery gradually warps both soul and flesh. Instead of a DEX minimum every level of spells has a negative CHA requirement instead (for example to cast 1st level spells a fomorian sorcerer needs IQ10 and CHA -8 or worse but does not have to meet any DEX requirement). Powerful sorcerers can be easily spotted by their hideous visages sporting bulging eyes, gnarled skin, twisted skulls, or worse. Finally, fomorian sorcerers cannot learn spells in the usual way, instead they must eat the fresh-killed brain of another spellcaster and in doing so absorb the knowledge of any spell known to the deceased caster that the fomorian has the sufficient IQ and negative CHA to cast.



PEOPLE OF LEGEND/RUNEQUEST

by Karl Brown

This article provides greater access to non-human player characters for the *Legend* rpg from Mongoose Publishing increasing the utility and appeal of that game. It requires only *Legend* and the supplement *Monsters of Legend* for use. *Legend* is a 'plain wrap' setting-free version of *Rune Quest II (RQ)* by Mongoose Publishing. Therefore this article may be of some utility to players of *RQ*.

As written, *Legend* only covers human PCs. Like its sire *RQ*, *Legend* has a very loose approach to balancing PCs; even human starting characters can vary in utility. In the supplement *Monsters of Legend* several species are noted as being suitable for PC use but no guidance is given on how to do this. From reading forums for *RQ* and *Legend* it appears that most people just 'eyeball' the core characteristics to see if they are not too powerful. Players roll characteristics as per the monster stat-block and but ignore the skills listed for the monster and acquire skills and spells as per human PCs. The new PC has all the extraordinary abilities of the monster version. This approach can result in non-human PCs that are more powerful than their human companions yet also denies players those species the referee arbitrarily judges too powerful.

Here I provide a way of generating non-humans that goes some way towards addressing balance issues while remaining in the spirit of the 'near enough is good enough' approach of *Legend*. I hope these rules make referees comfortable with including a much greater variety of PC species in their settings.

This article requires that the point-based method of determining characteristics is used. Unlike *RQ's* Glorantha, not all settings for *Legend* endow PCs with 6 magnitude levels of common magic. Here the terms **common spells setting** and **mundane setting** are intended to mean simply settings that grant human PCs six magnitude levels of common magic at creation and those that don't respectively. Each type of setting has a different way of balancing the powers of non-humans. A 'mundane' setting might still have wizards, clerics, and dragons; it is just that magic is not so ubiquitous that *everyone* knows a few spells.

Monsters of Legend

Most sentient creatures given in *Monsters of Legend* will be suitable for PC use. Every creature available for PC use has three values associated with it: assessment total (AT), characteristic points (CP), and skills reduction (SR). This article will guide you in assessing creatures from any *Legend* source, assigning these three values, then creating your character. For suitable creatures from *Monsters of Legend* these values have been pre-calculated (AT/CP/SR):

Human (0/80/0), Dwarf (1/80/0), Elf (3/86/6), Giant 2m-3m tall (2/82/2), Giant 4-5m (2/100/20) Goblin (1/80/0), Halfling (0/80/0), Ogre# (1/80/0), Orc (1/80/0), Troll (2/90/10), Centaur (2/93/13), Gorgon (6/86/6), Harpy (2/80/0), Lamia (2/99/19), Minotaur (1/97/17), Mummy (2/88/8), Satyr (1/95/15), Unicorn* (5/100/20), Werewolf (3/87/7), Wrym (5/100/20).

#assuming that the ogre characteristics being identical to orc in *Monsters of Legend* is not a mistake.

*Unicorns have high characteristic minimums and, while they just qualify, are not recommended.

Referees should disallow any of the above based on the setting. This is especially important given *Legend's* emphasis on communities. Referees should have a good idea of how integrated humans and non-humans are in the community. Do centaur merchants pass through the town regularly? Are the players from a mountain village of wrym riders with humans and reptiles living cooperatively? Will they be based in a cosmopolitan port where the streets teem with humans, elves, dwarves, and more?

Assessing a species for PC use

To check before proceeding consider the following four points:

1. The creature must have a charisma score
2. The creature must have non-fixed INT
3. The sum of the lowest possible rolls for each characteristic must be less than 80. For creatures that increase in dice by age (such as wryms) determine for 17-20 years of age.
4. Count the creatures Traits, add one for each of the following:
 - a. a flight speed
 - b. natural armour
 - c. one or more gaze, poison, disease or other special attacks not listed as a trait
 - d. healing ability, such as that of the unicorn
 - e. mist-form as well as a solid form (like a vampire) or similar*
 - f. immunities like those of a werewolf.
 - g. a ground speed 10+
 - h. can create permanently enthralled minions, like the power of a vampire

Subtract one for each of the following:

 - i. ground movement speed is 6 or less and the creature cannot fly.
 - j. the creature has no hands and therefore cannot use tools.

*Creatures that are always gaseous or intangible, such as ghosts, do not add one for this. The advantage of being unaffected by the physical world is balanced by the inability to affect the physical world or be aided by physical companions when attacked by fellow gas-monsters or spirits.

If the sum is less than zero, set it at zero. Note down this '**assessment total**'. The sum should be six or less; if 7 or higher the creature cannot be used as a PC. Note that natural weapons without the formidable weapons trait do not add to the assessment total. Later during character generation assessment total will be used to reduce skills or spells, but not both depending on whether the setting is common magic or mundane.

Determining Characteristics

Add up the maximum possible *roll* for each characteristic. Multiply this sum by 0.63 and round up. If less than 80, raise to 80. If over 100, reduce to 100. This is the characteristic points you have to spend on characteristics. If the total is over 80, subtract 80 from this. This second number is your skills reduction, note this down for later use. A character that reaches all her species maximums without spending 80 points simply loses those remaining. This is most likely for spirit creatures that do not have STR, CON, DEX, or SIZ.

The minimum for any characteristic is the lowest possible roll. Characteristic points are spent one for one up to the highest possible roll. After this 2pt are needed to raise the characteristic by one. The maximum possible for any characteristic is: maximum roll + (1/6 x the maximum roll, round up). For creatures that increase in characteristic dice by age, such as giants, create a character of 17-20 years of age.

When determining characteristics players are advised to consider any relationships between species traits or powers and characteristics, such as POW for Breathe Flame.

Attributes

Combat actions, age, damage modifier, improvement modifier, dedicated POW, magic points, and strike rank are determined as for human characters. Movement is as given in the creature's description. For non-humans with *different* hit location charts to humans calculate the HP for each location using the values given in the monster version in two stages. First calculate the HP Adjustment (HPA), this is different for every individual. HPA needs to be recalculated SIZ or CON permanently change.

HPA = (PC SIZ+CON)/(creature average SIZ+CON), round down to 2 decimal places.

Next for each location multiply the HP of a typical monster by HPA to determine the HP by location for your PC, round up.

Example: An average centaur in *Monsters of Legend* has CON 11, SIZ 26, and 9HP for the chest. Darius is a PC centaur with CON 12 and SIZ 31, therefore Darius' HPA= $(12+31)/(11+26)=1.16$ and $(1.16 \times 9, \text{round up})=11$ HP in the chest.

Common Skills

These are determined exactly as for human adventurers. PC versions of creatures do not get the skills at the level listed in creature's description.

Previous Experience

It is acceptable for some non-humans, particularly the elves, dwarves, and Halflings, to gain skills from culture and profession just as human characters do. Alternately, the creature's description can be used as a culture and/or profession as described below.

Cultural Background

If the setting's cultural details result in a non-human having a very different life experience to a human the following can create characters from a non-human culture, a creature culture.

1. Give the culture a name that includes the species such as Tanglewood Elves or Grey Orcs.
2. +30% to Culture (own)
3. +10% to Lore (own region)
4. +10% to two of the combat styles listed in the creature description (e.g. Bite). If only one is listed +10% to it and unarmed instead. If none are listed +20% unarmed instead.
5. 45% spread over four common skills listed in the monster description
6. +50% Language (native)
7. Choose two advanced skills from the creature's list. Treat 'Lore (All)' as 'Lore (Any)', If only one advanced skill is listed use this skill and +10% to a common skill. If no advanced skills are listed add +10% to two common skills.
8. Record the culture as an aid to character generation in the future.

Professions

Regardless of the cultural background used a creature might use a profession available to human characters or a creature profession indicating she fulfils one of the many roles of her native culture.

1. Give the profession a name that includes the species such as elf enchantress or orc bandit.
2. 30% spread over your choice of the common skills and/or combat styles listed for the creature.
3. Select two advanced/magical skills preferably from the creature's list but others are allowed with referee veto.
4. Record the profession as an aid to character creation in the future.

Free Skill Points

Non-humans begin with 250pt-(10x skills reduction). In mundane settings subtract (assessment total x3) from the number of free points for skills.

Points are spent as for humans.

Many species traits and powers are linked to skills, such as Resilience for Breathe Flame. Players of non-humans are

advised to consider these relationships when spending skill points.

Flying characters are encouraged to consider athletics, acrobatics, and brawn. Referees are encouraged to require rolls on these skills for demanding flight manoeuvres especially during stressful events like combat. For example lifting a heavy opponent into the air might require a brawn roll, flying into a gale might require athletics, while landing on a narrow ledge or on a crowded battlefield could require an acrobatics check.

Community

Unchanged, players should interpret all results through the lens of the creature's culture and biology.

Final Stages

Names, hero points, and equipment are determined normally. Creatures that cannot use tools do not begin with a weapon. Whether nobles of non-tool using species begin with armour depends on the setting and the referee.

Magic

PC creatures do not automatically gain the spells listed in the creature's description.

Common magic

For common magic settings the total magnitude of common magic spells known to the character is six subtract assessment total. Choice is limited by culture. If a creature culture was used then common magic is limited to any common magic listed in the creature description and the 'All Cultures' list.

Magic Using Characters

Sorcerers, priests, shamans, and witches determine spells just as humans of these professions do. If a character has a creature profession and has gained magic using skills from that profession the character has access to spells that are appropriate to the magic skills learned (i.e. Divine or Sorcery) from the creature's spell list in *Monsters of Legend* or a grimoire of a faction designed for the creature's culture by the referee.

Advancement

After character creation PCs continue to grow and develop. Depending on the setting non-humans may face social or even legal restrictions on their access to training and social advancement. Conversely, non-human cultures will have their own unique guilds, factions, and cults.

Vampires

To make vampires suitable for PCs remove the ability to create enthralled minions thus lowering the assessment total from 7 to 6. Vampires have 100pt of characteristics, and a skills reduction of 20.

Dragons

Under this house rule dragons become mentally independent 'adults' before reaching full size. Dragons hatch with 1d6 for all characteristics, which are raised to 2d6 at six months of age then 3d6 at one year old. Every 10 years of age they gain another d6 until they reach the number of d6 listed in *Monsters of Legend*. After this SIZ and POW gain +1pt every 5 years until +30 has been added to SIZ and +12 to POW from aging. The dragon given in *Monsters of Legend* is full grown and over 340 years old.

SIZ	Bite/Claw Size	Tail/Claw Reach
1-9	M	S
10-19	M	S
20-24	M	S

25-29	L	M
30-34	L	L
35-39	H	VL
40+	E	VL

Therefore a PC dragon is in the 4d6 range (maximum 28) for all characteristics if 17-19 years old. A 20 years old dragon is in the 5d6 range (maximum 35) for all characteristics except POW and DEX, which are in the 4d6 range.

PC dragons have 100 characteristic points, a skills reduction of 20, and an assessment total of 6. Dragons cannot use tools or weapons. Armour would have to be especially crafted, if the referee allows it at all. A dragon's talons can crudely grasp, like those of an eagle, but cannot manipulate objects. The size and reach of a dragon's natural weapons are determined by her SIZ. Tail size is one lower than claw size. Bite reach is one lower than claw reach. A dragons scales have $AP=SIZ/3$ (round up, maximum 12). At any age dragon breath inflicts 4d6 damage.

Designer's Notes

This was a difficult project for me. I wanted to go far enough down the balance road that referee's would be comfortable considering a greater variety of non-human PCs when designing their campaign but had to fight the urge to produce a full-on *GURPS* style point system at odds with the style of *Legend*. The most difficult compromise was the assessment total. I had to resist to assigning every power a spell magnitude equivalent. I know that some of the powers are more potent than others but the system here is of an appropriate complexity for *Legend*. In common magic settings humans have the advantage of *choice* of common spells compared to the assigned powers of non-humans; humans can choose spells with synergies to high skills and attributes. In mundane settings the non-human suffers a skill reduction instead; 1 magnitude = 3 skill points was inferred from the improvement roll system. Another hidden cost of many non-human powers is that players creating non-humans must also distribute points for characteristics and skills bearing in mind their powers as well as the usual criteria of preferred profession or party role. In any design problem the more criteria you want the 'product' to meet the less good it will be at each.

For some non-humans characteristics such as great strength or size are a defining feature. This system allows players to construct characters with one or a few higher than humanly possible characteristics provided they accept human-average or worse values for other characteristics. The skills reduction rule prevents non-human PCs becoming a cavalcade of freakish dolts, runts, and curmudgeons to get these higher scores. Since characteristics determine the base percentage for skills a PC with a skills reduction will generally have *almost* as many points of skills when completed (INT is used 8x in determining common skills, other attributes are used less but contribute to other game mechanics. The exact contribution of characteristics to a character's advanced skills is variable). The limit on skills reduction to 20 ensures that players will have at least 32-50pts to customise skills and ensure utility for their characters.

Creatures that would have a negative assessment total or cannot spend 80pt on characteristics are not compensated. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the player has chosen this creature; either she wants to play the role of a weaker character or believes the powers of the creature outweigh its deficiencies. Secondly, providing more free-spend skill points or magnitudes of spells has too much potential for abuse. Here to value of *choice* plays a large part. More skill points allows player to channel points so that some skills are much higher than humans could hope to achieve or overcome skill based limits on powers. Similarly, even a single extra point of magnitude makes available geometrically more combinations of higher magnitude spells. Given the 'close enough' approach of *Legend* a slight under-powering is a lesser evil.

Finally, the social, size, and morphology issues faced by non-humans in a human world are not assigned values but should be present in play. With these points in mind, non-humans should be approximately balanced, which is as close as *Legend* gets anyway.

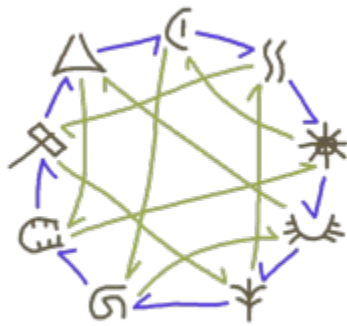
MOIETIES OF THE PIG ISLAND ORCS

by B. Thorn

The Pig Islands are a volcanic chain of islands (think Hawaii or New Zealand) named for some of their most dangerous and edible fauna. They're inhabited by both humans and orcs; by and large humans are concentrated in the coastal regions and orcs further inland, but there's a fair bit of trade and occasional intermarriage between the two.

There are many different orcish tribes - usually one per island, although exceptionally large islands may host several, and some of the seafaring tribes straddle many small islands. But large or small, all of the Pig Islands tribes observe *drachla*, which anthropologists would describe as a "moiety" or "skin group" system.

At birth every orc is assigned to one of nine moieties (*drach*). Within each tribe adult orcs of the same moiety form a single family and usually live together. Depending on the scale of the community, a single moiety might occupy a hut, a neighbourhood within a large settlement, or even an island.



Pig Islands orcs breed only within their own moieties. Reproductive sex with somebody from a different moiety is strongly taboo, although the severity of that taboo depends on the exact combination. Within moieties, things are pretty open - it's effectively considered one large marriage where anybody can sleep with anybody else, as long as parties involved consent. Of course, not everybody's interested in everybody else, and it's quite possible for two orcs within a moiety to end up in a *de facto* monogamous pair. But it's not considered more "normal" than any other configuration within a moiety.

Orcs don't track paternity at all, and maternity is a minor curiosity; children are raised communally with all orcs in the moiety considered "mother"/"father. Among other things, this means that nobody gets orphaned as a child unless the adults in the moiety are completely wiped out (in which case you might need to go to a neighbouring tribe and recruit some replacements).

Children do *not* share their parents' moiety. They're assigned to another moiety based on their sex and their parents, following the diagram below (blue arrows for sons, green arrows for daughters). For instance, sons of Moon will be in Fire and daughters of Moon will be in Snake. They're raised by their mothers and fathers until they reach adulthood, and then undergo a rite of passage that ends with them being welcomed into their own moiety. Depending on the tribe, this may be marked by tattooing and/or scarification. In some regions where moieties live separately, just getting to your adult moiety may be a major part of the ritual.

An important consequence of this system is to prevent close inbreeding. As long as everybody follows the rules, none of your male children/grandchildren will be in the same moiety as any of your female children/grandchildren or yourself. In areas where the population is small, it may force orcs to travel far afield to find partners - which also helps stir the gene pool.

This system also has social ramifications. Each moiety has two parent moieties (e.g. Wood is daughter of Iron and son of Bird) and one or two sibling moieties (if you ended up in Wood, your opposite-sex siblings will be in Stone). Orcs are expected to show respect to their siblings and especially to their parents, which leads to a sort of scissors-paper-rock dynamic: if you're being kicked around by a guy from Snake you might go to his parents in Wood, or his sisters in Fire, and see if they can talk sense into him.

Each moiety has its own specialties and stereotypes. For instance, orcs of the Sun moiety are associated with farming, herding, and bee-keeping. They have a reputation for being patient, hard-working, and stoic. (Pig Islands bees sting HARD.) This system isn't exclusive - most orcs will happily teach their lore to friends from other moiety - but respect is earned largely by prowess in the skills expected of one's moiety, so there's a strong incentive to concentrate on those.

Different tribes have different ways of handling decision-making, but most have a council of elders made up of the most respected members of each moiety. Important decisions are usually made by consensus (sometimes with a lot of shouting involved) but an elder holds more authority when the issue lies within their own moiety's sphere of responsibility.

Because the moieties feed into one another, political power flows in circles and tends to balance out over time; for instance, if an influential group of orcs rise to dominance in Stone, that influence will gradually filter down to Stone's children in Moon and Dog, and so on.

The full list of moieties:

1. Moon: associated with secret knowledge, story-telling, night and darkness. (In D&D 3.x, tends to be associated with wizards, sorcerers, bards.) Daughters of Sun, sons of Stone; has brothers in Bird, sisters in Wolf.
2. Fire: cooking, medicine, poisons. Nurturing but also hot-tempered. (Clerics, druids, occasionally monks.) Daughters of Wood, sons of Moon. Brothers and sisters are both in Snake.
3. Sun: farming, herding, bee-keeping. Dependable, stoic. (Druids, some clerics.) Daughters of Wolf, sons of Fire. Brothers and sisters are both in Iron.
4. Bird: travellers, messengers, traders, and lovers of flamboyant clothes. The Pig Islands have a lot of brightly-coloured birds of paradise, as well as bower birds that look relatively plain but know how to decorate. Charismatic, social butterflies. (Bards, some rogues.) Daughters of Snake, sons of Sun; has brothers in Wolf and sisters in Moon.

5. Wood: forestry, hunting, and wood crafts including bowmaking. Patience. (Rangers, druids.) Daughters of Iron, sons of Bird. Brothers and sisters are both in Stone, and often work with Wood on construction projects.

6. Snake: cunning, stealth, solitary warriors. (Rogues, fighters, barbarians, and sneaky rangers.) Daughters of Moon, sons of Wood. Brothers and sisters both in Fire.

7. Wolf: Leather-working and domestication of ferocious animals. Ferocity, loyalty and honour. Where Snake teaches solo combat skills, Wolf focuses on teamwork. (Fighters, some rangers, occasional paladins.) Daughters of Stone, sons of Snake; has brothers in Moon and sisters in Bird.

8. Iron: Methodical crafters (smithing and metal-working), including steel armour and weapons. After Dog and Snake, the most warlike of the moieties, but Iron concentrates less on combat skills and more on being well-equipped. Daughters of Fire, sons of Wolf. Brothers and sisters both in Sun.

9. Stone: stone-working, masonry, mining, gem-cutting. Patient and enduring, but also with a keen eye for detail and nitpicking. (Often fighters, though not as combat-oriented as Iron/Wolf/Snake.) Daughters of Bird, sons of Iron. Brothers and sisters both in Wood.

Some tribes modify this slightly. For instance, "Snake" may become "Shark" in some coastal tribes, and those that live mostly underground might replace Sun with Mushroom, Moon with Bat, etc etc. But the same rules apply to intermarriage, and neighbouring tribes will usually be aware of how the systems relate.

Designer's notes

Probably the most common representation of polygamy in fantasy is the harem: rich and powerful men collect wives as a way of showing off and enhancing their status. I thought it'd be interesting to go in the other direction, to play with a culture where marriage customs are still highly structured but polygamy becomes a social leveller rather than a tool of power.

One of the consequences of female polygamy (polyandry) is that it becomes hard or impossible to track paternity, which is a problem if you're trying to avoid inbreeding. The moiety system is one solution to this, inspired by various Australian Aboriginal kinship systems that classify people "skin groups" with restrictions on marriage. Those rules typically prevent first-generation inbreeding; designing a system that prevents second-generation inbreeding turned out to be surprisingly difficult, and with nine moieties there are only a handful of different rulesets that make it possible. (See if you can figure out some of the other possibilities - or if you're feeling really adventurous, try designing a moiety system that prevents third-generation as well!)

MAKING MAGIC MORE INTERESTING

by *Jim Vassilakos*

Making Magic More Interesting (and Dangerous) A Brief Mana System with Spell Failure for AD&D

After several years of playing AD&D back in the 80s, I grew somewhat dissatisfied with the game's magic system. Looking back, I think what was lacking for me was that ineffable sense of wonder that initially attracted me to roleplaying games in general. By that point, of course, I had become reasonably familiar with what most of the spells and magic items did, and so magic in the game unavoidably acquired a certain degree of mundanity, the very antithesis of the sort of feeling that magic is supposed to arouse. Of course, I'd heard about other GMs modifying the rules to shake things up and had even seen some examples of this, so that's exactly what I began doing with the magic system.

All I knew, initially, is that I wanted to recapture that sense of wonder, but I didn't exactly know what that would entail. Thinking about it now, however, I realize that I did have various specific goals:

- 1) Make magic more chaotic and therefore less predictable.
- 2) Make it more expensive to be a spellcaster (giving the PCs something to do with their treasure).
- 3) Make magic potentially even more powerful than usual (but only at the cost of even greater risk and treasure).
- 4) Incentivize and reward specialization.
- 5) Modify certain spell descriptions to make them less confusing and/or less abusable by imaginative spellcasters.¹

Rather than going through the whole magic system in great detail, I'm just going to present a bare-bones version that will hopefully give you some idea of how I achieved some of these goals. Hopefully, this will give you a feel for the system as a whole, and with any luck it'll give some ideas that you can port into your own game, should you feel so inclined. However, if you want to check out the whole thing, it's available in the campaign archive at <http://mypbem.com/Vassilakos/index.html>.²

Having said that, I should warn you that magic systems are a can of worms, and once you start fiddling with one aspect of the system, it may soon draw you into tinkering with other aspects. Ultimately, there's really no end to it, so decide for yourself how much work you want to put in or you may find yourself drifting down the slippery slope of designing your own RPG.³

The Thirteen Colleges of Magic

I started off with this notion that magic would be separated into various colleges. Hence, in addition to a general education in Common Magic, each initiate would select a number of colleges in which to apprentice. The colleges were as follows:

1. **Conjuration:** The conjurist makes things through magic.
2. **Divination:** The diviner, oracle, or astrologer foretells to future, sees into the past, and generally acquires knowledge.
3. **Divine Magic:** The cleric or priest manipulates the essence through a god or deity.



4. **Elementalism:** The elementalists call upon and manipulate substances from the elemental planes. These are your stereotypical combat mages.
5. **Enchantment:** The enchanter charms and manipulates.
6. **High Magic:** The wordist or runemaster uses magical runes and power words.
7. **Illusion:** The illusionist confuses the senses.
8. **Low Magic:** The spiritualist enters the spirit world and calls upon spirits from that world.
9. **Mysticism:** The mystic or psi manipulates the essence through the inner power of the mind.
10. **Naturalism:** The naturalist or druid manipulates living things and the forces of nature.
11. **Necromancy:** The necromancer or summoner calls upon devils, demons, undead, and the like and binds them into servitude.
12. **Thaumaturgy:** The thaumaturge or alchemist creates potions and magical substances.
13. **Transmutation:** The transmuter or changer changes attributes of things.

So, basically, what I did here was to divide the spells that I wanted to allow into the campaign between these various colleges (sometimes I'd allow a spell into more than one college if it seemed to apply to both). Likewise, studying within each college came with its own set of special abilities. Now, I realize that this is a lot of work that you may not want to do, but the reason I did this in my campaign had to do with goal #4, incentivizing and rewarding specialization. Read the section below, and hopefully it'll become clear.

Spell Level Restrictions and Spell Failure

<u>Intelligence</u> <u>Score</u>	<u>Max</u> <u>Level</u>	<u>Spell</u>	<u>Wisdom</u> <u>Score</u>	<u>Base</u> <u>Probability</u>	<u>Failure</u>
12	3		12	35%	
13	4		13	28%	
14	5		14	22%	
15	6		15	17%	
16	7		16	13%	
17	8		17	10%	
18	9		18	8%	
19	10		19	7%	
20	11		20	6%	
21	12		21	5%	
22	14		22	4%	
23	16		23	3%	
24	18		24	2%	
25	20		25	1%	

Note that intelligence controls the maximum spell level a mage can theoretically cast, whereas wisdom controls the base probability of spell failure. In short, intelligence gets you into trouble, and wisdom gets you out. In my game, I tend to use wisdom as a proxy for willpower, so in this sense, wisdom is what a spellcaster uses to control the spell he or she is casting.

The base failure probability is increased by 5% per college within which the caster studies in excess of one (hence, one way to keep spell failure down is to study within only one college, and, indeed, there is social pressure from peers as well as superiors to do exactly this). I should note at this point that in my campaigns, spellcasters cannot multi-class as fighter-mages or thief-mages, as they are allowed to do in most other campaigns. If you still want to allow this sort of multi-classing, I'd suggest building in a similar rule for this, such as +10% per non-spellcasting class. Hence, a fighter-mage-thief would be casting at +20% base spell failure. Or you can lower this to +5% per non-spellcasting class, if you think +10% is too extreme. It all depends on whether or not goal #4 is one that you share, and if so, to what extent.

The base spell failure is then reduced by sl/cl (keeping the fraction), where sl is the spell level and cl is the caster's level. Hence, a 6th level caster with a 16 wisdom who is studying within only one college would cast a 3rd level spell at 6.5% spell failure ($13 \cdot (3/6) = 6.5$). This is termed the natural probability of failure. If they're studying in two colleges, however,

then the natural probability of spell failure rises to 9% $((13+5)*(3/6) = 9)$. This percentage can be further modified by various environmental factors, but for now, it is enough to give you a basic idea for how the natural probability of spell failure is calculated. This section serves to satisfy goals #1 and #4, but like I said, if goal #4 isn't important to you, you can just dispense with the parts that incentivize specialization.

I think the main reason I decided that I wanted to incentivize specialization was that I realized that introducing a mana system (see below) would basically make the mages more powerful. They'd be able to cast the same spell over and over, and if they had the right mana, they could get superior effects. Hence, in order to bring them back down in power, at least a little bit, I figured that by forcing them to specialize, I'd be reducing their overall attractiveness to potential players. But like I said, your mileage may vary.

Mana

Spellcaster's expend mana in their use of spells at a rate of one point per level of spell cast (a half-point for cantrips). These mana points may be absorbed at a rate depending on the source of mana being utilized. There is no upper limit on the amount of mana a caster may have in his or her system. However, materials for meditation are typically expensive, the prime cost being the crystal or incense which casters must burn in order to acquire mana. The most common varieties of this crystal are described below:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Ice	5-15	Poor quality: poor effects, a little iffy
Hail	20-40	Standard quality: normal effects, non-addictive
Tempest	50-100	High quality: good effects, somewhat dangerous
Maelstrom	100-200	Highest quality: great effects, very dangerous

Here's a more explicit chart showing how different types of mana affect spell failure as well as the caster's effective level for purposes of determining a spell's effects:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Cost/Pt</u>	<u>Caster's Level</u>	<u>Effective Spell Failure Modification</u>	<u>Absorption Rate</u>
Ice	5+d10	Half	+50%	1 per 4 min
Hail	20+2d10	Normal		1 per 3 min
Tempest	50+5d10	+50%	Double	1 per 2 min
Maelstrom	100+5d20	Double	Triple	1 per 1 min

All the forms of incense are burned in an open flame which first melt the tiny sphericals and then cause their slow transformation into an ethereal essence. Other casters within the vicinity of the burn may absorb the mana (even unwillingly), thus stealing the effect of the crystal from its owner. Mana is expended on a FIFO (first-in first-out) methodology. If two forms of mana are used within the same spell, the practice is known as "mixing", and bizarre effects may occur. Incense is typically stored in small vials, each holding as many as a hundred grains of the substance.

Mana types, other than Hail, affect the caster's probability of spell failure. Ice increases it by 50%, Tempest by 100%, and Maelstrom by 200%. This is termed the modified failure probability. Hence, our 6th level caster, with a natural failure of 6.5%, would, when using Tempest, have a modified failure probability of 13%.

This section of the rules is basically meant to satisfy goals #2 and #3. #2 was especially important to me, as the PCs in my games usually had more treasure than they knew what to do with. For a few years I tried being the stingy GM, basically giving out silver when the rules said gold and gold when the rules said platinum, but the players were soon on to what I was doing. Telling them that I thought the game handed out too much dough was hardly satisfying (at least from their point of view). They, of course, wanted to buy magic items and castles, and these, of course, are things that PCs typically do once they amass enough wealth, but I wanted some means to bleed them dry long before they ever started looking around for a magic shop. This system didn't achieve that entirely, but it went a long way towards that goal.

Mana Tolerance/Addiction

The caster must make a tolerance check using the following table every time spell failure occurs.

Ice	1%
Tempest	3%
Maelstrom	5%

If the check is successful, the caster is said to be tolerant to the mana in question. For every point taken in by the caster (including the points currently in the caster's system), only half a point will be retained. What this means, essentially, is that the caster must now obtain twice as much mana as before. The caster may break tolerance by moving to a new form of mana, staying with that new mana for d20 spell castings before the tolerance breaks. However, in order to muster the will to do so, the caster must make a wisdom check (which may be made weekly until successful). Failing the check results in the caster being unwilling to change mana, and in this instance, the caster is said to be addicted.

Mana tolerance is usually accompanied by some physical manifestation, such as a change in eye color, a doubling in the size of the ears, a sudden loss of hair, or the like. Casters who refuse to break tolerance (and hence are addicted) eventually become ill or crazed or both if there is too little mana in their system at any given point in time. Likewise, strange magical effects are said to follow them, and it has not been unknown for them to entirely disappear for some time, wandering as ethereal beings or even drifting into astral space.

I threw this rule in basically because it seemed apropos. If the spellcasters were taking drugs for their mana, there should be some consequences. To be honest with you, however, I ended up not enforcing this very much, because most of the time it just seemed to get in the way of the game. You may just want to toss it out entirely, or if you do use it, you may want to come up with some magical ways of breaking addiction, so it doesn't end up slowing down the game.

Casting from Scrolls

For casters casting from scrolls, normal mana is not expended. The power for the spell comes from the scroll itself, so the effects are assumed to be the same as if the caster were using Hail as his mana source. As with normal spellcasting, the sl/cl rule is used to determine natural spell failure. However, the caster may attempt to cast spells from scrolls that he wouldn't normally be able to cast (for example, the spell's level may be too high). Hence, the sl/cl rule applies. This modified failure value then doubles if the caster is reading a scroll from outside his or her college (if you're not breaking the magic system up into various colleges, then you can ignore this rule).

Other Situational Factors & Spell Failure Results

Regardless of whether the spell is being cast from memory or from a scroll, the modified failure value is doubled if the caster has been using metallic weapons and/or metallic/leather armor during the past few (d6) days. For this reason, most casters use only bone daggers and wear only cloth garments. Even their sandals are made from woven straw, a sure sign someone is a mage, for even peasants will wear leather boots or sandals if they can afford them.⁴

Other situational elements also play a role in determining the final spell failure probability. If the caster is below half hitpoints, the modified failure increases by 50% of its value.⁵ Likewise, if the caster is attempting to do something (like running) while casting, modified failure goes up by another 50% of its value (running while heavily wounded would essentially double the spell failure probability). So, just as an example, our hypothetical 6th level caster's 13% would rise to 19.5%, if he were casting while heavily wounded. If he were running at the same time, it would go from 13% to 26%.

Interruption of casting (usually by being hit) will cause automatic spell failure. Whether or not this occurs is determined by the GM, but in general, the segments \times 10% rule may be used. To illustrate, all actions are declared at the beginning of the combat round. Fighters do combat, mages do spellcraft. If the mage is hit during the round, the number of segments required to cast the spell is multiplied by 10. That is the percentage chance that the casting was interrupted by the hit, resulting in automatic failure.⁶

When a spell fails, the mana is expended as if the spell were cast, however the effects may vary from unnoticeable to catastrophic. There is an $x/cl\%$ probability (where $x=\#$ of mana points reserved prior to the spell being cast, and cl is the level of the caster) during spell failure that the caster will "barf up his cookies" resulting in the accidental dumping of all

available mana into the failed spell.⁷ This may boost even a low-level spell to extreme power, and since failure is already occurring, nearly anything can happen.

Spell Failure Table (d10)

0-3	Fizzle
4	Reduced Effects ($\times \frac{1}{2}$)
5	Random Target (if another target is in range, otherwise fizzle)
6	Twisted Effects (spell works but with some minor modification)
7	Backlash on Caster
8	Mana Detonation (1d6 dmg per mana in spell to all with 30', save for $\frac{1}{2}$)
9	Doubled Effect
10	Something Unusual (take a luck roll) ⁸
11	Multiplied Effect ($\times d4+1 = \times 2$ to $\times 5$)
12	Roll Twice, ignoring this result

(Die modifiers based on mana: Ice: -1, Tempest: +1, Maelstrom: +2)

Needless to say, this section of the rules was written to satisfy goal #1, and for me it's really the section that does the most to recapture that sense of wonder I initially mentioned at the beginning of this article. Most other spell failure systems I've seen don't go into much detail about what it means if a spell fails. With this one, I didn't just want spells to fizzle. I wanted the possibility of them exploding with unforeseen consequences.

Note that not all spell failures need result in disaster for the mage or his party. Indeed, both multiplied effects and unusual occurrences can be of value in a tight situation. However, they can also spell doom for the caster, particularly if conjoined with a backlash. Casters, under this system, are known best for dying by their own hand in the heat of battle, particularly the low level ones who haven't had the time and experience to learn how to control their magic. Likewise, many a party member has been unintentionally toasted by his own mage. For this reason, casters are feared and despised nearly as much as they are sought, and many henchmen, having heard horror stories in various taverns, will refuse to join any party containing an inexperienced caster. Fortunately, there are certain magics which are docile in nature, such as simple cures and detection spells, and these will only fizzle or act upon a random target, perhaps yielding the wrong information in the case of detections. In all cases, consult the GM before assuming that a given spell is docile.

In addition to spell failure, I also like to make various high level spells inherently unstable. In other words, things may go wrong but not necessarily because the mage miscast the spell. Sometimes you do everything right and things still go wrong. That's just life. Hence, I'm going to present two special cases, just to show you how this works.

Special Case #1: Resurrection

Like many GMs, I've seen how resurrection-like magic can be abused to create rather bizarre situations. This is particularly true when you monkey with the rules as much as I do, and, more to the point, when you allow your players to do the same. One AD&D campaign witnessed a particular PC visiting a local slave city in order to purchase (or in some cases capture) live bodies into which she could place the souls of her recently departed companions. Giving a PC that sort of power (never mind that she's a 20th level Necromancer) places her in the position of being able to recruit some very loyal henchmen.

“If you have any questions about how dearly I value my employees, why don't you go talk to Lyngar. I brought him back to life just last week...and that was after visiting the demon realms to find his soul.”

Yes, I made things more difficult and dangerous than the simple casting of some heinous spells, but all fun aside, what would be the social ramifications of this sort of magic?

The most obvious one, I think, is effective immortality for those who can afford it. And this is a big deal. It means that rather than succumb to old age, King Phoobar can have the college of royal wizards transfer his soul into the body of that dashing young bandit, Robin whatshisname, who's about to be sentenced to death. Sure, you can make an adventure of the

merry men coming to save Robin, but the end result is that if you want to kill the King, you'd better kidnap him, take him somewhere remote, incinerate him with something hot and deadly, and then scatter his ashes to the four winds. It takes all the fun out of poison, if you ask me.

So what are we to do about this sordid state of affairs? Well, before jumping into the problem, let's look at what some other people have written on this topic. Here are three articles on the topic of resurrection in AD&D:

Ashes to Ashes (Graeme Drysdale), White Dwarf #78 (1986): Drysdale divides the traditional races according to whether they have a soul (dwarves, half-elves, halflings, humans, and gnomes) or a spirit (elves, half-orcs, and monsters).⁹ He says that only creatures with souls can be resurrected or raised (as per the "raise dead" spell). In his view, those with spirits would only be able to be reincarnated.¹⁰ Drysdale also suggests changing the resurrection spell so that it only recalls the character's soul but doesn't restore their body. He provides rules for spell failure, which may result in the wrong soul being recalled. Even if the right soul is recalled, he says that the shock of inhabiting a new body may result in insanity.

Dead or Alive? (Michael Satran), Dragon #210 (1994): Satran discusses some of the possible social and legal ramifications of resurrection and presents a number of scenario ideas. As for limiting its use, he suggests only allowing resurrections to take place on certain holy days of the year as well as erecting various legal and political barriers, and he brings up the notion of having resurrected characters suffer from post-resurrection stress disorder as well as other personality changes.

New Life for Resurrections (Rod Meek), Dragon #263 (1999): Meek suggests a number of variant outcomes for resurrection magic, such as (1) the recipient being required to make a regular blood sacrifice to the resurrecting deity, (2) the recipient's resurrection being only temporary, (3) the recipient being required to find someone willing to give up their life in exchange for his or hers, (4) the recipient only being resurrected for a certain period of every day, the remainder of which he or she exists either as a corpse or an animated undead, (5) the recipient's soul having been replaced by that of an infernal spirit (and, hence, the resurrection itself being more or less phony), (6) the recipient being bound to remain within the general proximity of the resurrecting priest or the temple where the resurrection took place, (7) the recipient's soul being unwilling or unable to return to his or her body, (8) the recipient requiring a new body because the old one is so badly mangled, (9) the recipient's soul being already bound to another person's body, and (10) the recipient coming back as an undead creature or as a living one who carries the secret scent of death, thus attracting the ire of the jealous undead due to their ability to sense that the recipient has been given a second chance at life, a gift which they themselves were denied.

It is interesting that Drysdale and Meek both came up with the idea of a resurrected body being inhabited by the wrong soul. When I initially began thinking about what could go wrong, this was also my first thought. However, before putting forward some generic rules on limiting the reliability of raise dead, reincarnation, resurrection, and similar soul-manipulatory magics, I need to first illustrate the concept of the luck roll, because that's what we're going to be using.

In my game, a great many results are decided by the roll of a d6 (or "luck die"). Whenever the players have a question about some aspect of the scenario which I did not previously devise, or say on a spell effect as to which I'd rather not make a snap-ruling, I'll say, "Take a luck roll," keeping in my mind some number which they have to meet or beat in order to arrive to a favorable circumstance. On the pro-side of things, it helps circumvent a lot of potential arguments and keeps the players from feeling like I'm nursing a grudge. This, in turn, keeps the game moving quickly. On the con-side, the luck roll can be overused and should often be rolled in secret by the gamemaster for determining the answers to questions before they get raised.

In any case, here are the new rules I promised:

New Rule #1: Law of Skulls. Generally speaking, if you want to cast a resurrection magic, you need the skull of your dearly departed. Otherwise, your odds of summoning the right spirit are next to zero. The only time this can be avoided, again speaking generally, is when you already have the soul inside a soul-gem (in which case, forget about question #1 below).

New Rule #2: Law of Chaos (a.k.a. Murphy's Law). Even if the spell is cast correctly and is successful (i.e. spell failure has been avoided), there is still a degree of chance involved due to the inherent complexity of calling a soul from the realms of the dead and joining it to a living host. A number of misadventures could potentially occur purely by chance. Consult the

following questions:

Question #1: Do we have the right soul? Roll d6:

1: Nope, you've got yourself a demon. He's a cunning SOB and will likely fake amnesia unless he's already done a thorough interrogation of the dead soul in question.

2: Nope, you've got yourself the wrong guy. He's no demon, but he's not your friend either. Last thing he remembers, he was falling down some pit yelling, "*My Precious!*"

3-5: No problem. You've got your man. And boy is he happy to be home...except for one thing. He wants his experience points and his share of the loot!

6: Not only do you have your guy, but he's brought a friend! There's now a second consciousness inside his brain which is able to feed him all sorts of information as well as the ability to use skills he didn't even know he had. Possible downside: the other consciousness can take control of the body while the initial one is sleeping. Can you say split-personality?

Question #2: What is the state of her memory? Roll d6:

1: Amnesia. You'll need some powerful magic to restore the bits in her brain. Until then, she's back at zero-level without a clue in the world.

2: Temporary amnesia. At first she doesn't remember much, but over d20 days, everything will come back, albeit slowly: "*Hey, wait-a-minute...if we're really married, where's my ring?!*"

3-5: No problem. She remembers who you are. That's why she's crying: "*Wah...not you guys again...I thought I'd finally gotten away from you idiots!*"

6: Not only does she remember who she is, but she has some memories from the other side, memories of conversations with the dead or with powers beyond those of the mortal realms: "*And then I saw Zeus, and he said, 'Frag off, ya lousy sod!'*"

Question #3: What is the state of his connection between body and soul? Roll d6:

1: Not so good, unless you like having a vampire in the party.

2: Everything seems to be fine until he starts seeing ghosts, the souls of past enemies who like to come along every now and then and beat the living tar out of him (see the movie [Flatliners](#) for an idea of how this could work).

3-5: No problem. He's alive and well. A bit groggy, of course, but that's to be expected, having been dearly departed and all that good stuff.

6: All appears well, except during the night when he sleeps. Then his soul has a tendency to go wandering out from his body, and when he wakes in the morning, he often finds that his dreams are more real than imagined: "*Was yakkin' with Zeus again last night. He says we're screwed.*"

These rules may not prevent kings & queens from being resurrected, but they'll sure make it that much more difficult. In any event, if you plan on including soul-transference in your campaign (along with elixirs of youth and so-forth), then you've really got to plan to have some long-lived rulers, leaders who have been in power for centuries, at the very least. These leaders will likely be some tough mothers, at the very top of their respective classes.

As for politics, instead of court intrigue revolving around the passing of the crown, it will revolve around the passing of favor, with all the resultant brown-nosing and status-building one might expect. Most likely, kings will be watchful of their subordinates, and many will likely seek to dispose of those who become too powerful, either personally or politically. In part, that's because their enemies can't just wait for them to die. On the flipside, if their enemies have access to the same magics, then the showdown will come eventually. Best to force it before their enemies grow too powerful. The particularly far-sighted ruler may decide to take care of a potential threat before his enemy even becomes his enemy: "*I'm genuinely sorry to have to kill you. You were a good friend...are a good friend. But you must understand... in time you would have become weary of serving another. It is natural... it has happened before...and it is the reason you now must die.*"

Special Case #2: Teleportation

Nearly everyone who has played AD&D is aware of the teleportation spell and may have even used it on occasion. Like the transporter in Star Trek, teleportation magic is a great plot device, however, I've found it useful to limit it in various ways.

1. **Gorgon's Blood:** Kings have been known to pay a high price for the blood of a gorgon, as when mixed into

cement mortar, it conveys a permanent seal against teleportation. Those who have access to such blood will always use it when erecting major fortresses.

2. **Lead:** Dwarves often dig their lairs among veins of this common metal, as just like Gorgon's Blood, lead also protects against unwanted magical intrusions. Unfortunately, Dragons also know this, and have been often known for enslaving dwarves to hollow out their lairs, lining their great caves with molten lead.
3. **Spells:** I've also postulated spells of magical sealing to temporarily prevent teleportation to or from a given location.

Even after adding these limitations, however, teleportation is still too easy for my taste, and were I to edit the rules some more, I would make teleportation a great deal more hazardous and hopefully more interesting as well. Of course, when devising such rules, it is worth considering what teleportation actually constitutes and what might go wrong as a result. For my own game, I would presuppose that teleportation involves some interface with the astral plane (or in the case of inner-planar teleportation, an interface with the ethereal). Hence, something as simple and seemingly unpredictable as an astral storm could completely ruin a spellcaster's day. Using this as a basis, the following questions should be asked:

Question #1: Will the spellcaster appear where he wants to appear? Roll d6:

- 1: No. Astral winds blowing across the surface of the plane pick up the caster (along with anyone accompanying him) and deposit him elsewhere.
- 2: Yes, but he appears facing the wrong direction.
- 3-6: Yes. (I dispensed with the old altitude control problems. I didn't think it fair, or very interesting, to have a caster's feet materialize inside a block of stone.)

Question #1a: In the event of being sucked off-course, where might the caster end up? Roll d6:

- 1: On another plane. Determine randomly.
- 2: Thousands of miles from his chosen destination. Determine randomly.
- 3: Hundreds of miles away.
- 4: Tens of miles away.
- 5: 1-10 miles away.
- 6: Within a mile.

Question #1b: In the event of a party being teleported during a mishap, do they at least remain together with the caster? Roll d6:

- 1: No, they all go their separate ways. Determine each person separately.
- 2: They are split into two groups (randomly determine who goes with which group).
- 3-6: They remain together.

Question 2: Will the caster's entrance (or re-entrance) into the plane be noticed by high-level mages and other local powers who make their home in this area? Roll d6:

- 1: You bet. Not only has someone sensed the vibrations of his entrance, but they also know his direction.
- 2: Yes, somebody sensed his entrance, but it's difficult for them to figure out the direction where he materialized without the use of additional magics.
- 3-6: No. Unless someone was actively sensing for magical vibrations, they didn't sense his entrance.

Question 3: Will there be an unusual mishap or other event? Roll d10:

- 1: Yes. See below.
- 2-10: No.

Question 3a: What is the Unusual Mishap/Event? Roll d10:

- 1: Caster and companions are all naked. They teleported in without their clothes or any other belongings.
- 2: Caster loses his mana in transit. If you're using a system where he must memorize spells, assume that he forgot them all and must take time to study.
- 3: The teleportation bubble broke in transit, and the party finds itself on the astral plane.
- 4: Same as #3, but they face an immediate threat.
- 5: Everything goes fine, except that when they appear at their location, the caster and companions find themselves para-

ethereal: like ghosts, in essence. This condition will last d10 minutes, at which point they will precipitate fully into the prime material plane. Ignore for the outer planes.

6: Same as #5, except that the condition is permanent until dispelled.

7: The passage of the teleportation bubble through the astral plane caught the attention of a major power, perhaps a demon lord, a devil, or even a God. GM's discretion.

8: The passage of the caster creates a temporary rip in the fabric of the multiverse either at the point of origin, the point of destination, or both (determine via d6: 1-2: origin, 3-4: destination, 5-6: both). For 3d20 minutes, a hole shall exist which will either suck people into astral space (or deep into the ethereal plane if the spellcaster was trying to get to or from one of the inner planes), or, in the case where both sides are torn, will allow free passage from one side to the other, as were a magical gate created.

9: Same as #8, except the rip will last for d20 hours.

10: Same as #8, except that the rip will remain permanently until magically repaired. A dispel is not sufficient, however, a wish is. If the gate is open-ended to the astral, it will eventually be noticed by higher powers, and they may wish to learn who created it.

Conclusion & Society's View of Magic

Obviously, these sorts of rules serve goal #1, making magic more chaotic. In so doing, they also tend to reduce a spellcaster's overall effectiveness, which is greatly enhanced by the use of the mana system. Hence, in terms of game balance, spell failure and the law of chaos tend to counterbalance the inclusion of mana (magic becomes more potent but less wieldy), but the critical point for me is that they do so without not necessarily diminishing the individual spellcaster's aura of power. One could even argue that they enhance this aura by making magic all the more magical. This style of magic-system, therefore, lends itself to that sense of wonder that I described at the beginning of this article.

Having said this, one must naturally consider the social ramifications of magic being so chaotic and unwieldy. As I view it, there would generally be two sorts of societies with respect to attitudes toward the spellcaster.

The first and perhaps most commonly held perspective, would be that spellcasters represent a threat to public law and order in much the same way that a thief's talents might represent the same, although the former case is all the more serious, as a mage has more sheer destructive potential than any thief. In these sorts of societies, spellcasters would need to find niches in which to hide their talents, and so the propagation of secret organizations would be the likely result.

The second sort of society would temper its fear of magic with a greed for its potential, and thus the position of being a known spellcaster would likely become smothered in bureaucracy, which may include restrictions to travel and magic-use within the community. To compound the problem, spellcasters would likely form subcultures around their various colleges, and some of these might even fall into conflict, such as the traditional animosity between priests and necromancers.

Hence, although there is great power to be won, there are also various potential social consequences to being a spellcaster that every GM should consider prior to starting a new campaign. Likewise, as long as lower-level spellcasters are dependent on higher-level ones for progressing in power and learning new spells, these spellcasting subcultures, whether legally sanctioned or otherwise, can become a real force in the campaign. Instead of simply starting a character out as a first level spellcaster, it might be appropriate to assign each spellcaster to a master, this being an NPC to whom they must report on a semi-regular basis. In this way, the GM can more easily convey to the players the social rules of being a spellcaster in her or her campaign.

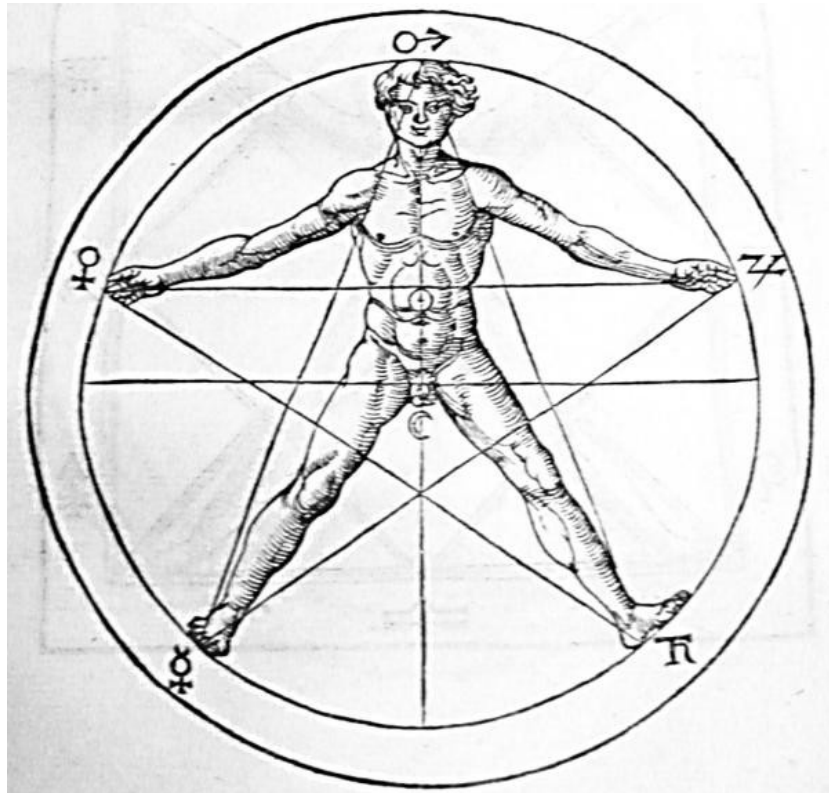
Endnotes:

1. In the early days of Dragon Magazine, there was a column called "Sage Advice" (see <http://jgrimbert.free.fr/add2/advice/>), where players would write in asking questions about the game, and occasionally these questions had to do with how to interpret specific spells. A particularly enterprising OSR-GM might want to go through these archives to incorporate various answers into the spell descriptions. Also, there are certain spells that are clearly overpowered for their spell level, and so players always choose those spells at the first opportunity they get. Rewriting the spell descriptions would naturally allow a GM to tweak the levels of various spells.

2. I should warn you in advance that the version in the campaign archive is, like the version I'm presenting here, incomplete. In short, if you want to

use it, there are some holes you'll likely need to fill in as your campaign progresses (in my case, I allowed the players themselves to propose various rules and spells for inclusion into the system). In any case, if you do end up using the system or some subset thereof, please drop me an email to let me know. Eventually I may get around to putting out an updated version, so whatever questions or comments you have may come in handy.

3. Not that there's necessarily anything wrong with that, but it can get time-consuming.
4. I was trying to provide a rationale for why mages don't wear armor.
5. Looking at this rule in retrospect, it may be a little too harsh. It may also present a bit of a book-keeping challenge, as mages in combat often get seriously wounded by virtue of the fact that they're potentially the most dangerous weapon that the party has, and so any intelligent opponent will focus on taking them out first.
6. I did this as a way to speed up combat. In most games I'd played in, the GM counts segment by segment, figuring out who attacks when based on their initiative roll for that combat. When I GMed, I decided that making everyone roll for initiative every round unnecessarily slowed things down. Likewise, the segment count slowed things down, forcing everyone to roll their attack only when it was their turn to do so. In my game, initiative is rolled once per combat, and all the players roll their attacks simultaneously. But in order to achieve this, I had to make up some rule to handle the situation of a spellcaster getting hit at the least opportune moment (when they're in the middle of casting a spell). Hence, this is the rule I came up with.
7. This rule used to be just $x\%$ rather than $x/cl\%$, but I decided to change it after watching too many incidents where a high level caster inadvertently ruined his own day most spectacularly. In one incident that stands out in my mind, the party had, after a series of adventures, finally confronted the big bad guy, a high level mage. With his minions protecting him, he was in a good position to toast the party from a distance, but unfortunately for him, I rolled spell failure, and then I rolled that he dumped all his mana into the spell (because, being a high level mage, he had a lot of mana in his system), and then I rolled a backlash on the spell failure table, so the battle was basically over even before it got really started. As I recall, he'd splattered himself over a wide area, his minions all ran, and the entire party just stared wide-eyed in disbelief. Hence, a word of advice: When you are tweaking your magic system, try to remember how your modifications will affect all the various power levels that will come into play.
8. In other words, roll a d6. 1-3 is considered unlucky and 4-6 is considered lucky. The GM consults the die and then simply makes something up depending on what would be good or bad for the spellcaster. For example: "The fireball appears, toasting the orcs where they stand, but after the initial blast, it doesn't dissipate. It's just hovering there, and as you look at it, it now appears to you too big to be a fireball. It starts coming toward you. What do you do?" The party will eventually figure out that the mage accidentally gated in a fire elemental, and needless to say, he's not real happy.
9. This rule also exists in the AD&D (1st edition) *Deities & Demigods* (1980) in the section on mortality and immortality, where it is also stated that spirits are typically reincarnated by their respective deities, whereas souls are not. This idea probably came from J.R.R. Tolkien (see http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/F%C3%A4_and_hr%C3%B6a).
10. Drysdale does not speculate on what would happen to an elf's spirit if he or she were reincarnated as a human.



SPELLCASTING AS A SKILL

by Patrick Henry Downs

When I was GMing 2nd and 3rd edition D&D I had this houserule that wizards didn't have to memorize spells every day but they did have to roll a skill to cast a spell. In 2nd edition it was a proficiency and in 3rd edition it was a skill, but both were called Spellcraft.

At first it was just a simple roll to see if the spell went off, a wizard PC would roll a d20 and add their Intelligence modifier. I rated the level of the spell as the difficulty, added to 10, so a 1st level spell needed an 11 or higher to cast and a 19th level spell needed a 19 or higher. Fail the roll and the spell fails, but you didn't spend the spell slot either.

During 3rd edition, I changed it to be more similar to combat. Casting a spell had a DC of 20 and the PC could add both their Spellcraft skill and their Intelligence modifier to their roll. Failing a roll still meant the spell didn't go off and you just had to try again.

I only ever had one player walk out of a game because of this houserule because anybody who played for more than one session learned about my other two houserules for wizards.

#2: Spell slots were directly translated to spell levels and could be spent like points to cast spells, so a 5th level wizard would have 10 spell levels to cast spells with while a rules-as-written 5th level wizard would have three 1st, two 2nd, and one 3rd level spell slots.

#3: Wizards could cast any level of spell as long as they had learned it and had enough spell levels to cast it, during 3rd edition days the DC for learning was based on spell level but during 2nd edition days it was a percentage roll based off Intelligence.

All of these together made wizards a lot more powerful earlier on, and it also freed the typical wizard player from focusing all of their time on strategizing their spell lists. Something else happened, during later sessions other PCs started thinking about picking up a level or two in wizard. Which made me start thinking "why do I even need a wizard class? couldn't I just let anybody with Spellcraft attempt to cast a spell?" But then I stopped GMing and sat on the player's side of the screen for the next decade or so.

Enter: World of Darkness

When I returned to GMing a longer campaign I attempted to splice my favorite setting of Birthright into the rules of World of Darkness. Instead of using the Mage rules straight from the book, I picked apart spells and applied them to the D&D tropes of spells. I had a short list of available spells that were detailed from top to bottom. And all of that was a mistake. Often my players cast spells expecting them to work just like their D&D counterparts, even though I wasn't trying to emulate them exactly but marry them to the low magic and gritty feel I was going for, or they simply forgot they had the spells. World of Darkness combat is also a slog so many optional and house rules were introduced, but this is a different subject for another time.

Enter: Dungeon Crawl Classics

I really enjoy this system. It feeds the nostalgia of my days playing and learning the rules of 1st edition AD&D, but it's rules-light emphasis with 3rd edition mechanics means it is also very easy to learn and utilize and build upon. It's also a system that requires a wizard to roll a d20 to cast their spell. The only thing I didn't like about it was that the spells

were sometimes written across 3 or 4 pages. Half of the rulebook is literally the spells many varied results, and I couldn't help but feel there is a way to simplify them, or there should be.

Enter: Apocalypse World

We played a short campaign of this and it changed the way I view role-playing games. The mechanics of the partial success are simple and evocative and can apply to anything. But the rulebook offers ideas for applying them to your favorite game. From page 279

Magic User: Cast a spell (intelligence)

Arcane magic comes from the use of formulae, ritual, and the magic user's own life force.

Roll 7-9: Player chooses 1

Roll 10+: Player chooses 2

- *the spell is not forgotten*
- *the spell has a powerful effect (maximize dice)*
- *the spell has a large effect (double range, duration, or number*

affected)

- *the spell does not misfire*

The implication being that if you roll a 10+ and choose for the spell to have a powerful effect and it doesn't misfire, that the spell also doesn't have a large effect and you forget the spell.

Enter: OSR influences

In a low magic, dark fantasy setting, where I want ability to take precedence in defining characters, how do I apply these lessons to make spellcasting costly but powerful and evocative of old school randomness but simple to use without charts or levels?

Blood magic. Power the spell with your blood or somebody else's, roll 2d6 and add Magic.

Roll 12+: success

Roll 8-11: success, but choose 1

Miss: all 3 are true

- the spell is lost until you rest
- suffer a cumulative -1 to Magic until you rest
- the spell fails or is cast and misfires, Oracle's call

Identify

Allows the caster to know all of the magical properties of a touched magical item.

Cost: 1 hit point, +1 hit point for +1 to Magic roll

Invisibility

Turns the caster invisible to sight until they interact physically with another object or person.

Cost: 2 hit points, +1 hit point for +1 to Magic roll, +2 hit points for the invisibility to last until dismissed (or loss of consciousness)

Fireball

A magical energy bolt flies from the caster's hand and hits another living target, causing 1d6 magical damage.

Cost: 3 hit points, +1 hit point for +1 to Magic roll, +1 hit point for +1 damage, +3 hit points for +1d6 damage

Teleport

Instantly transports caster to a location they have been to before.

Cost: 4 hit points, +1 hit point for +1 to Magic roll, +4 hit points to bring another living creature and what it's carrying

Rune magic. Take the time to draw the rune with the appropriate ink, roll 2d6 and add Magic.

Roll 12+: success, choose none

Roll 8-11: success, but choose 1

Miss: all 3 are true

- working carefully, it takes twice as long to draw the rune
- your work is sloppy, use twice as much ink to draw the rune
- the rune is drawn wrong, it either works strangely or it works in a very bad way

A typical vial of ink holds 4 uses. A typical bottle of ink holds 12 uses. An entire jug would hold 36 uses.

Trigger

When another living creature steps over, or passes by, this rune the caster instantly knows.

Cost: 5 minutes and 1 use of ink

Alarm

When this rune is activated by a Trigger rune it makes a loud noise, determined by the writing of the rune.

Cost: 5 minutes and 1 use of ink, +10 minutes and +1 use of ink for the sound to come from somewhere other than the rune, +5 minutes and 1 use of ink to designate a person to hear the sound regardless of distance from the rune

Wall of Fire

This rune creates a wall of flames that does 1d12 damage per round. These flames must be set by a Trigger and last indefinitely or until the rune is broken, unless another Trigger is applied to cease the flames.

Cost: 4 hours and 6 uses of ink, +4 hours and 6 uses of ink for +1d12 damage per round

Protection from Heat

This rune protects the object it is written on from fire, flame, and heat. Completely.

Cost: 10 hours and 20 uses of ink

Tattooing a rune onto somebody's body always adds +4 hours and +8 uses of ink to the Cost.

These are just ideas at the moment. I'm going to flesh out Blood Magic a bit more and make it less D&D-y, but I wanted to work out how some spells I know would work in such a system before I start making really unique pain-worshipping blood throwers.



Punishments were often designed not to reform, but to deter others from committing the same offense. This woodcut shows one of the humiliating punishments used in both the Old and New Worlds.

Originally posted at: <http://nerdwerds.blogspot.com.au/2014/01/how-to-cast-spell.html>

IN-CHARACTER ACTION AND IN-CHARACTER CONSEQUENCES

by Christopher LaHaise

“An in-character action will have in-character consequences”. A simple rule, but how often is it used in a game, and to what degree? Essentially, what it means is that when a character performs an action, there will be consequences related to this action, and the player should accept that such consequences are part and parcel of the game. On the flipside, it also means that a game master should accept that the characters will respond to actions performed by non-player characters as well, and the game master should accept that such actions are a part of the game.

The question that comes to mind is, how much does a game master abide by this kind of rule? In my current, classic D&D game, this rule is enforced strongly – and has led to a number of character deaths (though thank goodness for raise dead, or this would be really horrible). We’ve had one character die mid-air from a black dragon’s breath weapon, we’ve had three characters die from the breath weapon of a green dragon, we’ve had two characters die from spinning the Wheel of Fortune, and we had one character decapitated in a duel against Warduke. I enjoy running Classic D&D, and playing it has brought me back to my teenage years of gaming – any dungeon crawl could result in the complete and utter wipe of a party, and barring the cleric surviving, there’s little chance of the group coming back from the event.

Death, of course, is the “big consequence”, but there can be other consequences as well. If your character flaunts the law, he could be imprisoned, effectively removing him from the game. In some settings, there’s a wergild, causing a character to pay a price for the harm he’s inflicted. This could be the loss of property, land, or goods. It could mean having to serve for a period of time, and while this could be good for the start of a campaign, in the middle of one that can be a different story as well. In my Shadowrun campaign, one character had a conversation with his totem involving one of the BTL factories they’ve encountered. Me, playing his totem, informed him the totem sees the addicts as lost causes, and a drain on society (his totem is the Dark Lady). The final choice, of course, was his – he could disagree and try to save them, or not. He chose instead to try to kill them all by putting a virus into the BTL programs they were running. This got stopped by one of the other PCs, and has added some in-character tension to the mix. The consequences of his murder attempt are going to carry through for a number of sessions.

Earlier in the Shadowrun campaign, the PCs worked with Ares to deal with a mixed-bug hive that was under a lake. They decided they couldn’t deal with it, and called Ares. The result was a rock drop from orbit – obliterating the lake and killing possibly hundreds or more. The PCs still have this on their consciences, and it has ripples in the game even years later.

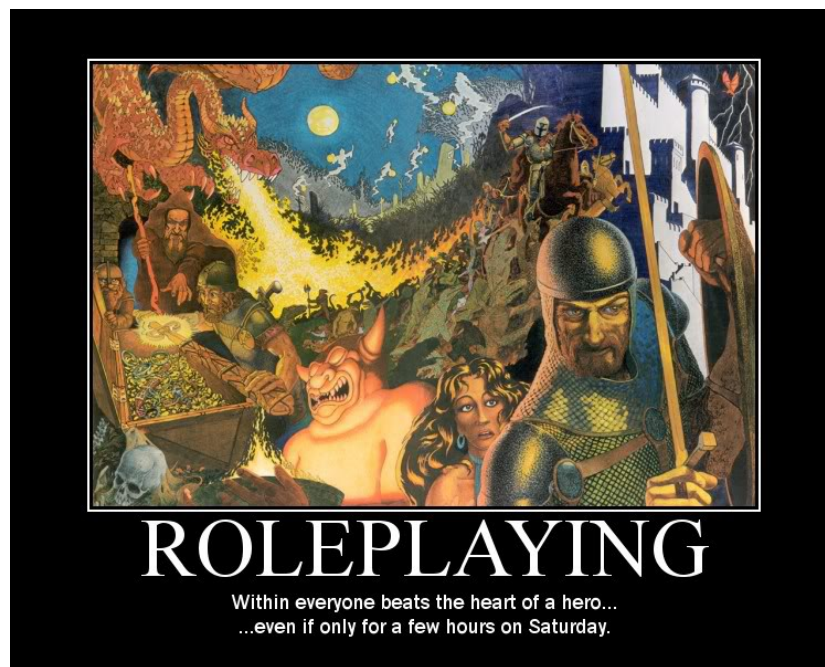
The question is – how hard should the hammer fall? If the PCs do something, and your mind clicks on the ‘this would make sense as a reaction’, do you go with it? I get the feeling in a lot of games lately, the ICC is rarely as bad as it could be – something that would qualify as a “game ender”. TPK is not nearly as common as it used to be, and there seems to be an aversion to events which would cause a deep trauma to the characters, or that would effectively damn one or more members of the group. I had one character get caught up in a plot between two rival clans in my Legend of the Five Rings campaign – and he tried to throw a shuriken at a daimyo, which got him decapitated in an instant. A different character decided to willingly succumb to the Shadowlands Taint, and got ripped apart as a dark god erupted from him. A third character of his had his horse turned into mincemeat when he brought it into one of the most lethal dungeons I’d ever seen, and then willingly became the lover of an oni, entering the Shadowlands and coming back later as a rather twisted anti-hero NPC. I’ve had other characters pulled screaming into the underworld by demons, others sucked into the void by a bad draw of a Deck of Many Things, and others have horrific breakups (or have their companions butchered as part of a dark occult ritual), and one character even had one of his defining skills stripped from him by faeries. All of these were done by character decisions, and while the players did not always know what

was in store from them, I have rarely seen complaints from my players. They understand ICA=ICC, and they know that I'll try to be fair about what's playing out.

Just, from time to time, I hear people (outside my playing group) say, 'I wouldn't play in your games', or that I'm doing something wrong. I'm told that anything that would 'end' a game, or that would 'end' a story, or that would 'end' a character's involvement (or agency) is bad. But I don't see it that way – the players are important to the game – and while the characters may be a part of the story, the actions and consequences of the game are what make up the story. The story doesn't have a fixed plot and ending – there's no promise that the heroes will win or save the day, or even make it to the final scene. Or, if they do, there's no promise that they won't be scarred by the events along the way.

Of course, not everything is darkness and gloom and doom. There are triumphs along the way – the PCs defeat the dragon. They rescue the princess. They pull off their mission and get paid. They find some nifty toys or magic items. The events leading through this add texture, and some of it is good, and some of it is bad. In one Shadowrun game, a PC revealed himself to an enemy and talked with him to learn about him (and threaten him for training children as thieves and assassins under his employ). The leader wirelessly contacted an ally who set up a sniper station a few blocks away. And when the time came and combat started – bang – one of the PCs had his head blown off. It makes sense – the PCs revealed their hand and gave the bad guys time to set up. (The PC in question did survive – he spent a permanent point of Edge, something the game allowed, but it was still a lesson). The group decided to have a talk with the PC who revealed himself, and decided to work on their teamwork a bit more – so all good, right?

I think ICA=ICC is a good rule, and I think it should be part and parcel of a game. I don't think the game master should really hold back on it either – if the consequences make sense, go for it. But this also, I think, falls under the rules for general adventuring. If your characters decide to go for that dungeon delve, then death, trauma, and worse should be accepted as possible risks. You're putting yourself in harm's way deliberately, you'd best accept the consequences of that choice.



THE DUNGEON AS NARRATIVE AND SIMULATION

by Lev Lafayette

The dungeon is a common feature in many roleplaying games, its historical inclusion is somewhat anachronistic and the implementation requires some investigation. In terms of a historical simulation, the dungeon, or more accurately the oubliette, is quite a rarity and when they do exist, they are hardly extremely extensive multi-layered designs of ten-foot wide corridors that fit into a nice grid map. When they do exist they were typically used either for immurement, or as storage rooms for foodstuffs, or valuables, or even a combination of these features. In any case they are likely to exist as only a few small and uneven rooms. In a rare case they may even provide an escape route, although that is only likely to be the case if there is a extensive plumbing design - and who wouldn't keep that backdoor protected. All in all, the traditional oubliette is hardly how it is portrayed in most fantasy RPGs. An interesting conclusion perhaps to storming a castle, rescuing the prince(cess) or similar, but certainly not a major plan in itself.

An alternative which is realistic however is the catacombs. With extensive designs underneath cities and major towns, these are usually associated as religious meeting places, especially for burial rites (*cata tumbas*, "among the tombs"), and were often adopted by criminals or refugees of various stripes. As can be imagined this combination of effects is a great opportunity for adventure design; guild's of assassins, nasty cults, and of course many undead (consider the Parisian Crypt of the Sepulchral Lamp), all existing underneath the city, is a great opportunity for urban adventure, and even for ancient ruined cities as well. Indeed, with the latter it is an extremely good location (apart from natural caves) etc., to place communities of the goblinoid variety – they are sufficiently far away from civilisation, they are hidden from view, some infrastructure is already in place etc.

Catacombs can become even more extensive when they connect to mining sites, of which the Parisian catacombs are a well known example. In this case, the adventure design can include stronger subterranean features where the religious burial tombs were taken over by a connection to a world from mining a little too far underground - the traditional location of hell in Christian mythology. So now with demons, thieves, assassins, rebels, undead, and of course the homeless, in an extensive, even city-wide, network of crypts, tunnels, tombs, and mines, one is beginning to see

something that resembles the typical presentation in fantasy roleplaying games.



There is an issue in stocking of such locations which seems slightly odd at first blush. That is, the deeper one goes, the more dangerous the opponents. On the first level of a dungeon in a game like *Dungeons & Dragons* the likely encounters include goblins, orcs, giant rats, and if one is unlucky, a low-level demon. By the fourth level one is encountering carnivorous apes, dragons, and werewolves - usually creatures that one would think that would prefer to live closer to the surface. By the tenth level is demons, devils, titans, and worse.

Now it doesn't take much tactical nous to realise that this is not a particularly good tactic. The rulers of a dungeon would not put their weakest troops at the defensible bottleneck that make up the entrance to the complex. Rather the entrance would be highly defended, as any ingress at that point by an tomb-robbing party (by which I mean "adventurers") would leave the complex wide open. But whilst it doesn't make sense from the perspective of simulating a reasonably tactical mind, it does make narrative sense. As the story and the characters develop, their challenges become greater until they reach the lowest level of the dungeon where their ultimate opponent ("boss monster" to use the video game term) will be located, and whose defeat represents the conclusion of the story. It is worth pointing out that although many consider "narrativism" to be a new component in RPG game design, and from a character's perspective it mainly is, the idea of the game system driving the story is evident from the earliest days.

Nevertheless a good game will provide satisfaction for a variety of the creative agendas which various players wish to explore. Whilst it is well-stated that a game system will encounter difficulties trying to incorporate different creative agendas simultaneously, it is a worthwhile challenge to at least provide a satisfactory combination of these features. This is certainly possible with the underground complex with a bit of care. For example, the entrance to the complex could be well-defended by the controlling force which is both realistic, but also provides a major milestone in the plot development. This does not have to be a martial opposition, it could simply be a trick or trap. The famous scene at the entrance of Moria in *The Lord of the Rings* is a case in point.

Once inside (and perhaps with a fleeting glimpse of the major opponent making a hasty retreat?), the invaders can engage in some exploration. Realistically, and this also works in terms of narrative, it will be a cat-and-mouse game. The inhabitants know the area and they'll do their best to wear down their opposition, split the party, and generally confuse them until they can make a serious strike. The invading party will have to make a choice depending which will depend on the size and population density of the location - do they push forwards, perhaps acting as the arrow-head to a larger force? Do they seek a defensible and hidden location for recovery?

As the story develops, and assuming the invading forces have a degree of success, the leaders will seek refuge behind a line of defenses and escape routes, which generates the notion of having the chief opponents deeper in the complex. Certainly if magical items and treasure are a focus of the story, in all probability they will be kept in distant defensible locations as well. If their origins are from deep underground they can seek a path in that direction, especially keeping in mind how different catacombs, sewers, mine shafts and natural caverns are in design. In terms of story development there are opportunities for a gradual discovery of the focus of the quest, perhaps even a tragic one (again, Moria in *Lord of the Rings*), the surprising discovery of an ally (such as Newt in *Aliens*).

Reviewing the material in the *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* (1st edition AD&D) or the example of Dyksund Caverns in *RuneQuest's Shadows on the Borderlands* provides many insights. The ecology of the underground complex must also be considered of course. For an amusing look at dungeon ecology *Tunnels & Trolls* offers "Rat on a Stick", which is essentially a very silly response to a sensible question – what to all those underground creatures eat? To keep this part realistic, if the underground creatures don't have an significant food source the complex will be sparsely populated or inhabited by creatures that don't need food (demons, devils, most undead). If the complex is in the wilderness or ruins the food source can be above ground ("the first sign that the area was inhabited by orcs was their goat herds"), and if in a city they could have quite a significant store acquired by raids. There are many other articles in numerous RPG journals over the decades that address this problem and are worthy of review.

The main points however is to illustrate firstly how the narrativist perspective in system design actually dates back to the earliest roleplaying games and is not as novel as is often made out. Secondly, it is emphasised that particular types of underground complexes should and can match a realistic perspective (small under castles and keeps), large and complex for burial grounds in cities, or for mine shafts, or for natural caverns. Thirdly, that simulationist and narrativist perspectives need not be in conflict in terms of the design of an underground complex if some thought is applied to the situation.

MOVIE REVIEW: DRACULA 3000

by Zenicurean

Some of you may know that I'm an atheist. I *was* an atheist. I have recently changed my mind. I now believe that there is a god. I also believe that this god is, in fact, a magnificent dancing butt which blasphemes and bubbles aimlessly at the center of all infinity to the thin and monotonous whine of accursed Bee Gees. Around this otherworldly callipygian butt god dance and sway forever the nameless and mindless Lesser Outer Butts.

Why this theological sea change, you ask? Because that is the only reality in which this fucking film gets made.

Darrell Roodt is a South African writer, director, and producer. By all accounts he's made legitimately good films in his time. In 2004 he directed "Yesterday", which has won awards and was even nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 77th Academy Awards.

Sadly, that is not all he directed in 2004.

Dracula 3000 is a mind-bogglingly stupid direct-to-TV horror movie Roodt wrote with one Ivan Milborrow. Filmed on a shoe-string budget and featuring an eclectic crew of bored actors who visibly don't give a rat's ass, it tells the story of salvage ship captain Abraham Van Helsing (Casper Van Dien) and his crew of bickering, unlikeable nitwits. Together they must explore the derelict spaceship *Demeter*, which just happens to be loaded with a suspicious cargo of coffins. Yeah, this movie doesn't do "subtle."

You'd think Roodt has managed to puke out nothing more than a formulaic "explore space ship, find out its horrible secret, run away from monster" movie, and in a lot of ways that's true. He hasn't, though. Not quite. Don't get me wrong, there *is* a vampire on board, they do run away from it, and it's all very formulaic. What I mean is that it also doesn't do "movie" very well. This film is no mere expression of formula. This film takes the formula and mashes it into an unrecognisable grey goo. It is a glorious paean to utter film-making incompetence.

We kick off with Udo Kier grasping a wooden cross and talking to the camera about something evil being on board. His entire shtick is that he sometimes appears in order to cough out backstory, as the digitised diary of Captain Varna (ugh), the *Demeter's* deceased skipper. Kier contributes nothing of value to this film, which is sad, because I really liked him in *Riget* and in *Shadow of the Vampire*. hilariously, the credits indicate that Kier is making a "special appearance". I don't know what that means. I think it's a little like some movies used to have "special guest stars."



He makes creepier faces than the actual vampire, though.

We're then introduced to the mission and the crew through the ingenious vehicle of Casper Van Dien talking to himself... because, you know, Roodt understands that force-feeding us exposition is more exciting than showing things. There are five other so-called protagonists on board. Mina Murry (Alexandra Kamp) is an "intern from the Academy of Intergalactic Navigation". The fact that she "works for free" offsets "the fact that we spend half our time lost in space". Her personality trait is that she's constantly terrified of everything. Given whom she works with, this makes her character borderline sane. The Professor (Grant Swanby) is the ship's wheelchair-bound tech guy. His personality trait is that he's haughty. In fact, everyone in this film gets a shtick: Deckhand Humvee (Tommy Lister Jr.) is a sociopathic douchebag who likes to sexually harass people, cargo specialist Francisco "187" Brett (Coolio) is a relentlessly annoying pothead, and "vice-captain" Aurora Ash (Erika Eleniak) is just sort of really high-strung.

Long story short, the *Demeter* has been found floating in "the Carpathian system". Mind you, Kier's character later insists on calling it the "Carpathian galaxy", because screw making sense, but either way Van Helsing's get-up is there to sweep the ship clean.

Say, remember all that cool banter from *Aliens*? Y'know, where Vasquez and Hudson traded barbs, and that set the mood, and gave us insight into their characters? Much of the dialogue in this movie was written by someone who saw that scene, fell in love with it, but didn't understand why that scene was there to begin with. Much of the rest of the dialogue is either awkward exposition, or weird dadaist gems like Tommy Lister Jr.'s otherwise surprisingly astute observation that "All that bloodsuckin', that's some white people shit".

This jibes well with the basic plot of this movie, which was clearly written by somebody who likes the first Alien, but doesn't comprehend how *any goddamned thing* in Alien actually works. The combination is lethal: It means that the first thirty-forty minutes of *Dracula 3000* are broadly about the crew walking around the ship, dysfunctionally insulting each other like a pack of passive-aggressive kindergarteners, while Count Orlock (yes) very occasionally whooshes back and forth in the background like the fucking Roadrunner, presumably trying to figure out where he left his dime-store Bela Lugosi opera cloak.



One, two, three! Three victims! Ah ah ah ah ah!

A better film might use the time to establish the characters and their relationships, and, through that process, make us care about what happens to them. This movie really... doesn't. Actually, let's rephrase that. It certainly establishes *something* that in extremely poor lighting might pass off as character. But since every crew member -- except Van Helsing, who had to sell his personality for parts or something -- only gets a single trait, and since all them seem explicitly designed to make us loathe these people on a very deep and visceral level, the only sense of attachment we're going to be feeling for the rest of the movie is an overpowering desire to personally stab all the characters to death.

57 RPG REVIEW ISSUE TWENTY TWO December 2013

Luckily, once the crew stumbles on the coffins, each character gains two brand-new personality traits. (It's a sort of plot flag: They immediately decide to loot the coffins for the dead guy treasure inside -- as you do -- and shit starts hitting the fan.) These two personality traits are 1) utter bone-headed stupidity and 2) callous disregard for their fellow crew members. The movie then slowly degenerates into a meaningless pile of useless plot revelations, even lazier writing, and various characters getting picked off individually by the least scariest vampire in the history of Sci-fi.

Oh, one thing. As they find the coffins, we learn a piquant detail: Religion is obsolete in The Year X Thousand. Only our resident asshole, Humvee, seems to have any inkling of what God means... though Van Helsing seems to harbour some hidden religious affiliation as well, as he later spits out a very surprised "Sweet Jesus!". This never goes anywhere or pays off in any way.



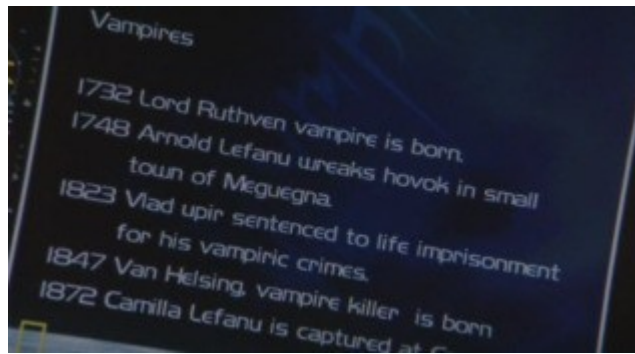
"Let's poorly simulate loathing at each other and fail at everything!"

Then the salvage ship... just sort of flies off, leaving the crew stranded aboard *Demeter*. This is strongly implied to be Orlock's doing. Why he wouldn't want to leave the *Demeter* and stow away on the space ship that's actually *functional* is never really explained. Orlock then attacks Coolio. The idiot brigade tries its best to save his life, but cryptical tooth marks soon appear on him, and he succumbs to Obvious Movie Vampire Syndrome. ("Someone... bit him?" "Some *thing*.")

Vampire!Coolio then runs amok ("Radical!") like a cartoon character. Apparently more bemused than terrified, the rest of the crew tries to smoke him into the open. They suck at it, though, and Vampire!Coolio kills Mina. Meanwhile, Count Chocula attacks "vice-captain" Aurora ("You are the most beautiful creature I've ever seen!"), but fails to kill her: Later it turns out she's a police gynoid who has infiltrated Van Helsing's ship for reasons of LOL NEVER EXPLAINED. She is, in fact, a "pleasure bot" repurposed for that role, again for reasons of LOL NEVER EXPLAINED.

Aurora melodramatically tells Professor, Humvee and Van Helsing that she saw "HIM". After a bit of awkward coaxing, she deigns to explain that Orlock is from planet Transylvania "in the remote Carpathian system". You know, that place where they currently are. She exoposits that Transylvania is a planet of vampires... except, that being a bit of a crappy business model, Transylvania's kinda dead and gone. Count Orlock hired the *Demeter* because he wants to flee to Earth in hopes of fresh prey. Being the radiant fucking genius he is, Orlock then apparently ate his own crew and left himself adrift in space. Huh. At least Dracula had the decency to wait a full five minutes before going Pac-Man on *his* sailors.

Consumed by paranoia, they tie robot woman to a sofa that she is apparently incapable of escaping. Guess they don't make gynoids like they used to. Then the Professor decides to dig up all the information on vampires that he possibly can. It looks like this:



I want to wreak havoc too.

They figure out the Van Helsing connection. Now, that never really pays off in any significant way that isn't completely idiotic, but the good captain starts figuring out ways to kill Orlock anyway. Meanwhile, Vampire!Coolio incompetently tricks Humvee into incompetently letting him inside! Vampire!Coolio then incompetently attacks Humvee; Van Helsing incompetently staggers to rescue, and... you know, let's make this a little easier. Whenever I've described or will describe any character action in this review, assume that incompetence is implied.

Anyhoo, Vampire!Coolio gets staked, they untie Aurora, and the rest of the movie is a prolonged, confused fight against Orlock and his occasional minions. Probably the greatest single moment in all of *Dracula 3000* follows when Aurora and Humvee find the Professor slouched over in the computer room. Aurora, *the police robot*, signals Humvee to be quiet, sneaks up to the Professor, and stabs him about ten billion times with a wooden stake. The Professor, revealed to be vampire, dies horribly. Humvee then asks Aurora how she knew the Professor had been turned. "I didn't," she says, and Humvee casually lets it slide. I love that scene. It's as rife with possibility as it is with stupidity. It encapsulates how these characters work. It encapsulates how the writers think. It's the pure intellectual essence of *Dracula 3000* in all its moronic glory.

I won't spoil the ending, just in case you're gluttons for mental punishment and somehow want to see this monument to human witlessness. Suffice to say, everyone that I hate in this movie dies. That may, in fact, be the sole good thing I can say about it. (It *does* have a major character in a wheelchair, in all fairness... but the movie sort of wastes the concept, as the Professor being in a wheelchair is constantly shown to be a massive impediment to him actually doing his job. That, in turn, *almost* but not quite graduates into a real plot point. Again, *Dracula 3000* is almost allergic to any sort of pay-off.)

So, to sum it up: This movie is 82 minutes of Darrell Roodt assaulting your brain with a grindstone. Everything the characters say and do is silly. The actors are terrible, the dialogue is terrible, and you could herd a thousand nerfs through the plot holes in what this thing tries to pass off as a story. You can visibly see the actors struggle as they go through the motions. Some films achieve a sort of grandeur about their own stupidity, but even in this *Dracula 3000* fails: There's a weird sense of detachment hovering over every scene that seems to suck the fun out of *MST3K*:ing this pile of crap. It's like *Dracula 3000* is aware of being nothing but an elaborate kindergarten play, something we're supposed to... sort of *endure through* rather than enjoy.

Don't watch this film. There are plenty of enjoyably bad vampire movies out there. This is not one of them.

MOVIE REVIEW: THOR – THE DARK WORLD

by Andrew Moshos

dir: Alan Taylor

Yeah, you think you're Thor: I can hardly walk, because I just watched The Dark World. And here I thought it would be a screening of childhood favourite The Dark Crystal. Thor fights a giant Crystal and loses! No I didn't, I'm being a jerk. My beloved partner and I went to the flicks to celebrate the anniversary of the day of her birth. What better way to celebrate such a golden day than let her watch many scenes of Australia's Own Chris Hemsworth showing off that incredibly chiselled physique? Those granite abs, that geography of musculature and those planes and angles of flesh she's hopefully not going to be able to touch in real life with anything other than her eyeballs?



It was a golden day for all concerned. Maybe not Hemsworth, since he was probably busy all day long oiling up those quivering muscles, but I'm sure he's doing all right. This is his flick, yeah? The next instalment out of the Marvel Machine that is no longer content with just taking the hardly-earned money out of teenage losers' pockets and middle-aged shut-ins' bank accounts with comics has Thor! taking centre stage again after that grand occasion of The Avengers getting together last year.

The first instalment was pretty much a comedy entry in the franchise. I know the other ones have elements of motor-mouthed comedy and such, specially the Iron pantsed ones, but this branch of the franchise somehow comes across as the most inherently ludicrous. I mean, it's the Norse God of Thunder. He should be on retro album covers perhaps, or at most on those of comics, or on the biceps of guys who got a tattoo of him in the 1970s and can't afford to get the laser removal until that check finally comes through from that meatpacking job they were fired from 15 years ago, but there was something to do with worker's comp, and it'll definitely come through any day now.

60 RPG REVIEW ISSUE TWENTY TWO December 2013

Instead of buffooning around Asgard, fighting anyone that looks at him funny, getting tricked by Loki again and again not only because Loki is a trickster god, but because Thor is thick as shit in the old fables, instead he's the hero of a film where some dark elves want to make the whole universe dark again. Huh? What? What sort of a dumb motivation is that? What, they're too light-sensitive? Get some fucking sunglasses you whiny brats. How about you godawful antagonists just shut yourselves in someone's basement, order takeaway constantly and just smoke lots of weed instead? The only light you'll see is from the telly that will never be off, otherwise the other bright lights of the universe will be of no consequence to you ever again.

That's not enough for these goofballs. Apparently, 5000 years ago, these doofuses decided to wipe out everything and got into a war with the Asgardians, you know, like Thor's grandfolk. They were going to use this red stuff called Aether, as opposed to that great stuff that makes you sound retarded when you inhale too much of it, ether, to turn everything into dark matter. Dark Matter. Yep, quake in your boots now, audience. The Asgardians somehow triumphed, and these pale, pasty Goth types all mostly died. Mostly. The dumbest of them, I think he's their leader, basically killed off most of his own people just for kicks, or for revenge or something. And now he wants revenge for the people, his people, that he killed, on both Asgard and the entire universe?

It doesn't matter, does it, really? The threats in these things are never credible and are always overblown, stupidly so. It's one thing to accept that New York, or some other city, an actual place, is at risk. When it's something like "the whole universe is a risk, and only one spider-guy/green angry giant/guy in a metal suit/guy with a shield/ Norse God can save us", there are no stakes. The stakes are too big at that level to be stakes that we care about. Don't get me wrong; I care about the universe, and wouldn't want it destroyed by Dark Elves from Svartalheim, because who wants to be beaten by dudes who look like pasty homeless kids who come from a place called Svartalheim?

They know how goofy these elves look, so they beef some of them up with performance-enhancing rocks, and come up with this really original and radical name, calling them Kursed (it's all in the 'k'), which means they're big ogre-like guys for a while before they're either killed or they die for some other reason. Just like footballers. Ogres? Elves? Doesn't this sound a bit whimsical, a bit fey for what's meant to be a beefy, busty, buxom, raucous, explodey blockbuster? Well, funny you should ask, because what this really ends up looking like is Lord of the Rings having a fight with Star Wars and Star Trek, with some comic relief. I know how dismissive, how cringeworthy that sounds, but I couldn't stop the mental images from cross-multiplying. That's just kind of what it looked like to me.

I have a bit of a hard time reconciling the idea that Asgard, instead of being a heavenly realm where the Norse Gods of old cavort, fight and get drunk heroically, is instead an advanced society of humanoid-aliens who have super technology but really like the retro medieval look because they're such fans of Game of Thrones. And then when a bunch of dudes who've been 'sleeping' for 5,000 years come knocking, what with their space ships and all, they're mostly going to be fighting them with spears and axes and stuff. It's too goofy for words. It's like watching robots riding dinosaurs, ninjas fighting cowboys, or astronauts fighting cavemen. It sounds like a science-fiction / fantasy obsessed nerd's wettest of wet dreams combining all the various genre stuff they're into, into one giant unholy stew.

And into all this they throw one god who wields a magical hammer that only he can lift and which comes back after he throws it, and his evil god brother Loki (Tom Hiddleston), who has more villainous twists and turns than a WWE wrestler, and what do you get? You get something that strains credulity and begs for unwilling suspension of disbelief more than you could possibly believe. Of course none of these flicks are even vaguely based on what we call reality, but sometimes you can stretch the fabric of believability too far to engage me in the craft of the storytelling on display, or not on display, as the case may be.

There are, of course, enjoyable elements to the movie. Even after all that criticism, seriously, I actually enjoyed most of it. I know it doesn't sound right after dismissing it as a generic genre exercise that adds nothing to this world or its inhabitants, but I am nothing if not tolerant of just this kind of crap. Because this is the kind of stuff made for people like me in mind. They're catering to me, pandering to me, if you will. Thing is, I'm not very keen on being pandered to.

As an action spectacle, it covers all the kinds of stuff you would expect and it does them in fine style. Dramatically, well, who really cares? Thor moons over a girl he met for a few hours two years ago. She, being Jane to his Tarzan, moons over him too. I never found out why, other than it's in the script. The 'science' is all over the place, but the 'convergence of the realms' leads to some pretty funny moments in the climax, as Thor and the rest get booted all over the cosmos and London as well, leading to probably my favourite moment when Thor has to ask for directions back to Greenwich. Darcy (Kat Dennings) provides an overabundance of comic relief, but she's good at it as she is good at providing that in everything she does. Poor Stellan Skargard is reduced to a gibbering idiot running about with his googlies out, but he gets a funny moment while giving a lecture (coupled with the obligatory Stan Lee cameo, which is decent in this one).

Of course Tom Hiddleston is great as Loki, but he spends most of the flick in Asgard jail, which is probably the piss-poorest jail outside of the ones they show in Westerns where a horse can pull the bars out of the wall with ease. So much for a technologically advanced society. Of course the best moments of the flick dramatically or otherwise involve Loki curling his lip and turning a phrase that drips with malice and sarcasm into another ice-cold weapon, or turning it back so we think there's still some heart behind his actions. And then he turns it again, like the twisting of a blade, again and again. There's no end to his machinations, and there's no end to the delight he brings.

The final conflict probably was well done, though it didn't leave me with warm and fuzzy feelings about any future instalment. It's made half a billion dollars so another one is probably inevitable, independent of his inevitable appearance in another Avengers film (ye gods, when are these going to stop?) As for that post-credits stuff? Benicio Del Toro in a fright wig looking like Tina Turner in Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome? Sometimes when they do these scenes, introducing some really goofy element from the comic books of thirty years ago, they make you embarrassed that you watched the film in the first place, and reluctant to watch any future instalment. Maybe it has a different effect on other viewers, but it soured me slightly on the film I just watched, which probably wasn't the idea.

If it was, well, Great Job, Marvel!

7 times they need to be giving Loki his own film right now out of 10

--

"I wish I could trust you."

"Trust my rage." – okay, finally, we're getting somewhere – Thor: The Dark World

Originally published at <http://movie-reviews.com.au/node/1909>

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

Different Worlds!

**An exploration of fantastic and
speculative worlds and designs**

**Mystara ... Greyhawk ... Tékumel...
Glorantha ... Barsaive ... Middle-Earth ...
Mars ... Discworld ... Jorune ... Ringworld ...
Talislanda ... Titan ... World Design for
Science Fiction and Fantasy**

