

RPG REVIEW

**Issue #35-36, June-September
2017**

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Gaming from the Antipodes

**MOB Interview ... Antipodean Game Reviews (inc
Hunter Planet, Albedo, EPOCH, Sol)... Hunter Planet
... Max Max GURPS Autoduel ... Ralis Campaign
Setting ... Batmania ... Skum of the Stars ... Laundry**

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Files Down Under... Gulliver's Trading Company ... D&D 5e Gulliver's Antipodes ... The Last Remnants of Men RPGaDay ... Moonlight Movie Review ... and much more!

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ADMINISTRIVIA

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Cooperative News and Editorial

Cooperative News

It's been quite a few busy months for the RPG Review Cooperative, especially given that this is a double issue and, as expected, we have twice as much to report on.

We currently have eighteen known RPG groups run and organised by the Cooperative almost entirely within the state of Victoria, which means we still need to spread our wings a little bit and get some interstate and international people involved.

Our library has grown, thanks to a generous donation of 15 items from Andrei Nikulinsky we now have the core rules for *Megatraveller*, several *Spacemaster* modules, some *Traveller: TNE* material and a couple of additional pieces. Unsurprisingly, we've taken the opportunity to make use of these items and now are running a popular *Megatraveller* game, along with *Elric!* following the three copies of *Elric!* and *Stormbringer* that are available.

A *Blade Runner 2049* movie night at IMAX was recently held which was pretty special and controversial film. The next issue of RPG Review will cover a great deal of the appropriate discussion. It may even include a movie review!

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Also, with the upcoming release of a new *RuneQuest*, the Cooperative ran a playtest session for RPGaDay. The RPG Review Cooperative has a strong association with *RuneQuest* not the least hosting the archives and mailing list for the *RuneQuest* Rules group, which has been a series of successive lists since the 1980s!

Of course, the big event from the Cooperative's point of view is that *Papers & Paychecks* has finally been completed with Tim Kask, the first employee of TSR, writing the foreword, which is the height of appropriateness. Special thanks to all our patient supporters, and the supplement *Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery* is well in progress. Funds from these two publications, will go to expanding the Cooperative's library and funding future activities.

It's not all good news however. Two of the founding members of the RPG Review Cooperative, Inc., Lachlan Smith and Rick Barker have had to retire from from the Cooperative and from gaming in general.

Lachlan had been a gamer for many years and joined the Cooperative playing '7th Sea Freiburg' and 'Eclipse Phase Rimward and Return', two campaigns which is participated with major characters. Unfortunately even on joining Lachlan had already been diagnosed with a brain tumor which advanced rapidly this year and he passed away at the end of July.

Rick has experienced a rapid onset of a dementia-like condition. An older individual who was introduced to RPGs in his early sixties but with some prior training in theatrics he took up participation rapidly. He was an active participant in several games including 'Mimesis Outbreak of Heresy', 'Legend of the Five Rings/Bushido The Ainu Nezumi', 'RuneQuest Prax', 'MERP/Deciper LoTR/GURPS Middle Earth', 'GURPS Krononauts', '7th Sea Freiburg' and 'Eclipse Phase Rimward and Return'.

We deeply miss our fellow gamers and express our deepest sympathies to their family and friends.

Editorial

In a sense it is a curious fact that it has taken almost ten years to release an issue of *RPG Review* that is explicitly orientated towards game design from Australia and New Zealand, given that it is published in Melbourne, is governed by an incorporated association in the same city, is lodged with the Australian National Archives, and has an overwhelming number of contributions from author's based in these countries. There is also an impressive array of RPG systems and supplements that originate from Australian and New Zealand game designers, of which not even a majority are covered in this issue. The following is an attempt to list the games in question.

Super Squadron (1984) by Joseph Italiano
Battlemaster (1985) Chris Norman, Jody Ellis
Albedo (1988) by Paul Kidd
Lace & Steel (1989) by Paul Kidd
Hunter Planet (1996) by David Bruggeman
Rus (1990) by Mark Chapman, Joe Caruso
FSpace RPG (1991) by Martin Rait
Elric! (1993) co-authors include Richard Watts, Mark Morrison
StaRPlay (1999) by Phil McGregor
d4-d4 roleplaying game system (2004) by Kyle Schuant
Nylon Angel (2006) by Cary Lenehan
Ascendancy - Rogue Marshall (2012) by Tim Westhaven
On Mighty Thews (2011) by Simon Carryer
Hero Kids RPG (2012) by Justin Halliday
Experimental Paradigm of Cinematic Horror (2012) by Dale Elvy
Big Damn Sci-Fi (2012) by Nicholas Moll
Sol (2015) by Phil Day
Skum of the Stars (2016) by Nicholas Moll
Papers & Paychecks (2017) by Lev Lafayette

Also, I know there was a game called *Oracle* that was published by the Otago University RPS, because I saw it in a

second-hand bookshop several years ago but though the price-tag was "a little steep". Plus a hat-tip to the New Zealand publishing company Red Brick, who were responsible for publishing *Earthdawn* 3rd edition (2009) and *Fading Suns* (2012), and of course to the numerous supplements written by Antipodean RPG authors, of which some of have graced the pages of RPG Review in the past. And I am absolutely sure I've missed a couple of people of course.

This issue of RPG Review tries to cover some of the old and new Antipodean games, broadly defined. There is a new article, RPG Review game blogs, where we cover in narrative form some of the games that our members have been getting up to. It is not comprehensive in either the number of game sessions referred to (because not all our GMs keep summaries) and by no means is it particularly detailed for those games in question that it does cover, as we just want to give people an overview. After all, now that the publication is operated by a Cooperative, it is a good idea to have some more Cooperative news included.

There is also couple of interviews, one with Michael O'Brien who has recently taken up a new role at Chaosium which is a showing a surprisingly Australian connection, and another with Andrew Gillespie, artist for *Skum of the Stars*. Yours truly has a few articles, including a review of a few of the aforementioned games, two articles on *Hunter Planet* (one being Hunter Planet in NZ), and co-authoring with Torquil Gault and upgrade of Ralis, a kinda-sorta fantasy Australia, for *D&D* 5th edition.

Nicholas Moll provides an interesting journey with *Batmania*, which RPGs because an option for some deep historical exploration, and some designer's notes for the morality of *Skum of the Stars*. Karl Brown has a couple articles for his project, *Gulliver's Trading Company*, which covers the Antipodean regions and an attempt to convert the same to *D&D* 5th edition. Andrew Daborn as a contribution with the *Laundry Files* Down Under which explains how things function in the mad-house down here, along with some rather disturbing scenarios. Add to this is the designer's notes by Andy Malcolm for an upcoming RPG, *The Last Remnants of Men*, and of course, Andrew Moshos provides his regular movie column, this time with a review of Moonlight. Plus there is also our annual RPGaDay response, and this year it is massive, courtesy of some amazing detail by Ian Borchardt. Holy dingo balls, when asked a question this cobbler can respond in depth.

Also Nicholas has provided a special offer for RPG Review readers – the core rules of *Skum of the Stars* for a mere \$9.00. The link is the following URL:

<http://www.rpgnow.com/browse.php?discount=9c520d7b7f>

One thing this all does make me wonder is the relative dominance of the RPG industry by the Anglophone world. Yes, RPG games do have an international market. There are various RPG games in French, German, Spanish, Swedish, Polish, Korean, Japanese, etc, plus a plethora of translations. But in reality the market is overwhelmingly dominated by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Australia and New Zealand are bit-piece actors at best, even if we do punch above our weight at times. Yet, some of those non-Anglophone countries do have a very healthy RPG communities and, by all accounts, amazing conferences. How much longer will it be before we witness an Esperanto RPG? Or even better the Ten Baidu Deities RPG?

Until those days, enjoy our Antipodean issue.

Lev Lafayette, lev@rpgreview.net

Just Released!
Papers & Paychecks

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**The Roleplaying Game of
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Technological Society in
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Gaming Blogs

by Andrew Daborn, Damien Bosman, and Lev Lafayette

*Megatraveller, Pirates of Drinax
by Andrew Daborn*

327:1116 Imperial - Scaladon

Luxury yacht Ptompkin pulled out of Scaladon's prime spaceport, last Imperial port on it's return journey to Drinax after a Grand Tour of the Tobia subsector.

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On board were: Cmdr Piotr Mendeleev, Baron of Nova Toya and former commander of the Drinax Star-Guard Marines. His wife, Dr Anya Villanova, Baroness of Nova Toya and mistress of the Potemkin. Jacob Ondracok, research scientist travelling to the sector renowned University of Drinax to pick up the lab ship and project he had been assigned.

They had also picked up Mr Grey, a courier travelling from Fist to Drinax who had offered substantial funds to Cmdr Mendeleev for delivering him safely there.

Leaving the horrific majesty of Scaladon's toppling skyscrapers and the fanatical Prophets of Geynim behind the Potemkin headed for Exocet, their next stop. A wing of fighters escorting an Imperial patrol cruiser 'Drakes Drum', intercepted the Potemkin demanding an inspection of the ship for an enemy of the Imperium. After carefully hiding and shielding their passenger the crew complied and the Imperial agents found nothing.

327-341:1116 Imperial - Exocet

A week in jump-space later the Potemkin stopped off at one of Exocet's gas giants before jumping immediately out again for Clarke, the colonial outpost not being felt noteworthy enough for examination by the crew.

355-356:1116 Imperial - Clarke

While refuelling and restocking at Hiewad City, spaceport of Clarke the team split up. Jacob scanned the feeds of the planet's net trying to gather data on the system's archaeological sites that he could sell on at Drinax. Baroness Anya and her husband opted to explore the sites first hand spending a pleasant day knee deep in mud, ancient nicknacks and quaint scavengers. As the couple drove back to Hiewad City the peace of the day was ruined by what turned out to be two ships assaulting the site, levelling the buildings and killing many of the locals. Rushing back to the site Anya attempted to help the survivors while Piotr's swift analysis of the situation identified that a type-S Scout ship and a Far Trader had landed during the assault.

Local authorities arrived shortly after, securing the site as priests began spraying critically injured victims with carbon-foam to preserve the before their True Death. The Psychopomp death cult of Clarke holds that all those in imminent danger of dying must be frozen in carbon and placed in one of the pyramid like warehouses until a medical cure can be found for them. Unfortunately the scraps of high-tech equipment on the planet are mostly employed to freeze and maintain the supplicants, not invested in medicine...

At Hiewad City the provost of the starport, Keeper Malos, was deeply distressed by the murderous raid and appealed to the nobles for aid from Drinax.

When news that Drinaxian nobles were visiting the High Psychopomp, Boone, granted an audience and made an additional request. Prince Harrick of Drinax had been mortally wounded in the battle of Asim and placed in suspended animation at the time before being healed by the advanced science of Drinax's scholars. Boone invited Harrick to be the new High Psychopomp as he represents to fulfilment of the faith's promise, resurrection!

With these messages for Drinax the crew of the Potemkin finish refuelling and prepare to return home.

"Five and twenty ponies,
Trotting through the dark -
Brandy for the Parson, 'Baccy for the Clerk.
Laces for a lady; letters for a spy,
Watch the wall my darling while the Gentlemen go by! "
- Kipling

356:1116 Imperial - Clarke

Their business on Clarke completed the crew of the Potemkin left Hiewad City for Drinax. Almost immediately their plan went awry. The way was barred however by the arrival of an armoured yacht displaying the colours of Planet Scaladon "The Flaming Sword of Geynim" Only 30 minutes away from intercept with the Potemkin the new yacht hailed her, demanding immediate surrender of Mr Grey - they had tapes of him in the shower...

Threatened with attack the Potemkin pulled over and acquiesced to be bordered by the Imperial agents - only to pull the old grenade through the boarding tube and counter-boarding action trick!

Overcoming the agents and the remaining crew of the "The Flaming Sword of Geynim" Baron Piotr claimed the ship before broadcasting the event to Clarke. Finally the two yachts leaped gracefully into J-Space, destination Drinax!

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's chest
Drink and the Devil had done for the rest
The mate was fixed with the bo'sun's pike
And the bo'sun brained with a marlin-spike,
Cookie's throat was marked belike
It had been gripped by fingers ten,
And there they lay, all good dead men,
Like break o' day in a boozin' den
Yo-Ho-Ho and a bottle of rum!"
- The Derelict, a traditional shantie.

363:1116 Unaligned - Drinax

Potemkin and Flaming Sword of Geynim docked in Drinax's Palace starport. The mysterious Mr Grey went his way and the scientists were invited to set up a psionic institute on Drinax through Drinax University and Mr Jaanson. They were gifted a lab ship and funds and encouraged to start by infiltrating an existing Institute. Piotr's cousin, the King, invited the crew to the unveiling of a battered but space-worthy commerce-raider which he offered to the team if they would be his privateers.

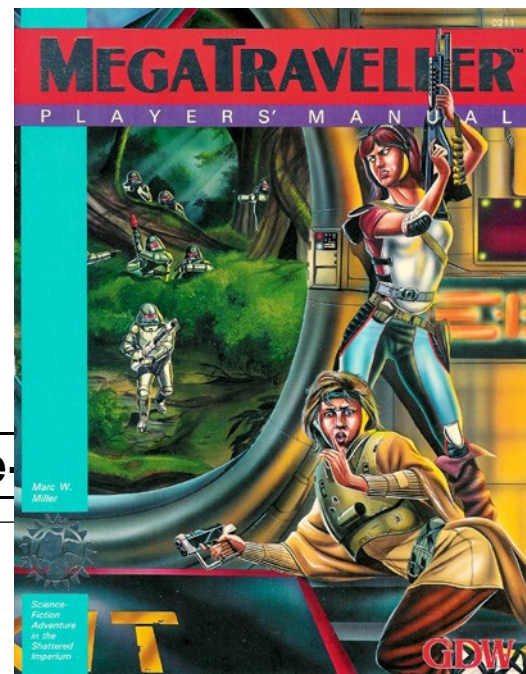
"So, here's what we're going to do. You take the Harrier and you cut a bloody swathe across the stars. Attack shipping, raid starports, hit fuel depots. Take what prizes you can. Don't kill anyone you don't have to, though – we want to bleed the merchants until they go crying to the Imperium, not start a bloody war. Pirate's part one of the plan. Part two is all those worlds out there. We make them our allies. Sell stolen goods there, defend 'em from raiders, recruit crew, give them a taste of wealth, and bring them back under the banner of Drinax. When the time comes, we offer the Imperium a deal – the pirate attacks stop if they recognise the Kingdom of Drinax and give me my rightful due."

He slams his meaty fist into the arm of the throne. "We do this right, and we'll show there's life in this old empire yet." "Now, the terms. We keep this a secret from the Imperium for as long as possible – and that means you keep that letter of marque hidden until we sign a peace. The ship's being loaned to you – you're responsible for repairs and maintenance, but she's coming home at the end. Ten percent of any money you make goes to me. Spend as much as you can spare on the colony worlds and curry favour with them. We'll need them on our side if this isn't going blow up in our faces."

Princess Rao, first in line to the throne was introduced and King Oleb was informed of the diplomatic incident in Clarke. Rao informed the crew in return that there had been another attack by pirates, this time in Torpol with a similar MO to the Clarke attack and suggested that they investigate that next. King Oleb was asked if his son would agreed to be the next High Psychopomp of Clarke and the crew were politely encouraged to as him themselves.

"I met her at the 'Sailor Arms'
A bar down by the docks
Full of prostitutes and deviants
And fellows wearing frocks
Went there to drown my sorrow
My misery and paaaiiiiaaiiiaan
With fourteen multicoloured pills
And a pint of heavy ale
(heavy ale)

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And I saw this girl across the way
Who was smiling through the wine
So I begged her come on over
Come on over, spend some time
And I spilled my life before her
And she seemed to understand
Although she was a girl
We were talking man to man
(man to man)"

A Rousing Shanty by Dread Captain Doug Anthony and the Crew of the pirate ship 'All Stars'

363:1116 Unaligned - Drinax

My Lord Baron,

What follows is a summary of my actions and a record of the events that occurred following your eventful meeting with King Oleb.

364-365

I took the liberty of registering the company you ordered be formed with Drinax Administration. "Muscovy Company" is merely a placeholder, feel free to amend that at your convenience my Lord.

Additionally I recruited crew for The Skopa, George Gamow and The Flaming Lamborghini. I have registered all personnel, ships and boats under the company and, unless previous owners are most persistent, they are firmly held assets, manifests and crew files attached (they're not really).

001:1117

New Year celebrations. There was some discussion among your officers as to what to do next. A knife fight nearly broke out over a discussion involving displacement tons, but calmer heads prevailed (I couldn't remember the mass/volume of a dton!(13.5kL)). The plan was to follow news of a pirate assault in the Torpol system.

002-004

With the assistance of your academic colleagues we advertised both a 'New Year Break party bus' service for students of Drinax to the pleasure pits of Torpol and transport for a group of researches on a field mission to core Torpol's southern pole. Following this your adept officers managed to fill all remaining space on board our fleet with freight also designated for Torpol.

005-019

Your fleet jumped to Torpol, arriving intact.

Following completion of contract on the freight payment for 122,000c was received.

On return to Drinax, estimated to be on 047:1117, we expect payment of at total of 400,000c for return tickets on the Torpol-Drinax run.

020-022

After arriving at Torpol's south polar starport your officers met with Provost Falx, starport administrator and a rather gregorious fellow. It is not my place to say but I believe you would have enjoyed his hat.

Falx was keen to resolve his pirate problem and provided the required access to identify what happened. 3 weeks prior a far trader and a larger salvage hauler assaulted an orbital refinery, blasting off and escaping with a cargo module. They went under the names of 'Argo1' and 'Argo2' but closer analysis by Jacob identified the salvage hauler as the ex-Imperial Navy ship 'Mercifuge' a ship associated with a renegade Imperial Admiral, now pirate lord, Darokyn. It appears a scout ship 'Misery's Company' jumped in a day before the attack, 'staked out' the target and made contact with the pirates when they arrived. It left soon after, but not before selling cargo stolen during the attack on Clarke. (Her grace has placed the 5000c gratuities on your expenses budget) Before she left the scout attacked an Asim far trader q-boat near jump limit and was badly damaged. The captain of the far trader intercepted comms from 'Misery's

Company' of a vagyr in distress demanding a jump to the Borite system.

023-025

Jacob invested significant time in identifying sources of Harrier spare parts to help ease the burden of maintenance and repair costs.

During this period, Provost Shala, a sagacious terra-architect, asked me for an introduction to your officers. She was interested in hiring personnel on a mission to recruit Dr Thorkan, a marine biologist from Thalassa who has research Shala believes essential to Torpols prosperity. Provost Shala recommended we approach Torkan with an extraordinary assertive approach.

- Grigor

"They got rid of their instruction manuals, the fools are defenceless!" - Lev Lafayette

032039:1117 Unaligned - Borite

The Drinax Harrier jumps alone to Borite to follow the trail of the 'Misery's Company' and make contact with Borite Continuum Authority. In their hold is a prototype neutrino sensor satellite array.

The Borite system - an ancient Sindalian space-station is found in a decaying orbit around the outermost of Borite's three gas giants.

A faint distress beacon draws the Skopa to the station. Cautiously the spacers approach, and board the station finding two hidden lifeforms. A chamax hunter leaps on Pytr who slays it with one blow of his sword before miraculously dodging a spray of blood/molecular acid!

The crew stumbled upon Krrsh, the Vagr Pirate who quickly spewed his guts. Krrsh swears to serve The Skopa loyally. The hound claims he was the captain of Misery's Company, and part of the retinue of a human pirate called Ferrik Redthane.

His crew abandoned him at the station. They turned on him after he ordered an attack on a freighter that turned out to have more guns than expected. One of his crew was killed in the attack. He was also part of the raiding party that hit Clarke. Ferrik Redthane was formerly part of the pirate gang commanded by Admiral Darokyn, one of the pirate lords of Theev. Krrsh does not know what happened, but Ferrik and Darokyn quarrelled, and Ferrik now has a price on his head.

Krrsh reports that because of this Ferrik needs the protection of one of the other pirate gangs and that he launched the raids on Torpol and Clarke to show how dangerous and competent he is. Krrsh states that Ferrik dare not set foot on Theev, and that he's probably sent his trusted lieutenant Miria Silverhand to negotiate with the other gangs on his behalf. Krrsh states he knows the secret routes to Theev if they take him.

With this exposition dump the team continue their main goal, opening trade negotiations with Borite!

A week later the team have completed some routine, but greatly overdue, maintenance on Borite Mine 1's atmosphere pumps and have the beginnings of an agreement with Borite:

Sindalian-Borite Trade Agreement

Drinax of the Sindal Empire will:

- promote education within Borite system.
- provide protection for the Borite system from pirates, raiders and insurrectionists.
- promote trade between Drinax and Borite.
- provide protection for trade between Drinax and Borite systems from pirates, raiders and insurrectionists.

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Borite Continuity Authority of Borite will:

- promote trade between Borite and Drinax.
- provide free passage, shelter and protection for Sindalian ships and their crew.

As the harrier leave Borite sensors pick up two heavily armed corsairs leaving one of the gas giants.

046-047:1117 Torpol:

The Skopa then returns to Torpol to refuel, noting only that the two corsairs seem to have followed a day later. Rather than risk a confrontation the crew take the jump to Drinax and home...

Elric! Isle of the Purple Towns
by Andrew Daborn

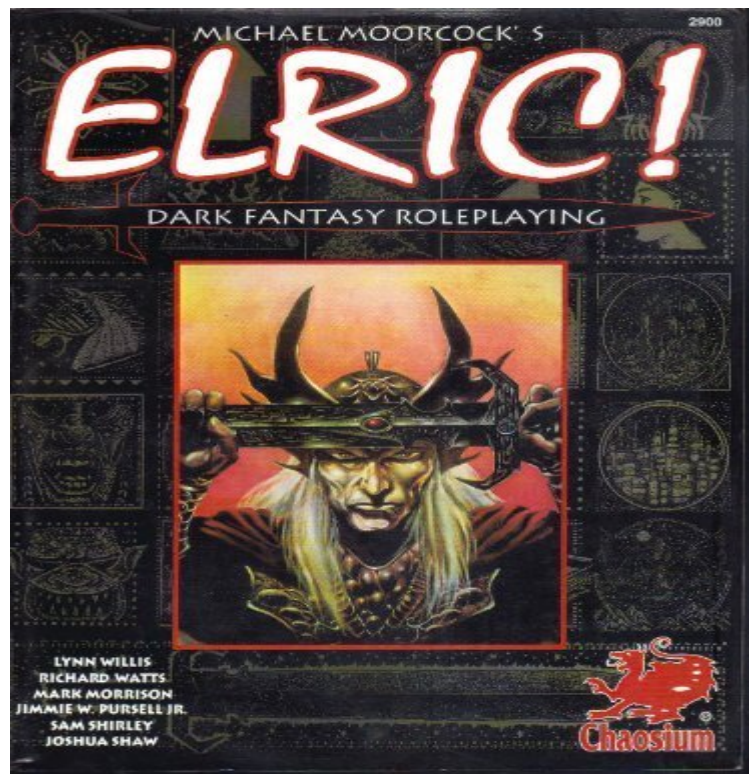
"I have this feeling that my luck is none too good
This sword here at my side don't act the way it should
Keeps calling me its master, but I feel like its slave
Hauling me faster and faster to an early, early grave
And it howls, it howls like hell" - Blue
Oyster Cult

On the Isle of the Purple Towns, Merchant Prince Dobbas brought together Ellen, Jules, Tace and Bogret: swords for hire in these troubled times. He commissioned them to serve Fiorgan, merchant of Kariss, with a writ for the return of a golden statue used as collateral for a bad debt.

After an uneventful journey to Kariss our heroes spent some time investigating Fiorgan dressed as beggars and eating his stew. When approached Fiorgan gave up the statue with little resistance. Suspicious as always the heroes went to a statue expert to investigate it further who identified it as valuable but daemon possessed.

During a brief but unhelpful conversation with a local sheriff of the Church of Goldar the heroes were told to find the sorcerer who summoned this daemon and bring his head to the church. They concocted an intricate plan to confront Fiorgan and find out the identity of the sorcerer! Cunningly splitting their forces Tace and Bogret approached Fiorgan who revealed himself to be a sorcerer, summoning a daemon to smite the two heroes!

{An interlude; the daemon was defeated and the heroes were sent onto another mission, Tower of Yrkath Florn, a dangerous beginners scenario which appeared in the the first four editions of Stormbringer. Despite carnivorous flying apes and a demon, the heroes survived that as well, and found themselves in possession of not only a tower but also a Melnibonean Wheel, a massive gold coin worth a small fortune. Heather was concerned...}



Heather confers with the rest of the party.

"A pity about Bogret, that peasant had promise. If we ever find out where his family is, we'll give them his coin and tell them to hide it! Those Melnibonean lords will rob all their peasants. We'll bury the body outside the tower, and take his ringmail, axe, and coin for safekeeping."

"Now that the Tower is clear of immediate threats a more careful exploration can be undertaken. My first suggestion is that we act like cleaners. I am still sore from where that damned centipede bit me. I'm sure we missed something in that kitchen, for example. Let's sweep all the debris out, room by room. Put those damn clackers on a pile, downwind, and set their stinking corpses on fire."

"Don't go anywhere near that mirror, I have a bad feeling about it. Same with that wine cask, probably full of poison. The demon door is an interesting item. Can we remove it from the hinges? Seems weirdly cruel to leave it here. Even a demon doesn't deserve to be stuck in a door forever. And what about that brazier? Cute to have something that lights up like that, although it probably shouldn't go in our hovel. We might need to build that up or something, now that we have wealth."

"Yes, wealth. With Bogret dead we can carry an additional 300 pounds at least. Our nags were probably able to take another 150 pounds each, and if we walk them, another 300 pounds per horse."

"And now we have a Melnibonean Golden Wheel. Twenty pounds of solid gold, only four hundred and twenty eight in existence, one for each Emperor. I wonder which one we have? It's worth five hundred thousand large bronzes, by the way."

"Looks like we've found our Stormbringer", Heather concludes wryly.

"We might be able to tempt a priest of Donblas out here to cleanse the door of it's demon" pipes in Ellen

"... and if we donate enough to the temple they might not burn the tower down with us in it too..." she adds after a thought.

"Sounds good to me", remarks Heather.

"Say, couldn't we use the brazier fire to simply burn the door down?"

"We need someone who knows about such things.", Ellen responded. "What about our friendly antiques dealer who sent us on the mission to begin with? A sketch of the items and a description would give them a good idea of what we're dealing with."

And so our fair heroes tale continues. They have defeated the tower and found it's riches but not the frog figurines their patroness desired.

Doctor, huntress, soldier and sailor...

Our heroes bravely returned to Menii, leaving in the tower a totally not cursed giant gold coin. Valiantly, they handed over their antique gold and silver to Lady Rydychei to find a suitable buyer and swapped their other loot for mythic fistfuls of bronzes! Great was the bathing on that day! Everyone bathed, except Ellen who had remained at the tower and stank. New clothes and suits of armour were purchased or renovated for all! Mighty Allan the Shepherd was granted land and a dozen hens for protecting our heroes shack.

After the celebrations the GM tried to tempt the into another shopping trip, but they were having none of it and went straight to Bunnings.

They quested long and hard to find a bunch of labourers, half an ox cart of MDF, a carpenter and a mason to fix up

their pad before trekking long days back to their hold-out.

On return our heroes mightily vanquished the remaining piles of Clakar droppings and venomous bug nests from the Sorcerer's Tower and secured it against further flying-ape infestations. As the renovations were being completed noble Ellen washed the dishes and found that they had a lovely set of 10 silver plates to go with the cutlery. As the beginnings of a home came together a messenger was spotted approaching the tower...

Mice & Mystics: Sorrow & Remembrance
by Damien Bosman

HomeBrew Rule:

Usually you are only allowed to carry over one Search card between chapters; however, in this campaign I've allowed unlimited Search cards to be carried over in exchange for giving up Individual Achievements (these are achievements earned by, for example, rolling 3 cheese in an attack which gives extra cheese for the rest of the chapter).

The Players:

- Filch The Scamp (Jacqui) -> Dagger, Dodge
- Lily The Archer (Damien) -> Lily's Bow, Aimed Shot, Accurate Shot
- Tilda The Healer (Erica) -> Leather Breastplate, Tilda's Mace, Whiskerfroth Elixir (Item), First Aid, Thundersqueak
- Maginos The Mystic (Lev) -> Maginos Staff, Invoke Cheddar Golem (Scroll), Invisibility, Meeps, Chain Lightning

Notes:

- We have acquired Miz Maggie's assistance

Campaign So Far:

Prologue: Daz Bellows tells his son Tip a bedtime story about how Prince Collin and his allies fought the witch Vanestra after she took over their kingdom. The men turn themselves into mice to escape jail and their adventure begins.

Chapter One (Flight to Barksburg): The mice flee the jail and fight off rats and roaches on their way to Barksburg. The tactics of letting the crows kill some of the rats, as well as Tilda's mace of fury, are particular highlights of their escape.

Chapter Two (Lily's Tail): The mice find a trapped Lily (damn mousetraps!), who uses her bow to kill the enroaching roaches. The brave mice rescue Lily and continue on.

Chapter Three (The Grapes of Rats): The mice enter the castle determined to find out more information about Vanestra's evil schemes. Meeps is captured by Captian Vurst, however, a distraught Maginos frees his little friend. The mice succeed in getting the assistance of Miz Maggie, and she sweeps aside (literally!) some of the rats. The mice succeed in getting information about a Beast that Vanestra is building. Once again, Tilda's mace of fury destroys rats, roaches, and centipedes with abandon.

All six mice stood on the table in the Alchemists Chamber and surveyed the path before them. Rats and roaches appeared, as they are wont to do, and were swiftly dealt with by our heroic mice.

Deciding to split into 2 groups, Collin assembled a team to save King Arden, while Nez lead the rest through the pipes to investigate the rumours of Vanestra's latest sorcery.

Prince Collin lead Filch & Lily into the King's Chamber, but were outmatched by the spiders and rats. As Prince Collin drew his final breath, he squeaked "Three spiders were too much!"

Meanwhile, Nez lead the brave Maginus & Tilda into the tunnels and through the pipes, smashing rats & roaches with

ease. Maginus' penchant for cheese in precarious locations (ie. mousetraps) nearly caused some drama, however, Maginus insisted he was sacrificing his body for the party (as cheese crumbs fell from his lips).

Nez & co arrived in the Forge only to find half a dozen rats, half a dozen roaches, and Captain Vurst waiting in ambush. Maginus used his cheese stash to lather himself in cheese, which was quite effective, but alas the sheer quantity of enemies overwhelmed Nez's team and as Nez went to meet his maker he could only think "if only we had all 6 of us here to take down this rat & roach horde"

SUDDENLY..... *GASP*Prince Collin woke up! He was still in the Alchemist's Chamber.....it had all been a dream! "What a lovely, lovely cliché," he thought, as rats & roaches suddenly appeared in the Alchemist's Chamber....

Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition: Bishop Giselbert's Four Vassals
by Lev Lafayette

Initial Scene

It's 772 AD, and a personage of no less than the Roman Catholic Bishop Giselbert gathers the young player-characters together at the Cathedral of Tournai to send them to Frisia. There has been stories of the dead walking at the nearby Frisian village of Kolven (which translates to "The Flask", on account on the fine beers).

The PCs include:

- Eric, an acolyte (1st level Cleric) of the Church.
- Merd, a knecht (1st level Paladin) of the Church.
- Rebecca, an astrologer (1st level Wizard) from Cordova who is allowed to travel because of his scholarship.
- Rainer, a guide (1st level Rogue) from Hleri (Leer) who has knowledge of the Frisian lands.

Charlemagne and the Franks

Your King! <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne>

And this is the mighty Empire, and indeed what it will become (unless you break things)
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Frankish_Empire_481_to_814-en.svg

The heartland is Austrasia and the Charlemagne was coronated at Aachen.

The most important legal code is Salic Law https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salic_law

Oh, and this is the Pope https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Adrian_I

Languages

A character's language skills, both spoken and written, are a function of their intelligence. All the languages in the region are West Germanic. That means all character can understand each other with a -2 modifier to INT at worst. The Ingvaeonic languages (Old Frisian, Old English, Saxon) are related to each other with a -1 modifier. The Istvaeones language (Frankish) will eventually become Old Dutch (yes, arguably Charlemagne is Dutch or Belgian)

Outside these groups there is the Irminones language (Elbe) and Old Norse which is related to the West Germanic with a -4 modifier. Vulgar Latin (also known as Sermo Vulgaris, or "common speech"). This is the most common language of the people of western Europe. Among the western Franks however is already being significantly transformed by Frankish words and will become Old French. Even know the Franks understand Latin with a -4 modifier to INT, and vice-versa (unless of course, the speaker has Frankish)

Religion

The primary religion in Roman Catholic Christianity, although the degree that this followed is imperfect at best. In the countryside, as the name implies, many are "pagans", associating themselves with local superstitions. Germanic aboriginal polytheistic paganism is in direct conflict with the Christianisation of the area, and is pushing in an eastwards direction into the Saxon lands. In addition there are many monuments to Roman and Celtic polytheism.

There are small populations of Jews in the region who do their very best to keep to themselves (and, indeed, they have to). They are barely tolerated at best and for any excuse the "Christ killers" will be targeted.

Gender roles are designed and enforced by religious edict. Those who don't follow them will be treated with suspicion, at best, and heresy at worst. Broadly speaking, the pagans are somewhat more tolerant of women taking public roles.

Chapter One: Kolven

To: His Holiness, The Pope Adrian I

Most Holy Father,

It brings me much pleasure to hear that the good Frankish king Charlemagne has provided assistance to you against Desiderius, now former king of the Lombards. What is the world coming to when a supposedly Christian king takes up arms against the realm of the Pontiff, and so soon after you were elected to that role? Still, what can be expected given that Desiderius appointed Phillip as an Antipope a few years ago. Nothing happened to that of course, and Phillip - after holding office for just one day - went back to his monastery at St. Vitus on the Esquiline. Curious though, that the invading Lombard Desiderius married off his daughter, Desiderata, two years ago to Charlemagne, but that marriage was annuled last year. I wonder what happened to her? Probably just as well, really, one can only imagine what the pillow-talk would have been like: "Darling, I've decided to declare war on your father and take his crown", which is of course what he did. The iron crown of the Lombards now rests on the head of King Charlemagne. I must say, I do like this new Papal coin that you've had struck in celebration. That's an idea that might catch on.

To more local matters with most of the King's army away in Lombardy I have been quite pressed here. There has been stories of the dead walking at the nearby Frisian village of Kolven (which translates to "The Flask", on account on the fine beers). I recruited a most unlikely group of youngsters to investigate the situation. I had sent out an acolyte, Eric, to gather together some individuals to aid in this endeavour and whilst he came back with a squire named Merd, he also returned with a ruffian, a Frisian burgher named Reiner, which I suppose makes some sense given where they were travelling to. But there was also a Jewish scholar named Rebekah. Yes, I know, a woman and a Christ-killer - who reads, no less. Those Jews have no shame.

Against my better judgement I let this group make their way to Kolven and the accounts I received back from Eric it seems that I may have been mistaken with their aptitude. They spoke to the villagers and indeed there was rumours of the walking dead. The fact that these stories were confirmed by the village wise-woman (who is wise and a woman), Marta, added some veracity. As it were, they took to the village graveyard and they did indeed encounter the walking dead. As a major piece of the yard, there were three old pagan barrows. The middle of the three included the bodies of two dead local villagers, requiescat in pace. There was also a second level, which where there was a ghostly reaver as well as walking corpses and skeletons. The youngsters vanquished these abomination and rescued Katya and her child. Also discovered was a carved onyx skull, which had been imbued with evil magicks and had become active as light had entered the barrow. Taking their knowledge of religion the skull was smashed thus breaking its necromantic effects.

Nevertheless, a most remarkable tale. Animated corpses, skeletons, and restless spirits - all due to the presence of an old pagan artifact. It sounds like to me that there is justification for some holy purging of these lands.

Bishop Giselbert, Cathedral of Tournai, Anno Domini, June 772.

Chapter Two: Aachen

To: His Holiness, The Pope Adrian I

Most Holy Father,

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Once again it pleases me to hear that the good King Charlemagne and with his uncle Bernard has come to your aid to deal with those dastardly Lombards, although I understand they have had some problems in the Susa Valley due to Lombard fortifications. Still they have been driven back to Pavia now, although I understand they don't have much in the way of food there, a rather foolish way to protect oneself in a siege. Crossing the Alps was quite a clever move by King Charlemagne I must say, although I have been told that uncle Bernard contributed a great deal at that point. He was a real saint in that venture. I must confess Saint Bernard of Helvetica does have a ring to it.

You will recall last year I wrote to you concerning the experience of my young vassals in encountering the walking dead and ghosts in Kolven. Well, this year there has been another incident. I received note from a priest in Aachen that there had been walking dead there as well. I gathered the vassals together and explained the situation, and it turns out that it is the home of the Frisian burgher, Reiner - you know, the queer one. Armed with a letter of introduction I sent them forth to Argilos, a Greek scholar who has settled in that town. For good reason to, I hasten to add. The Romans under Hadrian had founded a spa and mineral water resort town there, Aquae Granni, building up the original Celtic village who curiously had a god dedicated to such things named Grannus. I rather suspect that's another opportunity for a sainthood; I quite like the idea of a saint of spas and mineral water.

Anyway, the did see Argilos who has good contacts with the merchants of the town and the various secular authorities. They are, as you could imagine, not very fond of the idea of this ancient Roman temple spewing forth walking skeletons and other corpses. Worse still, some locals who had gone missing were now returning as walking dead. Whatever was in that old temple had woken up and was unhappy about something. Turns out that the skeletons and corpses were being animated by a Roman pagan wraith. Although sorely pressed they managed to dispatch this creature with the radiant powers from Eric and Merd, but it as a close encounter nonetheless. Further, as they ventured throughout the rest of the old temple they encountered the bodies of some locals who had not succeeded at all at tomb raiding, and then a Roman ghost named Flavia from the old 6th Legion who said that they were bound by the Fates to remain there after failing to prevent the assassination of their centurion. It was from Flavia that it was revealed that the wraith was actually the assassin, and now that assassin was gone, there would be no more animated dead.

It is disconcerting that there has been two such incidents in as many years; it worries me too that Charlemagne is spending so much time in his campaign against the Lombards. Whilst I know this is necessary to protect The Holy See from these dastards, I must raise the matter that the Saxons have began raiding again and even have retaken the towns of Eresburg and Syburg and attacked the the episcopal centre of B uraburg, although that stood firm, praise be to God. Could these incidents of the restless dead be related? I hear stories the Saxons have evil wizards in their midst and are planning to threaten Christendom.

Bishop Giselbert, Cathedral of Tournai, Anno Domini, June 773.

Eclipse Phase: Rimward and Return
Lev Lafayette

The Story So Far

The characters begin on vacation on Ceres as company Pathfinder is reloading the ship "Eros' Load" with supplies to take back to mine, when they encountered an Octomorph, Nicolas Bourbaki, who had an alien artifact deceptive purchased from him by Exo Tech. The characters broke into Exo-Tech and recovered the artifact, leaving in Nikolai's ship, The Ten Tickles. Nikolai informs the party that the alien artifact has a consciousness trapped within, and that he works for an organisation dedicated to protecting transhumanity from existential risks - Firewall. The characters join and become Sentinels.

Making their way to the Jovian system, the Sentinels join a psychic research team to improve their knowledge of the artifact, which is revealed to be of an Iktomi alien. Included at the facility is an orphanage of psychic children. They attach themselves to Di Yi Nuhai resulting in Father Jorge Ubico, head of the research facility, imprisoning Di Yi Nuhai at the facility. The Sentinels smash their way out of the facility and then through the starport to make their way to Europa. Whilst in Europa, the party investigates an alien takeover of a seabase, and then participates in the defense of Europa as Jovian attack.

The Sentinels then make their way to Saturn where they are assigned a task from Firewall to find out what has happened to an antimatter bomb; it turns out to be taken up by a religious cult operating a matrioshka system. From there they are assigned a visit to the Echo Systems, where the Iktomi aliens originally come from. Attacked by giant spiders, they make their way through to their nest and then into an Iktomi mine system which suggests a battle from within. Beyond that they find the habitations, and buried deep within a pool, an Iktomi egg in stasis. Go to the other Iktomi world they find that the place was a prison, and is still guarded by powerful robots. Morphs are destroyed, before a successful mission recovers additional mind shells.

Firewall sends the Sentinels on a quest for a missing researcher who has fallen into a bad crowd of organised criminals. Turns out the criminals were under control of a perverse virus, which the Sentinels dealt with. Then they were subject to a powerful hallucinogenic drug which shared memories into a single reality. Working backwards from implausibilities, they managed to break out of that as well.

11.0 The Rings of Uranus

11.1 Hatchlings

The normally inscrutable Professor Magnus Qiao-sen Ming could not contain his excitement when announcing to the Sentinels that the Iktomi egg was on the verge of hatching. Rushing their way to the secure premises on the Titan Autonomous University, a detailed security and biohazard check was undertaken before admission was granted, even given the Sentinels experience and association with the Iktomi.

Once inside however, special access was granted and the Sentinels were allowed to enter the hatching chamber if desired. Nuhai was of course interested in this, but the events that followed were certainly unexpected. The hatching occurred as expected, with the applause among the scientists present with the arrival of an alien lifeform long thought extinct. Foodstuffs cloned from the egg were provided, but the hatchling spider showed disinterest in what was provided.

Following the suggestions of the pendant consciousness, Nuhai not only recommended the provision of meat for the hatchling, based on lifeforms found on Echo IV. Not only that, Nuhai shocked those present by removing her biohazard suit - the hatchling spider quickly clambered on her and started its singing sounds. It seemed that it associated Nuhai as a mother figure.

Hoping that the association was not permanent, Nuhai exited the chamber and joined the others in celebration at this new and wonderful life, and many congratulated her on the apparent insight in suggesting a "child food" rather than a "baby food".

Naturally enough the event was circulated through the solar news services, at least as fast as communications would allow. It was then even more surprising when Professor Magnus again contacted the party with even more extraordinary news - TAU had been contacted by The Factors, a known sapient alien species who sought an audience with the Sentinels at a specified location in the Uranus atmosphere.

Recently a brinker war had broken out on an L5 trojan of Uranus, between Malaysian sikhs and Canadian survivalists with the former group apparently hiring Ultimate mercenaries to assist. This however was occurring some distance from the co-ordinates, and with limited time the Sentinels had to engage in Ego-casting and sleeving into new morphs, appropriate to the environment - the Cloud Skate being a popular choice. As the Sentinels ego-casted to the Varuna aerostat (population one thousand) their thoughts surely turned to what the exotic Factors were really after.

11.2 Factors and Divisors

The further one travels out from the main habitations of transhumanity the stranger people become. Uranus, the last planet that follows the Titius-Bode law is certainly testament to that suggestion. And who can blame them? A mere several years after the near extinction of transhumanity, many have sort refuge in otherwise inhospitable places clinging together in small and deliberately isolated communities with the desire to survive being their primary importance. But several years of living in such a way, talking to the same people in the same room, leads to some very interesting ideas on how the universe works.

Still, such exotic environments does bring its own benefits; it has been said you haven't lived until you've skated the atmosphere of a gas giant, and the opportunity has presented for the Sentinels to do just that. Uranus is a planet of rare and strange individuals, living in aerostats usually large enough for small communities, making a living from skimming volatiles from the atmosphere. The Sentinels farcasted to Varuna, the only aerostat on the planet with a significant population (all of a thousand) and sleeved into Cloud Skate biomorphs, certainly the most common morph in the region.

Flying was not a skill that the Sentinels had previously much opportunity to undertake, but Uranus is large and there was plenty of opportunity to make mistakes. Taking a aerostate to the coordinates provided by the Factor communication the Sentinels took the wing and began their search for transhumanity's First Contact. It didn't take long, making its way out of the clouds the alien ship called the transhumans to its equivalent of an airlock.

The Factors, resembling ambulatory amoeba, made a number of veiled warnings and expressed concern over certain technological developments, particularly unrestrained artificial intelligence. As per prior encounters, they indicated they would have refused to deal with digital entities and broken off negotiations with anyone currently engaged in AGI development. They also issued stern warnings against use of the Pandora gates, and this matter particularly concerned them with the Sentinel's discovery of Iktomi eggs and the recent hatching.

Discussing their experiences with the group, explained that the Iktomi had too suffered the equivalent of attempted TITAN extermination. They expressed the considered opinion that every unrestrained artificial intelligence would, through failures on input devices and processing speed, would eventually encounter contradictions and thus become destructively insane. Vivian expressed the opinion that this could be solved through paraconsistent programming - something that was a fringe interest in the philosophy of logic. But in order to implement this, then the remaining TITAN machines would need to be infected - meaning a return to Earth.

Leaving the gnomic Factors the Sentinels returned to Varuna and made contact with Julius a Romanian-speaker Bouncer morph who was one the cult members who the Factors first came in contact with. A message was also received from Professor Magnus Qiao-sen Ming on Titan; the autonomist gate Fissure was under attack from Ultimates on Xiphos. The Titanian Commonwealth had received a request for assistance and would be sending a retaliatory force. Titanian Commonwealth Fleet intelligence indicated that they wanted to employ the Sentinels as mercenary soldiers to aid the Canadian survivalists in the Brinker War in Neptune, and this interested Firewall as well. Professor Ming emphasized strongly that whilst Firewall had a neutral stance towards the Ultimates, the recent and surprising military maneuvers required an assessment on whether they were a threat to transhumanity - as part of their ascetic did suggest that all those less than them ought to be destroyed.

12.0 War on a Distant Moon

12.1 Dust Gets in Your Eyes

The Sentinels, now employed as mercenary spied by the Titanian Commonwealth and as agents of Firewall, farcasted from Varuna to the L5 Trojans and the spectacularly named 2008 LC18, with a diameter of a mere 100km with an irregular shape. The trojan was the largest in an area littered with small rocks, many high in valuable metals and minerals, and the celestial sky was almost foggy in the level of dust in this eerie deadzone of gravitational influence.

The entire trojan was effectively a battlefield between the Canadian Survivalists and the Malay Sikhs and their Ultimate mercenaries. The Sikh's, having captured a nearby automated mining outpost used by the survivalists, have had that output commandeered by the Ultimates who have set up a military HQ there. Prior to the involvement of the Ultimates the battles had consisted of waves of drone strikes against each other's respective (and well defended) bases, and targeting supply lines leading to significant shortages.

The Sentinels were sleeved into available morphs at The Beaver's Lodge, the main base of the Canadian faction on 2008 LC18. Herman took a modified Nova crab which had previously conducted mining operations, and Nihi a Slitheroid. Both these morphs had battle scarring suggesting that their previous owners may be elsewhere. Adrien was sleeved into Swarmoid, a difficult body to acclimatise to, with Vivian remaining as an Infomorph. The Sentinels were introduced to William Campbell as the contact and guide who went through the process of outfitting and explaining the

lay of the battlefield.

For the former, Hermann included a heavy combat armour layer on top of the standard vacuum suit, itself on top of the standard vacuum suit, and took six EMP grenades and two concussion grenades, along a rail gun assault rifle, repair spray and a first aid kit. Nihi's Slitheroid came with 360 degree vision, an access jacks, anti-glare, chameleon skin, enhanced vision, grip pads, hidden compartment, lidar, light combat armour on top of the standard vacuum suit, mnemonic augmentation, radar, and a t-ray emitter. For weaponry, a sniper rail rifle, two swords (burning favours at the fabber), two light pistols, six EMP grenades and two thermite grenades. Both were equipped with a medium radio transmitter, cutter, and electronic rope. Adrien's Swarmoid is a skulker variant with the advantage of being invisible to radar.

The lay of the land was relatively simple; the frontline - such as it is - starts some thirty kilometers from Beaver's Lodge, which large defensive emplacements for the Canadian Survivalists have been established. Beyond that is a region of some five kilometres were groups of transhumanist soldiers form a front-line to hinder any potential invasion. Beyond that is a ten kilometer band that constitutes the real front-line in a no-man's land - where swarms of druids and guided missiles hammer out a battle against each other with the earth pitted and rent. On the other side, almost like a mirror, the Malaysian Sikhs and the Ultimates had their transhuman soldiers, and beyond that their heavy armour. From there it was another thirty kilometers to the former mining base and now the Ultimate HQ. The objective of the Sentinels? Get to the HQ and hopefully disabled it; kill the head, and kill the beast.

12.2 On The Brink

The first action was taking a sled to the Canadian fortified positions some 20 kilometers from the base. These were essentially command-and-control centres, launching pads for drones, and entrenched heavy weapons. Several kilometers beyond that was scattered forces of transhumanist squads, holding position, probing enemy lines and protecting their own. Beyond that was the true front-line - drones, swarms, and the occasional transhuman salient - among the constant bombardment as positions were revealed. The war continued "above" as well of course, as much as this potato-shaped rock had an above - with the Canadian and Malay forces sending small craft into each other's territory.

The first experience in no man's land was an encounter with a Canadian scout saucer, which emitted the appropriate call sign. Shortly afterwards, a converted mining robot came into view that did not. It was worrying that the enemy had penetrated this far, but seconds later the mining bot added to the fog of dust as it was silently destroyed. It provided the Sentinels a lesson in the environment; don't get seen. The next encounter were three enemy Swarms, difficult to see in the dusty environment, but sufficiently so that the party was able to throw EMP grenades to central locations, destroying the micro-robots with ease. Finally, there was a stealth drone, which was taken out at a distance before it could transmit.

The party now were out into the transhumanist region of the Malays, and almost immediately they perceived a squad of Ultimate mercenaries. These conflict between the two groups resulted in mutual avoidance and disengagement, but the penetration behind enemy lines had begun. Avoidance could not last forever however, and an hour later, the Sentinels found themselves in a firefight against a squad of Malay. It was a brief and bloody exchange which resulted in hits on Hermann's Nova Crab, but two fatalities on the side of Malays, who beat a retreat. Word had clearly gotten around that the front-line had been breached as the Sentinels ran into another squad of Ultimates, however these were avoided in entirety.

As the Sentinels made it to the entrenched locations of the Malay forces, much greater stealth and caution was employed. A near-encounter with a Fenis - a five-ego walking tank - that was armed to the hilt, was enough for the group to see that discretion was the better part of valour. Indeed, Hermann decided it would be much safer to return to the Canadian base, as passed on the Faraday cages containin the morphs for Vivian and Adrien. The Nova Crab morph had fulfilled its role as a meat-shield for the rest of the Sentinels until this point was reached, and the journey to the Malay command-centre - a former mining building - was without incident. The presence of two-combat modified harvester 'bots however, left Ni Yi considering her next move.

13.1 Justin Case

Sent to the extrasolar Basilica gate, the Sentinels had little to do with the terraforming occurring on Just In Case. They did however, learn a great deal about the management of the gate and the project. The Basilica gate and Just In Case is a curiously multi-factional location; the hypercorps provide the mining and habitation facilities, the commonwealth manages governance, scientific work by the argonauts, security by the ultimates. All paid, in the first instance, but an unknown source by third party key escrow. The Go-Nin are, of course, present, but are skirting around the edges. The Planetary Consortium are conspicuously absent. Even Firewall has no idea who is in charge. The gate itself is managed by committee and carries out serious checks on all people visiting.

Assigned Ultimate duties as security on the gate, the Sentinels reviewed their situation. The Morningstar Constellation manages the administrative and corporate relations, the Ultimates the security, and gate operations by the Argonauts. If the Ultimates were to take out the gate the other two factions would have been neutralised in some manner. Several attempts by the Sentinels to socialise to determine that among the Argonauts on the same shift there was two biohazard testers (Meridoc and Peregin), one gate operator (Howard W. Campbell Jr), an analyst (Sarah Briscoe, a bouncer with blue fur and tail) and one researcher (Dexter Ward). Attempts to befriend Sarah did not go well. Nor did the meeting with the Morningstar operatives, with Shirely Kwan, head of finance, giving a particularly cool reception.

Vivian was caught Howard W. Campbell Jr trying to hack into the Argonaut subnet which was a reportable security incident. A particularly interesting incident was when Di Yi Nuhai/Savvi Sidana came to the idea that they were under attack by a Factor. Nuhai attacked the "Factor" however video footage showed that it was in fact their doona that suffered the effects of the blade. This was perhaps not as significant as Aryan Kelaka's revelations that he was part of Project Ozma, a Planetary Consortium X-risk organisation. Hermann expressed concerns that this person was now a triple agent (Firewall pretending to be Ultimate, Ozma pretending to be Firewall), but Aryan pointed out that Ozma really is investigating the same risks, it's just that the pay is better and they're better organised.

Eventually the Sentinels decided that interrupting the Ultimates' attempt to take over the Gates was an appropriate action. They revealed to the Argonauts and Morningstar Constellation management of the Ultimates' plans and quickly disabled the other Ultimates on shift before they could send a message planetside, whilst at the same time declaring the station under quarantine. Arranging themselves to be all sent to Vulcan, they ensured that messages were sent to Portal and Luca to prepare for attempted take-overs by the Ultimates. From Vulcan of course they would be able to receive new 'morphs and make contact with their old Firewall cell leader, Dr. Nicolas Bourbaki.

14.0 The Spiders from Mars

14.1 Chain Reaction

After completing the most epic betrayal of the Ultimates, the Sentinels thought that discretion was the better part of the valour and decided to get new morphs, after contacting Dr. Nicolas Bourbaki, their Octomorph Firewall contact from many years ago. Desiring his old model, Hermann Blank went back to a Fury morph. Whilst Adrien and Vivian also returned to their original morphs, Nuhai decided to take up a Martian Alpiner, whilst Aryan selected an Ayah, and adopted a new identity 'Arian Heresy', in recognition of their prior history. Hermann thought it valuable to pass on to Firewall Arian's membership to Project Ozma.

Taken a shuttle from the Vulcan gate to the Mars elevator, the Sentinels had minimal time before another Firewall agent contacted them through the Thousand Heavens augmented reality game. An issue is raised that five scientists have died in various accidents recently and now another, David Williams, has gone missing and Firewall would like to know what is going on. A review of the Mesh indicated that David is a fairly private person, concentrating on virology research. A review of surveillance footage initially indicated he had entered his apartment but had not left. A visit to the apartment, and a reworking of the cleaner bot by Vivian, allowed for a comprehensive search, discovering a small number of an unauthorised copy of the drug 'Happy Thoughts', various wigs and missing shoes. A second review of the surveillance footage showed David leaving.

Use of contacts revealed the drug most certainly came from the HLC district, a largely abandoned outer suburban ring in Olympus. Hermann used some old contacts to provide local knowledge and track down the likely supply from Ju Lin, who works as an indentured prostitute at The Thousand Candles, which is thematically based around mid-20th century Catholicism, with all the perversions appropriate for that time and style. Ju claimed that David (known to her as Victor) has purchased a large quantity of Happy Thoughts and had gone to Fuxingmen. After that Hermann spent some

quality time in her company.

Returning to their apartment, the Sentinels began to research where in Fuxingmen David could be hiding. But Ju had also been doing some research and contacted Nuhai and send a revealing encrypted and self-deleting message. Julia is dealing illegal drugs for the Shui Fong triad as a means of paying of her debt early with a delivery to the Doll House, which is next door to The Thousand Candles. Julia bought a large supply of Drive when the Shui Fong flooded the market and prices dropped. Betrayed by the Shui Fong and now even deeper in debt, Julia sold the location of what she believed to be the Shui Fong's drug factory to the competing Smoke Lions for a large amount of money, hoping that the factory would be destroyed and her Happy Thoughts inventory would rise in value again, but she the Smoke Lions to was not the factory. In response, the Smoke Lions then blackmailed her into kidnapping David Williams and delivering him to them from the Doll House. Receiving the message Nuhai began to make arrangements to ensure that Ju would have a place in the Buddhist nunnery.

14.2 Trash Explosions

Following Ju Lin's revelations, Nuhai made contacts with her monastery, Nui Xem (Viet: "Mountain View"), and requested a major favour. The superior, Zheng Huan, made some amendments, and all was agreed. Vivian took control of a automated garbage disposal unit, whilst Hermann stuffed the vehicle with smoke bombs, whilst on Nuhai's suggestion a giant stuffed lion was placed in the driver's seat. Meanwhile Nuhai visited the Thousand Candles to seek an appointment with Ju Lin and with the aid of a small amount of explosives would blow out the barred window, allowing for escape. As the explosive went off, Adrien arrived with a getaway vehicle to assist in the escape of Ju Lin to Nui Xem. All went according to plan - with the single exception that the vehicle alerted its owners that it had been compromised.

With Ju Lin ensconced, further information was revealed through questions and subsequent research. David the virologist was kidnapped and delivered by ComEx to Mike's Custom Morphs, which is revealed as a Shui Fong front, which seemed to a curious request by the Smoke Lions. The Sentinels decide that Mike's Custom Morph's is worthy of investigation.

Arriving there they find that much of the upper floor of the building has been hit by an explosive. Ignoring the "Police Site: Do Not Enter" tape, they make their way through the building and note that the extent of the damage - and the fact that the fridge is operational again and accoring to its logs in recent use. They soon find the reason for this with the meeting of some surprisingly well-armed Smoke Lion triad members who, after some negotiation provide a tour of the facility, which includes meeting David in a healing vat. David informs the party he is working on investigating a bioweapon virus called "Chain Reaction" which literally causes biomorphs to explode. He is currently operating on Hyperdrive and simulspace to speed up his research. The four Smoke Lions believe that they are infected by the virus.

As David is completing his research there is a massive explosion upstairs, where a group of attackers are destroying the building. The Smoke Lions and Sentinels engage, with one of the Smoke Lions exploding when wounded, with hard shards of his skin flying about. The Lions and the Sentinels eventually defeat the attackers who are assessed as an Ultimate group. Returning to the lab, David completes his research, and indicates that the bioweapon development was led by one Zaizan Bosshard.

David produces enough of the antidote for the Smoke Lions to be relieved of infection, and arrange an evacuation. The Sentinels contact their Firewall contact, Proxy21. Muses of the Sentinels alert them that there have been two recent

cases of exploding individuals in a manner that would suggest infection with Chain Reaction. Over the next several days there are additional explosions with a terrorist group named "A Plague of Locus" claiming responsibility, increasing public anger at anarchists who deny responsibility. The Martian OIA ensures that all the people injured by the explosions receive antidoes, thereby



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preventing further explosions.

Finally, the Sentinel's respective Muses note that the garbage truck crashing in Thousand Candles was reported, although described more as a vehicle malfunction than anything else. Nevertheless, video spimes may exist of the Hermann adding smoke explosives to the truck, and certainly of Nuhai entering the establishment. At the very least, Shui Fong and the garbage company will be conducting their own investigations.

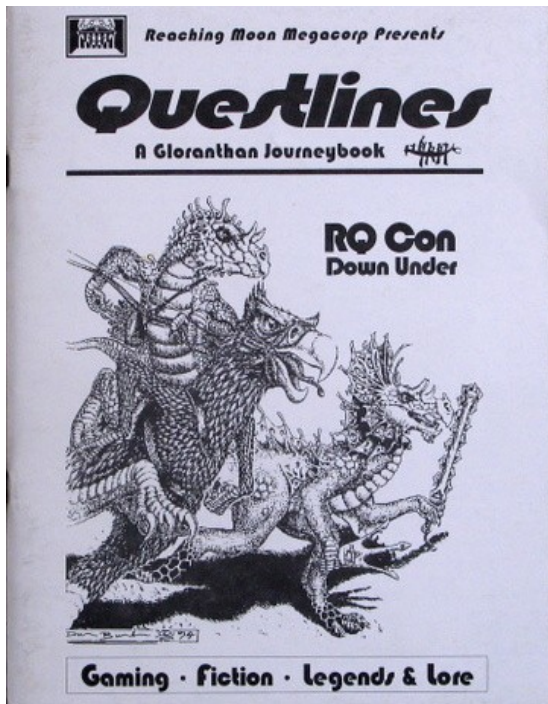
Michael O'Brien Interview

with Michael O'Brien

Chaosium Downunder!

Q: How did you initially get in RPGs, and what spurred the initial interest in Chaosium games?

A: I first started playing RPGs as a young teenager, at secondary school. Like many gamers back then, I started with the blue box D&D. RQ2 is the second RPG I ever played. One my friends got a hold of a copy of Chaosium's scenario Apple Lane <<https://www.chaosium.com/apple-lane-pdf/>>, long before we saw the RuneQuest rules. Working out RQ from first principles was pretty tough, particularly as we were teenagers still rooted in the DnD paradigm, but we were excited by the tantalising hints and glimpses of Greg Stafford's game world Glorantha. Some time later we got a hold of the RuneQuest rules; ; luckily for us, right when the golden age of RQ2 had just begun! In the intervening time I had made my own first-ever RPG purchase, TSR's Boot Hill, but found it, and D&D, very much lacking after our discovery of Chaosium's elegant and rational d100/BRP approach.



Q: What's your own background with official Chaosium publications? What about other Australian/NZ Chaosium authors? (e.g., Mark Morrison, Penelope Love, Richard Watts)? How closely have you worked with them?

A: I can proudly say I had my first manuscript cheerfully rejected by Chaosium some time in the early 1980s. I was first professionally published in 1992 (the RuneQuest supplement Sun County

<https://www.rpg.net/reviews/archive/classic/rev_6784.phtml>), but that was under Chaosium's licensing arrangement with The Avalon Hill Game Company, so technically not by Chaosium. Although I have known Greg Stafford and Sandy Petersen for over 30 years, and collaborated with them on various creative projects (mostly through the magazine Tales of the Reaching Moon <<https://index.rpg.net/display-search.phtml?key=magazine&value=Tales+of+the+Reaching+Moon&type=pictures>>, see question below), my first actual Chaosium credit wasn't until this year, 2017. This was Call of Cthulhu - The Coloring Book <[---

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cthulhu-the-coloring-book/>, which I was very surprised and happy to see get nominated and win the 2017 Gold ENnie for Best RPG Related Product <<http://www.ennie-awards.com/blog/2017-noms-and-winners/>>.

Mark Morrison, Penelope Love and Richard Watts have been my friends since university. I did work closely with Mark Morrison at one point back in the 1990s, but that was in the Children's TV industry, not games. But we now do work closely with Mark's company Campaign Coins <<http://campaigncoins.com/>>, as they are producing wonderful Call of Cthulhu and Glorantha coins, pendants, runes and the like under license.

Recently, I've had some involvement in getting Mark's Reign of Terror <<https://www.chaosium.com/reign-of-terror-pdf/>> into release. This is a new Call of Cthulhu supplement set in the French Revolution, and Penelope was part of the writing team too, along with fellow Australians James Coquillat and Darren Watson. Mark sets a high bar for the quality of the Call of Cthulhu material he's written over the years, and he thinks this is the best scenario he's ever written.

(I can also add I am currently playing in a 24 person, multi-GM campaign masterminded by Mark, using Schwalb Entertainment's Shadow of the Demon Lord rules - described by Mark as "like 5e, only 666% more bad ass").

Q: You've also been involved on associated publications that you have been directly responsible for, such as 'Tales of the Reaching Moon' and 'RuneQuest DownUnder'. Could you elaborate on these?

A: Tales of the Reaching Moon <<https://index.rpg.net/display-search.phtml?key=magazine&value=Tales+of+the+Reaching+Moon&type=pictures>> was a Gloranthan fanzine, which published 20 issues between 1989-2002. I was sent a copy of issue #1 by one of the editorial team at White Dwarf magazine. Back then, WD was a general gaming magazine, covering all sorts of RPGs, including RuneQuest. I'd had some RQ articles accepted for publication by WD, but this was right at the moment it was winding down its coverage of other games and turning into a miniatures catalogue it has been ever since. So my contact at WD suggested I should see if Tales was interested in my stuff. I wrote to the editor David Hall - as in *wrote*, and then put the letter in an envelope and posted it, because this was in the days before email - and that was the start of a great creative collaboration and friendship with David and a whole crew of others interested in Greg Stafford's world of Glorantha. Another person who later joined the editorial team was Rick Meints, and we still work together now at Chaosium (he is the president of the company). Tales of the Reaching Moon certainly kept Gloranthan fandom alive in the late 1990s and early 2000s, after The Avalon Hill Game Company stopped publishing—Glorantha fans have a lot to thank David Hall for.

Regarding RuneQuest Con Down Under, there were actually two such conventions - one in 1996, and the other in 1998, both in Melbourne. I was part of the organizing team for both of them. They were a lot of fun, and pulled in attendees and guests from all over the country and internationally. We ran several large LARP/freeform events at these cons.

Q: In 2015 you became a co-owner of Moon Design Publications, and then shortly afterwards it was announced that that Moon Design become part owners of Chaosium and you became Vice-President of the company. What was the state of Chaosium at the time and its licensed range (RuneQuest, Stormbringer, Call of Cthulhu, ElfQuest etc)?

A: I formally joined Moon Design Publications one day and the following day Moon Design became part owners of Chaosium. It's not a secret that Chaosium was in very poor financial shape when Moon Design Publications came on board, and had two massively overdue and unfulfilled Kickstarters to deal with



(Horror on the Orient Express <<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/448333182/horror-on-the-orient-express-a-chaosium-publicatio>>, Call of Cthulhu 7th Ed <<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/448333182/call-of-cthulhu-7th-edition>>), among myriad other problems. This article "Cthulhu Company Kickstarted Itself to Death - then this happened" <<http://geekandsundry.com/cthulhu-company-kickstarted-itself-to-death-then-this-happened/>> over at Geek Sundry tells the sorry tale, and what we had to do to turn things around.

Financially we're not out of the woods yet, but we finally declared HotOE done and dusted recently - with a bonus 20th scenario <<https://www.chaosium.com/blog/-horror-on-the-orient-express-kickstarter-ends-with-all-backers-receiving-free-bonus-20th-scenario/>> by Mark Morrison going out free to all the backers as a way to say thanks for their patience and forbearance - and we have one last top tier backer item to go for CoC7. We've done a lot of work to reengage with our audience.



Q: There's also a small range of publications for Hero Wars that you've been involved in. How do you find Hero War/HeroQuest compared to RuneQuest? Will there be collaborative publications between Issaries and Chaosium?

A: HeroQuest <<https://www.chaosium.com/heroquest/>> is another rules set, more narrativist in its approach than RuneQuest. We intend to keep HeroQuest as another way to experience roleplaying in Glorantha. We also have 13th Age in Glorantha

<<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/416625372/13th-age-in-glorantha>>, which is a d20 level-based rules set and an expansion of the 13th Age RPG by Rob Heinsoo and Jonathan Tweet. Recently, I have been more involved in getting that somewhat protracted Kickstarter project finished than working on anything HQ-related. 13AG is going to be a beautiful looking book <<https://www.chaosium.com/blog/13th-age-in-glorantha-update-layout-samples-full-chapters-at-gencon/>> with a superb rules set, and I'm looking forward to seeing that released by the end of 2017.

BTW Issaries Inc doesn't exist any more - in 2013 all of its Gloranthan IP and related trademarks passed to Moon Design Publications.

Q: A new edition of RuneQuest is coming out soon after extensive developments and playtesting, including on FreeRPG Day. What the publication plans for that and upcoming games? And who else from Australia or New Zealand is involved?

The RuneQuest Quickstart <<https://www.chaosium.com/runequest-roleplaying-in-glorantha-quickstart/>> was a popular item on Free RPG Day earlier this year, and we had GMs running it in games stores around the world. It is now available as a free download

<<https://www.chaosium.com/content/FreePDFs/RuneQuest/CHA4027%20-%20RuneQuest%20Quickstart.pdf>> at Chaosium.com, and can also be purchased in print. The complete RuneQuest - Roleplaying in Glorantha <<https://www.chaosium.com/blog/designing-the-new-runequest-part-18/>> rules are now done, and at Gen Con last month we released a special preview version (limited to 100 copies), without art or layout. That is happening now, and the new edition of RuneQuest will be out in the first quarter of next year. I am the key Australia/New Zealand person involved in the creation of the new rules, but I have roped in various antipodean friends and RPG colleagues for playtesting and feedback.

Adam Gillespie Interview

with Adam Gillespie

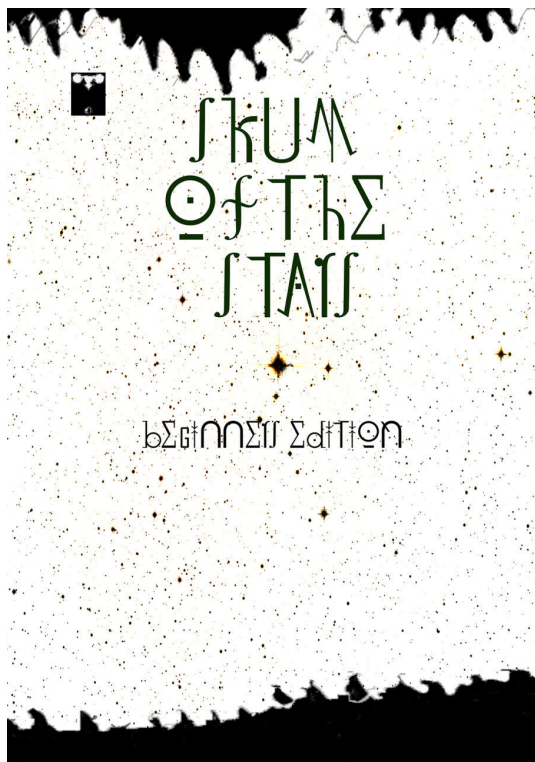
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Q - Hi Adam, and welcome to RPG Review! How did you first get involved in the RPG hobby? What sort of games do you enjoy playing?

Hi, thanks for having me. I started playing AD&D when I was about 12. Some new friends I met when I started high school were into it and introduced me. I was into the HeroQuest and Space Crusade board games, so it was a natural progression for me I think. Then my mate Steve, who was dating a friend's older sister at the time, started running a weekly game for us kids.

Our group moved on from D&D to Champions which I enjoyed because I am and always have been a big comic book reader, and back then superheroes in particular. So playing a game where you got to design your own superhero from the ground up and play as that character really appealed to me. I still have a lot of my old character designs in a folder somewhere.

As an older player, my gaming centred mostly on D&D, Vampire: The Masquerade, which I love, and Star Wars, which I also love. The first game Nic (writer of Skum of the Stars) ran that I played in was a Vampire game set in Gotham City, which was an insanely cool idea. Star Wars is the only game I ever GMed. When I moved to Sydney, I got a few people together that I knew (my mate Steve I mentioned earlier, my housemate, a guy I had played with in Albury who was in the army and was posted to Sydney) and gave GMing a crack. I have loved Star Wars since before I could even walk I think, so I thought it was a natural fit for my first game. I didn't love the experience so it was also the last game I GMed.



These days I play mostly board games with the family. I haven't played an RPG in many years. Moved town a few times, started a family. I can be pretty introverted, so finding new people to play with can be hard for me. It went on the backburner for a while and now I find myself well out of practice! But the kids, my wife Emma, and I love to play Cluedo. A new hobby we've stumbled on is making our own board games. I moved house recently and the kids were bored but the board games were packed up. So we sat down and designed and drew up our own game. It was called Rescue Mum & Dad From Vampire Dave. We just did another one which we haven't named yet. I think we get more of a kick out of making them than we do playing them.

Q - I understand you are currently working on producing artwork for Nic Moll's Skum of the Stars RPG as well as having recently started a webcomic 'Help I'm a Projectionist' What got you into a career as an artist?

I stumbled into it to be honest. I have always loved to draw. I made my own comics when I was a kid. I loved to do character designs for all the characters I created for various RPGs I played. Sometimes I even drew the other player's characters for them. I loved to draw. I was going to be a comic book artist when I grew up.

Then as life got in the way, with work and relationships, I drew less and less until I stopped altogether. It wasn't a conscious decision, it just faded away. I mean, I would doodle and finger paint with the kids from time to time, but I had stopped taking the

time to really sit and draw.

I was reorganising my comic collection one day and discovered a dusty folder standing between the wall and the shelf. It was some old pencil drawings that I had done maybe 17-18 years prior. Some stuff that I had drawn for a submission to art school. I posted a few of them on Facebook, and Nic who I hadn't seen in person since about 2004 saw them and contacted me to ask if I had ever considered illustrating an RPG. I had once upon a time considered a career in art, but

not for a long

time. I was nervous that I would be too rusty or something, but Emma was very supportive of the idea, and so I dived in head first and haven't looked back since. It's been a blast.

Nic is so great to work with. He lets my imagination run wild, but knows when to reel it in if I get off target. Doing Skum of the Stars has reawakened my love of drawing and Help! I'm a Projectionist has come out of that. It's a weekly web-comic chronicling the many (exaggerated) mishaps that have happened to me or other projectionists since I started working with film. It occurred to me one day that film projection is pretty much just things going wrong all the time and what better than that for a comic strip? I'm also finding time to draw just for myself again which is nice.



Q - Where do you find inspiration for your work?

I'm a pretty imaginative guy, which I put down to a life-long love affair with science fiction and fantasy films and literature, comic books and the most creative pastime of all, roleplaying. When Nic comes to me with an idea we usually bat it back and forth for a little bit until we're both happy with the direction, then I just put on the page what I think looks cool. It really just boils down to that. If I think something would look cool, It goes in there. It doesn't always work out and Nic has sent back art saying it's not quite there, which is great because it's usually the ones I have some doubt with myself after I think I'm done with it. Then I re-do it, and it's always for the better.

Usually we talk about things to avoid. Like, don't make it too Star Wars. Or too Dune. That being said, I think Star Wars and David Lynch's adaptation of Dune are big influences on my work. But it's one thing to be influenced and another entirely to just copy. I try to not just copy.

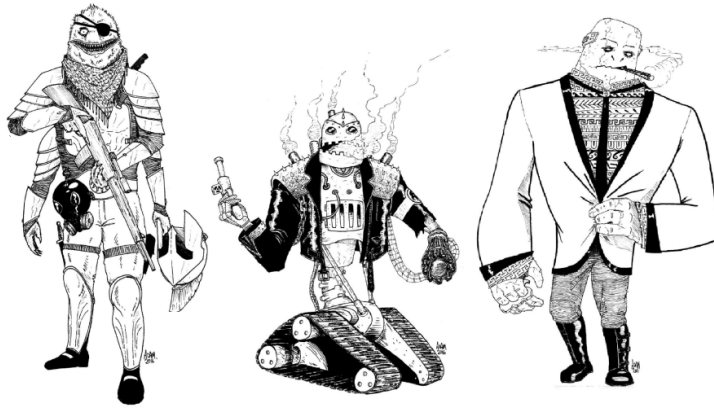
My favourite comic artists are also influences on my work, which I think is unavoidable since I've been reading and collecting since I was 5. Classic artists like Walt Simonson and Jack Kirby, and neo-classic artists like Jim Lee are big influences on my work. I would like to qualify here that I am NOWHERE in their league as an artist, just that I love their work and can see their influence in mine.

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Q - What other projects are you involved in or have planned for the future?

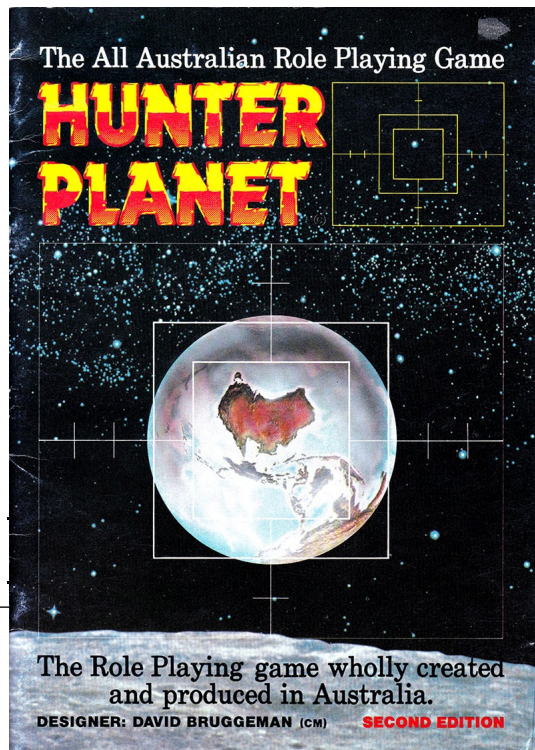
Nic and I intend to continue working on *Skum of the Stars*. After the core edition rulebook for Skum is released the plan is to work on supplementary material set in the same universe called Skum*Mag. So I'll be working on that. Help! I'm a projectionist will continue for as long as I can mine my tragic past in the projection booth for ideas. There is a plan, not set in stone, for me to pursue self-publishing comic books. I have a couple few ideas that have been batting around my head since the turn of the century (wow, that long!?) that I really would like to see on paper in the nearish future.

Talking comics, Nic and I are playing with the idea of a Skum of the Stars comic that will be serialised in Skum*Mag, utilising the character templates from the Beginner's Edition as characters. Our own Skum of the Stars comic book!



Q - Our focus this issue is on the gaming community in Australia and New Zealand. Are there any projects from this part of the world, that you are not involved in, that specifically interest you?

I feel like I'm letting the team down on this one! I haven't played an RPG in about 10 years so I'm really out of the loop on that. My exposure to Aussie games has solely been through Owlman Press, and even then I haven't played any. My hope is that working on Skum going forward and being in amongst it a bit will build my knowledge of the local games industry. It's exciting for me as someone who has been away from it for so long to get back into the community and maybe find some great local games to try out!



Antipodean RPGs Reviewed

by Lev Lafayette

**Hunter Planet : The All-Australian Roleplaying
Game (Second Edition, David Bruggeman, 1987)
Physical Product and Introduction**

Hunter Planet is a light-hearted and rules-light RPG about aliens that hunt humans and then discover that the humans are not nearly as weak as they thought. The second edition with executive pack,

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the most common version of this game, comes in a rather impressive package. Firstly the exterior cardstock cover, in bold red with gold embossed lettering, also doubles as a GMs screen which is mostly an abridged index for reasons that will become evident. Also included is the rulebook at 36 pages (including cover), which features a nice full-colour photographic style image of Earth, and Australia in particular, a scenario pack called "Sidnee", also at 36 pages with a similar cover, a 16 page booklet of "Exile & Arena: Hunter Planet Possibilities", and a pad of character sheets.

The text is mostly double-column, justified, with a serif font. The organisation of the the text, the layout, the writing, and the cartoon-artwork is pretty amateur, albeit with a good dose of humour. There is no table of contents, but there is a "comprehensive index", which deliberately includes entries for topics that are not present (and cannot be present on the page numbers). For example, page numbers have the same font-size as the rest of the text, and there are no chapters as such although the text is broken up into sections. The writing style is verbose, distracting, and sometimes amusing. Much of the game, such as it is, is background and narrative.

Setting, Character Generation, and Rules

The backstory is that an interstellar hunting group from the Federation of Planets, Hunter Tours Limited, ran a sample on the intelligence of the people of Dirt (which is how Earth is translated). From a local zoo they picked up a chimpanzee, an alcoholic, a brain-fried drug taker, and "a native bushman who had never seen civilization", and the chimp received the highest score in the intelligence test. When the new planet was opened for hunting, unsurprisingly Earth fought back and quite successfully. There was a brief nuclear exchange with the usual sort of casualties, with the end result that hunting tours continued as part of a large corporate cover-up. Player-character alien hunters get beamed down to hunt, and then become the hunted by non-player character human resistance fighters, and the survivors are beamed up.

Character generation consists of a random, in-order, d10 roll for the characteristics of Strength, Dexterity, Charisma, Intelligence, Constitution, and General Knowledge. Luck is based on a d6 roll and is re-rolled each game session. Hit points likewise are rolled on a d10. After that, it's equipment: all hunters are provided with a communicator. They main also have two main weapons, one secondary weapon, three grenades, and a range of utility equipment which includes first aid kits, flak armour jackets, and so forth. Most of these are described not in game terms, but rather in a single sentence, and sometimes these some very incongruous (e.g., a machine gun is described as being provided with 3 clips of 30 bullets each, but fires at 50 bullets a second), whereas others fit the humour of the game (e.g., packets of dehydrated water). Hunters are also supplied with three pills (red, white, and blue) which can cure wounds, but also have comical side effects. A sample character, X Bear (Paddington Bear as a Hunter) is provided.

Most of the rules are really random effects of comic violence. There is a combat system however, sort of. The chance to hit is 50% plus whatever modifiers the GM (or CM in Hunter Planet lingo, usually Certified Maniac) considers appropriate. There's a detailed chart at the end for those who prefer such things, which can be ignored anyway. A successful hit rolls for location which damage being expressed in a number of d10s, with head and neck shots doing double damage and the groin triple damage. Armor will reduce damage to a single point per die. Weapons can malfunction on particularly poor die rolls. Players may appeal to Luck which is tested on a d10 roll against the rolled value. If a character survives a hunt they receive an additional 1d10 hit points; that the entire experience point system.

Supplements

The Sidnee supplement is a document providing the history of the namesake, some encounter possibilities, and a map of the surrounds. As one may suspect it comes from a certain eastern city of Australia which was subject to a pacification programme from the Federation of Planets. It now contains an large radioactive inlet, mutants, towering cliffs, human habitations, and of course plenty of hunting opportunities. Over half the text is presented as either narrative, or narrative description. These short stories do provide a good feeling for the setting, and some comical characters and events, all of which could be introduced to a game session by a CM who has taken sufficient notes. For example, the Moonlight Hotel is place that is a typical Australian outback pub which is having a rough time dealing with mutants who are setting up their own pub. Another example is The Ship which sits in the middle of the Sidnee inlet, a great landing location and already heavily inhabited but mutants and an array of other characters. A sample monster is even offered, a sort of gliding possum which whilst normally placid, turns into a savage and cunning opponent if attacked.

The setting expansions, Exile and Arena, put a different twist on Hunter Planet. On the former, certain Hunters have been exiled for engaging in a crime of some sort (such as befriendng a natives of Dirt, or shooting a fellow Hunter). As a punishment they are exiled to Trid, which is a medieval society with magic-users. Well, sort of magic-users, but enough to make life difficult for an Exile. In contrast Arena is a snuff game of Hunter vs Hunter, a place where condemned criminals compete with each other to find out who is worthy of survival. A simple concept as stated, but of course with numerous elaborations that one could take.

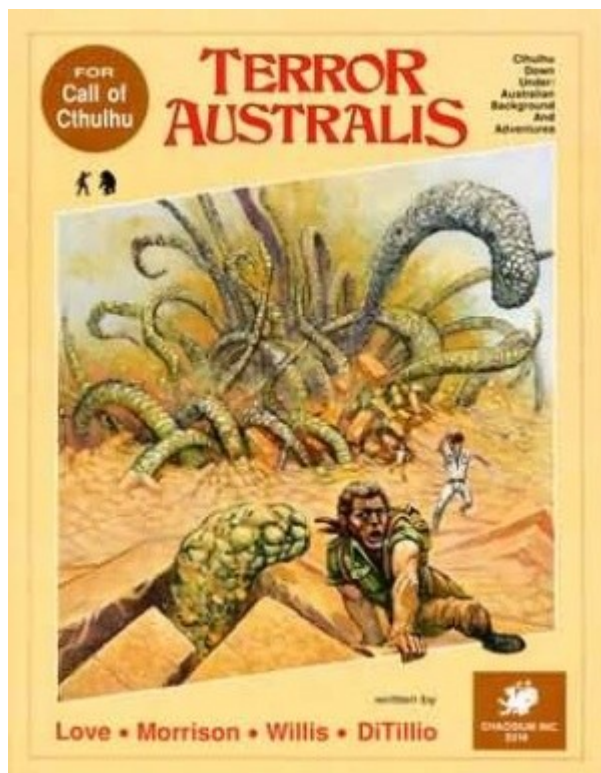
Conclusion

Overall, the rulesystem is perhaps a bit disappointing as it switches between entirely freeform, ad-hoc, and then unexpectedly detailed (hit location charts?), although this certainly isn't the focus of the game. A lightweight set of consistent rules of the same depth throughout would have been easily implemented and a lot more satisfying. A stronger Australian orientation would have helped as well, because there's certainly enough cultural quirks to provide sufficient humour in such a supplement. Finally, whilst an fairly entertaining read in the only right, the narrative stories that make up the bulk of the text should have really been reduced in favour of more detailed setting and game information.

Nevertheless, Hunter Planet is a bit of a classic in the history of RPG and of course very much so in the limited range of Australian RPGs. The quantity of material that comes with the Executive Pack is seriously worthwhile - at least several sessions worth of scenarios, the pad of character sheets and a set of rules (of sorts), and the physical production is pretty good too, even if layout and text organisation could do with improvements. It is, of course, a delightfully silly game in so many ways, and as long as the CM can keep the tension and pace going, a thoroughly fun game. That in itself should be an endorsement.

Style: 1 + .3 (layout) + .4 (art) + .7 (coolness) + .4 (readbility) + .7 (product) = 3.5

Substance: 1 + .3 (content) + .4 (text) + .9 (fun) + .3 (workmanship) + .2 (system) = 3.2



Terror Australis Review (1987, Penelope Love, Mark Morrison, Lynn Willis et al.)

Introduction

Terror Australis is a supplement for Call of Cthulhu which, as the title indicates, provides Australian-based background and adventures. The physical product is a 136 page softback, consisting of 128 pages of text plus handouts in a thicker paper stock. A full colour double-page pull-out map is provided which unforgiveably chops off Tasmania just below the northern edge of the country's smallest state. The glue for the book's binding, it must be said, is not the greatest either; handle with care. The text is presented in a two-column justified serif font with a good use of white space. Each page is marked with section title and page number and whilst there is no index, the single-page table of contents is quite detailed, including the author for each section. The colour cover art is a desert outback setting with a typical theme of investigators about to suffer their fate from a cthuloid monstrosity exploding from their feet. The internal art is evocative and contextual. The writing style achieves that rare combination of being relatively easy in structure yet also scholarly in content, making it an absolute pleasure to read for its own sake.

There are essentially two major overall sections of the text.

Firstly is the background information about Australia in the 1920s; facts about the country, language, indigenous Australia, the Dreamtime (Alcheringa), and creatures from the Dreamtime, both monsters and the prehistoric days of Australia's megafauna. In total this section takes about some fifty pages of the book. The second section, with around eighty pages, is three multi-session scenarios, 'Pride of Yirrimburra', 'Old Fellow That Bunyip', and 'City Beneath the Sands'. The latter scenario is the "missing scenario" from the original boxed set of 'Masks of Nyarlathotep', which was incorporated in latter editions of that supplement.

Australia Information

The section which provides background information about Australia is of very high quality. There is essential statistical information and lifeworld experiences of Australia in the 1920s, a short but necessary collection of Australian slang (an essential component of any Australian-based supplement), a curious but perhaps unnecessary section on a handful of Australian ghost stories, and an absolutely exceptional overview of Australian aboriginal societies and cultures, which includes artifacts and tools, sample sites, and general statements on way of life, theology, etc. This is followed by an equally excellent selection of creatures from the Dreamtime (Bunyip, Marsupial Lion, Mimi, Yowie etc).

These latter sections show a great deal of scholarship, sensitivity to the diversity of myths, legends, and cultures, and yet whilst necessarily far from comprehensive, a sufficient amount of material to give a sense of the enormity of the project. It is, quite frankly, one of the best introductions to Australian indigenous mythos that one is ever likely to find, although one must be alert to the fact that this product was published in 1987 and a great deal of scholarship has occurred since then, not only in matters of physical anthropological evidence, but even down to some of the prehistoric Dreamland animals. One thing in game terms that should be highlighted is that the version of Alcheringa is explicitly derivative and designed for the game, rather than being a replication of beliefs. It is similar to, but not the same, as H.P. Lovecraft's Dreamlands, and is a place where non-indigenous visitors cannot enter unaided.

The Scenarios

The three multi-session scenarios provide the bulk of the book and the author's betray a bit of a Melbourne-centric point of view with two of them set in Melbourne and regional Victoria and the other in an extremely remote corner of Western Australia. This said, the scenarios are all of very high quality and one hesitates to say that at least two of them ("Pride of Yirrimburra" and "City Beneath the Sands") are among the most memorable published under the label of Call of Cthulhu.

The first, "Pride of Yirrimburra" is written on paper as a simple vengeful ghost story. But there is enough investigation, gruesome scenes, colourful characters, horrific hidden secrets, potential conspiracies, 'dungeon' (well, mineshaft) crawls, endemic prejudice, and a canny and powerful protagonist, to build an extraordinary plot from what is on offer. It may be particular to Australians but the 'big reveal' in this scenario properly executed can generate powerful emotional responses from the *players*.

The second scenario "Old Fellow That Bunyip" is an investigation into riverside murders, strange lights, visits to asylums (including one where your reviewer currently inhabits), and then an extraordinary journey upriver following the path of the Yarra whilst negotiating an acceptable solution with the local indigenous people.

Finally, there is "City Beneath the Sands", which comes with a great legend, a difficult journey out to one of the most remote and desolate corners of the world, the discovery of a one of the more alien architectures (and that's for a CoC game!) and inhabitants, various Cthuloid enemies, dangerous cultists, science fiction weapons, mad sorcerers, innocent victims in thrall, and then, because the scenario demands it, a rather unfortunate encounter with a very powerful and ancient enemy. It is a seriously impressive above and below ground investigation that is both full of creeping horror, uncertainty, and action.

Overall

Terror Australis is truly one of the great products to come from the Chaosium in the 1980s for Call of Cthulhu. To this day, it is one of the best expositions of Australian culture, both European and indigenous, albeit firmly based in its 1920s setting. The organisation of the text is good, the writing style superb, the artwork skilful, contextual and disconcerting. There is several sessions worth of play at least in this product and that from running through the

scenarios as written with little deviation to the supplementary material provided. The greatest weakness found with the book is that some background material is not exactly up-to-date, one of the scenarios is now published elsewhere, and it was not of the highest physical quality. All this aside however, it certainly stands as one of the great RPG products.

Style: 1 + .7 (layout) + .8 (art) + .9 (coolness) + 1.0 (readability) + .4 (product) = 4.8

Substance: 1 + .8 (content) + .7 (text) + .8 (fun) + .9 (workmanship) + .8 (system) = 5.0

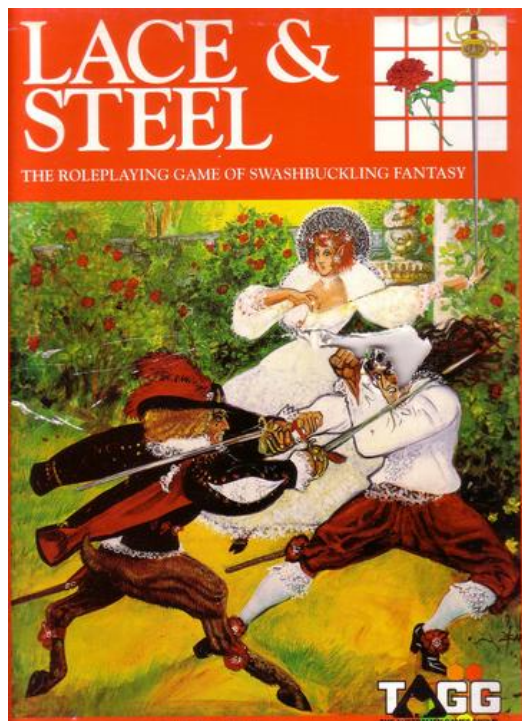
Lace & Steel Review (1989, Paul Kidd)

Introduction and Physical Product

Lace & Steel an attractive physical product. It comes as four saddle-stapled booklets and a deck of cards in a fairly sturdy box and with a colourful slip cover which illustrates rather well pretty much what the game is about (as does the title); it's derived from 17th century western Europe (England emphasised), swashbuckling, and fancy clothes and high baroque aesthetics, but also with anthropomorphic species. Notably the author was also responsible for the hard-science but furry, Albedo and comparisons are almost inevitable.

The cover and books are beautifully illustrated with black-and-white line-drawings by Donna Barr showing both creativity and technique and often contextually appropriate. The layout of the books is two-thirds single-column serif text and one-third side-bar which is nice on the eyes, although the latter often has too much white-space. There is a front-page index in three of the four books, but no table of contents. Page numbers are rather tiny but chapters are indicated on a per page basis (although with four booklets this is somewhat unnecessary). Tables are printed on the inside and outside rear covers. The writing style is friendly and clear, and mostly well-organised. The four books cover

Characters (50 pages), Naked Steel (combat and magic,), Mittlemarch (the game world), and Adventures.



Characters

The character book starts off with a short and obligatory "what is roleplaying?" section before diving into a preliminary of setting, style and system. It is explicitly described as being "reminiscent" of the 1640s, and is about "court intrigues and dazzling balls, secret messages and lovers met by moonlight", all with magic and fantasy added. The game system is based around d6s for task resolution and a card-based combat system.

As for characters, the game provides five "races" available as PCs. Humans are a comparatively dull default and receive a three-sentence introduction. Apart from these "two-leggers", there are also half-horses ("centaurs"), satyrs, harpies, and pixies. In addition there are NPC races, fairies, merfolk, trolls, and ogres. Whilst obviously a good portion of this material is descriptive, there is some solid system inclusions as well. For example, Half-Horses have double Strength when engaging in tasks which use body weight, however have to make a Dexterity check when using bodily manipulation (such as climbing a ladder), among other modifications. As a stylistic element, horses, satyrs, and harpies are noted - in their own way - as being somewhat more amorous than their humans find entirely comfortable.

Characteristics consist of Strength, Endurance, Dexterity, Reason, Intuition, Drive, Charisma, and Magical Aptitude, all of which are as they say. All are rolled on 2d6+3 with up to three characteristics favoured, meaning take the best of two rolls, and an equal number slighted, meaning take the worse of the two. All characteristics are rolled on 2D6 + 3. If a character scores 14 or 15 their initial dice roll they may roll an extra D6-1 and add the result to its total Magical aptitude score. All characters start the game with experience points equal to Reason + Drive. For a cost of 5 of these experience points each, characters may purchase extra characteristics

points on any of their characteristics, which includes Magical Aptitude with the boost if they reach 14.

In addition to this there's a collection of derived characteristics called "Special Factors", which includes Fatigue, Hit Points, Wound Level, Maximum (card) Hand Rating, New (card) Draw Rating, and optional Sorcery and Repartee card ratings, Weight, Encumbrance. Unconsciousness is at zero hit points, death at 0 HP minus wound level (which is usually only 1-2). Healing is slow with a hard weekly check to gain but a single point back. A tarot deck is used to determine the personality and disposition of characters based on a single draw. This may result in changes to rolled characteristics.

Skill tests are based on a two-table look-up. Firstly assign a difficulty, which has a value. This value is subtracted from the character's characteristic, modified by their skill. The difference then provides a target number to rolled on 2d6 or less. Obviously this two-step procedure could have been simplified to a simple modifier to modified characteristic or a contested roll. In any case, there are skills, and the starting skills are based on social class which differ according to race and with additional skills purchased with experience points according to skill level. There is over 70 skills altogether, broken up into roughly equal groups of social skills, courtly skills, knowledge skills, military skills, movement and perception skills, craft skills, and magical skills. Most of these are described in but a couple of sentences. Experience is gained in a RuneQuest-like fashion; check skills used in an adventure, roll under a target of 10, adding the existing skill level to the roll. A success will add 1 experience point to the skill (which has an increasing cost per level). There are also rules for study and maintaining skills.

Lace & Steel is a game with a lot of emphasis on interpersonal relations and these are given appropriate coverage in the game. All PCs and NPCs start with the aforementioned dispositions. These also have personal ties and antipathies towards ideals, other characters, organisations etc. These are treated like skills and act as a modifier when the character has to act with the tie or antipathy in question. New ties and antipathies can be established through critical checks on the Charisma characteristic and may change through emotional events, favours, etc. Characters may also invest in their self-image to improve their confidence when carrying out tasks, or when successfully carrying out tasks where there is a tie or antipathy.

Combat and Magic

Melee combat is played out as a card game in Lace & Steel. The 52-card deck is divided into attack lines of upper, middle, and low. There are also dodge cards, intuition, and disengage cards. Characters have a varying number of cards in their hand based on modified by wounds and fatigue. The difference in skill ratings also determines a varying number of initial cards. Initial initiative is based on a simple modified draw. The attacker declares the line of the attack and nominates an attack card (face down), the defender selects a defense card, and both are revealed with a comparison between line and value to determine damage. Damage is based on adding and subtracting the numerical value of the attack and defensive cards, with an additional card added if they mismatched suit. There are options for drawing additional cards, ripping off cards from the opponent, applying a desperate defense, feints, ripostes, etc etc. Armour will defend against damage based on the line of attack and the type of attack (firearms, thrusting weapons, brawling weapons). Weapons are defined by their reach, heft (a comparative modifier to defense and initiative), modifications to armour, and minimum strength. When fighting against multiple opponents the attackers combine their hands together; this can become very confusing when multiple members of the group are also fighting multiple opponents.

Missile combat has a task difficulty based on range and always goes first in its initiative order unless the shooter is surprised. Missile weapons take one or more turns to reload. It's a fire and movement system insofar that after missile use, characters may move at rates depending on race and Dexterity. Damage is determined by a single card draw with the option of a second. The majority of missile weapons are smoothbore gunpowder; pistols, muskets, blunderbusses, and carbines, although there is some use of short composite bows, and swivels (hand cannons). Missile weapons are differentiated by range increments, reload time, and handiness rating which contributes to initiative. If missile weapons miss critically, mishaps such as jamming, broken flints, etc can cause the weapon to be temporarily or more permanently damaged.

The magic system is based on mana, derived from perception of objects. The more people who are aware of an object or place the more likely that magical events are associated with them. As per the characteristic generation, most characters do not have access to magical skills. These magical skills represent schools of magic. Every time a character gains a level of skill, they also learn one of the specific spells within that field. Each spell within the discipline can

also be purchased separately with experience. The magical fields include Alchemy, Artificery, Astrology, Demonology, Hedge magic, Illusions, Mental Disciplines, and Necromancy. These provide utility magics of some sort; production of potions and items, divination and summoning, etc. Each of these has the aforementioned experience point cost to learn, a difficulty rating, and where appropriate, a time and materials cost, Sorcery however is a contested combat skill. Like melee combat, contests of sorcery are simulated by a card game, with its own deck. However unlike melee or missile combat, sorcery is more of a slower and calculated affair where attacks and defenses (especially defensive shields) are built up over multiple rounds.

A dice-based combat system is also used for other circumstances, such as Mass Combat and Ship Combat, however the game switches back to the card-based system for Repartee Combats. Although only a page long it is well designed, with "high" attacks representing attacks on intellectual pursuits, the "middle" referring to circumstances and appearances, whereas the "low" is innuendo.

Mittlemarch and Adventures

The gameworld of Mittlemarch is based on the civilised southern continent, with the wilds beyond that largely unknown. The major countries are the island nation of Duncruigh (kind of like England) whose royal line is half-horses, the far south and cold lands of Scarmis (Nordic countries), the passionate, devious, and proud nation of Nantierre (mais oui, les francais), the wild lands of Aurey (Ireland and Scotland), the new political organisation of the south, Forija (Russia), the proud and sometimes cruel northern nation of Alberinia (Italy and Spain), the small coastal republic of Welland (Holland) who fights off foreign and internal attempts to re-establish the royal family, and the Tantric Empire (Germany), composed of a dozen principalities and duchies. People of all the lands are at least members of the gameworld's monotheistic faith; Christianity. This gameworld variant however has no saints, no heresies, and no inquisition. Added to this is a short bestiary of mainly the standard west and central European mythic creatures (e.g., basilisk, griffin, unicorn).

A technology section points out that, like 1640s western Europe, the world has emerged from medieval technology, but in this context has the additional effect of magic. The discovery of gunpowder has led to a revolution in warfare with infantry firepower replacing cavalry shock assaults, although the cavalry is still important for movement. Siege weapons and naval weapons are described, as well as some fairly intelligent description of non-human units. Following this summary of warfare, there are descriptions of less martial daily life, music, the class system and behaviour, courtly life, town life, rural life, and life at sea. There substantial discussion on money and wealth, weights and measures, and a collection of items for sale, starting with various types of armour, then firearms, bows, artillery, melee weapons, clothing and clothing style, transport and vehicles, and various costs relating to travel.

The adventures book consists of two scenarios, 'Pressed Men', primarily for male characters of low social status, and 'Masked Ball' for courtly characters. The former, as the name indicates, involves the characters being pressed into a seaman's life and a few sample incidents that can follow on from there. In comparison the latter has some social intrigue, repartee, and the addition of gambling. Neither are typical adventures in the sense that there is a coherent implied narrative, rather the GM will need to take the setting and flesh them out into a real story. In addition to these there is a few stock incidents, such as a Fairy Market, Haunted Ruins etc, to add to the collection.

Conclusion and Evaluation

Lace and Steel is a beautifully well-presented game. The artwork is simply delicious, the choice of setting highly enjoyable and enticing. The emphasis on character interaction, style, and social conflict was especially a welcome breath of fresh air at the time. However the game is not without its flaws. There is a hefty degree of unwarranted randomness, detail, and clunky mechanics in the character generation. The task resolution system is also more difficult than it needs to be. The combat system is innovative and somewhat interesting, but could have also been simplified and at the same time expanded. Why have a dice resolution system and a card resolution system in the same game? Indeed, why have two separate sets of cards and card resolution systems? The game world is interesting enough in its own right, but does have the issue of, like so many RPGs, being basically western Europe without saying so. The inclusion of Christianity as the religion of choice was decidedly odd. Finally, the sample scenarios were a bit disappointing in the sense that they didn't have a scenario as such, but rather scenes requiring further elaboration. Despite these criticisms, Lace and Steel is certainly a worthy game for its stylistic elements alone.

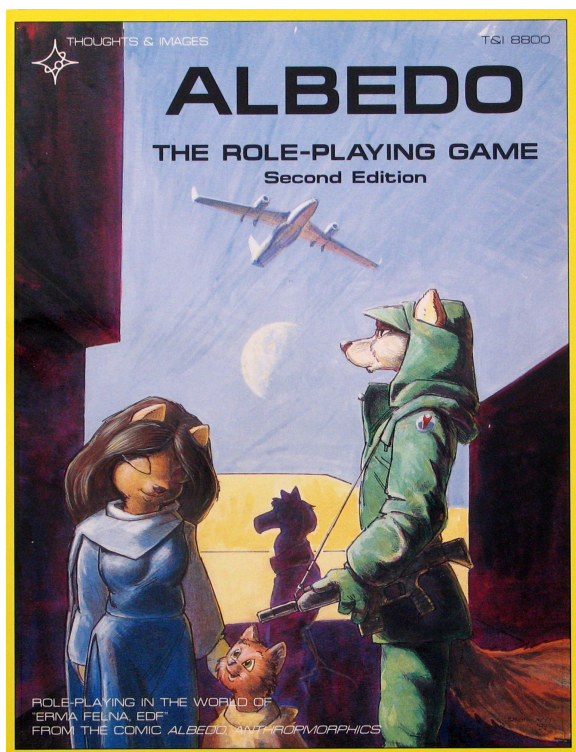
Style: 1 + .6 (layout) + 1.0 (art) + .8 (coolness) + .7 (readability) + .7 (product) = 4.8

Substance: 1 + .6 (content) + .6 (text) + .6 (fun) + .3 (workmanship) + .4 (system) = 3.5

Albedo Review (2nd edition, 1993, Craig Hilton, Paul Kidd)

Introduction and Background

Albedo describes itself as "roleplaying in the world of 'Erma Felna, EDF' from the comic 'Albedo Anthropmorphics', which basically means it's an unexpected combination between hard science fiction and the anthropomorphic animals. The well-glued softback comes in at 176 pages, in a larger sans-serif font with two-column justified layout. The usually-in-context artwork, by Steven Gallacci (also responsible for the comic), varies significantly in detail, clarity, and execution. The colour cover art is certainly nothing to be excited about either. The book games with a single-page table of contents, a five page index, and several pages of game aids. The writing style is formal and dry throughout, and can be a little heavy going. The seven main chapters, following the obligatory forward and introduction (including a handy set of definitions for the game) are as follows; Character Generation, Playing The Game, Combat, Equipment, Background History, Star Systems, and Tashtan Station (an adventure). The organisation of the text leaves a lot to be desired.



At the end of the Introduction the authors inform us, in all-caps no less, that it is essential that all players and umpires (that's their GM title) must be familiar with the setting background prior to character generation. Perhaps it would have made sense then to make that the next chapter? Temporarily jumping ahead then, the backstory is pretty much thus; two hundred years ago approximately one hundred and sixty three species (they're called 'races') of animals had a Great Awakening and discovered that they were smart and surrounded by technology. The currently theory is someone put them there. With the development of jump drive technology a two-hundred or so light year colonisation begin, hampered by a war between the Independent Lapine Republic and ConFed (everyone else), which has just become hot again. The bunnies are the bad guys!

What follows is several pages of general societal notes between ConFed and the ILR, with some concentration on the former. In terms of general economy the advanced older colonies have liberal-socialist regimes, whereas the outer-colonies, where infrastructure is low and the money motive high, have a more more laissez-faire approach. Albedo society, being only two hundred effective years old, does not have a strong sense of traditional values. Nevertheless, they do have expectations of active citizenry with responsibilities.

There are notions among some of a Creator Myth, there is linguistic diversity but a 'standard' language, an octal numbering system, and an attachment to martial arts as leisure. In terms of technology, the most significant features include advanced biosciences and health and, interstellar travel with fusion and jump-drives.

Character Generation and Playing The Game

Character generation begins with selecting a species. The various species are 'fingered' (typically three fingers and a thumb), although those descended from hooved animals are somewhat clumsier. The species are divided into broad groups (e.g., Avians, Marsupials, Mustelidae) and subcategories to generate lettered characteristic ranges. Characteristics consist of Strength, Stamina, Manual Dexterity, Coordination, Reason, Intuition, Drive, and (Mental) Stability. These are then cross-referenced on a table, that defies functional arithmetic, for point-cost values. All species start with the same Reason, Intuition, and Drive base range. There is also a number of derived characteristics as well,

including Recoil, Actions per Turn, Initiative, Fatigue, SPI (general intelligence), and Self-Image.

Character disposition is randomly determined, for core and inclination; if they same number is rolled the character has a mental disorder instead, an extreme version of the core disposition (e.g., cautious becomes paranoid). Characters begin with some core and background skills, then can select from a range of social and movement and perception skills. Those from the armed forces also receive Coolness Under Fire. All of this is prior to upgrading skills and expertises related to the chosen career. Each skill has a governing characteristic which determines base levels, plus bonus skill levels can be acquired to indicate Adept or Master level, which provide significant very coarse-grained bonuses to resolution.

Like much of the game, the core resolution system is a chart-based innovation. The Umpire decides which characteristic or skill is applicable and what it is being contested against, adds the appropriate value, subtracts the difficulty, includes any modifiers (there can be many), rolls 2d6 and attempts to roll under the success number, with graduation in success or failure grades. In addition to this resolution methods, there's also a number less variable modifications for particular characteristics and skills, such as adding and subtracting Self Image points, the effects of encumbrance and fatigue (it is possible to be killed through Fatigue loss, but it's improbable given you'll fall unconscious first).

Combat and Equipment

Combat is carried out in five phases of a three to five second turn, with the number of actions per turn determining which phase a character can act (very similar to the Hero System). In cases of ties, a non-random initiative is determined. A variety of actions is summarised (move, aim, shoot, etc), with missile combat carried out as a contested test between the character's skill and the range (or versus skill or characteristic for melee combat maneuvers), plus various modifiers such as automatic fire. Damage occurs after hit and location is determined (a second specific location roll for head shots) and when a the modified penetration value of the weapon is greater than the penetration resistance of the armour.

Armour is pretty tough, usually a couple of successes is needed to penetrate flak, for example. If armour is not penetrated however, damage still occurs. A modified 2d6 roll is made against a column damage chart with the armour's impact resistance shifting the damage column from the most dangerous (high velocity penetrating weapons) down to less dangerous (impact weapons). The results of this chart determine specific types of wounds (graze, light, massive, serious, and catastrophic) and effects (stun, tumble, knock-out, knock-down, fatigue loss, blood loss, characteristic loss).

Situated somewhat strangely between missile and melee combat are the rules for vehicular and starship combat. In the former, a key difference is that shot difficulty is not based on range, but on the opponent's driving skill. Damage is resolved in the usual way, except there is an interpretation of wound levels to vehicular damage with damage to the vehicle's sturdiness. For space combat, initiative determination is based on a random roll plus pilot skill. Depending on whether the ships are involved in rapidly converging vectors ("pass") or minimal vector difference ("encounter") there will be an exchange of ordance, followed by beam weapons fire.

The equipment list and description takes up about of a quarter of the book. As should be expected by now, it has a very significant military bias. This said, it does cover civilian clothing, food and lodging, travel costs, computers (with optical storage, one million pages per disc!), medical equipment, tools, armour, robots, sensors, vehicles, weapons, grenades, guns, heavy weapons, and melee weapons.

Settings and Adventure

Aside from the previously mentioned Background chapter, Albedo also provides for world generation given that there has been two hundred years of interstellar travel. Unlike many SF games this does not really bother itself a great deal with the physical environment (a single 'environment' roll is provided), but much more so with the social, concentrating on a range of random rolls for economic infrastructure, political system, legal system, and cultural factors such as family life. Each of the randomly determined features is described in more detail in the actual text, a couple of paragraphs for each criteria.

The final chapter of the book is a short adventure, Tashtan Station, which involves a murder mystery on a spacestation with potentially explosive consequences, given the diplomatic issues that are stake. The setting and characterisation are

the strong points of this story, but the scenario itself does give plenty of opportunities for the players to familiarise themselves with the setting and system, which means that as an introduction it is certainly good enough.

Conclusion

Albedo is a strange game; it really takes some getting used to the idea of a hard militaristic simulationist science fiction game with furry anthromorphics. There is a lot of glorious crunchy detail here, with an innovative core system that is not exactly optimal in design and applied quite haphazardly. The strength is really in the setting, not in the anthromorphics, although their great variation does make character generation and characterisation interesting (our actual play team of archetypical Australian animals was good fun). Where the game falls short is on the organisation of the text and artwork, the actual physical product itself (cheap paper), and a game system that is not entirely easy-to-use or intuitive. Nevertheless enjoyable, Albedo has established a strange niche in the story of roleplaying games which it will uniquely hold.

Style: 1 .3 (layout) .3 (art) .6 (coolness) .4 (readability) .4 (product) = 3.0

Substance: 1 .7 (content) .7 (text) .5 (fun) .4 (workmanship) .4 (system) = 3.7

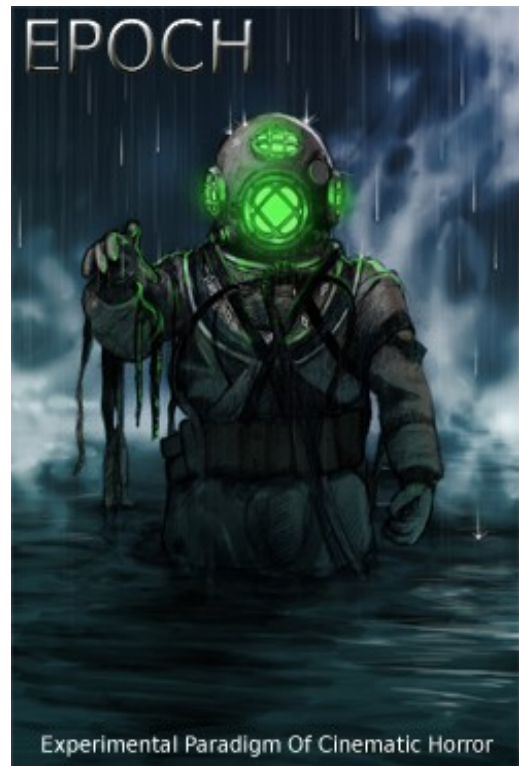
Originally published on

<https://www.rpg.net/reviews/archive/15/15946.phtml>

EPOCH Review (Dale Elvy, 2012)

Introduction and Product

EPOCH (Experimental Paradigm of Cinematic Horror) is a new style RPG from New Zealand which seeks to incorporate the cinematic elements of tension and fear within a storytelling game framework that incorporates player investment in the characters. As a physical product, it comes as a A5 softbound book of some 148 pages (about 100 pages of rules and the rest cards used in play). The colour cover art is attractive and evocative, as is in the internal black and white artwork, although it must be noted that it is usually without context and there isn't much of it. The game uses a lot of white space and a two-column justified sans-serif font. There is a detailed table of contents, but no index. Pages are clearly numbered, although without chapter detail. The writing style is rather heavy-going. Concepts are introduced with some clarity, albeit verbosely, but the implementation detail takes a lot more effort due to some poor organisation of the text. There is effectively three sections to the book; rules (about the first forty pages), and three scenarios (around sixty-five pages).



Game System

The EPOCH game system is broken up into "Bone, Muscle, and Skin". "Bone" is the underlying framework, a method for running the game which includes the core principles. The "Muscle" is the player-centric (note: not character-centric) mechanics which invites their engagement and participation in the story construction. The "Skin" provides additional colour for the results that are generated (which includes a popular, but false, misconception about 'learning styles'). The core proposition of the game is to "create an environment where the players manufacture their own beliefs to create an atmosphere of tension and suspense". It seeks to achieve this by maximising player investment in the character then forcing the player to make "terrible choices" about the character.

It sounds good in theory, but how does it work in practise? The "Bone" section illustrates how the game must have player buy-in that they are engaging in narrative construction, and "blocking" by the players (actions which break the

narrative construction and immersion) is explicitly rejected. Each scenario consists of several Tension Phases which progressively increase in dramatic quality. Character elaboration and development occurs within these Tension Phases, through both their interaction with the environment and with other characters.

The "Muscle" section elaborates these principles. The character creation process consists of establishing what sort of group the characters are; Colleagues, Friends, Famil, or Strangers. For the first three each character receives a Relationship card and may write down a Secret card. For Strangers, the characters receive a Circumstance card and Occupation card. Each character is also randomly dealt one Trait card and one Strength/Weakness card, which are kept secret by the players unless revealed by the character during the game. Because apparently you don't know your best friend's strengths or weaknesses. They also receive set of four Outcome cards (3 physical/mental outcomes and 1 Hero/Zero card).

In each Tension Phase, the players develop their characters by interaction and exploring the horror in a narrative fashion with interaction between the player and the GM. At the end of each Tension Phase the players are confronted with a challenge (the Challenge Round) which they respond to with an Outcome card, having been given four at the start of the game. The Hero/Zero (selfless and selfish acts) cards can be played on other characters, and alters how Outcome cards are applied. If a player runs out of Outcome cards for their character, the character is killed or driven insane.

Once the Challenge Round has been resolved the players and GM anonymously vote using first-past-the-post (the worst voting method in this situation) for the most interesting character in the Tension phase, who can recover one of their Outcome cards. You can't vote for yourself. Because there is typically six Tension phases and only four Outcome cards it is necessary to recover Outcome cards to survive. Non-winning characters receive a Flashback card, and optionally a Complication card to provide a narrative device in future rounds. At the end of the game surviving characters have the opportunity to narrate an epilogue derived from their points on the Horror Track. This awards characters points for their progress (discovering clues, NPC interactions, finding specific items etc), and the number of points accumulated determines the degree of success.



Scenarios and Game Support

There are three fully-developed scenarios in EPOCH, "Fever Pitch", "Sunshine Falls", and "Price Slash". Each of these use the recommended six Tension Phases. The first is an open sandbox (constrained location, but the GM sets the location) that involves the spread of a rather nasty virus. Following the recommended narrative trajectory of the game, Tension Phases consist of a build up, a climax, and a Challenge round. An interesting aspect of this particular scenario is that apart from the opening phase, all other Tension Phases can be introduced as required and resulting from the actions of the characters. The main disadvantage of this of course, is that the sense of increasing build up between Phases is non-linear and the GM will have to work their descriptive abilities to create a satisfying conclusion.

The same applies for the second scenario, "Sunshine Falls", where a series of small town murders have resulted in some vengeful dead. There are some fixed contact points within the scenario but also a great deal of flexibility but within some constraints - in this case a rather weird opening Phase and a rather impressive concluding one. Again the typical Tension Phase has a sequence of build up, climax, and Challenge. Finally, the third scenario, "Price Slash", is a

supernatural teen-slasher horror scenario based on the opening of a new mall. What could possibly go wrong? This scenario, despite the physical constraints of the scenario, is not recommended for beginner players because of the heightened possibility of PC-vs-PC conflict.

The core rulebook only comes with sample Outcome cards for reference. The actual card collection is provided as a separate PDF file, which is fair enough, as they would have been at a prohibitive cost if actually printed. What is less encouraging is the relatively minimal range of these cards. There is only several each of the Group Relationships, Strangers cards, Traits. There is only three levels of physical and mental wounds (light, moderate, serious). It is only a matter of time before players start drawing the same cards ("oh, looks like I'm the Rival - again"), which breaks the immersive quality.

Conclusion

EPOCH is a well-designed game, and fairly well produced. However there is a certain lack of flexibility and scope in the game system from character generation, to action, to setting. The game system is narrative-exclusive, which means there it is, by design, lacking in scope for expanding the single-shot scenarios into an ongoing "campaign". Curiously for a largely narrativist game, the chargen system is entirely random with no option provided for player buy-in from the start, a rather unusual straight-jacket and with no good reason as a design feature.

Finally, the scenarios are entirely contemporary, which is rather odd choice. The game system could, in principle, be expanded to include medieval horror or science fiction horror, which would make a nice change of pace and an opportunity for some new example character cards - and which would have fitted the evocative cover which is more suited to a pre-WWII setting. Further, there is a lot of positive things that can be said about the style of the game, and the way it works in actual play. This happens however almost in spite of the presentation of the actual text and its organisation.

Overall there is a lot of good ideas in EPOCH, and it is certainly excellent for a few single sessions, which is what the game is designed for. As presented cannot go much beyond that, despite the evident opportunity to do so (e.g., expansion of various abilities). Some further elaborations and some additional flexibility would raise this from a good game to a great game and should have been included originally.

Style: 1 + .4 (layout) + .4 (art) + .8 (coolness) + .4 (readability) + .7 (product) = 3.7

Substance: 1 + .3 (content) + .4 (text) + .7 (fun) + .4 (workmanship) + .5 (system) = 3.3

Sol Review (Phil Day, 2014)

Introduction and Product

A strange purchase in the discount bin at a FLGS was "Sol", published some two years prior in my hometown and even with its own website (at least for a while, <http://soltabletoprpg.com>) after a successful Kickstarter campaign. The format is unusual but not entirely unpleasant; an A6 (yes, you read that right) thick booklet, 185 solid gloss 113gsm pages with tight binding and a fold-out back cover to include an A5 character sheet and major tables which doesn't quite line up properly with the rest of the book. It's quite a solid and neat publication.

There is a three page table of contents, no index, but a five page glossary (it needs it). The writing style is extremely formal. The black-and-white artwork is evocative, quite skilled and contextual. The book is broken up into seven main colour-coded chapters; Protagonist, Supernatural, Tasks, Combat, Solian Society, Hidden Folk, Umbra, and a short Adjudicator chapter.

Sol is pretty much a standard style RPG game but set in a rather exotic world with a alien culture. The people are humanoid, with a technological level of development which varies between axial age civilisation and early modern. The society is strictly organised, pretty much theocratic in its approach to the social behaviour, and with quite a collection of punishments that we liberal moderns would consider downright "cruel and unusual". It satisfies the title of "fantasy" with the inclusion of magic and the supernatural.

Sol

A single chart with six grades
+ three six sided dice
= every possible task.

Less rolling, more role-playing.

DAR	1-3 U	4-6 A	7-9 B	10-12 C	13-16 D	16-18 E
TM	03	-6	-4	-	1	2

☰ ☱ ☲



Character Generation and Tasks

Protagonists have four attributes, Cognition, Dexterity, Strength, and Health determined from 2d6 and allocated by player's choice. Character Types (read: class) has a range of non-adventurer professions but a handful which make up a "palm", or party; Sister (healer, leader), Deem (fighter, melee weapons), Galdr (mage), and Master Ballistic (fighter, ranged weapons). Character types are limited according to race and gender, although player characters types are limited to the Kota and Minia races. Of particular additional note are the Epistemologists, the educated ruling class.

Spellcasters in Sol can summon the souls of the dead, exchange memories and skills, and house them in items. Various magics

(curative, psychokinesis, and telethesia) are performed by cantations. The provided spell list is short but are notable in the notable in their temporary cost in Cognition. Effectively spellcasters become more stupid when they use magic - but it recovers ever six hours of rest.

Tasks are tested against Attributes (no fine-grained skill system) against six grades of difficulties which generate inconsistent linear modifiers to a 3d6 under Attribute test roll. A successful skill roll also comes with a chance of Amelioration, which increases the Attribute by 0.5 - a sort of rapid experience point system. Spellcasting is also a type of task with the same sort of difficulty grades for cantations and conveyances.

The combat system operates in an initiative order determined by Cognition plus Dexterity, and task checks for ranged and melee attacks, and damage based on weapon modified by Strength (again inconsistent non-linear) for the latter, or thrown weapons. The weapon list is impressively short - only six melee and missile weapons and five types of grenades. Rifles and pistols (4d damage) are extremely powerful. Armour (leather or shield) reduces damage by a minimal (2 AP, 1 AP) amount.

Sol Society

Sol City is the principal location of the game world, of some 35,000 people with no currency system, operating on reputation for individual benefits and collective wealth in general. With the objective existence of souls, many of those in Sol are vegetarians and animals are not kept as beats of labour or as pets. There is stringent requirements on legal relationships between the different races as part of a complex legal and theological system. Several major characters and institutions are described in some detail, including the "Children of Umbra", those who have engaged in illegal relationships, use contraband, etc. There is a brief description of the world in astronomical terms - a fixed face planet with a relative small region that is the "Threshold" which allows for habitation.

Outside of Sol are the Hidden Folk who are pretty much treated as wicked, strange, and monstrous barbarians. They vary enormously in their physical characteristics, with some being half-sized to the people of Sol, and others being twice their size and more. Each have their own exotic weapons, magic, culture and so forth. A person favourite is the five metre high furred Broose who speak a simple language and, despite their size, sleep in trees.

Beyond the Hidden Folk as those of the Umbra, a specific natural region enclosed in darkness but still habitable. This includes quite a range of exotic natural animals, such as giant moose, giant bats, giant turtles and the like. Along with these there is a two intelligent species with one particularly prone to mutations, and true monsters such the leviathan, a 90m long giant worm, and the draconic Serpent.

Conclusion

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Sol is a curious game to say the least, not only in format and presentation, but also in content. The straight-jacket of the game system with its extremely highly limited options actually fits the gameworld and whilst it does make character generation simple, it also provides - once players have explored much of the alien culture - a narrative reason to break out of the strict cultural mores.

The alien world and culture comes with a language which may be off-putting. For example, early in the book one reads: "A PYOTR boy has received his ASSAY, and is now a DEEM. What the new DEEM does not know is that the MORESE of the DRONE have fought many BURR." Translated, it means a young fighter has received a magic sword with a embodied soul that has fought a particular monster. To say the least, it takes some getting used to.

All this said however, this is a very dense book that does include a complete RPG albeit one that is fairly simple. It will require work and elaboration of a GM is going to run it for any length of time. But such elaborations, as the setting suggests, would be extremely worthwhile. I rather wished it had a beginner's scenario included. Still, it is certainly welcome and strange addition to the RPG world.

Style: 1 + .4 (layout) + .6 (art) + .7 (coolness) + .5 (readability) + .6 (product) = 3.8

Substance: 1 + .4 (content) + .9 (text) + .6 (fun) + .3 (workmanship) + .5 (system) = 3.7

Hunter Planet Rules and Equipment Revision

by Lev Lafayette

There are, of course, very few rules in Hunter Planet. It is a mostly rules-light game that concentrates mainly on the dynamic verbal delivery of humour and wit, and that's as it should be. However, those principles can be kept in the game whilst at the same time expanding the current ruleset and making them more consistent with each other and with the design orientation of the game itself.

To be fair, the game doesn't delve deeply in those theoretical expositions such as "System Is Important". It's primarily a setting and story driven game, and the rules have been added mainly to provide some sense of structure, and almost as an afterthought. In the spirit of the original game however, and indeed as an endorsement of this set of new rules, we reiterate from the very beginning, Rule #1.

Rules

Rule #1: The following rules are a guide rather than a set of laws of of the Hunter Planet RPG. If the CM doesn't like them, the CM doesn't need to use them.

Rule #2: Players in the game are alien Hunters from the Federation of Planets. Hunters are aliens civilians who, as part of a weekend holiday, have come to hunt slightly intelligent and slightly cunning members of the native species on the planet Dirt. Seriously, you'll be fine, you're smarter than them and have better weapons. What could possibly go wrong?

Rule #3: Choose your character's name (or other unique product identifier), species, and, if applicable, sex. Not that the later should matter, we're not playing Legend of the Overfiend RPG (ooh, look retro 1980s reference). Choose your character's civilian occupation .

Rule #4: Roll a d10 six times. Allocate to your characteristics as desired: Strength (STR), Dexterity (DEX), Charisma (CHA), Intelligence (INT), Constitution (CON), General Knowledge (GEK). Differering from the old rules, there's no need for a reroll, includes old random dynamic, and gives the player the narrative buy-in to build the character, or to

play straight-down-the-line worshipping the Fates as they land, and both without compromising the aggregate randomness of the chargen system.

Rule #5: Pick three special skills or knowledges related to your occupation. You may be astounded to discover that these are called Occupational Skills, You CM will assign a related characteristic to those skills. Your characteristic times ten will be your base chance with these skills. These are what you do for a day job. Remember, Hunters are civilians so civilian skills only.

Rule #6: There is no rule 6. And if you believe that, all the natives on Dirt are named Bruce and none of them are homosexual. Really. OK, maybe a little after a few beers at summer camp.

Rule #7: Roll d6 for Luck. This will be rerolled each Hunt. Each time you think that the results of a die roll are unlucky during a Hunt, you can spend a point of Luck and reroll again. If you still don't like it, you can spend another Luck point and roll again, and so on. You will find that you use this a lot. "Is this the dump stat?"

Rule #8: Starting hit points are equal to your Constitution. Big rule change here, with the introduction of a *derived* characteristic. Oooh! A character reduced to 0 hit points is unconscious, and a character at negative hit points is dead. A character has suffered five times their hit points is either paste, minced, in lots of small pieces, or a charred column of carbon, depending on how they suffered their fate. You'll see this a lot.

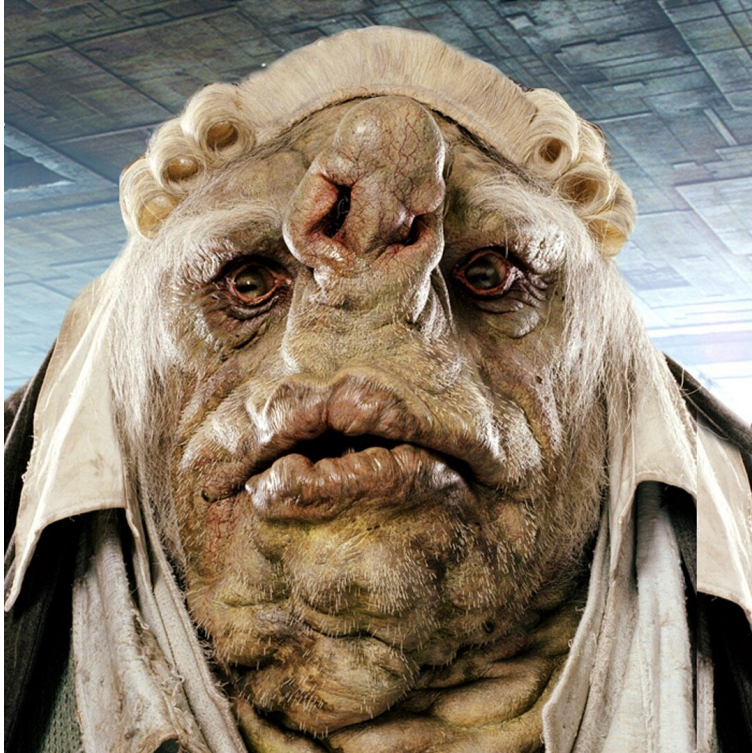
Rule #9: Speaking of derived characteristics, the sum of Strength (stride) and Dexterity (speed) is your character's GTFOH rating if they want to Get The Fxxx Out of Here, in metres per Action. A character's carrying capacity, or ENC (you know what this stands for), is equal to the sum of their Strength and Constitution in Things, if a Hunter starts to get silly in how much they're trying to carry around. When the character is at half their Things rating their GTFOH and dodge is also halved. The Federation of Planets recommends that you travel light when on a Hunt, just in case you get eaten by a Grue. See Equipment. Yes, this is also a change from the original rules too. "Even the starting equipment rules? Have you no shame?!"

Rule #10: All Hunters start their hunt with a choice of fine equipment. They may choose one main weapon and two secondary weapons. They may also choose up to five utility items, provided by Hunting Tours Incorporated. Hunting Tools Incorporated will also provide a Communicator, which not only allows you to contact the orbiting tour ship to be beamed up, it also translates the refined speech of the Federation to the gibberish of the natives of Dirt and vice-verse.

Rule #11: Actions occur in turns. The order of actions depends on whether the character is trying to do a physical action (Dexterity), a mental action (Intelligence), or a social action (Charisma is not a dump stat!). The period of time in a turn is a hand-wavy abstract period of time, but around 5 seconds. In case of a tie, both actions occur at the same time, because that's always entertaining. In each turn you can get to do two things from the following; attack, dodge, move (GTFOH), use an Occupational Skill, or engage in a characteristic-based action (see Rule #13 for examples). Yes, of course you can do the same thing twice.

Example: The CM counts down in a booming and ominous voice from 10 to 1, and enthusiastic characters will leap to action at the appropriate point of the count and of their characteristic. So if a character wishes to attack and move they will announce this on their DEX. If a character wishes to use to make a General Knowledge check and attack ("Say, is that salivating beast going to eat us?"), they can act on their INT and their DEX. If their DEX is higher than their INT however, they must hold their DEX action until the count reaches their INT.

Rule #12: A Hunter's base chance of succeeding at an action is their Characteristic or their special skill. Yes, you roll d10 and try to get equal or lower to that number. If it is a characteristic-based activity, like lifting heavy shit, then just roll against the Characteristic. If it is something that requires training, like operating a computer, and the character does not have an occupational skills then roll against the appropriate characteristic (often General Knowledge, also not a dump stat) but with a -3 modifier. What do you mean you only have a General Knowledge of 3? OK, clearly you didn't finish junior high school and then spent your time in unskilled labour.



Rule #13: As a hunting game the most common actions for both Hunters and Humans include noticing things, hiding from things, shooting things, hitting things, dodging things, and bulldusting (whether to natives or members of the Federation of Planets). All of these are untrained, characteristic-based actions. Noticing things is based on a character's Constitution times ten; a general level of perception is based on a general level of health. Hiding from things and is a weird one; it's 10 minus the character's Strength. Dodging things the same, except based on the twice the DEX of the character, rather than a flat score of 10. The bigger you are, the harder it is to hide or dodge! Shooting things has a base chance of Dexterity and hitting things is based on Strength. Bulldusting to others is Charisma.

Example: Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz has Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Charisma 2, Intelligence 7, Constitution 7, and General Knowledge 6. His base chance of noticing things is 7 or less, shooting things is 4 or less, and hitting things is 8 or less. To hide from things (which including sneaking up on

them) his base chance is $(10-8)*10 = 2$ or less. To dodge things his base chance is $(4+4)-8 = 0$. Being a great lummoX, he is not good at hiding, and really bad at dodging. He's not good at bulldusting either with a mere 2 or less chance, the propensity to engage in poetry is a contributing factor.

Rule #14: The base chance can be modified depending on the circumstances ("Praise be! I thought my STR 10 character would never be able to hide!"). Simply apply a bonus or penalty as needed. The range of modifiers should be from around -6 to +6, with every 3 change represent twice or four times as easy or as hard as a base difficulty. For example, shooting a laser pistol at four times the base range, would be -6, whereas hiding in the middle of the night with plenty of cover whilst there's a thunderstorm will be at +6. Even a Vogon could do that.

Rule #15: The base chance can be modified by how entertaining the character is in their exposition of their action. For example, a boring player who simply describes what they will do will received a -10% modifier to their chance of success. A very boring player could even get up to -30% chance. An interesting player who stays in character and personality traits might get an additional +10%. A player who dresses as their alien character would gain +10% also. A player who engages in melodramatic acting could receive +20% or -20% depending on the quality etc. Fate will smile on the dramatic and entertaining and sneer at the prosaic and dull, so don't be boring.

Rule #16: The degree of success and of failure will give the CM a pleasant range of narrative elaboration. The greater the success from the modified chance to succeed, the greater the success. The greater the failure from the modified chance to succeed, the worse the failure. A '01' or '10' result is especially interesting. Let the player describe the glorious successes when they roll a '01', and the CM will evoke their misery when they roll a '10'.

Rule #17: Damage from guns, explosives etc. is based on EUs, or "energy units", where each "Energy Unit" does 1d10 damage. Projectile weapons (i.e., bullets) also do 1d10 damage. A standard melee attack with no weapons (e.g., a punch, kick, head-butt, throttle, eye-gouge etc) does damage equal to a quarter the attacker's STR, damage standard hand-held weapon (dagger, hand-axe etc) does equal to half the character's STR, and damage from combat weapons (e.g., spear, sword) and bows does damage equal to the character's STR. In a game where a character only has an average of 5-6 hit points, you best not get shot, stabbed, flamed, or bludgeoned. The Federation of Planets advises that armour is helpful, along with being small and quick. See also Rule #7.

Rule #17.1 Oh, OK if you don't like rolling for damage just assign 5 points instead of a d10. CM's call.

Equipment

Main Weapons

All main and secondary weapons are described in terms of range, ammunition, Things, and description. The range given is "base range", with a bonus or penalty at two times, four times, half or quarter range. The base range follows Rule 14. For example, a Laser Pistol would at +3 at 10m or less and a beautiful +6 at 5m or less. Likewise it would be at -3 at 40m and -6 at 80m. Beyond that, you'll need the generosity of the CM. Actually scratch that, you'll always need the generosity of the CM (see Rule #6). In addition, beyond their base range projectile weapons do half damage.

The value in Things is described in Rule #9.

Assault Rifle, 50m, 2 clips of 10 bullets each, 2 Things. An alternative main weapon popular among Hunters who consider themselves to militarily orientated, the assault rifle does have a shorter base range to the laser rifle, but is also capable of burst fire. Each additional bullet in a burst provides a +1 chance to hit at a single target, and causes an additional hit for every +1 success. In addition, multiple targets can be attacked with an assault rifle in burst fire mode with a distribution as desired and bonuses as described, although with a bullet "wasted" for every 5m gap between targets.

Example: Bear X is armed with an assault rifle is sees three natives of Dirt rapidly approaching with pistols, seeking to cause grievous harm to the Bear. The CM describes the natives as being around 30m away with each separated by about 5m. Bear X responds opening up a burst attack against the incoming natives, with ten bullets. Native one is attacked with 2 bullets (+2), native two with 3 (+3), and native three with 3 (+3). A bullet is wasted between the gap of native one and two, and two and three. Bear X has a base skill of 7 or less, resulting in modified skills of 9, 10, and 10 and rolls 4, 8, and 2. Two out of two bullets hit Native One, one bullet out of three hits Native Two, and three out of three bullets hits Native Three. After damage is rolled, all three Natives fall to the ground.

"I always keep a clip of projectile ammunition under my hat, just in case!", exclaims the Bear.

Laser Rifle, 100m, 2 clips of 10 EU each, 2 Things. A standard and popular main weapon among Hunters, the Laser Rifle has an effective range and can cause as many EUs as the Hunter declares on firing, up to the size of the clip, against a single target.

Shotgun, 10m, 10 "clips" of 2 bullets, 2 Things. The premier short-range weapon for Hunters who like see the look of fear in the eyes of their deer, the shotgun has the special ability of causing double damage at half range and but has its damage quartered at double range and beyond. It can fire one or two barrels simultaneously. Shotgun bullets are not interchangeable with other projectile clips.

Rifle, 100m, 2 clips of 10 bullets, 2 Things. A standard single-shot long-range weapon for Hunters.

Sniper Rifle, 500m, 2 clips of 10 bullets, 3 Things. The premier long-range weapon for Hunters, the sniper rifle is a large and heavy single shot projectile weapon whose range is enhanced with telescoping sights.

Submachine Gun, 20m, 2 clips of 10 bullets each, 1 Thing. Like a hybrid of a pistol and an assault rifle, the sub-machine gun is small and has a limited range (like a pistol), but also has the capability of burst fire (like an assault rifle). It is favoured among Hunters that like to take out several nearby targets rapidly.

Secondary Weapons

Crossbow, 20m, 2 clips of 10 bolts, 2 Things. A curious choice of secondary weapon that at does have the advantage of silence which is useful when wanting to let something loose that is "silent but deadly".

Laser Pistol, 20m, 2 clips of 10 EU each, 1 Thing. A standard side-arm among many a Hunter, the Laser Pistol can use

as many EUs as the Hunter declares on firing, up to the size of the clip.

Projectile Pistol, 30m, 2 clips of 10 bullets, 1 Thing. An old-school side-arm weapon which some classical Hunters swear by on account of its superior range.

Light Sword, 2 clips of 20 EU, 1 Thing. For Hunters who think very highly of their swordsmanship and come from a galaxy far, far, away, the Light Sword is the weapon of the true master of midi-chlorians, and especially those who engage in melee combat. Each round a Light Sword will use up 1 EU, regardless, but if it hits it will do 1d10 damage. When used to parry (as a dodge action) it provides a bonus of +2 to the check. If it is used to parry (through a dodge action) it will damage the attacking weapon. As a rule item a metal item 1 Thing has 5 hit points, and an item with 2 Things has 10 etc, and wooden item half that value.

Knife or Hand Axe, STR range in meters, 1 Thing. By knife what is meant here is a hunting knife, designed for Hunters! It's a pretty solid piece of equipment, indeed as big as a hand axe, which is why both can be mentioned at the same time. These are often selected by smart Hunters who value their utility in non-combat situations. When thrown, a miss is redirected by 1m per 1 over the targeted value.

Sword or Spear, 3*STR range in meters (spear), or 5 when preceded by a GTFOH action, 2 Things. A rare choice of Hunters, these weapons are sometimes a matter of necessity. The spear comes with the advantage of being a ranged weapon, and the disadvantage of not being a sturdy (see Light Sword for such effects). Both are adaptable and have a bonus of +2 when used to parry (as a dodge action). When a spear is thrown, a miss is redirected by 3m per 1 over the targeted value, or 5m per 1 when preceded by a GTFOH action.

Grenades

All grenades are hand-held devices, with a base thrown range of 3*STR in meters, with additional effects on a direct hit. When a grenade is thrown, a miss is redirected by 3m per 1 over the targeted value. Five grenades is the equivalent of 1 Thing and as a secondary weapon.

Concussion and Fragmentation, 5m blast radius. A successful hit from a Stun grenade will render the unfortunate victim 'stunned' for a number of rounds equal to 10-CON rounds from a direct hit and half that if in the blast radius. If there is appropriate objects around, these can result in fragments, causing 2d10 damage to a direct hit and 1d10 in the blast radius. Fragmentation grenades are designed to increase these results to 3d10 for a direct hit and 2d10 for within the blast radius. Ouch.

Smoke, 5m blast radius. A successful hit from a smoke grenade will cover the blast radius area in a thick smoke, reducing perception in and out and any laser fire by -30%, and -60% for the location of the direct hit. These values are reduced by 10% per round every round under light wind, and half that if indoors or with no wind. This is the only grenade that characters sometimes drop at their feet deliberately.

Tangle, 5m blast radius. The high-tech sticky strands encapsulated in this little egg lead a character being immobilised for 10-STR rounds if struck, or half that if in the blast radius.

Flash-Bang, 10m blast radius. A flash-bag goes flash (very brightly) and bang (very loudly). This is rather disruptive to those who experience it, leading to the same stunning effects as Concussion grenade, as above, but with an additional blast radius as noted. Make sure you look away after throwing this.

Basic Equipment

Anti Gravity Belt, 1 Thing. "Look mum, I'm flying". An wonder of Federation of Planet's technology, an Anti-Gravity belt, when activated, allows you to fly! Characters can move at an amazing rate of 20m per move Action; real quick! The belt provides 5 hours of sustained use, don't forget to keep track when going on high and long-distance flights.

Armour, 2-7 Things. Reduces projectile and melee attacks with an effectiveness according to thickness of the armour. Reduces 1, 2, or 3d10 of melee or projectile damage (+1, +2, or +3 Things respectively) to a single point depending on thickness, and comes in three sizes, small (+1 thing), medium (+2 Things), and large (+3 Things), and extral large (+4

Things) depending on the size of the character (STR 1-3 is S, STR 4-6 is M, STR 7-9 is L, STR 10-12 is XL).

Atmosphere Mask, 1 Thing. An Atmosphere Mask allows the Hunter to breathe in a variety of toxic environments and even underwater. It will last for 10 hours of sustained use.

Backpack, 1 Thing. A waterproof bag with lots of pockets for small items, and plenty of space. Can hold 8 Things, and due the marvel of load balancing, can even increase a character's ability to carry Things by an additoinal 1/4 of their ENC! Don't go hunting without one. Oh and don't lose it. Hunters are always losing their backpacks.

Communicator. A wonder of modern FOP technology, a communicator allows communication between all characters who also have communicators, translates all languages within the Federation of Planets and even the gibberish of the Natives of Dirt, along with Maps of the Hunting areas as well as an impressive handheld computer. Even plays music. Brilliant! Also suffers the occasional problem of losing radio contact, especially when it was most important. "Hey guys, can you beam me up now?! Umm... guys, are you there? Help?!"

Concentrated Food, 10 meals for 1 Thing. The ultimate in Hunter rations, Concentrated Food is a completely nutritious flavoured square block that acts as meal replacement. Delicious!

Danger Glasses. Effective glasses with a short wave neurological link to the Hunter, it goes completely dark when they are in a state of fear, thus providing an additional level of cool. Also reacts automatically to sudden changes to light, providing immunity to Flash-Bang grenades.

Dehydrated Water. Just add water for a nutritious drink. Actually it is nutritious, it's not bad at all. In a pinch it could be used as a meal replacement. But you need to add water.

Door Charges, 5 charges for 1 Thing. Who has time to pick locks, or even force open heavy locked doors? With Door Charges you can simply blow the lock off! A powerful shaped charge has a limited range and specific direction and is good for destroying locks or otherwise puncting a hell of a hole into an object. If you insist on attaching it to living creature it will do 4d10 damage.

First Aid Kit, 1 Thing. Various salves, bandages, slings and the sort, ten in total, all good for healing 1 hit of damage each. Not much right? Ahh, yes, but they also contain three wonderful pills (red, white, blue, "these colours don't run") which heal 1d10 of damage. However the Surgeon-General of the Federation of Planets notes that these have unintentional temporary side effects (typically lasting the duration of the Hunt), the red pill causing physical side effects, the blue social side effects, and the white mental side effects. The side effects are "interesting" (left leg grows 10cm, awful Tourette's syndrome manifests, paranoia develops). The game effect is -3 points to a characteristic to determined by the CM.

Life Detector, 1 Thing. Hand-held device which detects life of STR 1 or more at 200m or less. Capable of 5 hours of sustained use. After an epic hunt failure on LV-426, the Federation of Planets in its wisdom upgraded these devices two provide a 3D directional scan, rather than 2D.

Radiation Detector, 1 Thing. Heft-hand held device that provides a 100m range detection of radiation levels. Quite handy if the Hunt involves in going into radioactive areas, real or imagined.

Reflec Armour, 1 Things. Lightweight silver body jumpsuit which is the epitome of fashion and comfort. Reduces damage received by 5 for laser weapons and reflects the rest elsewhere in a random direction - sometimes back at the attackers, sometimes to friends and innocent bystanders. Also doubles as a cold-environment space blanket.

Tangle free, 5 cans for 1 Thing. Many alien Hunters describe their character as having thick hair or fur, and a nice CM may even assign a 1 point armour bonus as a result. However such hirsuite individuals on a Hunt often suffer tangles and stickiness after sliding through mud, getting drenched, and spending too much time in city sewers. This handy aerosol has 10 sprays and will clean and detangle the poor Hunter.

Tuff Role, 50m, 1 Thing. This marvellously strong and syntheic rope can hold up to 2 tonnes without difficulty. Fantastic!

Hunter Planet: The Bastards Have Landed

by Lev Lafayette

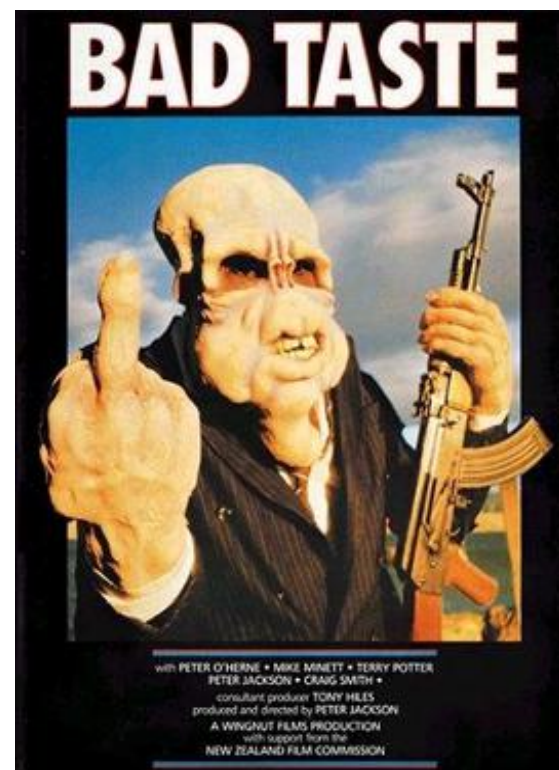
CM's Introduction

This is a single session scenario for Hunter Planet with the modified rules from RPG Review #35-36 using the story from Peter Jackson's first film, "Bad Taste". Watching the film beforehand is very informative for matters of style, characterisation, setting, plot, and theme. In other words, watch it. Note that any PC Hunters killed during the unfolding of the blood bath can be replaced with another alien Hunter until there is nobody left. Which almost certainly means an ultimate stand-off between Crumb and Derek.

Hunter's Introduction

What could be better? Not only do you get to have a weekend away from the boring job at Nalic Nod, part of the Interplanetary Federation of Planets, on a big-game hunt, but you'll even be paid for it. "Crumb's Crunchy Delights Organisation" is seeking wildlife as a food source for their new line of snacks from the exotic planet where you'll be doing your big-game hunting trip. *"Your paychecks will reflect the gratitude of the company; McYaballow's Fried Moonrat won't know what hit them."*

The planet is teeming with the native wildlife we're after. We've done tests and they're below idiot level, congregating in villages of various sizes. *"All the livestock we need are right here."*



their more isolated villages. It's pretty simple, we'll land, kill the natives of the village, and get them back to the ship and put 'em in storage. *"Oh, except last one"* (beckons to the PC Hunters). *"I want you to capture one for a feast after we're done"*.

Now there's about twenty Hunters here, and the village has about four hundred natives. So on average you should get twenty natives! But of course there's a competition. A special and secret prize for the Hunter who brings in the most.

The name of the planet? Ahh, 'Dirt' or something like that.

The Collection

For the sake of authenticity a CM should use a local map of Pukerua Bay, New Zealand. Keep in mind for the setting of the film (1980s rural New Zealand), which means a population of around 400 and cars that look like they came from the late 1960s. The name of the town in the scenario is 'Kaihoru' (hungry, greedy, ravenous).

<https://www.google.com.au/maps/place/Pukerua+Bay,+Porirua+5026,+New+Zealand/>

The opening scene is an opportunity for gun-toting Hunters to take out as many "natives" as possible. They will be of variable strength and capability of course, based on small-town professions and distribution of age etc. There's about 100 buildings altogether; about 90% will be similar to Average Family, and about 10% will be like the Bad Brothers

Average Family #1: e.g., Mother, father, 2 kids, and grandparents

Mother: STR 4 DEX 6 CHA 5 INT 5 CON 4 GEK 5 GTFOH 10 HP 4 Kitchen knife

Father: STR 6 DEX 4 CHA 5 INT 5 CON 6 GEK 5 GTFOH 10 HP 6 Hammer/Club. The town cop has a gun. About 10% have rifles.

Kids: STR 2 DEX 5 CHA 4 INT 5 CON 3 GEK 2 GTFOH 7 HP 3

Grandparents: STR 3 DEX 1 CHA 6 INT 5 CON 3 GEK 6 GTFOH 4 HP 3

The Bad Brothers #1: Three brothers who are tough biker types. The one with the shotgun is actually quite smart.

Bad Brother 1: STR 7 DEX 6 CHA 4 INT 4 CON 7 GEK 3 GTFOH 11 HP 4 Axe

Bad Brother 2: STR 6 DEX 6 CHA 4 INT 4 CON 6 GEK 4 GTFOH 12 HP 4 Cleaver

Bad Brother 3: STR 5 DEX 6 CHA 6 INT 6 CON 4 GEK 7 GTFOH 11 HP 4 Shotgun

The Crumb's Crunchy Delights Organisation spaceship (a rambling three story house) will land about 5km out of town in a hill with ocean views. There is a road that leads nearby which clever PCs can take bodies back to make their quota. This will require a GEK check at -20%. An land vehicles skill will be appropriate, similar skills will be at -10%.

Run the Hunt until the first PC Hunter reaches 25 native kills. They will be winner of the competition. There be a screeching sound to indicate that there are no more natives in the village.

"We've got a bunch of extra-terrestrial psychopaths on our hands. Like a... visit from a planet full of Charlie Mansons. They've wiped out a small town for starters. It's my guess they'll go on to something bigger next time. Christchurch, Wellington..."

"Auckland?"

"Yeah, well that wouldn't be so bad."

The PC Hunters are then assigned the task to capture the last native, a charity collector named Giles who is a little surprised to (a) discover that nobody is home and (b) that aliens are eating people. He'll try to escape in his car, which creates difficulty (how do you stop the car?).

Giles: STR 6 DEX 6 CHA 6 INT 6 CON 4 GEK 7 GTFOH 12 HP 4. Drive Car 60%. Damage from car depends on acceleration From nothing in the first round to 1d10 per round of acceleration on the road to a maximum of 6d10. Car has a GTFOH of 10 per round from 0 to a maximum of 60.

Feasting with The Boys

A cold room in the cellar of the building is used for storage of the various cadavers to turned into fast food. When captured and returned to base, Giles is put in a pot to marinate. Crumb will do a villainous reveal at this point:

"I suppose you're wondering why you're soaking in Reg's eleven secret herbs and spices? Tomorrow we're having you

for lunch. You are the exotic new taste sensation. Human flesh is it! You're going to be the first bit of meat that we've had a chance to get our teeth into since we arrived. So we're going to treat ourselves to a feast with you as the main course. It's quite an honour really."

"We'll bring out a whole line of homo-sapiens low-calorie delicacies ... juicy raw rump ... brains soaked in lemon juice... spinal fluid sauce ... assorted organ stew ... sapien-burguers ... and chewy homo nuggets. Just before we leave tomorrow we'll have a little party dinner with fresh local meat. It's my show of appreciation to you all."

Crumb congratulates the various teams of their great harvest. The winner of the competition will be rewarded a pay bonus of 1000 credit of redeemable Crumb's Crunchy Delights, a very large framed certificate (1 Thing). This is, of course, quite illustrative of the pay and conditions at the Crumb's Crunchy Delights Organisation. A feat will be held with chunky crunchy food that looks rather like baked beans with green food dye.

"Once the Fast Food Authority have checked the samples and issued the Mass Slaughter Permits this grotty little planet will tremble under the full might of the Lord Crumbs restaurant chain!"

"The sad news is that we will be heading for Nalic Nod with six of our co-workers in a state of permanent death. They died today, murdered by some real arse-holes. Robert escaped their clutches and reported back to me."

Unbeknown to the Hunters, they have been infiltrated by The Boys, the Astro Investigation and Defence Service who are *"only authorized to use violence when protecting the planet."* *"And the moon."* *"Yeah, and the moon"*. They will wait for an opportune moment before launching an attack on the base, like the bunch of murderous arseholes that they are:

Ozzy: STR 7 DEX 7 CHA 6 INT 7 CON 7 GEK 6 GTFOH 14 HP 7. Assault rifle. Big Projectile Pistol (only half the shots, but 2d10 damage each), Armour (2)

Barrie: STR 7 DEX 7 CHA 6 INT 7 CON 7 GEK 6 GTFOH 14 HP 7. Assault rifle. Projectile Pistol. Armour (2)

Frank: STR 7 DEX 7 CHA 6 INT 7 CON 7 GEK 6 GTFOH 14 HP 7. Assault rifle. Projectile Pistol. Armour (2)

Back in their car they also have a anti-tank rocket launcher, which can cause massive damage against the house or anything else it hits (especially sheep). Rocket Launcher, 300m, 1 shot (2 more in storage), 3 Things. 5d10 damage on direct hit, 4d10 at 5m, 2d10 at 10m.

When the Aliens suffer 50% casualties, Crumb will prepare for evacuation. This will take another 5 rounds before takeoff, by which time even more Hunters will end up curling up their toes. Note that none of the other alien Hunters will be successful in attempts to take out The Boys. The only one with a chance is the PC Hunters.

Derek's Don't Run

Trapped inside the house and designed to take out all remaining characters (including the PC Hunters and Crumb) is Derek. Having lost part of his brain he has become more psychotic than usual. Removing the belt that holding his brain in place will stun him for a round.



Derek: STR 7 DEX 10 CHA 6 INT 7 CON 10 GEK 4 GTFOH 17 HP 10. Chainsaw, 2d10 damage.; chainsaw keeps going.

Crumb: STR 10 DEX 3 CHA 7 INT 9 CON 8 GEK 7 GTFOH 13 HP 8. Assault rifle.

Crumb, as pilot, will probably be the last Hunter left. As Derek takes him out realisation will set in that he's on his way to the Hunter's home planet.

"Suck my spinning steel, shithead! I'm born again! I'm coming to get you bastards!"

Ralis for D&D 5e

by Torquil Gault and Lev Lafayette with Michael Cole, Rodney Brown, Les Mallet, and Wayne Tufek

Several years ago in an earlier edition of RPG Review and article was provided on the campaign world of Ralis for Dungeons & Dragons 3x/Pathfinder; Ralis, Issue #2 (http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_2.pdf). The origins were initially one of expedience; a game was being run and there was a need for locate it in a wider geography. This was satisfied by the presence of a high school atlas within reach. Now obviously the setting could not be 20th century Australia, but it could serve as at least a partial physical description and climate that the players were more than just familiar with. Further, the major isolated population centres easy to conceive as the idea of a vast and largely unknown wilderlands outside of these domains.

As for creatures? Well, Australia has plenty of reptiles. It was a very short trajectory to have plenty of dragons as well. Over time a history of the world was developed which included parallel ideas of the European invasion of indigenous Australian cultures and aspects of the harshness of the "Dark Sun" campaign world were added. The following provides a summary of the world, environment, kinfolk, creatures, and scenario ideas with upgrades to D&D 5e.

Geography and Environment

Ralis has an area of 1,537,370 square leagues (at 1 league = 5 kilometers), with an east to west distance of some 860 leagues and a north to south distance of around 458 leagues, and a massive coastline of some 7175 leagues. The countryside is old and rather flat, with the major exception of the Barrier Range near the east coast which separates a narrow eastern and south-eastern plain from the rest of the country. The Barrier Range was an epic magic ritual by invading Albionian wizards to prevent reclamations by Orcish or Elvish fae. The peak of the range is constantly, if poorly, patrolled by Albinonian rangers with a great number of waystations and small forts (c.f., Great Wall of China).

Much of Ralis is flat and lush grasslands in in the east which the Eromanga Sea spilling in to the flood plains and basin. In the south-east a peninsula is joined by a relatively narrow land bridge (c.f., Tasmania). In the north there is numerous islands and marshlands which, when carefully navigated, would easily allow light boats to make their way to the lands of the Supipapwa people (c.f., Papua). Along the south coast there is a notable feature of an open bay and tall cliffs. These occurred when the Sea God literally chewed Ralis from from the continent far to the south, and separated it. This area is known as the Great Ralia Bite.

In the west there is an growing desert. The Barrier Mountains have disrupted the magic of Ralis and a tragic process of desertification has began that will eventually see the extinction of most of the megafauna of the land, and a massive depopulations of both the Fae and the Dragonborn.

A famous ocean separates Ralis from Neu Zealandia known as The Ditch.

The main population centres in Ralia include the eastern Albion colonies of Sidley, Born, Bart, Laide, and Bane. The Zealanders have a fortified town in the west known as Perf. The Lustinians have established a small community in the north-west coast known as Vassoura.

Kin

Languages: The Common language of Ralis, imported by the migrants from Europa is *Franca*. The European Dwarves, Gnomes, also have their own language, as do Halflings, and Tieflings. Dragonborn speak Draconic with regional variations, and the Orcs and Elves speak Fae, also with regional and more widespread dialects.

Indigenous and Migrant Folk: The original kinfolk of the continent of Ralis was Dragonborn, who have inhabited the continent as long as the presence of other intelligent reptilian folk. Next came the dark-skinned fae, who would become the Elvish and Orcish kin. These three kin inhabited Ralis for many thousand of years, each of them gaining great competence in the strong magics present in the land. Most recently the balance that existed between these three kin has been greatly interrupted by the arrival of explorers, settlers, and penal colonists from the distant continent of Europa, including Albion (c.f., England), Zeeland (c.f., the Netherlands), and Lustinia (c.f., Portugal). Other Europa visitors include those from Franca and Rus (c.f., France and Russia), both of whom have expressed some wish to establish colonies in the rich lands of Europa. There are also stories of Malae, Khek-Ka, and Supipapwa people visiting (c.f., Malay, Hakka Chinese, and Papuan).

Dwarves and Gnomes: Dwarves have arrived with Albion and Zeeland European settlers and have established a sizeable community in Sidley, Born and especially the regional township of Rat, north-east of Born and with a substantial community in Bart. As with with people of their kin from Europa, the Dwarves of Ralis are primarily mining communities.

Elves and Orcs: The Elves are one half of the indigenous Fae population of Ralis. Like their cousins, the Orcs, the Fae has strong natural powers to land. Unlike the standard D&D rules, both Elf and Orc have very similar physical characteristics, with the main differences being the result of cultural orientation. Both Elf and Orc have a +1 bonus to Constitution, and also receive a +1 bonus to Dexterity (Elf) or +1 to Strength (Orc). The fae are of medium build and height, have a base walking speed of 30 feet, and have darkvision to 120 feet. Elves gain proficiency in Perception and Orcs in Intimidation. Elves have Fey Ancestry, whereas Orcs have Savage Attacks. Both have the Trance ability and both have two languages, typically their own language, Fey, and Common.

Dragonborn: These are a common and indigenous culture throughout Ralis with large populations in the central, north, and west of the continent, although with a population density of less than 5 per square league. The Dragonborn tend to live in small-sized communities on a village scale, although there are at least two cities of over 10,000 dragonborn. Confusingly for outsiders, both are called Big Red Rock (c.f., Uluru and Mount Augustus), which is evident in context among Draconic speakers but is often referred to Big Red Rock Sunrise (east, Uluru) and Big Red Rock Sunset (west, Mount Augustus) to differentiate. Dragonborn have only been recently discovered and confirmed by settlers from Europa, although rumours of their existence had been around for a number of years.

As can be expected the ancestry of Dragonborn is distributed compared to geography. Black are somewhat uncommon in most of the lands, but very common in marshlands to the north that connect Ralis to the lands of the Supipapwa people. Blue, brass, and copper ancestral dragonborn are widespread in the north-west. Green are most common in the far north and north-east of Ralis. Red dragonborn are relatively rare but can be found around the south and eastern regions of Ralis. Bronze dragonborn are common in coastal regions, especially in the south of the country. Gold dragonborn are rare, whilst White dragonborn are almost completely unknown in Ralis. Unlike Dragonborn of other locales, those of Ralis – like the blue-tongued goanna – do not lay eggs and instead give birth to live young.

Halflings: The Halfling inhabitants of Ralis are Euopa invaders and colonists from Albion, Zeeland, and Lustinia. Some have across from The Ditch. Halflings speak their own language and Common.

Humans: The Human inhabitants of Ralis are Euopa invaders and colonists from Albion, Zeeland, and Lustinia. All Humans speak Common and one other language.

Tieflings: The Tiefling inhabitants of Ralis are recent Euopa invaders and colonists from Albion, Zeeland, and Lustinia, that have found the land rather likeable. Tieflings speak their own language and Common.

Creatures

Giant Echidna

Zaglossus hacketti, or the Giant Echidna, is long-beaked echidna from Western Ralis, with impressive claws that it uses for digging for ants, termites, and other insects. It is approximately 3 feet long and weights about 65 pounds. It is particularly quick and adept at moving through wooded areas.

Small beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 Hit Points 7 (2d6) Speed 30 ft.

STR DEX CON INT WIS CHA

10 (+0) 10 (+0) 11 (+0) 2 (-4) 10 (+0) 5 (-3)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Sure-Footed. The Giant Echidna has advantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws made against effects that would knock it prone.

Giant Wombat (Diprotodon)

The largest specimens were hippopotamus-sized: about 3 metres (9.8 ft) from nose to tail, standing 2 metres (6.6 ft) tall at the shoulder and weighing about 2,790 kilograms (6,150 lb). Diprotodon superficially resembled a rhinoceros without a horn. Its feet turned inwards like a wombat's, giving it a pigeon-toed appearance. It had strong claws on the front feet and its pouch opening faced backwards. Footprints of its feet have been found showing a covering of hair which indicates it had a coat similar to a modern wombat.

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 10 (natural armour)

Hit Points 47 (5d10 + 20)

Speed 40 ft.

STR DEX CON INT WIS CHA

18 (+4) 10 (+0) 15 (+3) 2 (-4) 9 (-1) 6 (-2)

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Thylacoleo carnifex

The marsupial lion is the largest meat-eating mammal known to have ever existed in Australia, and one of the largest marsupial carnivores from anywhere in the world. Typical size was 2.5 feet at the shoulder, and 5 foot from head to tail, weighing about 250 lbs. Despite this relatively modest size, the marsupial lion had extremely powerful jaws and forearms. Indeed, relative to size, it was the strongest bite of any mammal in existence. The claws included an opposable thumb, which apart from being used to grapple, has also made the the lion a popular target for wizards who fancy the idea of given them additional intelligence and weapons.

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armour)

Hit Points 21 (3d10 + 10)

Speed 55 ft.

STR DEX CON INT WIS CHA

17 (+3) 17 (+3) 13 (+1) 3 (-4) 9 (-1) 8 (-1)

Skills: Perception +3, Stealth +6

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages -

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Grappling Claw: If the marsupial lion hits with a claw attack the target is grappled (escape DC10).

Pounce. If the marsupial lion moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the lion can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Running Leap. With a 10-foot running start, the lion can long jump up to 25 feet.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target . Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target., Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Bluff Downs Giant Python

The Bluff Downs Giant Python (*Liasis dubudingala*) is a constrictor snake that is approximately 30-35 ft long

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 60 (8d12 + 8)

Speed 30ft. , swim 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Skills Perception +2

Senses blindsight 10ft., passive Perception 12

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit , reach 10ft., one creature. Hit: 11 (2d6 +4) piercing damage.

Constrict. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16).

Quinkana

As if crocodiles weren't big enough the Quinkana was bigger still, and was the apex predator of Ralis with long legs (for a crocodile) and serrated, recurved, and dense teeth.

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 25 (4d10 + 3)

Speed 25ft., swim 35ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Skills Stealth +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 2 (300 XP)

Hold Breath. The quinkana can hold its breath for 15 minutes.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 14 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 12).

Bullockornis

Also known as the The Demon-Duck of Doom was a flightless bird (although some wizards have provided them flight. Standing over 8ft tall and weighing 550 lb, the Demonic Duck had a very large beak suited to shearing.

Armor Class 10 (natural armor)

Hit Points 26 (6d8)

Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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17 (+3) 14 (+2) 13 (+1) 2 (-4) 10 (+0) 3 (-4)

Beak: Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

GURPS Autoduel Mad Max

by Lev Lafayette

Mad Max is a 1979 Australian dystopian action film directed by George Miller, The film presents a tale of societal collapse, murder, and vengeance set in a future Australia, in which a vengeful policeman becomes embroiled in a feud with a vicious motorcycle gang The film became the first in a series, giving rise to the sequels Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior (1981), Beyond Thunderdome (1985), and Fury Road (2015).

GURPS Autoduel and Car Wars are, of course, strongly inspired by Mad Max. In addition to this book, the Car Wars and GURPS Autodule supplement, The AADA Road Atlas and Survival Guide, Volume Four: Australia, is of particular reference. The following is a short article that looks at the world of Mad Max, the narrative, and some adaptations to GURPS (3rd edition).

Setting

The series starts with the ambiguous "a few years from now" where motorcycle gangs roam the Australian regions with abandon and civil society is collapsing following a fuel crisis. This basic principle becomes stronger in the second film, The Road Warrior, where food and oil refineries are desperately fought over. In the third film, Beyond Thunderdome, it is clear that that international politics has become substantially worse with the world climate altered by a nuclear summer (the hypothetical post-nuclear winter event caused a greenhouse effect following the decay of organic matter). By the fourth film, Fury Road, the societal breakdown resulting from the nuclear war has led to a regression of civilisation and to a state where contemporary technologies are expressed as mythologies of the past.

Dating the events and the setting has been a pet project of many Mad Max aficionados, and not helped by the comic book series generating inconsistencies with the movies. In the original, "December 6th, 1984" is written on the Highway 9 Sector 26 sign. The official preamble to The Road Warrior mentions that the drying up of fuel reserves in the original was due to a war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, leading to a 32x price increase in fuel in a matter of days. With economies and governments collapsing in Australia, the Main Force Patrol (MFP) is established in 1983 as a desperate attempt to retain law and order.

Three years later (which would make it 1987-1988) the Main Force Patrol has been abandoned and society, such as it was in the original, has collapsed. As coal and oil generators stopped working so too did canneries, and food itself became a precious commodity. As people fled the now-unsustainable cities they found the countryside was controlled by marauding gangs "equipped with high-powered bikes and home-made dune buggies". It is notable that in every single film in the series the Australian outback dominates. The urban environment is present in the first film, but after that it is largely isolated communities, the closest thing to normal civilisation being Bartertown in Beyond Thunderdome which notably has its own fuel supply (methane from pig shit).

After the events of The Road Warrior, as remaining governments attempt to gain control of the remaining oil fields, a nuclear exchange takes place. One particular event in this cataclysm was an attempt by Captain Walker to take a group of people out of Sydney on a Boeing 747, which crashes, and where the survivors form The Lost Tribe. This is considered to be some fifteen years after The Road Warrior, which would date it at 2002-2003.

Fury Road (at least according to one source (Empire Magazine Australasia, November 2015 issue, p.98) is fifty years after the nuclear war, which would place it around 2035, although that would put Max at around and improbable 70 years of age. It is more plausible to place it 15+ years after Beyond Thunderdome, which would make it 2017-2018. As a broad development of the setting, Fury Road doesn't add much to what has already been provided.

Characterisation

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As the series develops the various antagonists, whilst always violent, become increasingly isolated from mainstream society and more bizarre in their worldviews which correlates with the general societal breakdown. The mental journey of Max however is more complex. In the initial film, Max loses his emotional and social connectivity in favour of revenge, and regaining a sense of community obligation in the second, whilst retaining a distant independence. This is retained in the third and fourth films where Max becomes an independent leader of great capability liberating groups from institutional (and increasingly crazed) oppressors (arguably, his role in Beyond Thunderdome is inadvertently disruptive and destructive). The introduction to the fourth film is quite fascinating where Max has been a loner for so long that speech itself is initially difficult.

Several others are also notable for their characteristics and development. In the first film the chief of the MFP, Fifi Macaffee, has a quirky domestic sense to retain a sense of normalcy (with house plants and a pet bird in the MFP offices) and a quixotic beliefs of the ability of the MFP to hold society together. The unnamed Gyro Captain from The Road Warrior is a great example of a 'mad technician in the outback' who, apart from his mechanical, piloting, and navigational skills, also has superb area knowledge for locations, flora, and fauna (especially snake handling). Jedediah from Beyond Thunderdome has a similar role and personality, and there is substantial debate among Mad Max fans on whether it is the same character (not helped by the fact it is played by the same actor). It is well recognised that Imperator Furiosa shows technical and military acumen, but also a high degree of initiative and leadership, something which MRAs on the Internet had an aneurysm over as they preferred female characters to be passive victims - which they are too often in the series.



It has to be said that most of the major antagonists in the Mad Max series are largely one-dimensional characters. Toecutter, from the original, obviously had a revenge motivation and a sense of loyalty to The Nightrider's legacy. Lord Humungus is more notable for his outfit, although he does show signs of being a strategist with good impulse control. Immortan Joe is an example of a character transformed from simple gang-leader to a megalomaniac dictactor with grand speeches, displays of power etc. Like many such individuals, is building a society in his own fashion. A more interesting exception is Aunty Entity who, in an attempt to be rebuild civilisation,

has become tyrannical.

Themes, Styles, and Concepts

Over the series there are several searingly obvious themes that make themselves evident. Revenge, personal loss, societal breakdown, reversion to barbarism, etc are all fairly obvious themes to some well known tropes (e.g., peak oil, car wars, iconic costumes, nuclear war, near future, antisocial hero, vigilante). Whilst Max is decked out in his leathers, there is some obvious male homoerotic elements among the antagonist gangs in the first two films (e.g., Gayboy Berserkers, Smegma-crazies), and to a lesser extent among the War Boys in the fourth. Probably a most troubling thematic consideration in the series is the suggestion (in both the third and fourth film) that societal collapse and reversion to barbarism has reached such a level that any attempt to rebuild civilisation is doomed to failure and its leaders will become tyrants or megalomaniacal. Dove-tailing this practical hopelessness is the utopian mythologies of Tomorrow-Morrow Land and The Green Place.

The most implausible aspect of the film series is that a radical loss of fuel supply leads to a highly motorised culture dedicated to finding fuel. Scriptwriter James McCausland, in part, took this from the behaviour of AUstralians to the 1973 oil crisis, where people formed long and aggressive queues for a tank of petrol, even though the price was skyrocketing. To McCausland this was indicative of the degree that many people would engage in to ensure mobility. Nevertheless to assume that this would become a long-term behaviour shift in favour of alternatives seems challenging

at best. On a related note is the outback setting. Australia is a highly (sub)urbanised population, with some close to 90% living in the main population centres. Whilst the post-Road Warrior nuclear confrontations would surely shift that number substantially, the lack of urban involvement in the first two films is rather curious.



Max Rockatansky

ST 13 DX 13 IQ 13 HT 13

Speed: 6.5

Advantages: Alertness +2, Attractive, Charisma +1, Combat Reflexes, (Legal Enforcement Powers I), Luck, Reputation +1

Disadvantages: Code of Honour I, Compulsive Loner II, (Enemies), Flashbacks I, No Sense of Humour

Quirks: Iconic leather outfit

Skills: Brawling 14, Drive 16, Guns (Shotgun) 15, Guns (Handgun) 15, Knife 14, Stealth 13, Streetwise 14, Survival (Plains) 14, Survival (Desert) 15, Tactics 14

Equipment: V8 Interceptor, .357 magnum revolver, sawed-off double barrel shotgun, Mauser C96, various knives, Kevlar motorcycle leathers (PD 2, DR 4), cattle dog.

V8 Interceptor (freely adapted from Kenneth Peters' statistics from the Ford Mustang GT Convertible)

Subassemblies: Body +3, 4 Wheels +1.

P&P: 250-kW improved wheeled drivetrain, 250 kW std. gasoline engine, 2,500 kW lead acid battery.

Fuel: 15.7 gallons gasoline (fire 11).

Occupancy: 1 XNCS, 1 XNS, 2 XCS. Cargo: 11

cf.

F	RL	B	T	U
4/6	4/6	4/6	4/6	4/6

Size: 15'x6'x4' Payload: 1,114.2 lbs. Lwt.: 2.247 tons

Volume: 160 cf. Maint.: 124 hours.

HT: 14. HP: 296 Whl: 35 each.

gSpeed: 160 gAccel: 8 gDecel: 17 gMR: 0.75 gSR: 4 Ground Pressure High. 1/5 Off-Road Speed

Body is 130 cf with fair streamlining; wheels are 13 cf. Structure is medium, standard. It has improved brakes and a convertible ragtop. Armor is cheap metal. Mechanical controls. Empty weight is 3,380 lbs. 2.8 cf empty space in body.

Batmania: Exploring Melbourne's Past

by Nicholas Moll



Batmania. The lost city. Melbourne's hidden history. Founded in 1835 by John Batman in the Port Phillip region. Batman led an invasion of

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squatters, wealthy pastoralists and ex-convicts into the area, founding the settlement. This could be considered a period of “outlaw” settlement. That is not an often-used term, but it is one that embodies the idea and actual legality of the establishment of Melbourne and other surrounding regions in Victoria’s history. At this stage, Victoria does not exist. Rather, it is part of a broader New South Wales, which is itself one of three distinct colonies – along with Western Australia and Tasmania. New South Wales in this sense, covers roughly half of mainland Australia but has a population mainly restricted to the West Coast, particularly around Sydney. However, in 1800 the Port Phillip region was surveyed and found to be rich with potential. This finding prompted a number of endeavours into the area. None of the endeavours are approved, and the new towns and settlements that are built do so without government sanction much less documentation. They are illegal in the eyes of the British Government and invaders of Indigenous lands, existing with no law, structures or government other than that which they can define for themselves. There is some sense of rebellion and freedom here and, given the not unheard of bouts of revolution in the nineteenth century there was some rationale for concern. These concerns stemmed from events where small regions strove to become independent nations (a phenomenon that stretched from small yet not uncommon incidents such as the 1826 Republic of Freedonia within then-Mexican Texas to world changing events such as the Haitian Revolution). This idea has since become attached to the Kelley Gang, framing them as a group of Revolutionaries led by Ned Kelly (1854-80) who attempted to secure an independent nation in the emergent Victorian Colony. This idea is a myth and exaggeration, but its persistence shows just how prevalent and plausible the idea was during the 19th century. However, the presence of wealthy backing and the rapid growth of Batmania in a strategic location gave governor Sir Richard Bourke some pause for concern and led to the appointment of Captain William Lonsdale Chief Agent of the Government in the Port Phillip Bay region. While still illegal, the presence of Lonsdale saw Batmania and other settlements governed in a summary, ad hoc, fashion by the British Government and eventually led to Batmania’s official recognition as “Melbourne” and its eventual establishment as a separate colony.

This is a history ripe with opportunities for narrative and storytelling, and working within a group of fellows from Federation University Australia - Paul Michael Donovan (an Anthro-Historian) and Timothy Kirkham (Graphic Designer) – we have been doing just that. The project itself is a hybrid one. The project is titled, appropriately but not originally, Batmania and the final output form is a board game. But aside from the commercial implications of the product, Batmania is designed also to reflect the skills and knowledge of each of the team members in an interlinked yet highly distinctive manner. For Paul, it reflects his research into the history of the Port Phillip District -inclusive of the interplay of prospective colonists with Indigenous Australian civilizations in the region. For myself, it is an actualization of my current research and practice into Gamification, specifically regarding the use of theme and narrative into gameplay constructs. For Timothy, the challenge is to actualize both gameplay elements and historical content into the gameplay space – specifically evoking both specific and general geographies (i.e. ranging from Port Phillip itself to, say, a mountain). Thus, Batmania’s construction is not quite a conventional piece of game design, nor a linear research project but a distinctive work that contains elements of both.

The gameplay of Batmania is thus far quite straightforward. The game is played in rounds and on each round, a player performs two of a number of actions for their turn: take a character card, place a tile (depicting general geography), found a settlement, move a settlement, import or claim a resource. Points are scored at the end of each round and throughout play the board grows as exploration occurs, the timeline progresses and the cast of characters is expanded through cards depicting individuals. Herein the historic elements drive those of gameplay. The abilities of each character card and the advantages they confer during gameplay are based on the individual’s biography. For example, a Governor allows its player to steal a card from another player – reflecting the intervention of political and legal agencies. The number of rounds in the game is governed by the key events and years of Port Phillip’s history with such happenings impacting the game after a set number of turns. In a two-player game, five turns pass between each event and the final



event ends the game: The Gold Rush of 1847. Lastly, geography influences the game board with general geographic features occur on tiles: Mountain, river, ocean, flats. Key, specific geographies are used as the basis of events or other gameplay aspects. For example, Port Phillip Bay is the starting region.

So far Batmania has been a fun project and we are looking forward to launching the game in 2018. That said, there is still a great deal of work to be undertaken on it. The rules require further playtesting and refinement for one. And there are further political and ethical considerations to be addressed, such as the depiction of historical persons both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Not to mention the typical printing and distribution question marks that go with any board game project.

Aiming to Misbehave with Skum of the Stars and a Grey Morality

by Nicholas Moll

Varied space operas. Cult comic books. Retro-science fiction. Ming the Merciless. Boba Fett. TSR. Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Sergio Leone's Westerns. These are a few of the influences that went into building the fallen Blood Empire, the setting for *Skum of the Stars*, a new gonzo space opera roleplaying game by myself and Adam Gillespie from Owlman Press. In producing *Skum of the Stars*, I was pretty aware of two things. One that both *Starfinder* and *Star Trek Adventures* were on the horizon. Secondly, that throwing too much of one influence in or, in other words, just watching *Star Wars*, would produce a highly derivative setting. While I didn't necessarily want to reinvent the genre wheel, when it came to *Skum of the Stars*, both Adam and myself wanted it to be our wheel. Thus, our approach...

I say "gonzo" above because the games setting takes a lot of the established science fiction tropes and flips them on their head. For example, *Skum of the Stars* has the Evil Empire, but its fallen and without it the universe is coming apart at the seams (the old they – the Blood Empire and its space vampire rulers - were bad, but they "made the trains run on time" – or, in this case, kept the warp-gates functional!). Likewise, the setting has a lot of varied species – players actually build their own alien as the first step of character creation. But in doing so, this approach engages the often used Homogeneous species-cultures trope unless the player chooses not to design that style of alien (but unless stated, the assumption is there). But perhaps the most overt twist on existing space opera games is the basic assumption built into *Skum of the Stars*: that players take on the role of the typical bad guys from these settings. The pirates, the bounty hunters, assassins, sorcerers, storm troopers and other nefarious sorts.

I know a lot of Game Masters and players are sometimes hesitant to play roleplaying games from the bad guys perspective. Evil campaigns in *Dungeons & Dragons* often have an aura of infamy about them. Likewise, *Vampire the Masquerade* balances the character's urges with a complex morality system to "humanize" their protagonists. Even in

such games it's not exactly untypical for a tabletop roleplaying game, even one that presents a setting predisposed to evil, to frame the players in a heroic role, i.e. the Romanised Vampire's struggling against their inner nature and so on. Likewise, such games often present a predetermined morality system. Not so in *Skum of the Stars*, with morality left for the players, the game master and the actions between the two to explore. Herein, the galaxy functions somewhat like Conan the Barbarian's Hyborian Age and its kingdoms. The Blood Empire has fallen and after two-thousand years of expanding borders and imposing its rule amongst the stars, what's left in the breakdown is countless systems that have been forced to act autonomously for the first time in a long history. Most of these function like small kingdoms, wherein many falls under the reign of solitary monarchs or individual despots from amongst the local population or its invaders. Thus, disorder is the current order of the day and a crew of outlaws, pirates, desperados, bounty hunters and other unheroic undesirables are simply part of that structure.

This disorder as order doesn't make the characters evil. Or good for that matter. Rather, it's simply that the galaxy is geared towards criminal activity. Likewise, in denying to define a single, overarching, morality, *Skum of the Stars* is left with a complex "grey" space that emphasizes choice and consequence over simply framing certain deeds as "good" or "bad." And these choices and consequences are backed up through the Infamy system which both tracks a player character's deeds – simultaneously penalizing and rewarding them for their significant actions. Playing the bad guys, in this sense, does not give the characters a permission slip to do whatever they want when they want, but rather a series of actions that occur outside the context of a singular mainstream society with restriction and taboos within the setting. In this sense, the deeper themes of *Skum of the Stars* aren't necessarily about crime, violence, tyranny or other negative action. It can be linked to it, but as a means of negotiation with the wider setting. Rather, the galaxy presented in its Core Edition evokes a sense of fluid, uncertain negotiation that is distinct from the certainty of being "good" and thus "right." A galaxy that can be framed as possessing an "ambiguous" orientation in contrast to games that present a world of good and evil.

The Antipodes in Gulliver's Trading Company

by Karl Brown

New material for use with Gulliver's Trading Company Grub Street Edition (GTC) a roleplaying game of exploration of strange lands in the 18th century. GTC is set in the world of the classic satirical novel Gulliver's Travels. It uses a game system derived from FUDGE and FATE second edition. FATE is a story-oriented roleplaying game system by Robert Donoghue and Fred Hicks. GTC is derived from FATE but has been developed to model the cynical fantasy of Gulliver's Travels and therefore differs somewhat from most FATE games; which are based on the third edition of FATE. However, much of the material in this article could be adapted to a FATE third edition game.

The latest version of Gulliver's Trading Company (currently version 0.61) is free on www.Scribd.com or on this Dropbox: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/2feoha1zdfscm2l/Gullivers%20Trading%20Co%20Grub%200.61.pdf?dl=0>
To stay up-to-date and find out more about Gulliver's Trading Company rpg join the low volume mailing list: http://rpgreview.net/mailman/listinfo/gullivers_rpgreview.net

As always if you have any feedback on this article I'd love to hear it. Send feedback to:

Karl@rpgreview.net

After this point italics indicates a quote from the Swift's original Gulliver's Travels.



The world of Gulliver's Trading Company is the fictional one presented within Swift's novel, not the historical 1730's. As PCs travel further from London the game's world becomes increasingly historically inaccurate. I made the novel the primary source of information, after that what European's believed they knew about distant lands is a secondary source, and the real conditions in nations distant to Britain was actively avoided as a source. When Swift was penning his classic in England the Antipodes were largely unexplored by Europeans. The New Holland, Van Diemen's Land, and New Zealand of Gulliver's Travels are not the same as the real lands and peoples in the early 1700's and should be regarded as much works of fiction as the Lilliputians, and certainly not a comment on real indigenous peoples.

By placing several imaginary lands within the then unexplored antipodes Swift was able to parody the contemporary art popular genre of reputedly true travellers' tales and his audience in Britain was better able to suspend disbelief. Despite the impression you may have gotten from modern film interpretations of the novel, the protagonist of the novel was able to report with some accuracy the position of Lilliput and other lands. The Antipodes of Gulliver's world therefore includes: Blefuscu and Lilliput, Houyhnhnms' Land, New Holland, New Zealand, Van Diemen's Land, and perhaps other islands of your own devising.

This article takes a brief look at the lands of the Antipodes in the world of Gulliver's Trading Company and provides an example encounter for each destination. Like Swift's novel this article contains elements of satire; the author does not, for example, condone enticing opposing nations into a bidding war for weapons of mass destruction.

Blefuscu and Lilliput

The Gulliver's Trading Company core rules provide everything you need to play the 5 to 6 inch tall inhabitants of these islands. Here we summarize some information of interest to captains of trading expeditions from England.

Potential for Trade and Relations

Lilliput and Blefuscu would not be sources of bulk trade goods, even provisioning a single European was a drain on the Empire and required considerable logistics. Similarly, the island could not support an English colony. It may be possible to manipulate the fashions of Europe to create markets for the following prestige goods: exceedingly short soft grass, medicinal ointments, and tiny but delicious livestock. Diminutive geese might find favour with those who are

fond of ortolan. Additionally, the common cloth produced in these nations appears exceedingly fine to European eyes and its import into England is not yet illegal as many other foreign cloths are. Diminutive bed sheets could command high prices in Europe and replace the silk handkerchiefs currently found in many foppish pockets.

There are several potential imports likely to command the highest prices on these islands. The Diminutives, as can be inferred by their reaction to Lemuel's watch and spectacles, do not make clear glass, nor clockwork. It is likely that they only have opaque glass like that produced by the Romans. One can however expect that given the Diminutives' aptitudes for mathematics and engineering coupled with their tiny nimble hands, that clockwork will, in decades to come, become an export from these islands. Additionally, they do not have gunpowder. Given the war-like nature of the inhabitants initiating a bidding war between the two empires for exclusive access to gunpowder would likely be most profitable.

Geography and Nature

Lilliput and Blefuscu are separated by a channel 800 yards wide and 6' deep at most. The islands are but the raised portions of a larger barely submerged mass; as far as a mile off-shore the sea is only 6' deep. It is likely that a barrier of rocks surrounds the shallow sea over three leagues and one mile from the shore. This barrier of rock was inferred from the rocks that wrecked the *Antelope* and the calm conditions on the shallow sea. Longboats are recommended for the final approach.

Despite their small size the islands have, from the point of view of its diminutive inhabitants, as much variety in terrain as England. The fauna appears to be mostly Old World only scaled to the Lilliputians. Sheep are 1 ½ inches high, horses only a hand high, and geese as big as sparrows. The flora is also to scale, the tallest trees are only 7 feet high.

Diminutive Warhorse

The Lilliputians and Blefuscans maintain that they each have their own breed of cavalry horse, each claim superior agility, ferocity, and endurance of their horses over that of the opposing empire. However, foreigners can discern no difference in the animals.

Animal NPC

AR -6, WR -2

Nationality: Diminutive Warhorse O

Aspects: Cavalry horse O, Faithful Steed O, Powerful Hooves O.

Conscience: Enlightenment 1, Quality 2

Extras: Hooves WR-2, Gallop.

Skills	Rnks	Rnk-X	Adjective
Being Ridden	3	2	Good
Brawling	3	2	Good
Alertness	2	1	Fair
Athletics	2	1	Fair
Intimidation	2	1	Fair
Resist	2	1	Fair
Strength Feats	2	1	Fair
Begging	1	0	Average
Insult	1	0	Average
Stealth	1	0	Average
Strut	1	0	Average
Swim	1	0	Average
Tactics	1	0	Average

Blefuscus

Since Lemuel spent less time among the Blefuscans, fewer details of this nation are available than for its rival Lilliput.

Potential for Trade and Relations

After trade is established with the 'lesser-world' of the *quinbus flestrin* the very fine wine Flunec is a potential luxury export from this great empire. Considering the ruination brought upon them by Lemuel, some commoners and naval officers are likely to react most poorly to Europeans. However, Lemuel's later actions to ensure the peace would cause the Emperor to regard Europeans favourably.

The Blefuscan Emperor ruled that none of his subjects may depart beyond the known world with the *Quinbus Flestrin* Lemuel Gulliver, even if a citizen gives consent. This ruling would almost certainly extend to citizens (including PC Blefuscan) attempting to leave with newly arrived Europeans.

Geography and Nature

The principle harbour of Blefuscu is located on the channel that separates this Empire from its rival, Lilliput. This would provide a sheltered bay to moor a European longboat. This port was the gathering place for the nation's armada prior to attempted invasion of Lilliput. Unfortunately for the Blefuscan's Lemuel Gulliver captured their fleet and the Empire of Blefuscu had to make peace with Lilliput. The city of this port has a population in excess of 30 000 providing an immediate market for European goods.

Lilliput

Potential for Trade and Relations

Lemuel Gulliver is considered a traitor to the Empire by the Emperor and those in power; by extension Lilliputians will likely react poorly to the arrival of Europeans, in all likelihood a small group of Europeans will be greeted with a proclamation of war followed by the forces of the mighty Empire attempting to drive the interlopers into the sea then to be pursued by the Imperial Armada to the edge of the world (the encircling reef).

In the unlikely even that the hostilities are overcome and trade established then glimigrim a fine wine might command a high price in France. Apothecaries in Lilliput have a very effective ointment for the treatment of cuts and abrasions that should command a high price among the war-like inhabitants of Europe.

Law and Governance

...the image of Justice, in their courts of judicature, is formed with six eyes, two before, as many behind, and on each side one, to signify circumspection; with a bag of gold open in her right hand, and a sword sheathed in her left, to show she is more disposed to reward than to punish.

The institutions and laws of Lilliput were founded on the highest principles but have undergone much alteration in recent generations resulting in an admixture of the just with the corrupt.

The head of state is the Hurgo, which translates as Emperor. The Hurgo is advised by several high ministers including the Lord High Treasurer (readily identified by his white staff of office), Galbet (translated as Admiral of the Realm), General, Chamberlain, Secretary, and Grand Justiciary.

Candidates for government positions need not always be of high birth or liberal education. Originally, positions were appointed for good morals rather than great abilities. However in recent generations they are required to demonstrate agility by means of feats such as capering on a tight rope. A professed belief in Divine Providence is required to hold any public office.

Serving the Emperor and court is a massive standing army and an impressive armada. Citizens suffer very few taxes but are expected to serve the state in war at their own expense. Just under half of the ships of this armada are Blefuscan vessels captured by Lemuel Gulliver.

Lilliputians are known to have at least three titles of honour, Clumglums and the more prestigious Nardacs are awarded to citizens for services to the Empire. Snilpalls are awarded to those who have strictly obeyed the laws of the Empire for 73 moons. Ministers are sometimes awarded Clumglums for their achievements in office but Nardacs are only

awarded for the most outstanding services, such as capturing the whole Blefuscan Armada. While neither of these titles wields any legal power most senior ministers are Clumglums. Emperors often heed the advice of Nardacs as gratitude for the great service the Nardac provided the Empire. Snilpalls gain some privileges, probably much like a Justice of the Peace, and some money proportionate to their social status prior to the award.

There are several laws that visitors to Lilliput should be wary of. Crimes against the Empire are punished very severely but should the accused be proven innocent during the trial then the accuser is put to death. The innocent man is then quadruply compensated for his time and expenses from the accuser's estate, supplemented by the Imperial treasury if necessary, the Hurgo himself then issues a proclamation of innocence for the accused. Those intending trade with the Empire's citizens should be aware that fraud is punished more severely than theft and ingratitude is a capital offence. Legally binding oaths to abide by written articles have great legal weight. Some oaths are sworn while holding the right foot in the left hand, placing the middle finger of the right hand on the crown of the head, and thumb on the tip of the right ear. Foreigners are expected to swear oaths in this manner and in that of their own nation.

Geography and Architecture

The island of Lilliput is located near 30 degrees 2 minutes south. The island has a circumference of 12 miles and therefore is just over 4 miles in diameter. There are strategically important hillocks (about 2' tall) on the north-east coast where a channel separates Lilliput from Blefuscu. The capital is the well planned metropolis of Mildendo. The city is located near the exact centre of Lilliput about half a mile from the coasts. A ship wrecked European could walk there in just over ten minutes. On the way the visitor would pass the forested Royal Park, 100 yards from the city. The city is a perfect square 500' to a side, totally enclosed by its walls and quartered by great avenues each 5' wide. Lesser streets are only 12 to 18 inches wide. The population is around 500 000.

This city is protected by a wall 2 ½ foot tall and eleven inches thick. Cavalry can be ridden, even a coach driven, atop the wall allowing rapid response to threats. Towers are spaced at 10' intervals along the wall. The main entry to the city is the Great Western Gate.

The Hurgo's palace is at the exact centre of Mildendo where the two great avenues meet. The palace is surrounded by extensive grounds, extending 20' from the palace and bordered by a 2' tall wall. Within this perimeter are two inner courts. The great gates separating each court are 18" high and 7" wide. The buildings of the inner courts also serve as their walls. These structures are 5' high with hewn stone walls 4" thick. The first inner court is 40' across (therefore the palace grounds must be a square 80' across). 8' separates this courtyard from the final inner court (which must be 24' wide).

Crafts and Learning

The Lilliputian nation excels at mathematics and so has good knowledge of disciplines reliant on mathematics including astronomy and mechanics. The Lilliputians know that the Moon and stars are physical bodies but believe the world to be only Lilliput and Blefuscu in the midst of a flat world ocean. It is obvious then that Lemuel Gulliver must have originated from the Moon.

An excellent knowledge of mechanics allows the Lilliputians to construct ships inland convenient to forests then transport them on great engines (carts is too mean a description) to the sea. As can be gathered this nation has excellent engineers and carpenters enabling them to build impressive fortifications and magnificent temples, even houses can have three to five stories and garret windows.

Lilliput is a great naval power in its region of the world and from Lemuel Gulliver's account an outsider to the GTC could infer the following information that we in the GTC know from Johnathan Gulliver's access to his fathers notes. Lilliputian ships are proportionally smaller and lighter than those of Europeans and likely have has a Persian/Chinese aesthetic.. They are of a scale similar to European ships of the 16th century. A Lilliputian merchantman is about 7'6" and 1/10 ton, proportionally about 150 ton. As evidenced by Lemuels towing of the fleet of Blefuscu warships are smaller still, likely favouring speed and agility. This aids in the method of construction and transportation from the forests to the sea. The proportionally smaller ships of Lilliputians are to be expected since though they consider themselves a great naval power the Lilliputians are effectively limited to coastal waters and a mild sea channel by the rocks surrounding Lilliput and Blefuscu. Since the Lilliputians are without gunpowder their ships do not need to be

large to provide stable gunnery platforms as the ships of Europe do. Nor do Lilliputian ships use siege weaponry, they rely on archers.

Institutions

Lilliput has several institutions conceived in more enlightened times as hedges against injustice and for promotion of welfare.

Only cottagers and labourers raise their own children, most classes of people place their children in public nurseries. The nurseries are supported by pensions extracted from each family. Different nurseries are given over to the different genders and social classes. Nurseries for the education of noble boys employ professors and scholars who train them for honour, justice, courage, modesty, clemency, religion, and patriotism. The social environment of these youths is curtailed to prevent them learning crass manners from servants or the vices and follies common to European aristocrats. Similarly, their parents are only allowed access twice a year and are prevented from coddling them.

Nurseries for young noble ladies are very similar to those for noble boys including the education they are given. Young ladies are raised to be as much ashamed of being cowards and fools as the men, and despise all personal ornaments, beyond decency and cleanliness. The girls are not kept as long in the nurseries as noble boys, at twelve moons they are considered of marriageable age and returned to their parents. Noble parents also must set aside funds as security for their offspring.

The boys of merchants, shopkeepers, and those in trades are managed similarly but at lesser expense. Tradesmen are bound as apprentices at eleven moons. Young gentlemen are kept at their nursery for education until fifteen moons but given greater freedoms in their last three years. In the nurseries of females of these classes children are instructed in tasks expected of women of their social standing. Those intended for apprentices are dismissed at seven years old, the rest are kept to eleven. Parents of children in these institutions pay a monthly share of their earnings in addition to the regular nursery fees. These shares are set aside for use by the child, children can be neither spoiled nor neglected. Even the most humble Lilliputians are cared for in state hospitals when aged or diseased, there is no begging in this nation.

Customs and Manners

The basis of their faith is the teachings of the greatest prophet Lustrog recorded in the Brundecral, the holiest of books. The Lilliputians believe that the while intelligence and wisdom vary in people, truth, justice and temperance are attainable by all. It is likely this view is espoused in the Brundecral. Lilliputians also hold that the Hurgo's rule is legitimised by Divine Providence.

The Lilliputians believe that murder on temple grounds fouls the edifice making it unfit for religious use. However, the temple furnishings can be removed and used elsewhere without fear of contamination.

Their faith holds that they will be resurrected on mass in eleven thousand moons. The dead are buried head down in compliance with the ancient belief that come the resurrection the world will flip over and they will then be raised standing on their feet. Modern scholars doubt this particular.

Houyhnhnms' Land

Potential for Trade and Relations

Imagine twenty thousand of them breaking into the midst of an European army, confounding the ranks, overturning the carriages, battering the warriors' faces into mummy by terrible yerks from their hinder hoofs; for they would well deserve the character given to Augustus, Recalcitrat undique tutus. But, instead of proposals for conquering that magnanimous nation, I rather wish they were in a capacity, or disposition, to send a sufficient number of their inhabitants for civilizing Europe...

While the fertile lands of this country are a tempting target for colonisation by European powers Lemuel Gulliver has pointed out the folly of attempting an invasion. Lemuel Gulliver's scheme for introducing Houyhnhnm tutors to

England is also unlikely to meet with much enthusiasm. While the powers of Europe might desire Houyhnhnm as cavalry horses inducing these noble people to serve in that capacity would be near impossible.

Houyhnhnm Land is technologically primitive but has some resources that could be investigated as potential trade goods. They produce excellent herbal treatments for cuts and bruises which may improve on the practices of European physicians. The Yahoos of the island covert a kind of shiny stone. Lemuel does not expand on the nature of these stones, perhaps deliberately. They may be gemstones of great worth. A root used by the Yahoos as a purge may have medicinal value and another produces an intoxicating juice that will find a market in England. A native animal, the nnuhnoh, has a pelt of fine down that could not fail to bring luxury prices from the fashionable in Europe. Since these beasts are rabbit sized it may be possible to procure a breeding pair and avoid further adventure with the natives of this land.

Geography and Nature

This large island is located on 45° latitude far to the south-east of Madagascar, east of the south-western coast of New Holland.

There is a small rocky island six miles off the north east coast. Given the dangers of the mainland our officers may wish to anchor here before sending a longboat to Houyhnhnm land. There is also a stream running off the rock to supply fresh water. Standing on the east coast of this rock the coast of New Holland can be seen stretching to the north and south about 10 ½ leagues distant.

The land is pleasant and lightly wooded between meadows of grass and oats. These meadows provide grazing for the houyhnhnm and the brute cattle and asses they keep. The land does not have pigs. These meadows are crossed by beaten roads connecting Houyhnhnm estates.

Wildlife includes yahoos, weasels, abundant fish, rabbits, and Luhimuhs. The latter is described as a kind of wild rat but given the proximity of this land to New Holland the animal could be a rat-like marsupial. The nnuhnoh already discussed could similarly be a marsupial. If so raising nnuhnohs in captivity will be more difficult.

Crafts and Learning

Houyhnhnm are primitives unable to fashion ships, clothing, fortifications, gun powder, or paper. They do not shape metals nor value silver and gold but do produce a variety of tools in flint and wood. Within the houses are several kinds of furniture including mats of straw and bosses of hay to sit upon,

The race has excellent herbal medicines for accidental hurts such as cuts and bruises but no professional physicians. The houyhnhnms have little knowledge of sublime knowledge. Their knowledge of astronomy is limited to use of lunar months (but not 'weeks') and an understanding of eclipses

Law and Governance

The houyhnhnms have few traditions since these are not needed to govern a people motivated by the good of their kind as a whole and acting as dispassionate reason dictates. The principle social unit is the household consisting of a family of the more capable race and several families of servants. Households are grouped into several districts but are largely autonomous.

Each family is limited to an offspring of each sex to replenish the race but no more. The houyhnhnm have no problem complying with this restriction as they are without lust or romantic love. In fact the chief difficulty occurs when there are too few offspring. If a couple produces two offspring of the same gender then they conduct a switch with another couple with two offspring of the other gender. Should a mare prove infertile then another will produce two colts to meet the deficit. These transactions are conducted without the emotions that would accompany such a scheme if it was implemented in Europe for the houyhnhnm love all of their kind equally.

There are no schools or other institutions of learning. Children are educated in the home. Both sexes are educated equally in temperance, cleanliness and physical exercise. Their training in temperance includes adults controlling their

consumption of oats and other rich foods and to prevent them overeating until the age of eighteen. Presumably at this point they are considered adult.

The closest tradition to government and institutions found in this land are the regular gatherings. There are greater and lesser festivals.

Four times a year festivals are held in each district where the youth compete in running leaping and other physical feats. The winner is rewarded with a song describing their efforts and the festival ends in a civilised repast in an open field. Every fourth year there is a representative assembly on the vernal equinox drawing from every district of the nation. This meeting on a plain twenty miles from the house of Lemuel's master lasts five to six days. At this meeting resources including foods and livestock are redistributed by need, children reassigned to ensure each couple raises one of each gender, and other questions affecting the good of the nation settled in a civil and rational manner without the impediments of pride, greed or other corruptions common to European councils.

Customs and Manners

The Houyhnhnms have no religion but do not need this particular glue to hold society together or individuals to proper behaviour. The houyhnhnms natural virtues and application of reason seems to have replaced faith in these creatures. Lemuel asserts that his honoured master while in this country was in agreement with Socrates on most matters, this may give officers of our company a better insight into these houyhnhnms.

They hold civility and hospitality in high regard and unlike humans treat all others of their race with equal fondness. A complete stranger can wander the country, be welcome in the homes of others, and feel at home there as much as in his own house.

Houyhnhnm unions are arranged and entered into without any ceremony of marriage. Matches are planned to maintain the bodily grace, health, and virtues of the race.

Funerals are also without ceremony or emotion. They remain healthy until a few weeks before their time is up and take this decay as a sign to put their affairs in order.

Nnuhnoh

A rabbit sized animal of a kind unknown in Europe with a fine pelt. Given the proximity to New Holland it may be a species resembling the unusual rat-like hopping animal described by Willem Hesselsz de Vlamingh in 1696AD (the quokka) but with finer fur. The Nnuhnoh may represent a trade opportunity if specimens could be captured and returned to Europe for the fur trade. The Nnuhnoh would likely fear humans based on a history of mistreatment by the Yahoos.

Small Animal NPC

AR 0, WR -1

Nationality: Nnuhnoh O

Aspects: Don't damage the pelt O

Conscience: Enlightenment 3

Extras: Thick Fur (raises AR by 1)

Skills	Rnks	Rnk-X	Adjective
Alertness	2	1	Fair
Athletics	1	0	Average
Stealth	1	0	Average
Resist	1	0	Average

New Holland & Van Diemen's Land

The fictional New Holland of GTC is essentially a whole continent unknown to Europeans, marked 'Parts Unknown' on the map. It is a giant blank slate for referees to create their own imaginary lands of parody. What follows is what little is known and conjectured about New Holland.

Geography and Nature

New Holland is almost certainly contiguous with New Guinea. From the explorations of Lemuel Gulliver we believe that the coast of New Holland runs north to south at 45° latitude. From this we can infer that New Holland and Van Deiman's Land are also likely to be a single colossal land mass. Alternatively the uncharted regions might yet contain sheltered seas and archipelagoes rather than a vast unbroken land. That the islands of Blefuscu, Lilliput, and Houyhnhnms' Land all lie beyond the Western charted coasts of New Holland add credence to this theory. Lemuel believed that New Holland was 3° East of its position on most modern charts.

Little is known of the flora and fauna of this land in Europe. Sailors report that the animals and plants of this continent are unfamiliar. Lemuel ate oysters and limpets during his brief stay before a well-meaning Portuguese captain ended Lemuel's self-imposed exile.

The People

The few encounters between the natives of New Holland and Van Deiman's Land have been with technologically primitive peoples. Lemuel Gulliver's encounter with naked hunters armed with bows is typical. Lemuel believed that the arrows of the bows could have been poisoned. We can infer that they are not a sea-faring people, New Holland can be reached from Houyhnhnm Land in a small boat but the Houyhnhnms remain ignorant of the existence of this continent.

The discovery of the Diminutives and Houyhnhnms has led to many explorers wondering if the land (or islands) east of the charted coasts might contain other extraordinary peoples.

New Lands

A referee could also create new lands by following the general formula used by Swift. For example, consider a land where mice are the intelligent species but unlike the Houyhnhnm these creatures are consumed by 'animal passions' lust and gluttony. Here the referee constructs a scathing satire on 21st century Western culture.

New Zealand

Little is known of New Zealand beyond Abel Tasman's brief exploration of part of the coast. From these voyages we know the land is rugged and green and the coastal people have large double-hulled canoes, wind instruments, and racket shaped stone bladed weapons (called a 'mere', WR1). Beyond this small section of the east coast there could be almost anything. As with New Holland referee's are encouraged to invent new lands.

Blok Fragment, Photo composite by Hartebeest (Gerco Hiddink and Maaïke van den Heuvel) 2012
A page from the Abel Tasman expedition showing New Zealanders

Antipodean Ruhk

The Pouakai is a breed of giant eagles in the oral history of the Maori. Before the publication of Lemuel Gulliver's account of Brobdingrag Europeans



generally believed the Pouakai to be a local legend. However, the existence of colossal eagles in Brobdingrag has led some European naturalists on quests to capture the elusive 'Antipodean Ruhk' and thus earn fame and the right to properly name the beast.

The Antipodean Ruhk is based on a real animal. In the real world the bird became extinct around 1400CE but the memory of it lived on in the traditions of the Maori. European science thought the bird was a myth until Julius von Haast described the bird from its bones in 1871. The real Haast's Eagle had a wingspan of around 9 ft and stood about 3 ft tall. The Antipodean Eagle of GTC differs in that it is not extinct by 1730CE and it is much larger with a wingspan of around 20 ft and is as tall as a tall European. It is entirely possible that the Ruhk's range extends to parts of the Antipodes beyond New Zealand.

Animal NPC

Nationality: Antipodean Ruhk O

Aspects: Sagacious O, Stealthy O (These Aspects are described in RPG Review Issue 23).

Note: despite it's great wingspan and the ability to lift grown humans into the air the Antipodean Ruhk is still only 'Average' Scale.

Conscience: Enlightenment 1, Corruption 2

Extras: Bite WR2, Claws WR2, Feathers AR1 +1 to resist cold, Fly 3.

Skills: 6x1, 3x2

Survival	2	1	Fair
Alertness	2	1	Fair
Acrobatics	1	0	Average
Athletics	1	0	Average
Strength Feats 1	0	Average	
Brawling	1	0	Average
Intimidation	1	0	Average
Resist	1	0	Average

D&D5e : Gulliver's Antipodean Races

by Karl Brown

D&D, including the Player's Handbook (PHB), by Wizards of the Coast (2014). This article Karl David Brown copyright 2017 is based on materials from Gulliver's Travels (Swift 1727) and Gulliver's Trading Company Grub Street Edition (Brown 2010+). Races in this article were designed using a mathematical analysis of the D&D rules found at these links:

*<https://rpggeek.com/filepage/120857/reverse-engineering-wotcs-race-creation-system-opt>
and excel sheet*

<https://rpggeek.com/filepage/120858/excel-file-optional-extra-race-creation-article>

Odd-sized humanoids and talking animals are staples of the fantasy genre and D&D has a tradition of stealing and twisting ideas from many genres including mythology, science fiction, and Lovcraftian horror. Therefore adding ideas from Gulliver's Travels is not really a stretch. The talking horses (Houyhnhnms) and diminutives (Lilliputians) presented here are generalized so that they can be inserted into almost any D&D campaign world as inhabitants of isolated lands.

D&D assumes that PCs will be humanoid and about the same size as a human. Diminutives are only 5 to 6 inches high and talking horses are large quadrupeds. Therefore these two races extend existing D&D rules in experimental ways. The two races are also new designs that have had minimal play

testing. On the other hand these races were designed with a system based on a mathematical analysis of D&D canon races that has been play-tested for over two years. Specifically, the rules for hand-less animals and Tiny characters are cut down version of rules that have had *hundreds* of player-hours of testing.

Diminutives

Diminutives are inhabitants of isolated lands where plants, minerals, animals and people are 1/12th the usual size.

Tiny and Sartorial

Diminutives look exactly like tiny humans. They have an olive complexion and the range of eye colours seen full sized humans. The men attire themselves in an elegant simple style, including breeches, even the clothes of their Emperors appear plain to foreign eyes. Noble women may be magnificently clad in brightly coloured gowns and even poor women wear what colour they can afford. Humans find Diminutive voices shrill but clear. Diminutives have acute eyesight by human standards but in actuality this acuity is merely matched to their scale. Diminutives are somewhat more agile on average than full sized humans.

Petty, Overconfident, and Proudful

Diminutive profess to admire truth, justice, and temperance but few are paragons of these ancient virtues instead tending to petty or warlike behaviour driven by pride and fractiousness. They are also are, depending on perspective, brave, overconfident, or rash; they quickly they adapt to the presence of full sized people. This portion of their national character would be of great benefit when adventuring beyond their own lands.

Warlike and Fractious

The lands of the Diminutives are isolated from the rest of the world by geography. They might be islands encircled with treacherous reefs, on high mesas, or in magically lit caves deep in the earth.

Wherever these lands are, they are populated with plants and beasts one-twelfth usual size enabling the Diminutives to live, farm, and build cities just as humans do but in miniature.

The Diminutives are fractious and any population of them quickly becomes divided into warlike nations and bitterly opposed faiths. Even within a nation cabals and factions covertly compete for control. The lands of the Diminutives therefore are rife with intrigues and frequently at war.

Exiled or Unfortunate

Diminutive adventurers typically have had the adventuring life thrust upon them rather than choosing it. Some are exiles or refugees cast out of their homelands by war or religious intolerance. Raiders take other Diminutives from their homes when isolated Diminutive nations are discovered by bigger folk of ill intent.

Diminutive Names

First Names (either gender): Balmuff, Calin, Clefren, Clustril, Deffar, Drunlo, Flimnap, Limtoc, Marsi, Reldresal, and Skyresh. **Family Names:** Bolgolum, Frellock and similar sounding words.

Diminutive Traits

Ability score adjustments: Strength -8. The allowed range for strength is 1-2, not the usual 1-20. If using the standard array you must assign the '10' to strength.

As miniature humans Diminutives are agile, adaptable, and somewhat variable: Dexterity +2, Intelligence +2, and +1 to two of Constitution, Charisma, or Wisdom.

Type: You have the Humanoid Type. In some campaigns the DM may decide Diminutives are Faeries and have the Fey Type instead.

Age: Diminutives initially grow 12 times faster than full size humans coming of age at 20 months after which their ageing slows to a 'normal' rate and they can live to around 80 years of age.

Alignment: Diminutives do not tend towards any particular alignment.

Size: Tiny. Whenever the limitations of your Size places you in danger or prevents you from doing something critical your referee might award Inspiration (PHB p125). If your Size makes something more difficult but not impossible apply Disadvantage.

You are also so small that it is difficult for you to harm larger creatures. Your unarmed strikes do no damage at all to most enemies and one bludgeoning damage to Tiny foes. If the Medium version of a weapon does 1d6 then Tiny weapons do zero damage to most foes and one damage to Tiny foes. If the Medium version does 1d8 or 1d10 then the Tiny version does one damage. If the Medium weapon does 1d12 or 2d6 then the Tiny version does 1d2 damage. In all cases Tiny PCs using Tiny weapons or unarmed strikes do not modify damage or attack rolls for STR ever, regardless of whether STR modifier is positive or negative the STR modifier is treated as +0 when using these weapons. Unlike MM versions Tiny PCs *do* add DEX to damage when using missile or finesse weapons. The addition of DEX to damage gives Tiny PCs more utility in play. Tiny weapons have half normal range. Tiny armour is as effective as human sized armour.

Weapons of different sizes are different proficiencies. Your starting weapon proficiencies are only for weapons made for your Size. Tiny characters using two hands may use Small one handed non-Heavy weapons as well as Medium hand crossbows and Light Finesse weapons. When used by Tiny characters larger Size weapons no longer benefit from the Light, Finesse, or Thrown tags (i.e. all wrong-sized melee weapons are STR based when used by Tiny PCs). Tiny PCs using wrong Size weapons *do* apply their STR modifier to attack rolls and damage, this is often a negative. Tiny PCs never add a positive DEX to damage when using larger Size weapon (a hand crossbow does 1d6+0) but do add DEX to *attack* rolls with larger size missile weapons (not finesse weapons).

Speed: you have a base walking speed of only 5ft. Typically, Diminutives 'ride' around on other PC's shoulders. Handle this like mounted combat with the 'mount' acting independently (PHB198).

Keen Eyesight: You have advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks based on sight.

Fast Learner: You begin with one additional Intelligence skill of your choice.

Warlike, prideful, and fractious: You begin with one additional Charisma skill of your choice.

Leaping and Creeping: You begin with one additional Dexterity skill of your choice.

Fast Reflexes: You are proficient in Dexterity saves. If your class or another feature grants proficiency in Dexterity saves then no additional benefit is gained. Additionally your initiative bonus is raised by +1.

Tiny Human: You begin with a feat of your choosing and may choose any one additional skill.

Aptitude for Mathematics: You have advantage on Intelligence (Navigator's Tools) checks and any Intelligence check involving mathematics.

Headstrong: You are proficient in Wisdom saves. If your class or another feature grants proficiency in Wisdom saves then no additional benefit is gained.

Easy to overlook: You can hide when only lightly obscured. Given your Size this is quite often.

Languages: you speak read and write Diminutive, the language of your people, and Common. Since your people often deal with similarly sized sprites and pixies you also read and speak Sylvan.

Equipping your Diminutive

I recommend players pay Medium Scale prices for equipment at the time of character creation. If you take initial equipment by class and background instead then all weapons, armour and worn equipment is scaled for your Tiny Size.

After character generation prices of armour and other worn equipment is x1/4 while weight is 1/16 (this was determined by reversing the rules for barding not real physics!). For weapons and most other scaled gear cost is x1/4 and weight is x1/64.

Talking Horse

Talking horses have appeared in numerous sources. The Houyhnhnms of Gulliver's Travels were probably inspired by 18th century accounts claiming horses could do arithmetic and other tricks. Additionally, folklore and mythology has numerous examples of talking virtuous horses. Modern authors have also included virtuous, intelligent, horses capable of speech. George Orwell's animal farm had the sturdy Boxer and Tolkien's Shadowfax had talking ancestors.

Refined Equines

At first glance the Horses (with a capital 'H') appear to be ordinary brute horses. However, closer investigation reveals that they possess more refined physical and mental capabilities than normal horses, just as humans believe themselves more refined than apes. They possess fine bodily flexibility, are able to sit on their haunches, grasp objects between the hoof and pastern with sufficient dexterity for flint knapping and other Stone-Age crafts. Their feet are obviously more refined than common horses as the human hand is to the paw of a monkey. They are as swift and surefooted as any horse in perfect health. They go naked but need no clothes in the climate of their country and feel no embarrassment of their bodies. Their senses are equivalent to humans except they have excellent peripheral vision because their eyes are positioned on the sides of their heads. Horses feed on hay, oats, and milk. They take regular exercise to build speed, strength, and hardiness. In their own country following their own habits they do not develop disease and maintain excellent health.

Reason and Virtue

Horses are paragons of virtue who strive to be governed by reason alone. No other race can equal them for wisdom, honour, justice, truth, temperance, chastity, friendship, and benevolence. They have fewer desires than humans. Without greed, malice, envy, or intemperance there is little to motivate them to

travel. They are completely without cowardice and pride. They love all Horses equally placing no extra value on their own offspring or spouse.

Island Paradise

The homeland of the Horses is an isolated undiscovered island surrounded by a vast ocean. The warm temperate climate encourages the growth of lush prairies and green open woods. The simple villages of the horses are sustained by bountiful harvests due to climate and good management of the land. While they look like beasts to foreigners, the Horses are highly logical creatures who take only what they need, thus preserving the wilds. Despite a pre-metal level of technology they are not unsophisticated; Horses are often skilled poets, philosophers, or herbalists, and have a detailed oral history of their race.

Questing

Horses do not value precious metals or jewels. They do not adventure to acquire riches but to achieve logically desirable outcomes such as preventing a war from spreading to their island or an invasion of demons that threatens the whole world.

Once among humans such a traveller would encounter concepts unknown in Horse lands including lying, power, government, war, law, formal ceremony, and punishment. Similarly Horses do not hold opinions; a thing is either a fact, is disproved, or the evidence is unclear. Maintaining these high standards is a challenge when surrounded by the corruption of the humanoid races.

Horse Names

Horse names are unpronounceable by Humanoids. Companions often take to identifying a Horse by their position (e.g. My Teacher) or physical appearance (e.g. Sorel Nag). **Examples** (either gender): Hhoayn, Hnuyjah, Nymahnm, and Luhlyh.

Horse Traits

Ability score adjustments: Strength +3, Constitution +1.

Type: you have the Beast Type.

Age: Horses age slower than regular horses, coming of age at 18 years and living to nearly 100.

Alignment: Horse society places high value on reason, virtuous behaviour, an orderly society, and the common good of the herd. Most Horses are Lawful Good. PC Horses can be any alignment.

Size: Your Size is Large.

Speed: Your base land speed is 60 feet.

Hooves: attacking unarmed with your hooves inflicts 2d6+STR bludgeoning damage. You are proficient in this attack. For interactions with other rules this is a melee weapon attack not an unarmed strike. Hooves are melee weapons but are not light, heavy, or improvised weapons.

Healthy as a Horse: Advantage on CON saves (only) against poison and disease.

Brave: You enjoy Advantage on all saving throws against fear.

Gullible: Your culture barely understands the idea of deception. You suffer Disadvantage on all saving throws against illusions and magical deceptions. Additionally, you suffer Disadvantage on Wisdom (Insight) checks to detect lies and deception as well as Wisdom (Perception) checks to notice disguises.

Dexterous Hooves: You do not have hands but your forefeet are more developed than a normal horse in the way that the hand of a human surpasses the paw of a monkey. Horses can grasp items between hoof and pastern with sufficient deftness to achieve many tasks. You are able to grasp items, point wands, and even perform fine manipulation such as writing, sewing, opening doors, and manipulating spell components. You can even pick pockets, open locks, and disable traps all with Disadvantage. However due to weak grip and limited range of movement you cannot wield any weapons, or use shields (you do not have proficiency in these even if normally granted by your class). You cannot don or remove armour without help and cannot apply the bonus for Dexterity to thrown or missile weapons except objects dropped from above. You can use a focus as a substitute for material components and use a component pouch. Somatic components require your whole body to be free to move.

This trait is based on the Swift's descriptions of the Houyhnhnms, some referee's might decree that Horses have much more restricted manual dexterity. At the furthest extreme a Horse might need the *mage hand* cantrip to manipulate spell components, write in spell books, and use thieves tools.

Languages: You can read, write, and speak the language of Horses and Common. Additionally, you can communicate with normal horses, mules, zebras, and other equines.

Equipping your Horse.

Horses cannot use weapons or heavy tools and should not begin play with these items. If choosing equipment from class and background these items are missing without compensation. On the plus side any armour listed is actually expensive barding. If purchasing starting equipment with starting gold by class then simply do not buy the prohibited items. It is recommended that at character creation Horses buy barding at human armour prices. After character creation barding has its normal high price.

The Other Nationalities of Gulliver's Travels

What about the other strange peoples depicted in Gulliver's travels? Well, most of these could be created as Humans in the D&D PHB, though Backgrounds to represent these rather eccentric cultures would be a nice addition. The exceptions are the Brobdingnagians (as Lemuel's letter in the preface to the novel correctly spells it). At 60ft tall and 1728 times stronger than normal humans, the giants of Gulliver's Travels are simply beyond the range of capability the D&D rules can handle.

D&D is not a good system for playing in the world of Gulliver's Travels because D&D makes many assumptions that are great for epic high fantasy and mythology but are not true in Gulliver's world. Even if you do play the races from Gulliver's Travels you cannot easily emulate Swift's pseudo-historical 18th century satirical traveller's tale. If you want to play in Gulliver's world then try Gulliver's Trading Company, a free game specifically built to emulate the world of the novel which allows you to play characters of all the nations of Gulliver's Travels.

Laundry Files Down Under

by Andrew Daborn



Project QUEEN JUMPING STRONG

Preamble

Capital Laundry Services have SCORPIAN STARE and basilisk guns.

The Black Chamber have G-Men with X-Men`complexes.

Australia lags behind it's allies in the area of illegal matter-transformation megadeath rays, for now...

Six months ago Drs' Stheno & Euryale, eminent Melbourne ornithologists, made a breakthrough in their research into the neuro-pathways that govern vision in chickens, but in doing so uncovered the 'switch' that can activate Gorgonism in birds. Small doses of radioactive isotopes that Stheno had used as a dye rapidly gave some of the the test-chickens the ability to burn down laboratory buildings and with it all their research grant. Helpfully, ASIO's OccInt division stepped in with a generous grant and a keen interest in controlled activation of Gorgonism. The researchers, now brought into the fold, have made significant steps forward.

Sourcing ore from an abandoned mine in Queensland and utilising technology given to them by PLUTO KOBOLD they have a drug derived from uranium that they have been able to deliver to a variety of birds kept in a small warehouse with no ill effects. Over the last few months they have been testing this by sending batches of drugged feed to hen farms around Victoria to observe the results. It wouldn't be prudent to have another laser-eyed death chicken incident again too close to the office.

Be warned, there is a high risk of PCs getting fried in this scenario.

Act One - Eggs & Omelettes

The scenario starts with the investigators in transit to Coldstream, a small country town 36km north east of Melbourne, Victoria. Give the players a very brief flashback to the ASIO's OccInt division office earlier that morning. In a nondescript complex off the laneways of Melbourne's CBD an anxious operations manager, Cynthia Nguyen, gives them the following briefing:

"Victoria County Fire Authority report an ongoing structure fire at Happy Hill Farm, Coldstream. This represents a risk of Key Performance Indicator breach. We are only allowed four chicken farm or reptile house fires a year across the state. This is the third fire this quarter. You are to attend the scene immediately, identify the source of the fire and take remedial action to prevent further similar fires, I don't want to explain to management why we didn't hit that KPI. Unfortunately the incident with Greenpeace and ANNING BLACK last month has wiped our budget, so I can't offer much assistance. It should be a simple clean up anyway."

With that she dismisses them from her office. Cynthia won't administer a budget to this operation until she has established what is going on.

Back on the road they approach the farm where column of smoke and the stench of burning feathers soon fills their senses. With a Difficult Spot roll PCs can notice a small drone surveying the incident. It will disappear shortly after the team arrives. If asked the fire crew and farmers will deny it belongs to them.

The site is one of chaos. There are three main buildings: a modest office block and two long battery hen barns.

Two CFA fire engines are parked in the yard spewing water over one of the barns which is engulfed in flames. At the entrance a police car and two officers, Carruthers and Gilmore, block the approach. Jane Richmond, the farm manager is with them watching the blaze from a safe distance. The police are not expecting anyone else to arrive except journalists and curious locals so will hinder the teams entrance if they can't give a viable excuse.

There are eight fire-fighters present led by Officer Daniels. Her attention is on the fire and has little time for a carload of nosy consultants.

Moments later and to the surprise of the fire crew there is a burst of flames from the second barn. Panel of corrugated iron that make up up the wall glow cherry-red, falling to the floor. A cloud of terrified chickens and gouts of feathery smoke tumble out. A couple of the fire-fighters run towards the new blaze. Everyone is distracted by the fire providing a good opportunity for the PCs to act. As they do however there is a horrifying scream like that of an unnatural kettle boiling and the two fire-fighters freeze in place, bursting into flames. Witnessing this costs 1/d6 points for those who fail their Sanity roll. Any PCs too close may also be hit with radiation from the transformation, see page 92 of The

Laundry for details. You might want to keep that page bookmarked.

Amidst the chaos and between the rapidly cooling statues strides a lone chicken.

Call for initiative as the cockatrice attacks.

They might want to request a team of cleaners to assist with the tidying up, mind scrubbing and provide appropriate weather balloons for the curious. Officer Daniels can't provide much more information for the team. She attended one of the other recent chicken farm fires, but there were no death-ray-eye-chickens there. She speculates that anything in the barns should have died pretty quickly.

Jane Richmond, the manager will thank the team, informing them that the only change in the regular running of Happy Hill Farm was a change in chicken feed supplier. Jane has only recently heard of Majestic Feeds but was happy to try them due to their dirt cheap feed.

Reporting back to Cynthia Nguyen at the office, she will give them clearance to GAME ANDERS REDSHIFT. With a sigh she will explain that battery hen farm fires are not uncommon due to the occasional expression of recessive Gorganism genes in flocks. This recent rise in fires is significant however and Cynthia requests the team identify what caused this and prevent the trend from continuing.

Morecock Farm and Cyan Chicken Distribution are the other farms that reported fires. If the PCs wish to investigate them their story is much the same. Within days of changing to a new feed supplier fires devastated their barns. The supplier was Majestic Feeds in both instances. A quick Research or Bureaucracy roll will identify the business address of Majestic Feeds, a dilapidated warehouse in Sunshine. On a failure, give the information but at the cost of escalating the RnD team's response as they learn of the investigation closing in on them.

When they identify an investigation against them the QUEEN JUMPING STRONG team will initially respond through bureaucratic means. If the investigation is not warned off or bogged down in red tape then QUEEN JUMPING STRONG will move location, burning down the warehouse and contents, to try to hide whilst fast tracking their research. If the investigators persist, in rising desperation the researchers will unleash a menagerie of zombified and/or gorgonized birds after them.

When the PCs determine that this is a Laundry operation they may want to go to Operational Oversight, or their manager. In either case they will be informed that they don't have clearance to discuss any hypothetical projects of this nature. They are encouraged to gather evidence of wrongdoing and report back. Following this an easy Status check will determine that it is an RnD project. On a failed check give the information anyway but escalate the researchers' response to their investigation. If the PCs can identify either Stheno or Euryale they will easily be able to locate their office.

Majestic Feeds warehouse in Sunshine

The warehouse contains two dozen bags of contaminated feed piled in one corner, with some sort of industrial food mixing machine. There is a small run with two scared cassowaries, pacing around. The birds wear hoods, similar to those used by falconers. Taking the hoods off the birds is a bad idea as the birds have been Gorgonized. The floor is covered in feathers and guano giving the place a dusty feel. On the back wall is a large chalk array of occult symbols. Successful Knowledge Occult or Science Thaumaturgy checks will determine it is a transportation gate, due to open at 2000hrs tonight.

In a small adjacent office room are research notes on monitoring for Gorgonsim occurrences in birds and instruction manuals on how to raise chickens, cassowary and emu. Disturbingly there are also applications to tender for school catering contracts. A successful Bureaucracy or Tradecraft roll will determine that the research notes area formatted exactly like those from OccInt, Research and Development department.

The office also contains two residual human resources, co-opted from OccInt. They will attack intruders on sight.

Successful easy Sorcery or Status rolls will identify that these are OccInt RHRs which will stand down if shown a warrant card and commanded to do so.

If the team stakes out the warehouse they will notice a figure arriving at 6pm. This is Dr Helen Stheno who quickly deactivates the RHRs, feeds the hooded birds and uses the gate to jump to the mine.

Successful Status checks will identify who she is. If no one succeeds, the PCs can tell by her manner, dress and the warrant card she flashes at the RHRs that she is an OccInt employee.

If undisturbed Dr Stheno jumps through, to speak to the PLUTO KOBOLD and gets more contaminated. She will then take this back to the warehouse and mix it with grain, pack it in sacks and mark it for Jolly Rooster Farm, Annadale. It will be couriered there in the morning and a further fire will start the day after as more chickens are converted to cockatrices there.

If she is confronted Helen will first demand they leave, flashing her warrant card if necessary. If it becomes apparent that they are OccInt officers she will inform them that this is an ongoing project that they do not have codeword clearance for and threaten to go to their managers if they do not leave. She is a powerful sorcerer and will use this to cause mayhem whilst trying to escape through the gate. She will try to kill the investigators if she thinks they know who she is. Helen can also release the birds from their cages and remove their hoods quickly if she needs to.

The Mine

Mary Kathleen is a large, desolate, open cast mine in Queensland. It's officially closed but someone seems to have access to it. A Bureaucracy success will determine that RnD sometimes make use of abandoned quarries for testing and an undisclosed project requested access to this site early last year.

There's no shade and it's dusty. If the PCs hang around for long enough they will occasionally see mysterious glimpses of PLUTO KOBOLD moving sacks of ore in the distance. Closer inspection will find only a few clues of their presence. An attempt to assault or arrest them will lead to PLUTO KOBOLD retreating through hidden gates. PLUTO KOBOLD bodies dissolve shortly after death and are frustratingly difficult to get a clear photograph of.

Back at the Office

After receiving the team's report, from the farm or warehouse, Cynthia is happy to issue a budget of 20 points for the mission. If the team come with accusations of OccInt personnel being involved Cynthia will ask for the team to gather proof of any wrong doing, but not to disrupt any ongoing departmental projects by, for example, arresting or shooting personnel. Analysis of the feed will find it contaminated with an unusual uranium ore which with a little time can be traced to the Mary Kathleen Uranium Mine.

Research and Development

If the players can find a lead to the QUEEN JUMPING STRONG Project office and get in safely they will have plenty of evidence to present to Cynthia. It is deep within RnD's wing however. Getting into RnD is not difficult. Getting out without 'volunteering' for the latest field test duties is much more difficult. Here, concepts like health and safety at work are frequently swept under the flying carpet for the sake of progress. I could leave you with a list of mad-cap inventions to throw on the PCs but that would be doing your job for you. The formula is simple though: take an interesting new piece of tech, e.g. 3D printer. Add an esoteric extension to its function e.g. mini printer prints banishment rounds at will and then demand a Luck roll when used in anger. Make the complication entertaining e.g. there was a misprint in the binding runes on the round turning this Banishment round into a Summoning round! Also demand full field test reports from the characters.

Aside from the hoards of eyebrow-less researchers looking for new lab-rats QUEEN JUMPING STRONG Project office is easy to find. It is a small office at the end of a corridor with a clip-art picture of a cartoon snake stuck to the ordinary looking door. The door has a class 3 ward on it that will fry anyone walking through without a snake image in their possession.

Inside this two-person office is Dr Marie Euryale working on a drone controller and a dead chicken. Behind her are piles of papers detailing her research into Gorgonism. A mirror hangs on the back of the door. If asked convincingly for clearance to QUEEN JUMPING STRONG she will grant it allowing the PCs to gather information from Archives and other departments. If cleared Dr Euryale will answer any questions she is asked, all the while attempting to convince the PCs of the importance of the project for National Security.

If they threaten to go to Operational Oversight or to have the project shut down then Dr Euryale's attitude changes and she demands they leave immediately. If they don't she can whip out a small mister full of blue liquid and apply it to her eyes before attacking them with her Gorgonism attack.

The team are now in a small office fighting a fanatical researcher! Given the ongoing themes in this adventure if they are not yet walking around in mirror-plated hazmat suits they probably will be after this encounter.

In the event of a fight survivors will be hauled out of the room 4 rounds later when security turn up and taser anyone still alive.

Let the PCs choose how to go about confronting the scientists. If they leave it too long then their managers will be on their back about breaking SLAs. Additionally if left too long the scientists will ignore the PCs and go ahead with their plans to weaponize the noble emu. The PCs will find it hard to act without getting into trouble without at least evidence of this project being linked to the fires in the farms.

If the PCs survive, and whether the researchers do or not, they will be debriefed by a panel of auditors who will demand to know what happened and why. Depending on how well they give account of themselves reward or penalise the PCs 1d6 Status.

NPCs

COCKATRICE

STR 3 CON 6 SIZ 2 INT 3 POW 3 DEX 8 HP 5 Move 8

Damage Bonus: -1d6

Weapons: Gaze, automatic. Damage is 6d6. Characters may make a Dodge roll to avoid a gaze attack.

Sanity Loss; 0 to see a cockatrice, 1/1d6 to witness the effects of it's gaze.

GORGONIZED CASSOWARY

STR 8 CON 6 SIZ 6 INT 3 POW 6 DEX 12 HP 10 Move 12

Damage Bonus: -1d4

Weapons: Kick 30%, damage 1d10+damage bonus

Gaze, automatic. Damage is 6d6. Characters may make a Dodge roll to avoid a gaze attack.

Sanity Loss; 0 to see a cassowary, 1/1d6 to witness the effects of it's gaze.

RESIDUAL HUMAN RESOURCE

STR 15 CON 15 SIZ 13 INT 1 POW 1

DEX 6 HP 14 Move 6

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Weapons: Claw 30%, damage 1d3+damage bonus

Armour: None, but impaling weapons do one point of damage and all others do half damage.

Sanity Loss: 1/1d4.



PLUTO KOBOLD MINER

STR 12 CON 12 SIZ 12 INT 13 POW 13 DEX 14 HP:10

Damage Bonus: +0.

Move: 7/9 Flying

Weapons: 30% Pincer 1d6 + DB, 45% Grapple

Armour: None, but all impaling weapons do minimum damage.

Sanity Loss: 0/1d6

DR HELEN STHENO

STR 14 CON 12 SIZ 12 INT 16 POW 12 DEX 8 CHA 14 EDU 18 SAN 40 HP ?

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Weapons: Fist/Punch 40%, (damage 1d3+damage bonus),

Skills: Bureaucracy 35%, Computer Use (Magic) 50%, Lurk 40%, Language PLUTO KOBOLD 20%, Research 65%, Sorcery 50%.

Playing Dr Stheno

- You're smarter than them.
- They can't possibly understand the importance of this research
- They don't know who they're dealing with, you'll crush them!

DR MARIE EURYAL

STR 11 CON 10 SIZ 10 INT 16 POW 10 DEX 14 CHA 12 EDU 17 SAN 40 HP ?

Damage Bonus: +0.

Weapons: Experimental Gorgon Eye Mister (Gaze, automatic, damage is 6d6. Characters may make a Dodge roll to avoid a gaze attack).

Skills: Bureaucracy 15%, Computer Use (Magic) 60%, Fast Talk 45%, Jump 55%, Gesticulate Wildly 40%, Language PLUTO KOBOLD 25%, Research 45%, Sorcery 50%, Drone Operation 40%.

Playing Dr Euryale

- They're so slow! They don't understand the importance of this research, convince them.
- If you can't convince them you'll have to stop them interfering, you must act now..
- Be loud and believe in the project utterly.

“The Last Remnants of Men” Designer’s Notes

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by Andy Malcolm



The Last Remnants of Men is a tabletop RPG with a world setting that takes place in the early stages of a zombie outbreak, which more specifically focuses on survivors who have evacuated to outback Australia. Throughout the player's section of the Core Rule Book, flavour text describes the journey of an individual who leaves the ever growing dangerous environment of the city, to hit the road in the hope for a safe haven. They make it to the fictional town, Juna, which is located in the north-eastern area of Western Australia. Juna is a mining town, remote and placed in the harsh Australian environment where players will be battling the summer conditions along with the physical threat of the undead, which eventually catch up to them.

The undead are runners, which was necessary to the world setting. During early playtesting, players would simply jog around the shambling zombies, and they just weren't feeling any fear at all. Now, they are few in number, but fast and if you see one, you're going to have to think quickly. There's nothing special about the undead in The Last Remnants of Men, just good old flesh eating corpses.

My initial inspiration for the virus outbreak originated from various drugs such as basalt salts and flakka. In the background story for the players and the GM, I give a very brief overview of the world's decline and hint at the cause being from a synthetic drug that hit the world stage overnight. There is a link between the drug and scientific testing to prolong the human life expectancy. The negative effects take some time for the world to fall apart, it certainly doesn't happen overnight, but our game begins after many months of a world that was ill prepared due to it being in denial.

There are several game mechanics, designed and play tested to help resolve outcomes specific to the world. The game makes use of d6 and d10, more often the d6 gets the most throws at the table.

One unique game mechanic is Sanity. When characters are exposed to visual or psychological horrors, they will be asked to make a Sanity check. This is done by rolling a set number of d6 determined by the GM (Games Master.) Any roll that results in a double number will indicate that the character has been negatively impacted by the horror, permanently losing one of their seven Sanity points. Skills also employ the use of the d6, and are levelled to a maximum of 5. Each skill level allows the player to roll a d6. Their aim is to roll a 6 for success, so the higher the level, the more d6 rolled, the greater the chance of success. When checking a skill, the character can have a Failure, which may often indicate that they did not have enough time to perform the skill, and they can roll a Disaster (all ones and twos.) A Disaster can have a catastrophic impact, such as prescribing the incorrect medication.

Combat uses the d100, and after a player has rolled a successful hit on their opponent, they roll for damage. This uses d6 for every weapon. Players can score three different types of damage. They can just brush their opponent's clothes – no damage, a solid hit – 1 point damage, or they can roll a Blood Wound. Think critical hit. These can have a huge impact upon their character. They could lose an eye, break an arm or have a foot twisted. My goal was to make combat brutal, gritty and something that you really want to think about before you go running around willy nilly. Ideally, it is the system that I enjoy to play, with dice mechanics favour using.

If your interested visit my facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/The-Last-Remnants-of-Men-676757879170794/> and message me for a free copy of the players book PDF

Antipodean RPGaDay

79 RPG REVIEW ISSUE 35-36 June-September 2017

by Ian Borchardt, Karl Brown, and Lev Lafayette

Brought to you by the RPGBrigade

#RPGaDAY 2017

Now in its fourth year, this August we're again asking tabletop roleplayers everywhere to tweet, blog, youtube, instagram, tumblr, and facebook their #RPGaDAY answers to celebrate everything cool, memorable and amazing about our hobby!

- 1st What published RPG do you wish you were playing right now?
- 2nd What is an RPG you would like to see published?
- 3rd How do you find out about new RPGs?
- 4th Which RPG have you played the most since August 2016?
- 5th Which RPG cover best captures the spirit of the game?
- 6th You can game every day for a week. Describe what you'd do!
- 7th What was your most impactful RPG session?
- 8th What is a good RPG to play for sessions of 2hrs or less?
- 9th What is a good RPG to play for about 10 sessions?
- 10th Where do you go for RPG reviews?
- 11th Which 'dead game' would you like to see reborn?
- 12th Which RPG has the most inspiring interior art?
- 13th Describe a game experience that changed how you play.
- 14th Which RPG do you prefer for open-ended campaign play?
- 15th Which RPG do you enjoy adapting the most?
- 16th Which RPG do you enjoy using as is?
- 17th Which RPG have you owned the longest but not played?
- 18th Which RPG have you played the most in your life?
- 19th Which RPG features the best writing?
- 20th What is the best source for out-of-print RPGs?
- 21st Which RPG does the most with the least words?
- 22nd Which RPGs are the easiest for you to run?
- 23rd Which RPG has the most jaw-dropping layout?
- 24th Share a PWW publisher who should be charging more.
- 25th What is the best way to thank your GM?
- 26th Which RPG provides the most useful resources?
- 27th What are your essential tools for good gaming?
- 28th What film/series is the biggest source of quotes in your group?
- 29th What has been the best-run RPG Kickstarter you have backed?
- 30th What is an RPG genre-mashup you would most like to see?
- 31st What do you anticipate most for gaming in 2018?

Questions, explanations of the questions, and alternate questions can be found on castingshadowsblog.com
Use #RPGaDay and join the conversation!

AUTOCRATIN www.autocratin.com RPG Brigade

WILLBROOKS1989 FREELANCE WRITING AND DESIGN

August 1: What published RPG do you wish you were playing right now?

Ian Borchardt: As a result of recently rewatching the over-the-top action of Baahubal 2 I'd probably say *Godbound* (Sine Nomine), although that is doing the game somewhat of a disservice - Baahubal is far more over the top than any game could hope to embrace.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aK9ohIzeYSk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjWWuEWCBas>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqwthoWINxY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WibcvWT7KQQ>

On the other hand *Godbound* is one of the many games I do want to run and/or play anyway - and even using the actual setting (which for me is actually quite a rarity). Others include *Abandon All Hope*, *13th Age*, the new *Star Trek*, *The Belly of the Beast*, and most of the other KS games I've barely even had time to read. Not to mention all the other games I want to run (or even more, play in). I do want to run some space opera, possibly even using *Space Opera*, and a fantasy game based off of the *Houses of the Blooded* setting but actually using D&D style rules.

Actually I'd like to play almost anything at the moment.

Lev Lafayette: I'm lucky enough to be currently involved in a number of games all of which I like immensely; two different *Eclipse Phase* games, *Elric!*, *Megatraveller*, *HeroQuest* and with a *RuneQuest* game pending. In recent months I've had the opportunity to play in *Laundry Files* and *FATE Secret Lives of Cats* meets *Call of Cthulhu*. If anything it would be the latter that I would be most pleased if it started again.

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Karl Brown: Playing rather than refereeing? *Mutants and Masterminds* 3rd edition. I didn't get into comics until my 40's so it's not a nostalgia trip for me. Rather I have enjoyed the creative freedom inherent in the genre in a few play by post games and I'd love to play at a proper live table.

August 2: What is an RPG you would like to see published?

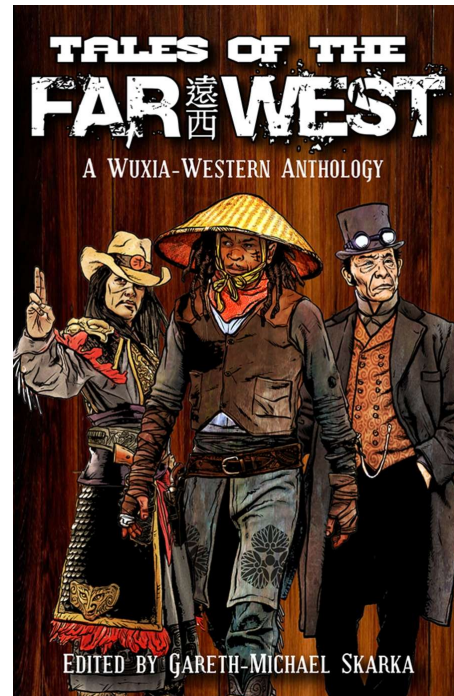
Ian Borchardt: Well the immediate answer is *Far West*. Not so much for my actually getting the game, but rather it's publication means that Gareth's is finally on top of his health-initiated financial problems. Unfortunately I don't think we shall see it any time soon.

I'd like to see an official English translation of *Hora de Aventuras* in all it's gerkinery glory. I've done a rough translation (although having actually never studied Spanish makes that interesting), and found it to be an interesting game with some interesting aspects.

Speaking of translations the latest edition of *Nephilim* by UBIK is beautiful and deserves to have an English translation too - except it will never happen. Chaosium has the full English rights and trademark on the game, and their version was less than successful. Admittedly it came out at exactly the wrong time (they were having their problems with Wizard's Attic, and retailers were overburdened by the d20 and CCG crazes). Additionally the core book was badly translated (and by someone who definitely had a thing about defining rules **exactly**), and they completely changed the direction of the game afterwards, which meant that the extensive background, adventures, and supplements of the French editions were rendered irrelevant. Judging by the mailing list of the time USAnians were particularly unenthused about playing "a magical parasite" and wanted to play a human sorcerer instead. [Then again my favourite edition is the 1st/2nd, where, for example spell definitions were **very** loose and fast.]

I'd like to grab a PDF copy of *Ki Khanga* at some point. Unfortunately they made a decision to only produce physical books. But at A\$75 for an RPG I'm not that interested in it just because I think it might be interesting (and most of that cost is postage rather than supporting game designers). Besides I like the setting of *Nyambe*, and *Spears of the Dawn* is a decent game, and I also have the "African" supplement for *Ironclaw* on the way some time. [Which reminds me I must get people to try out the new version of *Ironclaw* - my *Runeclaw* game uses legacy *Jadeclaw*. I meant to do up automation for *Fantasy Grounds* (since it can be a very tactical game).

I would like to finally see the long promised *GURPS Girl Genius*, mainly because it will have more Phil artwork (I highly recommend both *Girl Genius* GURPS IOU_). I actually ran a short *Girl Genius* game using *Spirit of the Century*.



And, of course, there is Reynaldo Madriñan and Grey Wiz's Break and Jez Gordon's *Feral* RPGs waiting in the wings.

Lev Lafayette: If I had an infinite time resource I would sit down and finish my *Mimesis* RPG which is a home-brew of a historical and mythological RPG that I have been working on for years. I have a mental image of something as big as a Larousse encyclopedia that would be a tool for learning historiography, anthropology, and dramatic structure whilst reading. You may have noticed that I'm a little bit crazy.

Karl Brown: Like Lev I've got few projects that I have been chipping away at for an embarrassingly long time. It will come as no surprise to regular readers that the one that's furthest along is *Gulliver's Trading Company*. Unfortunately the project has stalled for several years because of a lack of playtest groups other than my own.

Also I'd like somebody out there to produce a (reality) simulationist system built to be generic from the foundations up. One that can realistically portray the great diversity of life on Earth from microbes to whales well as well as the capabilities of machines. No, GURPS is not that system; at its foundation is a bell curve centred on human norms and assumptions of human senses, scale, hands, etc. I have a long running project along these lines but my work is too crunchy for the current fashions in RPG.

More realistically I'm looking forward to the *Krull* and *John Carter* games coming soon from Mophidius.

P.S. I have a copy of *Ki Khanga* on my shelf. All I need now is time to read it.

August 3: How do you find out about new RPGs?

Ian Borchardt: These days it is generally via Kickstarter (since that is where most of them end up getting their funding). I can't seem to resist an interesting sales pitch. Occasionally someone on G+ mentions an interesting little game (usually a homebrew or small press book). The indie-focused Bundles of Holding sometimes have something new in them (but usually only a single title that I don't already have). And finally I get a lot of spam from OBS which sometimes reveals new products.

Although that said I keep track of my favourite game systems and designers, so have a pretty good idea of what new products I am interested in is in the pipeline. People like Kevin Crawford, Robert Schwalb, Far Away Land, The Hydra Collective, Chaosium (although for the first time in four decades I'm no longer running any of their games), Reynaldo Madriñan, Jez Gordon, James Raggi, Jonathan Tweet, Greg Stolze, Jason Morningstar, and Alex Schroeder all have a strong social media presence of G+ which makes keeping track of their new stuff a lot easier. It's a bit more difficult finding out about new Nocturnal/Stafford, and Sanguine Games (although they seem to have become fanatical followers of PtB rather than producing more of their Catalyst system).

Given that I used to track down foreign language RPGs in languages I'm not fluent in, finding out about new English games is a piece of cake. Although I'm glad a lot of excellent foreign games are getting English translations now. [Which reminds me I have to finish translating *Thoan* - the French game about Farmer's World of Tiers. <sigh>]

That said, I already have more RPGs than I will be able to run in what is left of my life, and given that people seem to think it's fine to charge \$30-\$50 for a PDF means I am much less likely to pursue new games for the sake of newness, so am less concerned with following what's coming out. [Especially that after the KS is run the PDF is usually available at a deep discount within the year, as has happened with almost every KS I've backed. Which is annoying, especially when you receive an email offering the PDF to you for less than the KS pledge in order to celebrate the completion of the KS. Which I have a number of examples of.]

Sadly being a "furriner" (which is why I'm writing this from your future), means that shipping physical product out of the US has become prohibitively expensive (usually more than the price of the book itself).

And yes I am quite familiar with the fact that actually printing the book is the least cost of making a new one. But cost and value are different perceptions, and PDF are engineered to have no intrinsic value. So it means I'm spending more money that used to go to RPGs on boardgames and no longer buying stuff because it might be interesting - most boardgames have a better handle on foreign shipping than role-playing game publishers who would prefer to "set fire to the books in the parking lot" than deal with foreign customers (not that I blame them).

So I'm buying less new games these days, and am less concerned with seeking out the strange and obscure that I used to be in my youth. Besides my "let's play a new game each month" group has been in abeyance for three years now.
<sigh>

Lev Lafayette: Google Plus has some great RPG individuals and communities, and RPG.net has their hype-engine plus reviews and forums. Mingshi used to have an eagle-eye on such things. I wish she was still writing for RPG Review.

Karl Brown: I'm old fashioned. Mostly I really on word of mouth and going to stores and looking at games. For physical books this really is the only way to really judge a publication. After I see something interesting I go read reviews and think about it for a week or so before deciding whether to buy.

August 4: Which RPG have you played the most since August 2016?

Ian Borchardt: Actually I haven't been a simple player in a role-playing game for three or so years now (since I moved and formally retired from academia), and I kind of miss it. Either the local games are those I'm not really interested in (generally *Pathfinder* or *World of Darkness*), people never get back to me, or I'm too ill or too busy. And I'm not that keen on Hangout gaming, and not just because I'm in the wrong time-zone for most games (I'm posting from most of your futures) and have a perceptible transmission delay that I find irritating - I also dislike the very limited bandwidth in what is a social activity. I'm probably rather rusty.

Also being chronically ill makes my reliability at issue and I don't want to miss a regularly scheduled game because it is too painful for me to get out of bed. {and it makes my reliability as a gamemaster even worse, which is why I mostly do one-shots and short adventures these days}.

As for gamemastering I've run a couple of short *Beyond the Wall* adventures, which ties in nicely with the picture, because the basic setting I use for the game is that of the *Talisman* boardgame. That is, there is only one village (where the players come from), and a road that goes past it. One direction leads over the bridge across the stream and through the bandit-ridden forest to The City, whilst the other direction eventually leads through the ghost-haunted mountain pass to ... The City. Although it's a bit more medieval fairy tale, since it seems to have intelligent animals as well.

There have been two sessions of my Reverse Dungeon (5E), where the latest brave recruits. ("They actually feed us as apprentices! I even got an apple for marksmanship!") of the Venturer's Guild essayed the Forbidden Door at the top of the Bastion Tower, under the experienced leadership of a veteran willing to take a chance, and who, of course, met his fate in an ambush by subhuman Morlocks (Orcs) who are currently now hunting the party (at the end of the session they had discovered the Morlock village in a large cavern). Quiet fun. Especially the automatic tension between the Sun Priest and the Warlock of The Dark. Unfortunately I've been too ill to organise a subsequent session so I expect the game has died.

I did playtest for my *Ryuutama* adventure that I was going to run at the local con. Whilst I managed the playtest I was too ill to run it at the con. [And it was the severe case of pneumonia I picked up at the con that kaboshed the Reverse Dungeon game for that matter. Boo! for anti-inflammatories.]

There's been some minor playtesting work on my home-brew as I play with combat options, which has so far been met with a resounding "meh." They all seem to like the unimproved version and want me to run more of The Crater game. However that is really designed for big groups and coordinating big groups is an incredible pain. But at the moment I'm being distracted by wanting to run a *Houses of the Blooded* version of *Scarlet Heroes*, *Godbound*, and some sort of space opera game (maybe even using *Space Opera*). In addition to all the other games I want to run, like *Belly of the Beast*, *Blades in the Dark*, *13th Age*, etc. I miss having an experimental games group (they are now scattered all over the world).

Was DCC played in the last year? Can't remember. [And that's something that's increasingly annoying.]

Until I clean out the boxes in the proposed game room I don't really have a place to run games, which makes things difficult. I miss having access to university tutorial and conference rooms. And truth to tell I don't know how many more I will be able to run. One of the reasons why I like the digital *Talisman* is that when things are bad I can just about make a decision on which way to move based on the roll of a die. So no *Runeclaw* (which means this is the greatest break my Glorantha game has ever had).

And even then, I really have no clue how to get the players I need any more.

This look back over the last year did turn very depressing. Apologies.

Lev Lafayette: *Eclipse Phase*, twice as much as its nearest competitor, as I've been playing in two separate games since

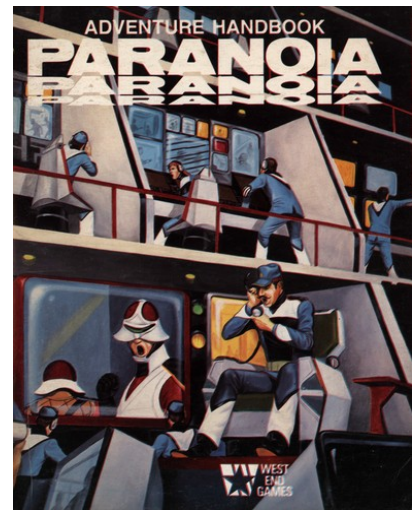
last August, so probably close to 50 sessions all up. Behind *Eclipse Phase* it's probably been a *GURPS Middle Earth* game which keeps reviving itself every couple of years, close to 25 sessions for that. Then about half that again for *Laundry Files*, *FATE*, *HeroQuest*, *Papers & Paychecks*, and *Godsend Agenda*.

Karl Brown: Easily *D&D 5e* as a DM. As a player I've had a couple of sessions of *Savage Worlds* in the *Starship Troopers* universe that's it. I run *D&D* because it is a good game that's right in my current crunch to speed of play sweet spot. Also, advertise a *D&D* game and you get too many players. Advertise anything else and get almost none.

August 5: Which RPG cover best captures the spirit of the game?

Ian Borchardt: For me there can actually only be one three answers to this question. And that is the excellent set of cleverly linked covers by Jim Holloway for the three books in the first edition boxed set of *Paranoia* (WEG).

Lev Lafayette: There is a number of great evocative RPG covers. The cover for *Skyrealms of Jorune* gives a good indication of the exotic science fantasy setting, for example. As another science-fantasy entry in a completely different style, *Shadowrun* should get a nod as well, as would fourth edition *Champions* ("the big blue book") for a superhero RPG. I loved the original Basic and Expert sets of *Dungeons & Dragons* and how Erol Otus' art built on each other (I was waiting enthusiastically on what the next one was going to be, and of course it never happened). On that point the 1st edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* cover for the Players Handbook was particularly good, and of course Jodie Lee's cover for third edition *RuneQuest* which had the mesoamerican style architecture and iron age characters with their runic emblems. First edition *Rolemaster* is worthy for wild and fantastic chaos. For evocative simplicity, the demanding view of the boss cover in *Papers & Paychecks* is something that Dan Smith can be very proud of.



But overall, if you're going for capturing the spirit of the game, it's one without any cover art at all. The original boxed set of *Traveller* gave this terrifying introduction that is burned into my mind.

"This is Free Trader Beowulf, calling anyone ... Mayday, Mayday ... we are under attack...main drive is gone...turret number one not responding...Mayday...losing cabin pressure fast ... calling anyone ...please help ... this is Free Trader Beowulf... Mayday..."

In space, no one can hear you die.

Karl Brown: I think covers that tell you about the setting and the types of characters oh can play are most useful. The cover to the second edition *d20 Conan* from Mongoose springs to mind. As well as the big man the cover reflects the diverse cultures and characters supported by the setting and the game. For similar reasons *A Time of War* the latest *Battletech* RPG. There are giant robot-tanks but these are literally in the background along with other vehicles. In the foreground are a variety of interesting looking characters from mech pilots and power armour troopers to techs and medics accurately reflecting the diverse but military SF setting of the game. The cover reflects the fact that this is a game about the characters first and robot tanks second. Others include *Mutant Year Zero* and it's spin-off *Genlab Alpha* both of which depict a selection of characters moving through post apocalyptic landscapes.

August 6: You can game every day for a week. Describe what you'd do!

Ian Borchardt: The only time I'd game every day for a week would be if I am at a week-long roleplaying con, in which case I'd try to get in on as many different games as I could manage. Playing with different people (and that includes running games for different groups of people) is one of the fun things about cons. You get to experience lots of different play styles (which is why running con games, especially the same game for different groups) is both enlightening and fun.

I would much rather have (at most) three regular game nights at most a week over a longer period. [Although now I might just manage one a week (but there are at least twelve different games I would urgently want to run/play in that single session).]

Lev Lafayette: Just one week? That's probably 21 four-hour sessions, one in the morning, two in the evening. Assuming that there was already preparation time etc., I think hiring a cabin in the mountains or similar (my partner's family who have a "cottage" in Schwarzwald, which would do nicely) so the group could enjoy the surrounding as well as participate in the epic week of gaming goodness. Plus they would have me cooking massive meals for a large group, which is something I really enjoy.

Apart from that it would be a case of picking a great campaign that would fit the timetable, and even better still, fit the environment. *Horror on the Orient Express* and *Masks of Nyarlathotep* were two classic campaigns we've played through in the past and I would recommend them to anyone who hasn't tried them, and ditto for *The Great Pendragon Campaign* (although 21 sessions probably isn't enough time!). The ICE Middle Earth campaigns in *Court of Ardor* or *Palantir Quest* are two others I'd like to try as well.

Karl Brown: Unlike Lev I'm not going to assume that I have had extra time before to prepare; a more realistic

assumption for my circumstances. That being the case I'd embark on a collaborative project to spread the workload. *GURPS* Demiurge this issue is one possibility but *Diaspora* or *Legends of Angletterre* might be better since the crunch of *GURPS* might slow things down in this timeframe. Each day would be a 10 hour session. Day one nothing but explaining the framework, sketching out the setting, and making stuff. After that each day would be 3 hours of everyone writing and making then 7 hours of adventure. Each day a new person would be the referee. Lunch is delivered and eaten at the table. Go hard or go home!

August 7: What was your most impactful RPG session?

Ian Borchardt: I ran *Pendragon The Grey Knight* for a half dozen friends at Uni. I did it in a public area, and as people wandered in they saw what was happening and wanted to join in, perhaps as one of the knight's squires. I said OK, expecting merely to use the squire's age as a skill roll as normal. But while was busy with the front of the table, someone at the back of the table was generating full-fledged squire characters. Hmmm. Too late to take back my permission, and besides they were doing an excellent job at being squires. Oh well. Go with the flow.

It reaches lunch time and more people appear and want to join, but we are now out of squire characters. Since I let the others in the game I might as well add these. Chance-met knights (either questing for themselves or met on the road), join the quest. It's a good thing that I like large groups. Everyone was really into the spirit of the game. Other people watching the game were drafted as NPCs. I'm a theatrical gamemaster and so will include a certain physicality in my gamemastering by preference, so if people are watching I will coopt them as spear carriers and extras.

Nine hours after I started we reach the final part of the adventure, which happens fast, and at high energy. Knights are peeling off to deal with foes, in the hope of delaying the enemy so their comrades can continue. People wandering past for a meeting are attracted by the noise and come and watch they've never seen roleplaying before, but they are cheering the remaining knights on.

And then it finishes. A total of 21 active participants and an audience of 8 people. Was lots of fun, but rather exhausting.

Lev Lafayette: Close to ten years ago now there was the "Gaumata's Vision" scenario from *Shadows on the Borderlands*, the *RuneQuest* supplement, which in which what initially appears to be weird turns into a magical conspiracy that is insidiously destroying a community - and where the players come to the climatic realisation: "we have to kill all the children". The carnage that follows is impressive, and especially when the parents arrive to see their kinder slain all around them.

Prior to that there was a fantasy Europe *D&D* campaign where the final session involved a massive strategic battle within the mental landscape of the devil himself, as he struggled between his enlightened side (Luciferean) and tempting side (Satanic), which resulted in the devil being driven out of his own mind. It was fairly cute metaphor at least.

I don't think of myself as an especially good storyteller, but on at least two occasions I have driven my players to tears, if that counts as impactful. One was the *Call of Cthulhu* scenario *Pride of Yirrimburra* where a vengeful ghost recites a story of how its extended family was viciously murdered. Whether it was my deadpan delivery, or the historical reality of similar events, or a combination thereof, that welled up an emotional response.

I think however that the final session of the *RuneQuest* Prax campaign however, where the player-characters - after a year of preparation - went on a HeroQuest, shamed the party leader, disabled Zorak Zoran (the troll war god) in a single (lucky) blow, retrieve fire powers for the god of light, brought two ancient enemies to peace against the forces of chaos, and had a character reach apotheosis. It permanently changed the political and religious landscape of the land. I guess that was that was the most impactful.

Karl Brown: Impactful could mean a lot of different things and no matter what is meant a single session is not long to make any kind of impact. I'm going to go with a 12 hour 'open house' D&D I ran at a small local convention about a year ago. A younger player (pre-teen) was introduced to RPG in that session. He was hooked and has joined my regular D&D campaign. Soon a couple of his friends joined him. I hope that the hobby I introduced them to will have as positive effect on their lives as it has on mine.

August 8: What is a good RPG to play for sessions of 2hrs or less?

Ian Borchardt: If you ignore the "or less" in the above statement, most any of them, if the players are already familiar with the game and have their characters ready. Almost none of them, if this isn't true.

When we ran competitive AD&D tournaments the game sessions lasted two hours of actual play (time was as much a part of the competition as traps, puzzles, and opponents). Plus set up time to move people into the room and get ready of course. It was actually a pretty good length of time to run a game of this type, because it kept things tight and focused. With most of the dungeons (they were almost invariably dungeons) most of the teams were able to reach and complete the climax within sight of the time limit.

But that was also pretty focused play. With casual play an evening can have as little as 5 minutes of actual play over three or four hours, because sometimes it's just a gathering of friends and not a game evening.

For sessions of less than two hours you really want something extremely simple (like *Toon*), or a skirmish tactical wargame where you identify with your miniature. Something like *Melee/Wizard*, or possibly *Frostgrave* (where most players identify directly with their wizard character). *Gladiator: Quest for the Wooden Sword* (where you play a gladiator) is also a strong possibility. It's the fact that you can directly identify with a character on the board that makes these a role-playing game. For example my favourite set of Western RPG rules is actually a very detailed set of tabletop skirmish rules called *Once Upon a Time in the West*.

Actually I've seen people run gladiatorial games using 3E in a lunch hour, but I personally don't think D&D really has the tactical nouse to pull of an interesting game in this style.

Lev Lafayette: If you have the right group of players I reckon Robin Laws' *Pantheon* would be the best, although would *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, or a side-session of *Power Kill* are contenders. More traditionally, one could fit in a short session of *En Garde!*, *Over The Edge* or *HeroQuest* in such a timeslot as well. Notably all of these games have a simple rules structure but plenty of opportunities for elaboration. This is absolutely essential for playing such a short game. You don't want to ever spend more time in preparation for play than actual play or, for that matter, even anything remotely close to it.

Karl Brown: *Puppetland*. Part of the game's mechanics is a timer set for an hour. Resolve the problem in-character in one hour or suffer the consequences. I have run this once and would really like to play this odd little game again. There is a review of that session here: <http://gamesvsplay.com/gatecon-vi-part-1-review-of-puppetland-rpg/>

August 9: What is a good RPG to play for about 10 sessions?

Ian Borchartd: Well the obvious answer is really any of them, but they may also be fun playing for a single session or several thousand sessions. So in itself there really isn't a definitive answer to this question.

There are a couple of games that do bear pointing out though. The first are those games with a discrete beginning and end, which is supported by the game mechanics. An example of this is *Grey Ranks* (Bully Pulpit), where you lose the use of the dice as you play them, which results in you eventually losing the game and ending up dead or insane, as you fail more and more often because you no longer have the dice to use. But then considering what it covers (surviving the doomed Warsaw Uprising as one of the *Szare Szeregi*), this is quite appropriate.

Another game where there is a discrete beginning and end is *Night Witches* (Bully Pulpit), because the operation tempo of the game is matched to the advances in the war. So after every few missions you move to a new airbase with a different set of missions. And of course, eventually the war will be over and the 588th Night Bomber Regiment gets disbanded and <https://plus.google.com/u/0/+JasonMorningstar/posts/DVHJbLdiTAY>

I have to also add the game *Noumenon* (Abstract Nova) here because it is a really weird game which relies on the existing set pieces described in the rules. Once these run out the game is effectively over.

Whilst it may take more than 10 sessions, one of the design objectives of *Shadow of the Demon Lord* (Schwalb) is that the players complete the story and face the Big Bad within 10 levels of play. All players level up simultaneously after completing a certain number of adventures. This is also the case with *13th Age* (Pelgrane), where level advances are handed out to the party as a whole (it also has a splendid idea of partial level advances, where you take one of the aspects of gaining the next level each time you are granted a partial advance. Once you have them all, you can start on the next level.

Finally there are also the games where the theme is really unsuited to extended play. For example *Ryuutama* (Kotodama Heavy Industries) is a game where the player characters are taking part in their ritual travelling pilgrimage

to new places (I tend to run it as an actual pilgrimage to one of the Dragon Temples). Once the pilgrimage is over it doesn't make sense to do it again with the same characters. Instead you do it with a new group of pilgrims. I do much the same thing with *Beyond the Wall* (Flatland) - since the beauty of the game is the initial character generation tables I tend to focus on that first journey into the unknown wider world with each new party, until it reaches some sort of conclusion (perhaps with the party formally becoming adventurers/heroes travelling off into the sunset (perhaps to find a Talisman and win the Crown of Destiny [or whatever other random ending is pulled])). Then again, this is my go to zero-prep D&D game if I'm asked to run a D&D game for strangers.

Lev Lafayette: As with the previous question the complexity of the game design and character generation should have some correlation with the time spent in the game. In this case there is the implication of session-to-session continuity, which would mean obvious single-shots mentioned above such as *Munchausen*, *Power Kill*, *Pantheon* wouldn't apply, whereas *En Garde!*, *Over The Edge*, and *HeroQuest* could. Of those three, *Over The Edge* would probably be just right for the characters to delve into that mad and strange world and come to a workable conclusion before the narrator finds themselves struggling with too many threads of plausibility and madness. Actually on that run, *Unknown Armies* would work as well. As another example, I would rate *Paranoia* is just right for about ten sessions as well. It would be the right for the proper establishment of involvement in secret societies, navigating the bureaucracy, a pretense of progression, and of course the final soul crushing realisation that of what The Computer really is. Come to think of it, a combination of *Paranoia*, *Over The Edge*, and *Unknown Armies*, would make a great mash-up.

Karl Brown: Have to admit I'm struggling a bit with this one. Mostly, I run self-contained one shots or open ended sandboxes. Don't think I've ever run a campaign with a defined length or one where I've dictated a story arch. I prefer to let the story evolve to reflect the actions of PCs and creative input of players.

August 10: Where do you go for RPG reviews?

Ian Borchardt: Nowhere really. I'm usually a first adopter so tend to rely on the elevator pitch of the designer to see if it is vaguely interesting. If it seems to involve an interesting system or setting then I shall probably buy the PDF (and will often upgrade afterwards to a physical book if I think the game has the possibility of hitting the table).

When I reviewed the work it was generally only after actually playing them (I had an experimental games group a while ago), and would cover what I personally liked and disliked about the game and/or setting, and how I intended to use it in the future. Rather enthusiastically. This apparently upset a few of the designers (after all it is their creative baby and they viewed it as criticism rather than review), so I stopped. A different ethos/philosophy I expect. It's one of the reasons I refuse OBS's requests to review products because I feel it shouldn't just be a matter of a glowing recommendation, which is just what they really want. I want something meatier myself.

Then again the only game I ever played totally by the rules as written was *Pendragon* (except 4th edition), unless I was blindtesting a game. Usually I'll do things like rip a nice setting from one game and use the nice system from another game. I'm innately Chaotic.

I used to like collecting lots of new games so that I could find something cool and interesting, but am doing it less and less these days as the prices rise to ridiculous levels (one of the recent KS I had a possible interest in getting the game recently wanted \$34 for the pdf of what appears to be a smallish book, which is ridiculous given the value - not cost - of a pdf). So am getting less and less these days.

I often end up pointing out possibly interesting games/mechanics to people looking for something similar. I don't warrant for any particular use though. I do have a particular interest in game mechanics and systems and once thought of producing an Encyclopedia Mechanica. Too lazy though.

Not so much for the purposes of review, but I will also point out Lowell Francis and his Age of Ravens blog [<http://ageofravens.blogspot.com.au/>], who in his attempts to cover the History of RPGs in various genres sometimes points out games which aren't in my collection. Very annoying that, and difficult to fix. <grin>

I will watch the boardgame reviews that are posted by various boardgame reviewers on YouTube, but only really for the actual play as they describe and show play (usually on prototype boards for KS projects). But that's because I'm interested in seeing the mechanics of play rather than hearing their opinions of it. This is a lot harder to do with RPGs because people will approach games with their own unique play style, and what works for one group may be an unendurable burden for another. For example I've never gotten good results with the games of one famous designer because our play styles are obviously too different - he solves for problems we never have and the rules tend to interfere with our ability to play the game. But they are good games, just not for us. which is a big problem with reviewing RPGs.

Lev Lafayette: For a range of the historical and new, *RPG Review* of course! That said, also and most definitely rpg.net plus the write-ups that make their way to the various Google Plus communities. There's also "FATAL and Friends" which does some truly brilliant and seriously in depth reviews often with the slightly edgy and slightly danky humour which I like. A nod must go out to grognardia, although curiously the author often reviews games that they only have a passing familiarity with. This said, quite often there is great strength in the comments that follow.

Karl Brown: Being a Neanderthal I just Google '[title] review'. Frequently, rpg.net comes up; i suspect because of the sheer size of that site. I tend to *skim* 10 or more reviews to get a feel for the consensus about the book before making a decision.

August 11: Which 'dead game' would you like to see reborn?

Ian Borchardt: There are an awful lot of my old favourites being updated at the moment (or an update has been announced within the next year or so). However many of these are really new games just borrowing the setting idea of the old, rather than the old game resurrected. Sometimes this can be good. Other times it can be bad. Some are languishing in the hands of a legacy publisher and only available as PDF, so are moribund rather than dead.

So I shall simply present a quick collection of worthwhile games from my collection: *The Fantasy Trip*, *Agone*, *Castle*

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Falkeinstein, Universe, DragonQuest, Alernity, Stalking The Night Fantastic, James Bond 007, Dune, Bushido, Barony, Nephilm. Powers & Perils, Deathside, Timelords, Nephilm, Flashing Blades, Space Opera, BESM

Lev Lafayette: There is a lot of good contenders here. I would have like to see *Lords of Creation* redone and modernised, there was some inventive ideas there. I do wish that the *Sandman* RPG would be redone with a little more effort. *Flashing Blades* by Mark Pettigrew is also a great game which he has already said he would welcome new material. The more snarky side of me which finds *GURPS* 4th edition well and truly overdone, a return to something that's more like *GURPS* 3rd edition and *The Fantasy Trip* would be a good return to earth. Ultimately however for a very long time I have thought that that for pure consistency, one of the most evocative magic systems ever produced, and some fascinating creatures (bunrabs, moonspiders), *Swordbearer* certainly deserves a third edition, and to an extend I still certainly hold to that.

Karl Brown: Three spring to mind. First, *Blue Planet*, hopefully done in the thoughtful text heavy style of the first edition. Second and third are settings for AD&D rather than full games. *Planescape*, a multidimensional setting with great role playing hooks. Finally, *Council of Wryms*. This was a boxed set setting with a great hook, you play dragons, and lots of potential that was both poorly executed and a victim of the the state of game design at the time. As well as the central hook of roleplaying the alien arrogance of dragons, themes such as *preventing* the war with evil, and ambitions that take centuries to achieve could have been very engaging if it had been done right.

August 12: Which RPG has the most inspiring interior art?

Ian Borchartd: Most SF/F fans really love their representational artwork (even if the artwork is of some alien of fantastic place that doesn't exist in actuality). And there are some mighty fine pieces of artwork that depict landscapes, people, and things that can certainly inspire your game in this respect. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words, but it is generally the thing they are representing rather than the artwork itself that is inspirational.

But that is not what I am going to discuss today. Today I'm really going to focus on the art that directly inspires a game. I strongly suspect that none of them will go on to win an art award (with one exception that may win a game award, but I doubt it), because outside the context of the game itself it loses almost all of its merit.

The first, which I hope may win a gaming award but probably wont because to most people it is simply a childish scribble, is of course Scrap Princess' wonderful art for *Veins of the Earth* (LoTFP). The antithesis of representational they certain carry the flavour of the creatures and events they convey. Especially given they provide a strong sense of The Dark, which is the basis of the game. And in The Dark, things are more felt than seen (and the artwork certainly conveys this well).

It was the bright technicolour illustrations of Dirk Stanley that won me over to *Far Away Land* (FAL). In fact I can remember the exact picture that made me go "I must have a physical copy of this game." [It was a picture of some Agnuns riding Grizzle Bears attacking some Noknills.] I actually think a much more representational style would have actually detracted from the game (especially the wonderful history and cosmology of the setting). For example, this

YouTube clip describes the history of the Bolgosphere magnificently [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUzfKtBOUrY>]. It is a definite favourite.

The style of art is also applied quite nicely to his World Architect cards [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2t_aogK27jU].

While not exactly interior art, I find the small painted hexes that Cecil Howe created for *Hex Kit* to be utterly inspiring. Each hex on the map now specifically invites you to tell an individual story about it.

A quick shout out to *GURPS IOU* because I always find Phil Foglio's artwork inspirational. And immensely funny. In a similar way Jim Holloway's illustrations in the early *Paranoia* were just as inspirational in setting the tone of the game as the covers.

UBiK's 20th Anniversary edition of *Nephilim* gets yet another mention here. It really is an absolutely gorgeous book. The Hogshead edition of *Nobilis* is another gorgeous book where the interior art of the book itself is magnificent as an object in and of itself. Whilst they don't inspire the game itself, they are themselves inspiring.

I love good art. I just wish I could do it.

Karl Brown: Pah, space wasted that could hold words! OK, the *Planescape* boxed set with honourable mentions for the original *Wraith* (1st edition) from White Wolf and *The One Ring*.

Lev Lafayette: In the mid 1980s there was some great material coming out of Games Workshop; their art in *Stormbringer*, *RuneQuest*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and of course *Warhammer FRPG*, especially in the 2nd edition, and much of the art in *7th Sea* was truly beautiful. Although it is not to my taste, the artwork in more recent editions of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Ultimately I think I'll have to say *Eclipse Phase*; so many examples of transhumanist horror.

August 13: Describe a game experience that changed how you play.

Ian Borchardt: Probably convincing my players that Open Secrets is a good idea. Basically instead of keeping the character's deepest darkest secrets secret from the other players, tell them. That way the players can, when bored, brush up against the secret in an innocent manner, which brings it to the foreground of the player's play experience rather than being hidden in the character sheet and rely on the gamemaster to objectively poke it.

I think the idea first appeared in an essay in *Houses of the Blooded*.

Another interesting thing is allowing players to create things in game of an inconsequential nature. However in order to overcome the natural reluctance of players to do this I give them bennies for entertaining play which they can use to buy campaign elements. Note that these bennies are totally distinct from game mechanics or experience (that is they do

not affect die rolls or game effects in any way and can't be used as experience), and players can only keep a limited number of them in order to ensure that they are used (in this respect I do like the style mechanics from the aforementioned *Houses of the Blooded*, but the actual mechanics probably come from *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies*). This is useful if they are looking for a specific skill in town, or a safe place to stay in the wilderness.

Examples include: "There is a temple about an hour's ride from here where we can seek shelter." "Ah, we are in luck, I have a cousin who owns a smithy in this town." As a running joke he was probably related, by blood or marriage to pretty much half the kingdom.

Sometimes it was an excellent opportunity to augment the adventure (I used my standard reaction roll to see what the reception would be like, just as for any random encounter). A couple of times it did interfere with my intended script, forcing me to improvise, but this was often to the benefit of the adventure, since it often pointed out inconsistencies. For example, why is the Baroness secretly importing alchemical supplies from the Capital when there is a perfectly fine alchemical supply shop located in the nearby town?"

And of course there was encountering multiple one-on-one play in the same campaign. Unfortunately I'm really bad at gamemastering it, though I'd like to. I tend to have big problems running sessions for less than six players. On the other hand I've run sessions in the high teens with no problems.

Lev Lafayette: Playing *Dogs in the Vineyard* was probably my most explicit example of narrativist game system where the numbers on the character sheet don't describe your ability to achieve a task, but rather to succeed in a scene - and then you take the opportunity to describe how, with your abilities this happened. Introducing elements into play that were not part of the scenario provided exceptional clarity in the idea of story creation.

Karl Brown: When i first downloaded the second edition of FATE (which is now on it's 3rd edition) in the mid 90's. In it's early days FATE was rather underground and experimental. The mechanics and how the game was played was very different from anything I had seen before; no set stats, using what's important to the PCs story as stats, wild stuff. This change in approach made a project I had been wanting to do for years possible: a game set in the world of Gulliver's Travels.

August 14: Which RPG do you prefer for open-ended campaign play?

Ian Borchardt: That would have to be *D&D*. In particular the early editions (*OD&D* and *AD&D*).

The reason for this is how simple it is to define an entity in the game. For example, once you have level and class you have generally described the game attributes of a NPC. Similar monsters are generic (HD, AC, and attacks and you have the creature). This makes it particularly easy to create random encounter charts that you actually use to generate the campaign as players move in it.

A very similar game that has used this approach is *Bushido*, although being both a skill and level system it's not quite as

easy to have valid characters at the drop of a hat, but the random encounter system is very nice for random skill generation based on character level. The encounter charts are useful, in particular the Level of Place table - something I also use in my house *D&D* rules. So you can actually encounter natural phenomena, villages, temples, schools, as well as the more conventional encounters of other games.

I make no attempts to balance encounters but rather let the players exercise common sense in whether they want to engage with the encounter or attempt to escape. I use the *OD&D* reaction table to generate the attitude of encountered beings. However direct hostile attacks by NPCs generally require existing antagonism (which may be toward the player's race and have nothing to do with the players). For example because of all the blood shed on both sides or-human relations are often antagonistic in most of my games. Additionally the damage bonus from a bane sword (+1/+3 vs something) is also applied as a negative modifier on all encounter rolls, even if the weapon is not drawn. Something about the magic of using the life blood of a creature to do the final temper of the weapon.

I also have random event tables that tend to be seasonal. So each season I roll to see if something special happens, especially to a domain. Or to an adventurer sometime in the season (although adventurers in a common local area of the game may all share the same seasonal result).

I also have special encounters scattered through the game. These are basically unique things, places of mystery, danger, and power (adventure locations from magazines for example) that are drawn from file cards (based on terrain). The original ore the hex encounters from the Judges Guild wilderness campaign. These often have connections with other things and introduce larger threads in the land. There are also "quests" available in many towns and sometimes castles, temples and monasteries. Basically these are really just job opportunities suited for adventurers rather than world-shaking quests. The world events are introduced in the campaign as a whole from time to time, and their events are generally felt by all in the region. Note that they do not directly involve the player characters - that is the player characters aren't required to solve them, although they can be involved in them.

The focus of many *OD&D* wilderness games is what is often referred to as the domain game, where players become the lords of some domain, school, guild, or other base of operations. I tend to start it a lot earlier (level 5 as opposed to level 9). One thing with a domain game is that play slows down (or rather game time accelerates in relation to adventure time). This has a great advantage in the domain schema in that players can see their domains build up as time passes. *Pendragon* also has this affect of limited adventure time - most of the time you are looking after your manor, holding court and settling dispute, doing your military service with your overlord, and of course, going to war, and you rarely get the chance (perhaps once a year) to go on an adventure with your fellow knights. However *Pendragon* is by design a closed campaign, since ideally it spans the fall of Uther to the fall of Arthur (*The Great Pendragon Campaign*). However like *Pendragon* players feel the effects of age a lot more and often seek immortality - the standard approach is to have children. I find this an excellent bit of fallout in the domain game.

An Echo Resounding is a sourcebook for generating things of interest in Kevin's *Red Tide* campaign setting. In fact all of Sine Nomine's products feature lots of very useful charts and tables that can generate features for a campaign, and are highly recommended. It tends to build the domain from the top down, whereas something like ACKS tends to build

it from the bottom up.

An interesting variation of the domain game is the naval adventure game, where the party are all shipmates, with the ship being their mobile domain. I ran a Star Trek fantasy naval game using *Thieves World VI* for the naval rules and was very happy with the result. Again, it features excellent encounter charts. The standard game of *Traveller* is much the same here, although I have never run a standard game of *Traveller* because I think it is resoundingly boring in that setting. On the other hand *Worlds Apart* adapts the Mongoose *Traveller* system to a fantasy-based game with massive trade ships visiting islands. Like *Agon*, you can use the idea of a fantasy setting to completely change each island to a much greater degree than in a science fiction game and make each new encounter completely different. And besides, you could make it so the world ocean is completely endless and that it will take many years to make it back home.

A variant of this which is interesting is the exploration hex crawl, especially one that takes place on a procedurally generated map as the expedition proceeds. The classic example of this is the board game *The Source of the Nile*, which is actually very D&Dish, in the fact that you are trying to make the best use out of your resources (supplies, porters, askari, guides) whilst exploring the unknown. Although for this to work well you need to have a system that generates new cultures as you encounter them, with different attributes. In this respect it is also useful to call on the old 4X games like *Starfire* and *Star Empires*. In fact the first of the *Star Empires* games, *Star Probe* is very much a trade/exploration mission into outer space.

Lev Lafayette: Pretty tough question as I don't particularly like open-ended campaign play; I like stories to have a beginning, middle, and an end, which is quite old-fashioned of me I know. But lifespans are limited so if I'm going look for a definite sense of when a campaign is going to end. Still, if I'm going to have to make a choice here, I'd make the curious choice of *Rolemaster* (probably 1st or 2nd edition). The reason for this is that it gives continuous incremental improvement to very high "levels" of advancement, so there is always an opportunity for meaningful growth.

Karl Brown: I'm pretty much the opposite of Lev. A predetermined story arc feels restrictive when I'm a player and restricts the ability of players to be equal creative authors when I referee. I prefer to set interesting start conditions and a world primed for drama and then see what develops. Humans are natural storytellers; given the freedom experienced players will naturally develop their own epic plots. Therefore systems that allow a lot of creative freedom, provide tools to create stuff, and/or provides structure for collaborative play. The system must be one the players know or can easily learn. The setting/genre must be one the players are familiar with or can easily wrap their heads around. These last two are important because in truly open ended play players will come and go.

So *GURPS* obviously, or *FATE* based games especially *Legends of Anglere*. *D&D 5e* does not provide good tools but the classes all cover a very large variety of character concepts, is in a popular genre, and a lot of people know the rules. The issue for me with *D&D 5e* was the small number of playable races; so I wrote race design rules. *AD&D* gets around having too few creative tools by having a massive amount of material written for it over the decades.

August 15: Which RPG do you enjoy adapting the most?

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Ian Borchardt: Ummm, all of them?

I'm an inveterate tinkerer unless I'm actually formally playtesting a game (or trying out a new game in an explicit test session). I'll use different rule systems for setting I like if I feel that is a better approach. Modify rules to provide the effects I want, etc. I enjoy it. It keeps me off the streets at night

For example I hated the original *Hero Wars* rules with the passion of a thousand exploding suns, but wanted to make use of the information contained within it in my Glorantha game (originally *RQ2*, modified, naturally). And the original *Ironclaw* system had just come out (and many of my regular players had an unwarranted aversion to "furry games"), so it was a nice match. Plus I could take the opportunity to formally write up the cults/gods as something different so as not to confuse people with my campaign - which started diverging in 1978 - and the canon version. So instead of the standard Orlanthi pantheon we have Lord Orlan, Grim Huma, Saris Silvertongue, etc

My very first formal adaption was for *OD&D* in fact. There was this movie coming out in a year, with an intriguing novelisation with some publicity photos in it, and we wanted to play a game in hit. "Star Something" from memory. You know, clerics with laser swords and all that sort of thing... <grin>

But given the number of editions (10 complete editions so far) my house *D&D* rules have gone through, this is probably the one I like adapting the most. My big problem is when I want to use two incompatible ideas that I like - I'll either spin off another campaign that makes use of that idea or keep vacillating between the two when attempting to formally write things up.

Although my current house *D&D* rules in play are fairly static for the players, but mainly based on a minimal set of axioms and accompanying tables rather than being formally written up in a rule set like previous editions (I have a problem of explaining why I do things rather than just saying what should be done). Which means I can easily make the rulings up on the spot consistently.

It's kind of *AD&D* with *OD&D* sensibilities.

Although eventually I get to the stage where I have to rewrite the levels of spells. Which is a task that usually kills an edition and makes me start a new one. I've just started this process 9if you ignore the fact that I had reversed all the names of clerical spells since my clerics are actually demon hunters, not priests and their ability to banish the supernatural is the basis of their ability to cast spells. So *continual light* became *banish darkness completely*. Mages on the other hand can create light so have magelight spells, but they don't have the ancillary spiritual effects of the clerical magic (since it also banishes creatures of darkness like vampires from the area of effect and the darkness that may lie in the hearts of those present).

I don't like playing games with people who believe the rules should be sacred and untouchable, probably from bad play experiences with that type of person. For example I once was publicly lambasted by someone (who wasn't even in the

game), for daring to call a large multiplayer space campaign I was running *Traveller*, despite using the *Traveller* rule set, because it didn't feature the Third Imperium. [OK, so it wasn't quite *Traveller*. Fuel was reaction mass, power plants were self contained fusion reactors where refuelling was a shipyard job, maneuver drives were low impulse but efficient ion drives, and jump drives were fusion torches, but all used the same numbers from the LBB.] Quite worried the non-gamers I was with at the time. I have never in fact run a *Traveller* game with the Third Imperium. It never existed when I started. Rules are a social contract, not gospel.

Karl Brown: All of them. OK historically *AD&D*, recently *D&D* 5e. I'm not sure if 'enjoy' is the right word. If a RPG is popular enough to attract players but does not give me the tools I need to create the worlds I want then I just have to 'crack' the math and create design rules. Mostly, this is focused on new PC species.

Lev Lafayette: For a person who does an awful lot of tinkering with games, I'd rather not have to do it! However when a game offends a sense of verisimilitude or has unnecessarily complex rules, I like to fix what I consider to be broken parts and simplify it. This was really the inspiration behind the *Rolemaster* Companion I wrote in the early 1990s. If I am to mention the game I most enjoy adapting it would be *GURPS* 3rd edition, because it is built on a pretty solid foundation and is sufficiently modular to expand and alter, yet still the recognisable game.

August 16: Which RPG do you enjoy using as is?

Well that's probably *Pendragon*. (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th edition, but definitely not 4th which violated it's own philosophical basis). Even though it was pointed out to me that I hadn't actually been using the rules properly wrt to critical hits. <grin>

Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies is probably the next contender, although given that I wrote a ship combat expansion for it, I really can't say it is "as is," but it doesn't contradict the base system or philosophy, just extends it.

Does having the Nova Class Dreadnaughts of the Terran Empire only massing 5kt in my first *Traveller* game count as running the game as is (after all that was the largest hull size in the game at the time)? <grin>

And I do commonly ignore rules that don't fit at the table. For example I don't use the AP systems in either *Dragonquest* or FASA's *Star Trek* because we tended to play the theatre of the mind, rather than on a tactical battlemap. Because I have a tendency not to use certain subsystems I can get tripped up when I recommend rules to people. On the other hand people have complained that while they otherwise like the FASA rules, they dislike the AP system. My response is simple - don't use it if you don't like it.

The problem is I think you can't really use a game or setting as is. As soon as you have it it becomes yours lock, stock, and barrel. Even if you produce no overt modifications to the game the customary style of play of your group will affect the game. It's yours, do what you want with it. One of the best things about conventions is the ability to play with groups that have different play styles and customs. As long as everyone is having fun, you are playing the game right.

Rules are a social construct. They allow everyone to have a good idea on how this social activity will be run, but they probably shouldn't be used to define the limits of the interactions. Somehow in the last four decades the ideas of the rules being the ultimate authority and inviolable has taken root in gaming. But this is anathema to me. Or in the customary terminology: rulings before rules. <grin>

Karl Brown: I don't think I have ever done this. No wait, *Puppetland* for a single one hour session and a *John Carter* playtest.

Lev Lafayette: Well, a playtest you really have to run as it is written otherwise the writers aren't going to get effective feedback. There's a couple of game systems which require setting-based modifications but are sufficiently flexible in their own right that they can adapt reasonably easily. In particular I am thinking of *Savage Worlds*, *FATE*, and *Basic Role Playing*.

August 17: Which RPG have you owned the longest but not played?

Ian Borchardt: OK, this will need referencing the Way-Back Machine. It's a pity that I have yet to add publication dates to my RPG database otherwise it would be a lot easier.

[There are a lot of recent games I haven't played. In fact there are too many that I haven't even read (I'm a sucker for good KS pitch).]

Thoan would actually be a possibility here, but whilst it is an old game, I've been looking for a copy of it for years, and have only just gone through the process of borrowing the use of a professional book-scanning rig to make an electronic copy which I can run through Google translate (only 25% complete in that regard - it is a very verbose set of rules). Which is a lot easier than translating it manually when you don't speak the language - the French double-negative for emphasis always gives me a headache. [I manually translated my copies of *In Nomine Satanis/Magna Veritas* and *Nephlim*.]

I wanted a copy once I found out about it because I've always loved Philip Jose Farmer's World of Tiers series.

I don't think my Swedish editions of *Kult* and its supplements count, since I got them because I liked the English edition of *Kult* and have run that. Even if they are yet to be translated Similarly I am going to disqualify the French edition of *Hawkmoon*, since I have run the English edition (the French just provided supplements covering people like the Gran Breton that the English edition was missing until Mongoose produced their own version).

Actually the reasons these are coming to mind is that I know how long they have been sitting on a shelf waiting me to get around to translate them for quite some time (it's a task that I kept putting off). It magnifies their apparent age.

In fact let's abandon edition wars altogether. [I tend to prefer the 3rd edition of rule - they've got all the bugs out and

feeping creaturism hasn't made an appearance - although I've played more 1st edition versions because I do like to try out new games.]

I don't think I've ever played *Behind Enemy Lines*. I definitely haven't run it. But I have no clue when I obtained a copy. Probably much later than the 1982 publication date. *Star Frontiers* (1982)? Never played but I would have got my copy after 1986 or so I suspect.

Ah ha! *Skyrealms of Jorune*. I remember getting my copy when it first came out. So that would have been late 1984 or early 1985. Never really liked the system although the setting was interesting, although not interesting enough for me to patch it into a different game system. that would probably be the game I've owned the longest and never played. Unsurprising really, given what was going on in my life at that time. Not fun.

Most of the others mentioned in the publishing timeline was stuff I picked up later (when I had more money) or stuff I have never heard of because it had a very local distribution All the rest I have run or played - even the 1977 epic *Space Quest* (even though I did play it well before I actually got my personal copy), and which I mention merely because of the temptation to actually run it in the near future.

Karl Brown: *Empire of Petal Throne* first printing, but not because I bought it new ;) A friend found it at a garage sale for 20 cents Australian many years ago.

Lev Lafayette: A hard one, either *Star Patrol* or *Metamorphosis Alpha*, a pair of short RPGs from the mid 1970s, and both of which I've had for a very long time and probably worth a few sessions but have never had the opportunity to play.

August 18: Which RPG have you played the most in your life?

Ian Borchardt: Well that's easy. *D&D* of course. Generally *OD&D* sensibilities using first edition *AD&D* charts and tables (because it was convenient to have all the tables in the same place, but we otherwise generally ignored the actual rules). This is why I think edition wars are silly. We once had a game where everyone at the table was using a different set of rules and the only difficulty was remembering whether that set used ascending AC or descending AC.

Second place is *Runequest*. Generally second edition. As well as a lot of other BRP games. I ran *Stormbringer* for a time, for example, and played *Ringworld*, but both campaigns lasted less than a decade so they don't remotely come near the length I've played any of the other games in this post. Although I've formally abandoned *Runequest* to use *Ironclaw* for my Glorantha game, because it can better handle the rune level play (the idea behind RQ2 was to get to rune levels where the "Coming in 1978" *Heroquest* was to take over; but that never appeared). The new edition apparently handles both phases well, but I like my adaption and won't be changing back.

Actually I probably should have included *Call of Cthulhu*, except I don't run it - just play intermittently when other people run it. And they have all been so good at running it that I definitely feel an inferiority complex and won't even

make the attempt. I've also never managed to roll a character with a POW over 8 in CoC, so I inevitably end up going insane when confronted by the Mythos.

Champions is probably my favourite superhero rules because you get to design your characters. Although generally I do, based on what you want, because cost accountancy isn't a fun role-playing experience and I'm much more generous with myself than I would be with you. It also means that your character are designed on the same basis as the NPCs.

My *Bushido* game ran regularly for over a decade, so that probably counts as having been played for a long time. I still think it is a wonderful game and it has influenced my D&D sandbox quite heavily (along with *Flashing Blades*).

I did a lot of *Traveller* early on but I was never really attracted to the default setting, so it eventually shifted over to custom space campaigns (one based on *Privateers & Gentlemen*, one based on *Starguard*, and one based on a combination of *Battletech*, *Living Steel*, and *Maximum Metal*. I've always had a problem with combat in a game with modern weapons, especially with people trained to use them competently. Incoming fire has the right of way. Trust me on this.

A friend did run a long term *Gamma World* game, but it was hard science game (radiation killed you; it didn't mutate you). It was well past the post-apocalyptic phase, as various nations/empires were actively rebuilding and in contests. Whilst raiding pre-Fall caches was useful, these groups had often gotten pre-Fall autofactories running again and so were generally armed with modern weapons. Most of the existing computer complexes were decided irrational because of the cyber-viruses released at the fall. The Venus part of the campaign was much more primitive than the Earth part, mainly because they were still actively terraforming it. There was even a Galactic Federation that had quarantined Earth, probably because of what humans had been playing with (retroviral psi-weapons for example). They may have even been responsible for the Fall. Some of them were certainly on Earth masquerading as Yet Another Mutant. All the standard mutant races were actually gene-engineered before the Fall, although they were even more sensitive to the the retroviruses that escaped from the lab than humans were. It's a pity that it died when one of his best friends did. It reminded him too much of him. Vale.

There is *Pendragon* and *Paranoia* which were run on an irregular basis for more than a decade. I've run the full GPC once and once as the BK preliminary, and would probably like to do it again with the new edition. Oh, and we used to be quite mad for *The Fantasy Trip*, although that was generally played as a tactical boardgame with characters we identified with. Lots of *Death Test* style dungeons, converted D&D monsters, etc. It really was our old-school dungeon crawl go to. I wouldn't mind running it again, although I think I will do the new edition *Ironclaw* first as a purely tactical game.

(He says lying blatantly because he knows he will never actually get around to creating the necessary automated virtual tabletop to do it on line.)

Karl Brown: Easily *AD&D* especially if you combine the two editions. From about 1984 to about 2000.

Lev Lafayette: I have to do a quick mental calculation for this one. There's lots of *GURPS 3rd edition* sessions, lots of *RuneQuest* sessions (also primarily third edition), a lot of *Champions/Hero System*, and a quite a lot of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 1st edition as well. But if I go by the numbers in terms of hours spent in actual play it's going to be *HeroQuest*. This is of course handily helped by the fact that I've run a game for ten years now in a PBEM format and it's still going.

August 19: Which RPG features the best writing?

Ian Borchardt: The problem with RPGs is that they are fundamentally reference books. That is, if they are being used, they are things which people want to look specific stuff up in. Prose is generally the enemy of this (for example the prose of *Thoan* is so overblown that it could be condensed by a factor of at least 10 without losing any vital information), which is especially noticeable when you are translating it from a foreign language (in your own language you'd just skim through it rather than having to actually read it).

The only time when the game will be read in a linear fashion is when you first get it. This is where good prose is valuable because it's your one real shot to convince people to play the game. But for me this prose comes under the heading of internal marketing budget which shouldn't get in the way of finding the rule you want.

Too many modern games force you to wade through prose to do this. Which is why I tend to prefer the older rules sets that just present the rules. For example I've always been a fan of the old SPI case system for rules, because it is set up so that you can easily find the rule you are looking for, through a case indexing number, and the brilliant use of font weight changes (remember that typesetter technology offered very limited choices back then). But you couldn't read these rules as linear prose, because you would keep burrowing too deep in details as you did so. Instead you had to skip over these holes in order to determine the structure of the rules.

One big development that living in the future brings is that of the PDF. Whilst not designed for the purpose you can create something that may pass as an electronic book. Which means you can organise the knowledge within them differently by adding hyperlinks and indexes that points directly to what you are looking for, rather than just a page number. So kudos to the **very** few people that actually do so (rather than just providing a print-ready copy of the book). And yes, this is writing.

Anyway, the problem is it is hard to use the description of "good" to technical writing, although it is **very** easy have "bad" technical writing. But not-bad isn't enthusiastically embracing the idea of good prose - it is the prose getting out of the way and not being noticed. Which is good for a reference book, but bad when you want to consider the quality of the prose itself.

So you are left with a limited selection of writings where the prose is sufficiently evocative to inspire you to run the game and setting, but which doesn't get in the way of you actually doing so.

One of the first that springs to mind is the first and second editions of *Nobilis* (the LPB and GWB respectively). And

the thing that makes these jump out at you are the epigraphs that tell a small story about the setting (generally appropriate to the section heading). They are distinct from the game text (actual epigraphs in the LPB and side-quotes in the GWB). They keep the mind focused on the setting of the game whilst you are reading the rules of how the setting actually works. I like side-notes (and to a lesser degree footnotes). They remove the interesting aside from the flow of the text, especially in those situations where the writer of the rules can't resist showing how clever they are. Although it is very easy to overload them (a big problem with most GURPS products).

[Rumours that I bought most of the *Phoenix Command* lines of products so I could find out the latest misadventure of Axly in the side-notes will be ignored with as much injured dignity as I can muster - but they undeniably add that extra bit of flavour insane flavour to products like *Living Steel*. There is a reason why soldiers are **very** responsive to gallows humour, so it is all very appropriate and evocative of the setting.]

Fiction can be a valuable part of the writing of rules provided it is left separate from the rules. I like *Underworld* purely for the stories it tells at the front, which are powerful enough imagery to carry the feeling for the setting through the rest of the rules. Normally inline illustrations, rather than writing, are used for this purpose.

Setting descriptions are important but they can also easily overwhelm the reader with a data dump. One section where they may add extra flavour to the rules is where they are embodied into a catalogue or list, such as an equipment (treasure) list, spell list, or a list of monsters. For example in *OD&D* you find in encounters the idea that 50% of the orcs you meet are in caravans - you have implied setting information.

In the early French editions of *Nephilim* just the names of the spells created the esoteric feel of the setting without it managing to make the spells confusing. One reason for this is the spells all lacked explicit mechanical detail (unless they summoned a creature). All you were left with is intent - by the bucketful. You don't see this in the English edition because the translator added extra mechanical detail where he felt it was lacking, to the great detriment of the rules (and often in contradiction to the actual translated text). Obviously that was the way he played, so he was just trying to be helpful.

The 5E *Monster Manual* does this nicely with the evocative descriptions of the nature and organisation of each monster. Making it far more useful to the gamemaster as a traditional bestiary. Similar kudos to the old *Ars Magica Medieval Bestiary* and the 13th Age *Bestiary* (and presumably *Bestiary 2*, which is also beautifully subtitled).

One of the things I really loved about the *Battletech Technical Manual* series was that along with the official illustration and game stats, it gave a brief history of the mech, flavour text for problems with it that wouldn't be reflected in the game stats, and a brief overview of notable battles featuring the mech and a bio of famous pilots. Who could resist mining such a rich vein for RPG purposes - I certainly couldn't when I ran a powered armour military campaign (all the powered armour suits were basically the battletechs), although the scale was more akin to *Living Steel* and *Maximum Metal* than giant robots [I've always had problems rationalising the effects of modern or futuristic military weapons in the hands of those trained to use them in combat orientated RPGs - but then I've had experience shooting and being shot at by them in RL so I may be biased (I really enjoyed a friend's *Top Secret* campaign where I

was the only character who didn't carry a weapon (and wasn't a scary looking martial artist either) - and was thus **much** more effective than the gung-ho cowboys - especially when my first reaction when some crazy did draw a weapon was to get out of the line of fire. (There is good reason why my field training concentrated on a doctrine of ambush and counter-ambush rather than peace through superior firepower (although that is extremely useful when breaking contact with an enemy force when you are an SAS team - you make them think they have contacted a much larger unit and skedaddle when they are reorganising to attack).]

Kevin Crawford also does a wonderful job sprinkling inspirational ideas for running your game in the body of these rules where you will need them most. Just as mentions in passing. He uses it to keep reminding us that the rules are for a particular setting and should be viewed in that context. But does it by providing unfinished ideas that the reader can carry onwards, rather than always definitively stating that this is the case.

Finally Chad Underkoffler does an excellent job in adding an extra chapter in his books which are essentially design notes - where he analyses the genre conventions, points out resources and explains why he went the route he did. Knowing, rather than needing to infer, what is going through the writer's mind is always very useful.

Karl Brown: There is a lot of good writing. It's the utterly woeful writing that stands out. I'll resist the urge to name and shame (barely).

Lev Lafayette: Like Karl Brown I tend to recognise the bad writing rather than the good writing. I also worry that my own writing style is too heavy biased by decades reading German philosophy. You know what? I'm going for first and second edition *Paranoia*, which really is a pleasure to read, is crystal clear to understand, and had a range of people writing it (Dan Gelber, Greg Costikyan, Eric Goldberg, Ken Rolston, and Paul Murphy).

August 20: What is the best source for out-of-print RPGs?

Ian Borchardt: Whilst I collect games am not a games collector. That is, I get them because I am interested in the rule system or setting. Most of my collection was picked up whilst new, and if physical, can best be described as "well-loved." And it also means that I have no innate objection against PDF - in fact given that shipping physical product from the US has generally become more expensive than the book itself, getting it in PDF means that I can buy 2-4 new RPGs in PDF for the price of 1 physical book. Besides, PDF has advantages over physical books when it comes to looking stuff up, extracting quotes, and actually physically finding them.

That said I have picked up a few physical books and boxed sets over the years second hand from the local second-hand bookstore (now long closed). Usually because the original owner has decided it was time to "put away childish things."

A lot of my collection has ended up going walkabout over the years, and whilst I wouldn't mind replacing things (like my boxed set of *Striker*), I'm not generally willing to pay collector prices for it.

So it is a rare out-of-print book that I want a copy of for myself for nostalgia reasons. In fact I'm more likely to try to

get my hands on a foreign language game than I am an old game. [There was a nice game store in the 5th arrondissement that didn't mind dealing with me in the Antipodes (and helped me get books from all over Europe).]

Anyway a couple of years ago an innocent comment on G+ lead me to finding out that +[Wayne's Books](#) had a copy of *Space Quest* on offer that wasn't even on their web page [<http://www.waynesbooks.net/>] So I just had to grab it.

I can really recommend their shipping practices too. I'd lay odds on the the book, when shipped to me, could have survived a low yield nuclear explosion quite readily. It was definitely going to survive the ravages of any postal service, even the US one (I've lost more parcels in transit from the US than anywhere else - enough to fuel at least two RPG-playing Cargo Cults somewhere in the Pacific [packages from Europe and South America don't seem to suffer this problem]).

And he has a reference site [<http://www.waynesbooks.com/>] where he talks about old games (including things like edition differences.

All in all, highly recommended.

Karl Brown: for most items I don't need a physical copy and Drive-thru is the one stop shop. That said I generally check the publisher first if they still exist. For physical copies I invest the time to shop around and get the best deal including postage to Australia.

Lev Lafayette: My spare room, without a doubt. Some of which has even made it to the official RPG Review store (<http://www.quicksales.com.au/shop/RPG-Review.aspx>). Seriously I have no idea how many physical RPG books I have, but I suspect it's a few thousand.

August 21: Which RPG does the most with the least words?

Ian Borchardt: *Land of Og* (Wingnut Games) for sure.

Because you are playing a caveman who only knows one (or two if he is Smart) words. Although you fellow party members can readily teach you their words (assuming that they have something to point to). So that is the entire vocabulary you have to talk to each other in the game. If you want to describe something you don't have the words for, well, that takes a certain amount of circumlocution and inventiveness.

The sample starting words they suggest you choose from are: YOU, ME, ROCK, WATER, FIRE, TREE, HAIRY, BANG, SLEEP, SMELLY, SMALL, CAVE, FOOD, THING, BIG, SUN, GO, and VERISIMILITUDE.

Instead of experience, you get to learn a new word. Usually supplied by the gamemaster so it may be of questionable usefulness. I got BOHEMIAN EARSPOON once - the gamemaster was obviously feeling generous in giving me two

words, even if they had to be used together. I may have been a bit too Smart for my own good. Go for it!

And yes, I am deliberately misinterpreting the question.

Karl Brown: How about this instead? "Be concise but also give me a lot of words and therefore a lot of rules, advice, and tools for creation. Writing short is a skill, but it's not an uncommon skill. I would rather you flesh out your novel twee idea with well, more."

Lev Lafayette: Oh, I know this one. *Papers & Paychecks!* "Gee, Lev, I don't know. Claiming your own game is the most concise ever written?" Well, yes. I was one of the design goals that I had in mind and have continued to use throughout. I really don't like RPG books that are several hundred pages long of mostly fluff. *Papers & Paychecks* is mere 128 pages, it includes a medium-weight game system, a good equipment list (including "special equipment"), about thirty or so fleshed-out NPCs and 'monsters', a dozen adventure seeds, and a fully developed campaign. There is a lot of material in there.

August 22: Which RPGs are the easiest for you to run?

Ian Borchardt: The ones with large groups of players. Despite liking one-on-one play, the best games are the ones with 6 or more players. Although it does tend to get harder at 19 players.

As for actual games my go to choice for zero prep D&D is *Beyond the Wall*, thanks to it's excellent method for generating characters. Although if I have time, I will draw a couple of *Talisman* cards to build the plot around. After all, my default setting for this game s the world of the *Talisman* board game.

My old *D&D* campaign ran via encounter table, so there was really no prep time for the individual sessions, but an enormous amount of front-end preparation.

I find *Paranoia* is easy for me to run for most people. The only problem is if some groups are a little too gratuitous at killing each other off, but that is soon ended when you execute a few people for wasting The Computer's valuable property (ie the other Troubleshooters), and they soon learn to make the accidents look hilarious or convincing (or come with enough evidence. manufactured or otherwise, to convince The Computer that they are Loyal Defenders of Alpha Complex. In one *Paranoia* game one of the players on his sixth clone actually snapped, thinking I was gunning for him (I wasn't, he just kept putting himself in the line of fire). The look of shock at what he was doing, followed by delight of every other player as they had a self-declared traitor in their very midst whom they didn't need to frame, was eventually followed by 17 simultaneous cries of "I open fire" (which in turn was followed by 4 simultaneous cries of "I have Combat Reflexes"). A glorious death.

Pendragon (Chaosium) and *Star Trek* (FASA) are pretty easy to run, mainly because people are already familiar with the background universe and how players are supposed to behave. One player in particular blossomed in the *Pendragon* games I used to run because he was a natural-born Arthurian knight and did everything properly (which is actually

quite different from correctly). Unfortunately mostly ignored by the other players because his play in other games was not quite as naturally inspired - and in fact earned him a nickname of a Steggie (as the dinosaur). But I (ad gamemaster) noted he was inevitably correct in his decisions and judgements (the only sad part about that entire game).

Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies is fun to run, because I innately like swashbuckling adventure and like to encourage it in most of my games. Some players have worked out that I will be far more lenient if they attempt the impossible than if they are staid and cautious. Similarly I find superhero games easy to run because I like people to be larger than life.

People like my *Bushido*, because I have always liked 17th Century Japan. Similarly both Imperial and Republican Rome are quite easy to run for me. If you are knowledgeable about a period in which a game is set then you can add the sort of little details that add authenticity to the game and make it interesting. Similarly my fantasy worlds are not ready to run until I can actually picture in my head what it is like to be there myself. When I can taste the world, it is ready.

The games built on what was eventually to become the BRP system are easy to run because they have the same basic mechanics. Although it is important to note that the reasons I believe the separate games were actually more successful than the formal BRP system, was that they customised the system to each game rather than fitting the game to each system. These minor differences often carried the flavour of the individual game.

I like my "D&D" house rules and my *Ironclaw* and *Cortex Plus* Gloranthan games because I wrote the variant rules (or in one of these cases didn't actually write much in the ways of formal rules). But because I created the game systems these run in it is easy for me to adjudicate situations consistently. Although players still want formally written up rules.

One advantage is that not having much in the way of formal rules means the game is automatically one of trusting the gamemaster's rulings rather than the rules, which is the play style I honestly prefer.

Karl Brown: honestly whatever I'm currently running. I quickly develop an unhealthy obsessive focus that helps me prepare prior to a session and recall rules during it.

Lev Lafayette: Yeah, I think I differ to Karl on this one. Don't get me wrong, I can quote an obscure rule from a favourite game system as well as any fan, including the rules I don't like. But in terms of running a game, I'd have to say *Wordplay*, closely followed by *HeroQuest*. Both use a universal mechanic for all conflicts with no exceptions; this is unlike modern version of *D&D* which use a universal mechanic with many exceptions.

August 23: Which RPG has the most jaw-dropping layout?

Ian Borchardt: Layout and graphic design is such an important part of what makes a beautiful book, that, with the inclusion of "jaw-dropping," this question is simply asking "what is the most beautiful RPG." Again.

So instead I shall concentrate on the good layout that makes the reading experience comfortable and the book easy to use. Since good layout, like the trains running on time, should properly be pretty invisible rather than call attention to itself. You generally only notice the bad layout (or the trains running late). In fact the beautiful books with "jaw-dropping" layout by this measure actually fail the test - they are often distracting, particularly artwork underlies the text.

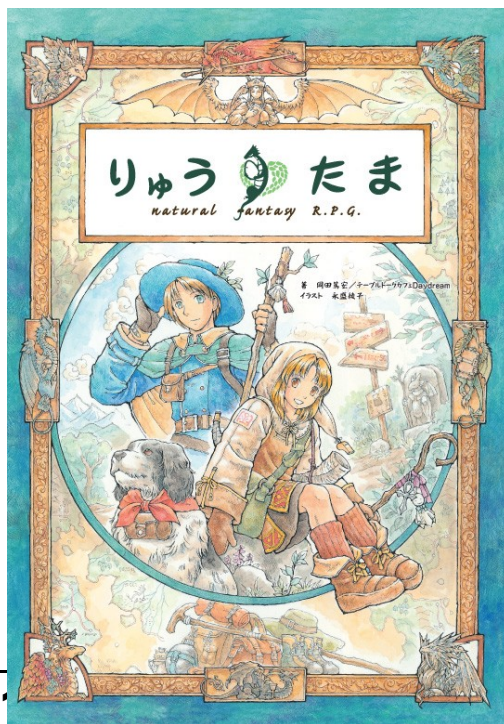


I'm also at a disadvantage in that most of the modern games I am getting these days are in PDF and this format almost always destroys good layout practice for a physical book. So in this regard, automatic kudos to any book that has a PDF version that is actually hyperlinked and indexed properly with bookmarks for use as an electronic book rather than something best printed off. Of which James Raggi is a prime offender [defender?] in this regard. Also Greg Porter's BTRC stuff. Well done sirs for talking that extra effort.

I almost threw my computer out the window when I tried to run the solo adventure for *Abandon All Hope* it was so irritating. If there is ever a PDF that needs hyperlinking, it is a Choose Your Own Adventure PDF.

Speaking of which *Vaginas Are Magic* is a well-laid out physical book (at least as far as I can tell from the electronic version since I was too ill to make it into the FLGS of Free RPG Day this year (which was also my

birthday, so doubly disappointing). Anyway the one-page spell layout is very nice, especially with with the end paper quick reference tables.



Agon is well laid out, with good use of sidebar explanations and white space making the reading experience comfortable.

Ryuutama was also nicely laid out - so much so that I went back and got the physical book just for the sake of having it.

Then again, when it comes to layout for games that will hit the table, I often cheat by atomising the PDF of the game and creating my own reference work (for my own private use). [Don't try this in the UK, and don't try it where you don't have permission to copy the text (in most other jurisdictions). Always check your local laws for what you may legally do and don't assume what may be legal in one situation is legal where you live.] But making a purely electronic reference document with one atom of information per page view is so useful for most games it is not funny. But it also

makes artwork and layout considerations irrelevant (since neither is included).

Karl Brown: Jaw dropping, really it's a book (insert old man rant about the real meaning of 'awesome' here). Pretty pictures don't make a game that's fun to play or provide tools to create worlds. Layout is nice but really what I want in a book is useful words, lots of them. Cut most of the art, turn three hardbacks into a single large one and I'm happy.

Lev Lafayette: Good layout is important is important to me, because it means less time flipping pages. I include the idea of a decent table of contents, a working index, glossary, and appendices here, as well as traditional layout on a page, which must make good font use, white space, section breaks, page numbers and chapters. Jaw-dropping tends to work in reverse here. Good layout is pleasingly functional. Poor layout drops jaws in frustration. What drops my jaw? *Chivalry & Sorcery*, 1st edition.

August 24: Share a Pay-What-You-Want publisher who should be charging more.

Ian Borchardt: I think Kevin Crawford's *Stars Without Number* approach works nicely. Having a free quick-start product so the people who are curious about a line can investigate it, but then having actual paid product immediately available to back it up. Of course his initial product was totally free to showcase his ability (and the second edition of it has broken six figures in KS at the moment).

PWYW alone doesn't generally work as a commercial strategy unless you have something to back it up. Although it is useful to see if your idea of a novel game system or play style fits that of the potential buyer.



But a pure PWYW publisher - you might as well just give it away yourself from your own website yourself. In fact I suspect doing so is actually more likely to actually get it read than having it drown in the flood of poor quality stuff at BS.

Karl Brown: I could not even name a Pay-What-You-Want publisher. I completely support this approach and if anyone want to go the Pay-What-You-Want route then more power to them. I wish they had existed during the years I was terribly broke but had more free time.

Lev Lafayette: Yeah, I'm with Karl on this one. No bloody idea.

August 25: What is the best way to thank your GM?

Ian Borchardt: Actually thanking them, would be a good start.

Too many players do take their gamemasters for granted. Expecting them to run the games, buy all the new product for the game, and often even host the game.

In four decades of gamemastering I can count the number of friends that have actually thanked me for running a game for them without taking off my shoes. It's often assumed as a condition of friendship I suspect. On the other hand, with the competitive tournament games we used to run for strangers I think the odds of a post-session "thank you" runs about 50%.

Now I do enjoy being a gamemaster or I wouldn't do it, but when you look back at the amount of entitlement shown by many players, it is depressing. And then there was that person who scared the non-gaming friends I was with by berating me in public over the fact that I was running a semi-public *Traveller* game that didn't involve the Third Imperium (and therefore according to him couldn't be called *Traveller*).

Otherwise sharing the gamemastering load is also good. Running something for your gamemaster to play in (a) increases the pool of experienced gamemasters in and of itself, and; (b) provides them with a break that may prevent the ever-present problem of gamemaster burnout.

I do know of a couple of *Pathfinder* groups that have bought their gamemaster a subscription to the product line. Which is something extraordinarily generous in my experience, even though they are the people that directly benefit from it. Most of the groups I've played with wouldn't do that. [I have in fact bought stuff for the gamemaster as a gift because I do realise how heavy a financial burden groups often place on the gamemaster expecting them to get the next splatbook. But then I'm probably not the person to ask this question to. Especially now.

Karl Brown: Simple, pay attention during the game and try to contribute almost as much as she does during the session.

Lev Lafayette: Contributing to the story, not spending too long on general table banter, not getting grumpy when things go seriously wrong for their characters, and exploring the story's theme (e.g., remember, in *Call of Cthulhu*, you're supposed to go mad and/or die horribly)

August 26: Which RPG provides the most useful resources?

Ian Borchardt: Ummm. They all do. I frequently steal stuff from one game to put in another.

Games that I have found particularly useful for this over the years (in particular reference to my house *D&D* rules) include *Bushido*, *Flashing Blades*, *Chivalry & Sorcery*, *Pendragon*, *ACKS*, *An Echo*, *Resounding*, *Elements of Magic*, *Atomik Magic*, *Thieves Guild VI*, and *Houses of the Blooded* (in no particular order). They have all contributed towards

the current state of affairs in different ways, and are all worth looking at interdependently.

One of the advantages of having a large collection of RPGs is that I can look at how people have approached certain problems, as well as blatantly steal their research and methods.

Karl Brown: Why is this even a question? *GURPS* der.

Lev Lafayette: There are good resources in other RPGs for different settings. For example, *Call of Cthulhu* has done some great packages for various locations and its times, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 2nd edition did pretty well with its historical supplements. *RuneQuest* has very useful material for both its historical fantasy and Glorantha settings. *Pendragon* really delves well in material for its setting as well (indeed, I'm prepared to say that *The Great Pendragon Campaign* is one of the most important historical fantasy works ever written). There's excellent setting specific material for *Ars Magica* out there, and likewise for *MERP/Rolemaster* for that narrow time-band that it picked, and of course the supplements for the *Star Wars* RPG were so good that George Lucas decided they were canonical.

But ultimately I'll have to go for *GURPS* for sheer breadth of material; dozens of supplements which are almost as good, if not better than any academic research available.

August 27: What are your essential tools for good gaming?

Ian Borchardt: Well dice, paper, and writing implements. I quite like having my quick-reference rules on a tablet or reader. If I'm running a tactical game like *The Fantasy Trip* or *Ironclaw*, I like using cardboard heroes. Oh yeah, players. I seem to remember reading somewhere that players are important. Which is surprising, considering the number of times they make a total hash of things.

And probably a better class of medication these days.

Karl Brown: dice, paper, pencil, humans with the communication skills of a competent 12 year old or better.

Lev Lafayette: The ability to adhere to a social norms of good behaviour towards others is the essential requirement. Other things which are optional, but worthwhile, is an ability to concentrate in the generation and exploration of the "shared imaginary space" with a sense of drama and imagination. As a GM/narrator, I also make ample use of text files. Easiest way to make notes on the fly, and the easiest format to search for material afterwards. Heard of "grep"? Learn it; it's real fast.

August 28: What film or series is the most-frequent source of quotes in your group?

Ian Borchardt: Depends on the group. Monty Python, Terry Pratchett, *The Princess Bride*, *Buffy*, *Firefly*, *Star Trek*, and even *Lexx* (especially the close correlation between Brunnen G and Elves, including the tendency of one Elf PC to

sing the Brunnen G theme song when facing down a human army [he died]) have all featured prominently.

Although if you want to get a good idea of what my house *D&D* game is like, I do recommend William Mark Simmons *The Dreamland Chronicles*, and especially it's tendency to invoke pop culture references at the drop of the pointy and badly-spelled wizzard's hat.

Karl Brown: There isn't one. Dull but there it is. Might be due to the wide age range, 11 to over 45, creating a chasm separating our pop-culture references. Maybe the kids are popping references all the time and I don't notice. I'm pretty sure they have never heard of Monty Python.

Lev Lafayette: It might have something to with the settings with played in recent years, but top of the list is *Aliens*, that's a very quotable film and especially for militaristic space adventure involving xenomorph terrors. There is, of course, a fair dose of *The Holy Grail* when playing any epic fantasy. To a lesser extent there's a fair few lines from *Bad Taste*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Casablanca*, *Blade Runner*, and even *Zulu*. It's fun when they cross settings. Personally, I find there's always room for *Bad Taste*. Every party needs a Derek.

August 29: What was the best-run RPG crowdfunding campaign you have backed?

Ian Borchardt: I think Kevin Crawford has the right policy for doing an RPG Kickstarter, and it shows with the steady escalation in the people that back his Kickstarters. He has published his rules in his *The Sandbox* magazine (free from OBS) [<http://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/143764/The-Sandbox-1>].

Basically he:

- (1) Has already written the entire product.
- (2) Uses the KS to add art assets to the product (although I'd also add the employment of an editor and layout to this level.
- (3) Generally does not add stretch goals, especially stretch goals that need to be written. If he gets a lot of backers then they can look forward to the **next** project being bigger and better thanks to the success of this one.
- (4) Knows he is a one-man shop and doesn't overextend himself as a result.
- (5) Uses POD to avoid the hassle of (a) collecting shipping fees during the Kickstarter, and more importantly, (b) dealing with freight, warehousing, distributing, and shipping the product.

This is especially beneficial to foreign backers, since shipping a book from the US using US mail will be more than the retail price of the book. Although more RPG publishers are learning from their board-gaming compatriots and using a local fulfilment centre to which they directly freight the product (which then ships locally). [If you are doing this to Australia/NZ I personally recommend Aetherworks because **every** game and book that has come through them has been excellently protected - the other businesses gave usually been cheaply packed and some may have exhibited damage as a result.] A lot of US-nased Kickstarters effectively bar foreign backers because they concentrate on physical product that has to be shipped (because, as one continual offender says "it's cool having this stuff and we just

didn't think about it.").

And he tends not to spam the backers with irrelevant email *trying to publicise the game to the people that have **already** backed it*. This is fine if you only back one RPG, but it soon results in a backlog of unread email if, like me, you can't resist a hood KS pitch. <grin>

And lastly I can rely on him for not selling the PDF of the game for less than he charged the backers for it. You'd be surprised at the number of emails I've gotten from publishers making this offer to "celebrate the completion of the Kickstarter." [Yes, from a creation viewpoint the price of a PDF is not much different from the creation of a physical book, so KS creators tend to set the pledge level for the KS high, both to account for this and encourage people to upgrade to the physical product, but for foreign backers it's not a \$10 price difference but rather a \$60 price difference. But once published, the PDF drops in their mind to having negligible value. And we are getting PDF levels that are frankly ridiculous because of this creator-based accounting. I think the record was recently set for a A\$64 pdf level - for a single smallish book. You've just wasted your prime sales pitch on me. I may wait for later if you do manage to produce the game, but then it's competing against all the other "expensive" PDF (and probably won't be bought). And it is more than likely that eventually the PDF of a KS game will be in one of the most excellent *Bundles of Holding* anyway. And it's annoying to see stuff you bought at full price being offered at such a steep discount - which means I, spending more money these days on non-RPG product because your PDF pricing policies on KS have priced yourself out of the marketplace. And yes it is a hot button topic for me. <grin>

Karl Brown: Maybe I've been lucky or maybe I have good judgment because I have only backed a handful of crowdfunding projects and they have all been very competently run. Even those by smaller outfits. I think communication with backers is a the key.

Lev Lafayette: I really can't say I've participated enough to judge fairly to be honest, although my eyes opened with complete joy when the two-volume quarto-sized *Guide to Glorantha* books arrived. I'm prepared to cut people a lot of slack on these things.

August 30: What is an RPG genre-mashup you would most like to see?

Ian Borchartd: If it is something I'd like to see I've most probably already done it.

If I like a particular setting I will often use it, just not usually with the rule set it was designed with. I am particularly enamoured of those settings that are outside of the normal experience (such as *Belly of the Beast*, where people struggle to survive in the belly of some monstrous beast.

Especially since I do rather like thwarting genre expectations. Some of my favourite *D&D* games have been of the fractured fairy tale format, for example. I've run a Star Trek based game as a fantasy naval game for example, with the Federation replaced by the Church of the Goddess ruling over the various human lands, and the orcs and elves being Klingons and Romulans respectively. [I think I gave the game away when I emphasised the elaborate cloaks that the

Elvish Sea Lords wore.] In my *Paranoia* game The Computer really **was** Your Friend and tried to be as helpful as possible. To everyone, which means it really wasn't helpful to anyone. But it was only a broken networked vending machine, so what do you expect. Time Travel and multidimensional games are fun. Games like *Passages* that mix fictional and real characters, for example.

This often requires that the characters in the game are actually wise to the expectations of the genre (at least to some degree), and can actually use them consciously as world laws that will affect the outcome. So players are free to use genre expectations to assist them in the game - or purposefully thwart them to mark their own path (leave the script behind entirely). Sort of like Rick in *Rick & Morty*.

This is accompanied with a meta-play approach. For example, I like "open secrets," where all the players at the table know the deep and dark secrets of the other players. I find this useful, because the other players can easily "accidentally" brush up against the secret repeatedly - which plays into the paranoia of the character that their secret is about to be discovered.

Essentially I feel that the game should be as entertaining for the characters as it should be for the players. Although probably less painful for the characters (but not always). Playing it straight goes against my natural instincts as a Trickster I suspect. [Although being a Trickster is also essentially self-defeating.]

Karl Brown: Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Huygen's *Cosmotheros*. Mars has two moons you know...

Lev Lafayette: I quite liked the idea of setting design by committee in *Other Worlds*, although ultimately the poor bastard who has to run the thing should have a power of veto. 'Pirates of the Caribbean meets Doctor Zhivago in space!' is all very well, that's what the Narrator is prepared to work with. What is genre anyway? A sufficiently ambiguous term that allows obvious character-setting examples that *Hellas* (classic Greeks characters in space) or multiple-thematic *Eclipse Phase* (first contact, transhuman, horror, conspiracy), *Shadowrun* (fantasy, cyberpunk) can all be given as examples. Contradictory thematic mashups are a lot harder, which is why I give *Grey Ranks* such high praise as it combines the violence of war with adolescent romance. More games like that please.

August 31: What do you anticipate most for gaming in 2018?

Ian Borchardt: Honestly? Being able to do even less.

This year was particularly bad as far as health was concerned, both with physical ability, pain [feeling very ouchy at the moment - it is painful to type], and mental degradation as this disease literally eats my brain (seriously affecting memory, concentration, fatigue, depression and anxiety [plus annoyingly I seem to have acquired the ability to consistently use the wrong homonym and not notice]).

One of the big problems is how this affects my reliability. Since I have no idea if I will be able to attend a regular session I've haven't made any attempts to join a regular group of players (even though 99.9999% of the local games are

either *WOD* or *Pathfinder*, neither of which particularly excites me).

As a gamemaster I'm still running irregular sessions, but was spoiled by being able to borrow university facilities to game in (not to mention as a good source of players). Most of my old players have moved though, started families, or died in real life though. My definition of being old was generating a Classic *Traveller* character who was younger than you were - and that is a landmark I passed many years ago.

The limited bandwidth of hangout gaming is irritating to me. Not to mention the perceptible delay when dealing with people on the far side of the world. I did pick up some VTTs to run some of the more interesting tactically-based RPGS (like the new *Ironclaw*), but I want to automate the procedure and that's work. Besides this is really boardgaming (or wargaming) than roleplaying. Nothing wrong with that though. I'd like to do more with some of the new Osprey skirmish wargames rules too - which is roleplaying as well - I've often used skirmish miniature wargame rules like *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *Starguard* as RPG rules. Except it would be on a VTT, since painting miniatures is beyond me now.

I don't even get the opportunity to do much boardgaming these days, despite still buying them. I can't resist a good Kickstarter pitch.

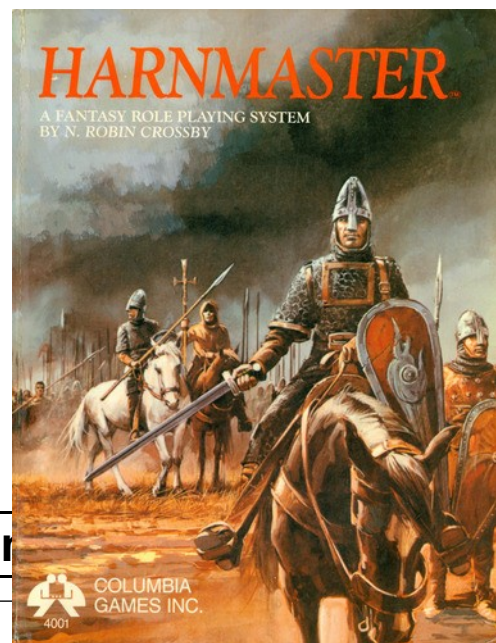
I still enjoy reading new games though (even though I have a backlog of unread games that goes back five years of so now, and am trying to actually write up some of my own game rules/settings in the hopes that people may find them interesting, but my brain doesn't seem to be particularly enthused with this. Which explains why tend to data-dump answers in other people's posts. <grin>

Despite the fact I don't want the universe to win don't know how much of 2018 I'll actually manage to enjoy. Speaking of which, typing has become a bit too painful to continue, so I shall stop depressing everyone.

Karl Brown: I am in this hobby as a creative outlet and my wish list reflects this. Firstly, I wish for progress on *Gulliver's Trading Company*. Second I hope to keep my current campaigns alive. Third there are several campaigns I want to run but I have to bring an existing one to a conclusion first. Finally, maybe I'll get to be a player rather than a referee.

Lev Lafayette: I'm looking forward to finishing my *Eclipse Phase* campaign after sending the PCs to every damn planet in the solar system and a few extrasolar ones as well, and seeing if they really can save transhumanity from a fate worse than death. After that I'm planning on running *Harnmaster* after having it sit on my shelves for so long. I'd like to finish my *HeroQuest Glorantha* game after ten years as well, the PC are a lot closer than they realise. As a player I have high hopes for an upcoming *RuneQuest Questworld* game, as well as seeing where *Megatraveller* and *Elric!* games lead us as well.

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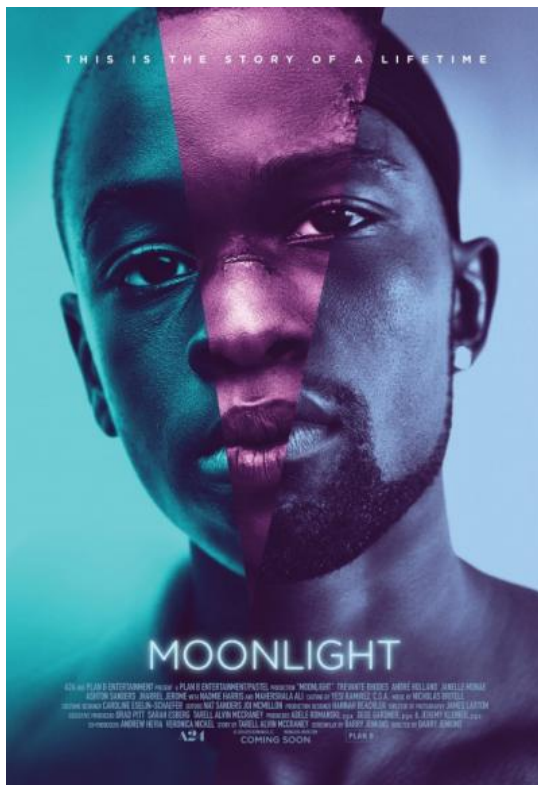
Wouldn't mind returning to *FATE Secrets of Cats/Call of Cthulhu*, but would need to convince the GM of that.

Still, you know what they say about great plans of mice and men.

Moonlight Movie Review

by Andrew Moshos

dir: Barry Jenkins, 2016



What a way to win Best Picture at the Academy Awards. Long after people have forgotten what the flick was about they'll remember, just like those jokes about Marisa Tomei winning for *My Cousin Vinny* way back in the day, people will be joking about how it was announced by *Bonnie and Clyde*, in their final act of defiance, that *La La Land* had won, when in fact *Moonlight* was the actual winner.

And it made for quite an awkward speech to cap the night off, from both the people who thought they'd won, and the ones who actually won.

Who cares anyway – the Oscars are meaningless, really, the actual awards don't mean anything other than marketing.

And yet, it is fucking bizarre that this flick won Best Picture. I have to believe that however the votes from the Academy members were tabulated, I can't believe that thousands of old white people watched this and thought it was the best flick of the year.

I say this as someone who watched it and liked it, and who thinks it's absurd that a flick like this can even be compared with something like *La La Land*. It's like comparing lasagne to clouds, or frogs to espadrilles.

Moonlight is a beautiful, touching, slow, meandering, exasperating and mostly gentle film. It is almost completely unlike anything else that comes out of America. This is

more like a French bildungsroman for a gay character, than anything else I've ever seen, and yet it's so keenly situated in the experience of an African-American boy through three stages of his life that it's impossible to think of it being set anywhere different.

It follows the trials and tribulations of a boy called Chiron (pronounced Shy-Roan), who's rarely called that. As a boy he's practically mute, overwhelmed with sullen misery and desperate fearfulness. He has a crack addict for a mother (Naomie Harris) and is bullied by other children, although at this early stage she's still holding down a job and surely that bodes well for the future?

Called Little by his bullies, he is pursued on the way home from school, and tries to barricade himself in a crack house, which is thankfully empty at the time. The local drug dealer, Juan (Mahershala Ali), sees the kid being chased, and takes pity on him.

This opening section is quite strange, we have to admit, because so much is being done with so little, for and around Little. Juan sees something he wants to protect in Little, and tries to encourage him, get him to feel protected, but during this whole section it's an exaggeration to say if Little speaks more than five words, at least initially. He either stares down in a defeated posture, or glares up at people with his wounded eyes. At all times he looks haunted (as his youngest incarnation).

Juan runs a crew who service a block or two, or "traps" as they refer to them as (not that I should pretend to get the vernacular, because a lot of the time I was wondering what the hell the drug references were), and he keeps a stern eye on his turf, but with Little or his partner Teresa (Janelle Monáe) he is nothing but gentle. We're meant to assume that he would have to be brutal in the service of his business, but we never see it. We only see his gentleness to Little, and his hope that he can be some kind of support to him, knowing that he doesn't have any male role models to look up to.

Of course, the biggest problem in his education of Little, in his desire to teach him what it means to be a black man in contemporary America, in terms of how a male has to represent himself, is that Juan is a drug dealer, and it's his product being smoked in a glass pipe by Little's mother and countless other addicts in the area.

It makes for what is often called a conflict of interest. Probably the first sad scene in the flick, well, there are plenty but the saddest for Juan is where he goes to berate some crackheads smoking in proximity to their point of purchase, only to be berated by Little's mum, who correctly points out to him that he may think he's all high and mighty, but it's him directly contributing to the ruination of Little's family.

Even though Little already seems pretty miserable, it's when his own mother starts verbally abusing him that he starts to believe the taunts from the lazy shithheads in the neighbourhood or at school. He asks Juan and Teresa what a 'faggot' is, seeing as his own mother loudly proclaimed him to be one, and he doesn't know what it means. Juan and Teresa gently explain something to him, also appreciating that he's too young for sexual preference to mean anything to him yet.

As such, we have a main character being defined as being 'something' before he has any sense of what it could even mean, and of course the callous shithheads around him, including his own mother, are more than happy to tell him what they think he is, and that it is something deserving of their abuse.

It sounds horrible, doesn't it? But this isn't played out in an overbearing or melodramatic way. I mean there is at least one harsh scene of violence later on, in the middle segment, but mostly these scenes all play out in a manner which I hesitate to call 'naturalistic', but which pretty much fits. They all (from the direction to the acting) generally underplay scenes rather than overplay them.

Of course sexuality plays a key role in the film, but lest this sound like a story likely to make the homophobic elements in the audience clutch their pearls in disgust and maybe feel a disturbing fraction of arousal, this is meant to be an aspect of Chiron's identity, not its sole defining characteristic. And this is, for most of the flick's length, a kid we're talking about. A kid with a terrible home life in a hostile environment (the Liberty City projects of Miami, which look like a very cheery locale in which to stab someone to death over their sneakers), who isn't able to put up the false front growing boys are expected to project, where they can brutalise each other without feeling a thing and can avoid ever expressing a genuine emotion.

The term 'toxic masculinity' keeps being bandied about, and it's hard to not use it yet again, because, hell, growing up for anyone; male, female, genderfluid, LGBTQI or not, is pretty hard. Those teenage years fundamentally...

The film jumps ahead to Chiron's teenage years, where a different actor looking nothing little Little plays the role. Now, in Chiron's life, things are thankfully only getting worse. His mother's addiction is worse, Juan is gone (though Teresa is still there to provide Chiron with some respite from the harshness of the world), and now his vicious mother is also pressuring him for money to fund her stupid habit. Instead of being sad and withdrawn, Chiron is now nervous and fearful, dreading the attention of a bully in his class (a dickhead who has the gall to terrorise Chiron despite looking like Milli and / or Vanilli), where the harsh words and homophobic taunts are being supplemented with threats of serious violence.

Chiron knows that the world demands that he be 'hard' but he doesn't think he can be. He mutters the words the other jerks might say, but deep down he thinks himself too 'soft', and cannot imagine any way out of his predicament. We see no indication that he has any hope of academic success or athleticism pulling him out of the projects and the public school system by his bootstraps with hard work and elbow grease and gumption and all that other bullshit, and he figures it's only a matter of time before he will probably get shot or worse.

There is a real feeling of hopelessness and futility and palpable anxiety in this section. With it, though, comes the possibility of something sweeter. He gets into an awkward conversation with one of his schoolmates Kevin (Jharrel Jerome), who is bragging transparently about banging some girl in school and getting detention because of it, but the looks he's giving Chiron kinda maybe sorta imply something different. His aggressive friendliness perhaps covers his own loneliness, but at the very least Chiron seems intrigued.

Later on when they share a joint on the beach, a beach that comes to have great significance to Chiron throughout his life (it figures in each 'chapter', for very different reasons), stuff happens which doesn't really clarify anything (in terms of defining who these characters really 'are'), but it at least affords Chiron at least one night of happiness. It might not change much, but he at least gets to have a conversation with one person about how great his sadness is, and how he feels like he could cry himself into the ocean.

In the only scene in the whole film horrible to watch, circumstances contrive to punish Chiron for his happiness, and his alpha male antagonist dreadlocked bumbarass bastard of a bully peer pressures Kevin into brutalising Chiron before the jerk and all his mates jump in to stomp poor Chiron. This leads to a scene I wish was harder to watch (in that it is perversely satisfying) where Chiron does exactly what the world tells him a 'man' should do.

Needless to say, the world then punishes him for it. Mixed messages or what?

The last section, unsurprisingly, called Black (being Kevin's nickname for Chiron, but now the name that Chiron goes by), we see Chiron transformed into the man his environment, his peers all demanded he had to be. As he's introduced as an adult (now played by Trevante Rhodes), he seems awfully familiar: it's not teenage Chiron he reminds us of, or his even younger self, it's just that he has moulded himself completely into Juan, complete with do-rag on his head, a crown on the dashboard of his car, and a manner none should fuck with. And abs on top of abs, like, extra abs and stuff.

The man inside, though, hasn't changed as much, and looks to the past with longing. A chance phonecall from Kevin leads to a situation very different from the one I thought was going to happen, what with the lifestyle involved, the gun, the potential for violence and such.

No, none of that. That last section, most of which is a meeting at the diner where Kevin works, is stretched taut with all sorts of different levels of tension. People either say lots or, especially in Black's case, very little if anything at all. He is, despite his magnificent physique, afraid of the world falling apart if too many words, or the wrong words, were to fall out of his mouth.

And yet clearly there is something he wants to say, or something he wants to hear, and we're just going to have to wait patiently for it to come, in its own good time.

Kevin is nervous, and we're not entirely sure why. He too did something dumb in his youth but as an adult has turned

his life around, and when he hears that Black is running 'traps' like Juan was in their youth, he's horrified, but also convinced that this isn't the 'real' Chiron, that this is a false self he's created in reaction to a cruel world. This isn't the 'real' him, he tells him, with such certainty.

I had to think during that bit, well, how the fuck would you know, Kevin, you easily persuaded unfaithful piece of shit? Plus, who didn't remember about Omar Little from The Wire? He was perfectly capable of killing drug dealers and stealing their money and no closet no matter how fabulous could ever contained him.

Omar coming, indeed.

But the film agrees with Kevin, and though nothing is spelled out (a lot in this flick is left for us to imagine, which maybe is to its benefit) we're meant to hope that there is something more to life and to their definitions of manhood that what they grew up with.

It's impossible to say what audience this flick really was made for, or even what the flick really is. It's not at all pretending to be a social realist feature (or maybe it is, maybe I've got no clues), but it's certainly not trying to be a crime flick about African-American life in the projects or anything like that. It feels pretty personal, and since it's a semi-autobiographical story that was first put out as a play Black Boys Look Blue in Moonlight, well, yes, I guess it says something about someone's life growing up.

At the very least, since it is more about defining oneself, about the confusion of growing up, it's definitely got more in common with the films of Terence Davies or Andre Techine (think gay coming of age stories) that it does with Boyz in the Hood. And that's in the flick's favour. Its themes are universal and cross cultural and across gender preference lines, because, in the end, who can't relate to longing, to wondering what one's life would have been like if that one crucial thing had gone differently, if that one person that tormented / blessed one's life had done things differently?

Maybe it has a happy ending, but is there not a keen sadness, crucial to so many dramas and romances where the star-crossed are kept apart by circumstance and their own fear, with an overwhelming sense of waste, of all that time that could have been better spent, if people had just done the right thing for themselves, and each other?

Beautifully acted, beautifully directed, the flick is a joy to watch and feel, and profoundly sad as well. Some situations can't be resolved, actions by family can't be taken back, and thankfully there's no magical solution when mother and son try to awkwardly forgive each other for stuff that is unforgivable. I think my heart broke a few times watching this flick, which makes me even more surprised that it was rewarded as much as it was. Movies this quiet and this gentle don't usually get noticed.

Mahershala Ali won some award for his portrayal of Juan, and he probably deserved even more awards, because he is amazing to watch in anything. But in some ways he's so commanding and magnetic it doesn't really matter what role he's playing or how long he's in a flick. Every scene he's in, whether it's copping abuse from Chiron's mum and taking it stoically, or the amazing scene where he teaches Chiron to swim, is magnificent. All of the Chirons did a good job showing the boy and then the man, but the Kevins were great too. The last Chiron is so quiet, and so muscly that it's almost frightening, but thankfully the gentleness comes through as much as the uncertainty about what the point of being a man is all about (as if any of us really know).

I don't know if it was the best film of last year, but I do know it was a pretty great one, surprisingly chaste, but also surprisingly romantic. There is much to love about this film.

8 times one wonders whether all boys look blue in moonlight, and not just the ones in this movie out of 10

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"Ok. Let your head rest in my hand. Relax. I got you. I promise. I won't let you go. Hey man. I got you. There you go. Ten Seconds. Right there. You in the middle of the world." - Moonlight

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Next Issue of RPG REVIEW

***Gods, Religion, and
Cosmology***

Issue #37, December 2017

***Godsend Agenda, Scion, GURPS
Demiurge, Pantheon, GURPS Religion,
D&D Deities & Demigods, RuneQuest
Cults, and more***



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