Cosmology, Gods, and Religion

GURPS Demigurge… Worldbuilding … Exalted … Pantheon…
A&D Deities & Demigods … RuneQuest Gods of Glorantha …
Rolemaster Campaign Law … RuneQuest Cult of Shargash ..
Movie Review Alien Covenant
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ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL AND COOPERATIVE NEWS

Editorial

In our gaming, we create and explore shared imaginary worlds. We populate those worlds with planets, and suns, and moons, and oceanic expanses, continents, and islands, beasts, monsters, and people. Depending on our genre, they can be fantastic, realistic, and often a mix of the two. Also, we create a mythos for these worlds, whether it be from impersonal elemental forces, to gods that walk among the people. In creating these worlds, we both reflect what we have learned and imagine, both consciously and unconsciously. It’s fairly heavy-going as deep study on the relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis, but there is an explanatory gem in Herbert Marcuse’s classic *Eros & Civilization*:

“Phantasy plays a most decisive function in the total mental structure: it links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality; it preserves the archetypes of the genus, the perpetual but repressed ideas of the collective and individual memory, the tabooed images of freedom.”

We create and explore imaginary worlds because of a partial rejection of the reality principle, and its performative requirements. It’s not that the world doesn’t offer many wonders that are worth seeing, if we are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to visit them. But it is only in our imaginations that we can visit a world that is “a slightly bulging, squarish lozenge, like the Earth Rune’s shape. The earth floats upon Sramak’s River, the Primal Ocean of mythology. The sky overhead is an off center bowl rotating about the Pole Star which marks the center of the sky, and is the only stable point in the celestial dome. Between the earth and sky the turbulent realm of the air and storm gods. Underneath both earth and sea is the dark, silent Underworld” (RuneQuest, second edition, 1979).

And before anyone asks, this applies even (and perhaps even especially) in Papers & Paychecks.

Whilst it is common to consider our gaming as “harmless escapism”, these imagining serve an additional and even functional purpose. The elucidate our unconscious desires (which can be both good and bad), they allow us to explore
the mindset of others through the characters in situations, they provide an opportunity to explore analogous situations and scenarios, they provide opportunities to think of an alternative reality to the one we are in. The club I founded in 1988 wasn’t called the Murdoch Alternative Reality Society for nothing.

Here’s a kicker – we do this socially and cooperatively. That is probably a unique part of our hobby and one which it has cemented a place in history by doing so.

So who created the gaming world that you participate in? Does it obey the laws of plate tectonics? If not, why not? Who are the strange beings that inhabit it? Who are the mundane ones? What problems do they face? What threats and conflicts, external and internal? What story will they tell? And how will you take these imaginings, these creations, these explorations, back into our shared reality?

To help us along this journey, we have yet another packed issue of RPG Review, which does deserve some award for having the dullest name for a fanzine in gaming history. This said, it has also been in operation for nine years now, which is certainly a lot longer than many professional publications. Make of that what you will (yes, we’re fanatics, right?).

It begins with Cooperative News, which includes our publications, library, and the excitement of formal financial statements that go with our annual general meeting. Knock me down with a feather. We even have some letters this issue, which is a good thing. Write to us and thank use, complain, or seek elaboration.

This is followed by some gaming ‘blogs, now a regular feature of the journal and something that probably should have been included from day one. All those sessions, lost, in the mists of time.

Daniel Lunsford providing the first of a seires in "Civilization in Worldbuilding" with the ever-important matter of geography, a particular pet peeve of mine in the mapping of imagined worlds. After that yours truly provides a number of "Godly and Worldly Reviews", including AD&D Dieties & Demigods, Rolemaster's Campaign Law, RuneQuest's Gods of Glorantha, GURPS Religion, Pantheon and Other Games, and Exalted. It would be too recursive to repeat the review of Godsend Agenda (issue 30) despite its appropriateness.

Karl Brown follows up with a clever adaption for cooperative world creation with GURPS Demiurge. Bill Blatt, following a long tradition of cult design in RuneQuest, provides and example of a rather violent old diety with the Cult of Shargash. To finish off, Andrew Moshos has some choice words for his movie review of Alien Covenant.

And that about wraps it up for our stunningly late issue – but finally it is here!

Lev Lafayette, lev@rpgreview.net

Cooperative News

This Cooperative News update covers our activities from September to December 2017.

Papers & Paychecks and Other Publications

After a long (too long) wait, Papers & Paychecks was finally released, with an introduction by Tim Kask (the first employee of TSR) and artwork by Dan ‘Smif’ Smith (“the GURPS guy”), with PDF and physical copies distributed around the world. Papers & Paychecks is available from the following URL for a PDF copy, or direct from the Cooperative for a physical copy. All proceeds go to the RPG Review Cooperative – indeed, it’s own main source of

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income, and we do actually have expenses.

Initial reviews appreciate the humour and express some surprise that there is actually a workable game, and the entire thing is not just milking the joke. Who knew that was going to happen, eh?

The first supplement for Papers & Paychecks, Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery, will be released with the next issue of RPG Review.

In the meantime, the Cooperative is also planning the release of our first D&D publication by Karl Brown, The Tinker's Toolkit, a race-design publication which reverse-engineers the system used in D&D 5th edition.

The two publications can be found at the following URLs:

http://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/227291/Papers--Paychecks
http://www.dmsguild.com/product/232813/The-Tinkers-Toolkit

**Gaming and Movie Nights**

The Cooperative has continued its policy of being a thoroughly decentralised gaming club, albeit with a membership almost entirely located in the state of Victoria in Australia. Nevertheless we count some 17 gaming groups within that geographical area, covering independently produced games (e.g., Skum of the Stars), well-known industry standards (e.g., D&D 5th edition), some old classics (e.g., RuneQuest 3rd edition, Megatraveller) and more.

It was also an amazing period for our interest in genre fiction film. We went to see Blade Runner 2049 on two separate occasions, the fortieth anniversary of Close Encounters of the Third Kind, and Star Wars: The Last Jedi.

**Library and Establishment of the Lachlan Smith Memorial Wing**

It is necessary to mention that the entirety of the RPG Review Cooperative library has now been fully cataloged (at some 678 items). A good portion was donated by current members, and the inheritance of the former games library of the now-defunct Murdoch Alternative Reality Society (MARS) had made up a good portion of the library. But mention must also be
made of the Lachlan Smith Memorial Wing.

In previous issues of RPG Review we have mentioned the passing of one of our members, Lachlan Smith. Lachlan was heavily involved in two RPG Review Cooperative games, ‘7th Sea Freiburg’ and ‘Eclipse Phase Rimward and Return’, both in which he contributed some major and interesting characters. Unfortunately even on joining the Cooperative Lachlan had already been diagnosed with a brain tumor eventually led him to pass away at the end of July 2017.

The RPG Review Cooperative through his family inherited the bulk of his rather impressive gaming collection which is now a major component of the Cooperative’s library, and we have established a wing of the library in his honour. Indeed, the wing is already in use with the commencement of an Exalted game based on the classic Chinese story, Journey to the West. It is probably a good guess that he would appreciate seeing his games being put to such use.

Annual General Meeting Notification and Committee Report

As an incorporated association, our Cooperative has to hold an annual general meeting, set for Sunday January 14th at the Studley Park Picnic area in Kew, right next to the Yarra River. Who says gamers don’t go outdoors? Also, as required by the Act, we have to report on our financial statement and budget for the coming year, as well as provide a report of activities. The excitement follows.

Committee Report

The RPG Review Cooperative held its founding meeting in December, 2015, and was subsequently incorporated by the State of Victoria on January 7th, 2016. The following is a review of our second year of activities. All activities have been in strict accordance to our objectives.

In the past year we have published four copies of the RPG Review journal (Issues 33-36, inclusive), constituting some 256 pages of material. Guest interviews included Michael O’Brien, Ron Edwards, and Rob Boyle. All copies of the ISSN-registered RPG Review journal have been submitted to the National Library of Australia. The RPG Review website received 54,312 unique visitors in 2017, an increase of 14%, with ROG Review issues 6, 17, and 23 each having over a 1000 downloads.

The Cooperative has also published a monthly newsletter for members and potential members, 'Crux Australi'. This newsletter has outlined the various RPG campaigns being run by members, which has increased from 13 at the start of the year to 18 at the end of the year. Continuing with our existing services, the Cooperative has also organised about visits to the Astor Cinema as a regular non-gaming social event. In addition, the Cooperative offers an online store for members to sell their second-hand or new games to the public through QuickSales, various IT support mechanisms (github, mailman mailing lists etc) with hosting donated from one of our members. For would-be game publishers, we also offer discount ISBNs which we gain an advantage from bulk purchasing. In addition, we also contributed to the FreeRPGDay by running a playtest session of RuneQuest Adventures in Glorantha. Further, in our advocacy role, we wrote a letter of support to Games Workshop concerning PETA.

Following the establishment of an RPG library for members in April 2016 we reached some 350 items by the end of that year. Now, with the library entirely stored in Coburg, Victoria, last estimations are that it stands at over 650 items (it is not fully catalogued). A substantial donation was made via Lachlan Smith’s family, which now forms its own wing. Lachlan was an active member of the Cooperative who passed away after a long on-going illness. On this note we also mention the permanent hospitalisation of another member, Rick Barker.

Even grander that the establishment of our library was the publication of ‘Papers & Paychecks’. Whilst our final pledge receipts were slightly lower than expected and the supplement is still waiting publication (end of this month is expected), we have received a very good response from initial reviews. On a related matter we also have another book planned for 2018 under the RPG Review Cooperative name.
Reviewing the aims for 2017 in our last Committee Report, the Cooperative has completed most of the tasks that we set before us. Our membership remained stable (25 total), we completed one of the two publications we planned, and we have a substantial cash and stock balance, although we also have a small loss for the year, although this will be offset by expected sales of our publications.

We have achieved a great deal for a small volunteer organisation that is only two years in existence. Looking forward to the 2018 year, the Committee will be looking at the following:

* Completing our second Kickstarter publication, selling and promoting 'Papers & Paychecks'.
* Releasing our third and and perhaps fourth publications, on D&D 5e Races and 'Gulliver's Trading Company'.
* Organising a national RuneQuest Con DownUnder in association with Chaosium (c.f., https://www.facebook.com/groups/158376971443228/)
* Releasing between four and five issues of the RPG Review journal.
* Maintaining our existing membership services, including library, discount ISBNs, store, and IT services.
* Investigating on whether the library can become a Deductible Gift Beneficiary.

As per the requirements of incorporated associations, a summary of our finances and future budget is also provided:

### 2017 Actuals

#### Profit and Loss

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#### Balance Sheet

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### 2018 Budget

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Membership 770
Association Registration 55.8
Includes 5 life members
ISBN Contributions 30
Two more purchased
POBox 41.33
Shared cost
RPG Review Domain 21.95
Hosting provided gratis.
Online store 60
Kickstarter 2350
Printing costs for supplment
PDF/POD Sales 1300
100 PDF P&P sales online
Physical Sales 2000
100 physical P&P sales
Annual BBQ 100
Library 300
Shelving
Postage 500
P&P postage costs
Totals 4500 3407

Letters

Is there a simple page on the website that links to all back issues?

Tom Zander, UK

There is now! Courtesy of your question we have linked all back issues to http://rpgreview.net/content/backissues

Lev Lafayette

So who’s the fellow between Lev Lafayette and Peter Tracy on p57 of the latest issue of RPG Review?

Gianna Vacca, France

One of the stunt crew (Dale Bensch) from the original Mad Max! Who hit his head in the bridge accident scene (c.f., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQCqyrWoIEs). Lovely chap. Lev’s trying to summon something from the helmet, in the style of Donald Trump opening the counter-terrorism center in Riyadh.

Peter Tracy and Lev Lafayette

Hi Lev

Thanks for your very thoughtful review of EPOCH. While I can’t say I entirely agree with the reviewers approach (not reviewing the game against its stated aims - i.e. replicating contemporary cinema horror and evoking tension at the table) I do appreciate the time and effort that have been invested, and always look to take on feedback to improve future game offerings. Reviews are essential to the craft of game design and I’m very grateful for your efforts.

Should any of your readers express any further interest in EPOCH, you may like to make them aware of the 19 additional scenarios published from 2013-2016, including science fiction, historical and war themed, published for the game (of which 5 are available free or for a nominal donation to charity) via https://www.drivethrurpg.com/browse/pub/3531/Imaginary-Empire

Finally, I also think the focus of your publication, on antipodean game design is a worthy one. I have made some efforts to catalogue New Zealand games published in recent years on my blog and these may be of interest to future reviewers:

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Kind regards

Dale Elvy, New Zealand

Awesome collection Dale and it’s good to see the expansions. Well done! Hopefully these will make a good game a great game. We look forward to more amazing games from the greatest country on earth.

Lev Lafayette

Dear Editor,

I have noticed the cover map on issue 35-36 is credited as Herman Moll 1729. This is an understandable mistake, however the image is copyright Karl Brown. The map was labelled Herman Moll 1729 but this is because in the fictional timeline of my game Gulliver’s Trading Company Mr Moll updated his world map of 1719. In the real world it is a portion of a map of the world I spent many hours forging it from a world map by Moll 1719 and the little maps in Gulliver’s Travels 1726. The final maps are copyright Karl Brown. I even have a little shop selling the world map https://coronoides.deviantart.com/art/Gulliver­s­Travels­World­Map­294804331

Yours sincerely,

Karl Brown, Australia

You’re quite right Karl. There is of course the addition of Lilliput and Houyhhnms Land. Although I do wonder what the prevailing winds of the latter land mass will do to the ecology of the west coast of Tasmania.

Apologies to any and all who thought that Lilliput was really in the vicinity of Norfolk Island and Houyhhnms Land was located in the Great Australian Bight.

For myself, I will be going to a remedial class on geography and copyright. Followed by getting my eyes checked.

Lev Lafayette, West Island, New Zealand
Megatraveller, Pirates of Drinax
by Andrew Daborn

Boney was a warrior,
Wey, hay, yah
A warrior, a tarrier,
- Traditional Short-Haul Shantie

102:117 Theeve - later that same night...

Armed with Mira Silverhand's location Vinniy and Jacob put together a boarding party: Kyrrsh, Kasiyl and Second Officer Chiara.

The five head to the scrapheaps, gathering intel on Mira's crew and scouting out the area before the assault. Once Kasiyl broke the team into the wrecked Fat Trader, Jacob led the attack down a cramped hall into a hail of gunfire! Surprise and chemical weapons won the day as the team rushed the pirates, slaughtering Mira's guards leaving her to threaten their mutual destruction. Succinct negotiating convinced Mira to work with our heroes to secure Captain Redthayne's safety - at least for now.

Mira will give the crew a location. It is up to the to determine their approach. Time is against them, Redthayne will likely jump away if he suspects something but the shipyards of Theeve are a perfect place to repair their harrier. Mira does have another ship, the Mercifuge.

"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 Vargr Pirate who quickly spewed his guts. Krrsh swears to serve The Skopa loyalty. 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.

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...

Remaining Threads
*****************

If Prince Harrick were to publicly join the Death Cult of Clarke and make it the state religion of a revived Kingdom of Drinax, then Boone would step down and name Harrick his successor as High Psychopomp.

Provost Shala, of Torpol, wants the privateer/diplomats to travel to Thalassa, break into one of the Thalassan bio-research facilities, and recover samples of the plant seeds along with data on how to cultivate these plants. Ideally, she also wants them to kidnap the famous Thalassan geneticist, Dr. Thorkan.
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...

The temples crusade left town for the Hall of Chaos over a week ago now and the usual bustle of the port has taken on an unsettled feel to it. The call to arms swept up both miscreants and guards in its fervor leaving an unnatural gap in the town’s ecology.

Despite all this you have all rested, trained and resupplied. We join you as you are awaiting the completion of the fishing boat, drinking in one of the taverns near your patron’s house. Her father is visiting so you were asked to make yourself scarce.

“That’s how far the world is from where I am. Just one bad day.”
- Joker, The Killing Joke

After a few weeks of recovery and contemplation in the metropolitan hub of Kariss our heroes are suddenly drawn to action after their patron Lady Rydychei, and her father Baron Bluestone, are kidnapped in the Baron’s own tower!

After a brief storming of the tower, fighting spiders and salamanders, Lady Rydychei is rescued. The Baron and his scribe Hammet the Dash were found, murdered by a seer called Cona Numdrum, who then spectacularly escaped on a skyboat!

Lady Rydychei reported that the seer had been employed to help cure her father, who had been driven mad by the many fiendish riddles someone had sent him.

Tace’s sweetheart blamed Numdrum for this and begged the heroes avenge her father.

Fortuitously Numdrum left a riddle in a box, offering them the chance to follow him if they find three items and sacrifice them to the God of the Sea.

Jules, Tace, Ellen and Heather picked up the keg of ale and the boat shaped weather-cock. They also found the minotaur’s nose-ring and Jules had wrestled the bull in the fighting pit but had not been able to defeat it.

Cunning side bets were made and bronzes were acquired, but the ring is currently out of their grasp...
Chapter 4 - the Vurst of the Vurst

The heroic mouses battled through spiders (4 in total), centipedes, rats and roaches in impressive fashion on a sunny Saturday afternoon. Great teamwork was on display but special mention must go to the ferocious Prince Collin who gained strength from seeing his Father poisoned, and unleashed spinning rodent fury on the poor minions (FIVE attack die in the King's Chambers...Holy smokes).

At the end, the mice came together to fight the dreaded Captain Vurst. Man, he was the vurst.....except not really because the heroes dispatched him pretty quickly.

The next challenge for our heroes sees them searching for the troublesome Brodie The Cat, which possibly might involve stepping into the hallway and yelling "Hey Cat, where are you?"....truly epic.

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

Chapter Three: Aquileia

To: His Holiness, The Pope Adrian I

Most Holy Father,

It was of course great that good King Charlemagne finally conquered the Lombard Kingdom, and established a new kingdom with the title Rex Langobardum. Does that make him an emperor now? I am not sure how these secular titles work. Neverthekess, I do know of prisons! The Lombard Desiderius is now exiled to Corbie Abbey in Picardy where I promise to keep an eye on him.

It pleases me greatly that the Holy See has been attentive of my correspondence, as has good King Charlemagne. It could not expect such a great honour for my young vassals to receive the task that was set before them. True, they had proven their investigative ability and were now not strangers to disruptions of the spirit world. Brother Eric has informed me a great deal of the journey to Duchy Friuli, and their reception in the seaside town of Aquileia, although I suspect that he gained a lot of information from the Jew, Rebekkah. A lot of Roman ruins I am told, although it was indeed wise to take the pagan temple in our own hands for Christendom.

The story of the vassals this year involved the chaperoning of one Lucia Vorloi from her father's other home in Marseille to Aquileia where she would be wed to Christoph Tonescu. The Vorloi family are allies of Charlemagne and it is important to cement a Frankish-Roman union just as would be fitting in the presence of the King for the Franks and Lombards. To that end, the vassals carried out their taks most admirably.

On entering the town I am informed that there was a there was the annual procession for the memory of Saint Nicholas of Myra. The good Saint is patron of sailors and merchants, archers, thieves (repentant of course), children (ditto), brewers, pawnbrokers. and students. As can be imagined in such a place Saint Nicholas is highly regarded, with
associated miracles of generating wealth for the impoverished and raising the dead.

The procession is led with a relic of the Saint, his clock, over a statue which is a credit to the tailor given that it is over four hundred years old. Leading the procession is a matter of some status, and the two leading families of the city, the Radu and Torenescu families apparently were involved in some heated discussion about the direction of the procession. Whilst the vassals did not intervene this would be of some import, as my correspondence will reveal.

After delivery of the maiden, the vassals were housed in an establishment, The Siren's Call, next door to the Vorloi merchant compound. They took the opportunity to explore the town for a while, but were encouraged to members of a local mercenary group, The Veiled Society, as that rogue Reiner ascertained by their usual contacts. These mercenaries wanted to hire some people to take an exhibition to some local ruins which contained treasures from Cleopatra's Egypt, but was guarded by a flock of Harpies. As the negotiations were being considered, an elderly resident of The Siren's Call, Thanato, who entered the common area complaining about monsters under her floorboards. An investigation of her room did indeed lead to a discovery of a hitherto unknown tunnel that led directly to into the Vorloi home.

Alas, there it was discovered that Lucia Vorloi had been murdered. More to the point there had been a poor attempt to cover it up. A suicide note, claiming that she would rather die than marry the sorcerer Christoph, contained numerous grammatical mistakes which Rebekkah considered unlikely given her education. Eric made the claim that her wounds seemed to have been strangulation from the rear by a thick rope. And Reiner noted a clue of red hair, produced by henna.

Whilst the city militia arrived and questioned the vassals, it seems that word got out concerning the death. The following day a visit to the Tonescu home seemed less than successful, and shortly afterwards a trouble-maker stirred up the crowd in the market against the Tonescu ("Sorcerers! Merchants!") and against the Vorloi ("Harlots!" "Strangers!" "Invaders!"). A riot broke out which led to great destruction and chaos, but it was put down by the King's soldiers, praise be to God. As Rebekkah followed the orator to the Jewish quarter it was ascertained that they were simply a skilled speaker and were handsomely paid in wine and coin to cause trouble.

As the clues accumulated they pointed towards the Radu family warehouse at the docks. The vassals went down there at night and discovered the hive of activity and especially a rousing speech by one Zweis Radu on how they will take the town. Also present was a red-haired Greek named Agorios - and previous investigations had determined that he did indeed dye his hair with henna.

Throwing caution to the wind, the vassals attacked the group with great heroicism. They were however quite outnumbered and facing some experienced opponents. Merd in particular, it is noted by all, fought very bravely, but the sheer quantity of the opponents - and their use of magic – wore down on the vassals. It is indeed fortunate that it seemed that the Tonescu household had their own followers to the vassals actions, and they were able to engage in 'hutesium et clamor', bringing the King's men to aid. A very close call indeed for my vassals!

It is good to have my vassals home again. However I must express again my concerns of Saxon raiders however; they have apparently burned the abbey at Fritzlar, and the abbot and monks have been executed! Could Aachen or even Tournai by next? And what if the Saxons free Desiderius? A horde of ill-educated Saxon pagans is one thing, but if they are under the leadership of a canny Christian leader like Desiderius who know what mischief they could cause?

Bishop Giselbert, Cathedral of Tournai, Anno Domini, December 774.

*House Rule: Helmets*

Helmets are like shields; +1 AC for 5sp or +2 for 10sp and -2 PER

*House Rule: Languages*
Vulgar Latin (also known as Sermo Vulgaris, or "common speech"). Old texts and some people (about 1/5 speak Lombardic, a Elbe related language, uses runic script. Related to the West Germanic with a -4 modifier. Mostly Christian, albeit often unorthodox.

_Eclipse Phase: Rimward and Return_

_Lev Lafayette_

14.3 A Plague of Locus

David Williams' antidote (not a vaccine) against Chain Reaction had limited utility. Exploding people resulting from the infected Drive continued during for a week, with group calling itself the 'Plague of Locus' releases a statement claiming credit for the attacks. This statement was eagerly taken up by the Planetary Consortium media, seeking to blame the outbreak on anarchists from Locus and offering warnings not to take non-prescription Drive.

Meanwhile the Sentinels receive another message from the Thousand Heavens MARG to meet their Firewall contact, Proxy 21. For X-risk reasons, Proxy 21 suggests that Firewall would be very interested in finding out the source of the Drive, and whether it is possible that the Chain Reaction virus has tainted any official supplied. In addition the Olympus Infrastructure Authority (OIA) are under pressure from the Prosperity Group to find the source of the infected Drive, although the precise reason on why the Prosperity Group (microgravity agritech, aquaculture, hydroponics, pharmaceuticals) are so interested is unknown.

A copy of the OIA report is provided which details the actions of an OIA police task force formed to find the source of the Drive. The task force initially believed that the Drive was being smuggled down the space elevator by the Big Circle Gang. However, they quickly realized that the Shui Fong was behind the Drive and the source was somewhere in Olympus. Finally, the task force had a black ops team abduct a Shui Fong member. Though the triad member had an emergency farcaster, the team succeeded thanks to the help of an outside consultant. However, the Shui Fong compartmentalizes its operations and the abducted member didn't know where the Drive was being produced or even who in the organization had that kind of information. The task force was planning on attempt another abduction, hoping to get lucky, when the explosions began. The task force has been suspended in order to free up resources to deal with the terrorist threat.

The Sentinels take up fake IDs as Employees of Night Owl Investigations, a small and somewhat shady private detective agency (c-rep 10; g-rep 10; 2,500 credits, 2,500 crypto-cred). Making use of the social networking skills, the Sentinels discover an investigative journalist named Lian Levi may have uncovered information, as has a freelance interrogator named Shinobu Urashima.

Lian is working on an exposé of ComEx's illegal indenture practices and learns about a a runaway ComEx indenture named Zaizan Bosshard. Initially discovering that Zaizan had left for the rim on a Scum barge, she also heard of a dying neotenic named Zaizan in Fuxingmen which begged the source to send a message to a woman named Tu Tsui-fang, and was paid for the message. Intrigued, Lian dug deeper into both Zaizan and Tsui-fang. Tsui-fang is probably a member of the Shui Fong triad and Zaizan, prior to the Fall, worked for Arnaud-De Fehrn: a pharmaceutical company that produced nootropics. Thus Lian concluded that Tsui-fang is likely involved with the recent Drive epidemic on Mars.

Further investigations by the Sentinels reveals that Tu Tsui-fang died during the Fall and was subsequently re-instantiated on Mars. Several years ago, her indenture contract was inexplicably renegotiated and she became a free woman practically overnight. She then became a business owner, purchasing a drug bar in Deshengmen called 'Iniquitous', which she renamed 'The Den of Iniquity' after a brief legal battle with the old owners. The Den of Iniquity is almost exclusively patronized by regulars and outsiders are treated with hostility, leading to numerous poor online reviews. Tsui-fang is an anti-indenture advocate, which is curious given that the gang she has connections to has
extensive indentured labour.

An investigation into Zaizan Bosshard reveals that he was a predictive control system expert and chemical engineer who was re-instantiated and sleeved by ComEx in AF 8 but was not allowed to leave the compound. In March of AF 10, Zaizan disappeared, and ComEx announced that he had skipped out on his indenture and issued 10,000 credit bounty for him.

Later a menton using the ego ID of Elijah Mars attempted to board the space elevator. Elijah passed the nanotat ID scans but was taken aside for a brainprint due to suspicious mesh activity. The brainprint confirmed his identity and he was allowed onto the elevator. From the elevator he boarded a shuttle and traveled to a passing scum swarm. Several days later Elijah Mars was revealed to be Zaizan Bosshard, using a Fake ID. A man named Junichi Azuma on Locus tells the characters that Zaizan arrived on Locus and stayed for a short time before leaving in a private shuttle. During his time on Locus he had a qbit reservoir and was in regular communication with someone. A ego-hunter Bianca Yia-Ti reveals that ComEx employee Laura Blake is still looking for Zaizan. Blake has the innocuous title of "Human Resources Manager".

Investigating Urashima included some scum scorcher programmers whom Urashima provides XP interrogations from the victim's perspective. The Xps great for scorchers because Urashima, instead of ordinary VR psychosurgery, employs a mad blend of meat space neurosurgery, psychological manipulation, and something 'else' that the scum can't quite figure out but which makes his work exceptionally disturbing. From the corporate world, Marty Grimes, a 'security specialist', reveals that Urashima is the hypercorps go-to guy for interrogations in Olympus. Urashima himself works exclusively in the information extraction phase of operations. From the research communities, the Sentinels make contact with Naomi Lee, a scientist working on Ptah for Skineaesthesia. Naomi tells them that Urashima was employed by Skineaesthesia as a neuralware designer. Following these contacts, the Sentinels receive details on a 30,000 credit bounty being offered for the recovery of Shinobu Urashima's ego, a map to the location in Fuxingmen where he is believed to reside, and a dead drop in Olympus where his stack is to be deposited.

The Sentinels first met with Tu Tsui-fang at the Den's opium lounge, where the Sentinels revealed that they were interested in the source of Chain Reaction and that they knew that Zaizan was probably behind it. Tsui-fang revealed that she did know Zaizan, and that he was working for someone called Dr. Revolution. In contrast, the meeting with Urashima was very revealing, although difficult. Urashima lives in Fuxingmen and has limited mesh access, requiring asynchronous communication and a map to find the right location. After telling Nuhai in no uncertain terms to keep well away from him, Urashima informs the Sentinels that because a dishonourable client had refused to pay him he was free to divulge their secrets, namely that Zaizan Bosshard, an indenture at ComEx, was working on a precognitive system for shipping and package delivery called SKULD. SKULD interfaces with the brain and ComEx discovered that when Zaizan himself used SKULD, it operated much better; to the point where it could predict future events in a general sense; this is because Zaizan is an async. ComEx had a fork of Zaizan transferred to a black lab in Zhongguancun. However, the fork somehow escaped the black lab and made a deal with a triad soldier named Tu Tsui-fang. Tu Tsui-fang freed the Zaizan fork at ComEx by pretending to be with the OIA and hiring mercenaries. On his way out, Zaizan managed to destroy SKULD. One of the forks of Zaizan left for the outer system via a scum barge, while the other is still somewhere on Mars. It is likely that only Tu Tsui-fang knows where.

Urashima is willing to do business. For 20,000 crypto-cred he can provide services as an interrogator, and equipment for acquiring subjects for interrogation. In lieu of payment, the characters can perform two tasks for Urashima. The first task is to exact revenge on aforementioned client; namely infiltrate the resleeving party for Laura Blake's daughter, Tiffany Blake. At the party, the Sentinels must attach a device Urashima invented called a 'skull burrower' to Tiffany Blake's head. Tiffany must be awake and lucid while this is done. The burrower will transplant a XP from Laura Blake's victims. By majority consideration, the Sentinels decided not to go down this path.

14.4 Sanity Assassin

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Making their way back from meeting Urashima near Nexus Industrial Repair in Fuxingmen, the Sentinels were suddenly attacked by drones with explosives. Nuhai was knocked unconscious as the other sought safety under cover, taking her body. Vyvyan took control of the drones and crashed them to the ground. Then they were set upon by an assassin in a chameleon suit. The battle was brief but brutal, with the Sentinels making use of their TacNet to outmaneuver the unlucky would-be assassin.

Realising that their assassin had come from Tu Tsui-fang the Sentinels decided to go to back to Urashima and wire through the 20K credits for his assistance in taking out and interrogating this gang leader. Urashima provided a nanotoxin that deactivates emergency farcasters and dead switches, and a dual acting nanotoxin that disables drug glands and renders common suicide drugs inert. These would have to be applied to Tu Tsui-fang if the Sentinels were to be successful.

After a few hours in the healing tank Nuhai put on a new cocktail dress and headed off to Tiffany Blake's resleeving party. There she met a young woman who seemed to be rather inebriated on something, and this seemed to an ideal moment to introduce them to Buddhist koans. Rach El was sufficiently amazed that she took Nuhai into a secluded room where some socialites were chewing feathers from an alien bird-like creature from Echo IV. Nuhai managed to purloin a feather just before Tiffany's resleeving entrance.

Meanwhile the rest of the Sentinels arranged a raid on the Den of Iniquity. A knock-out gas was the chosen weapon, working on the assumption that most of the residents, would not be prepared for such an assault. This proved to be incorrect, as a large number had enhanced respiration for dealing with the harsh Martian climate if they were ever caught outside of the dome. The Sentinels took out a few of the 44Solids gang, before beating a retreat to give chase to a vehicle leaving the building.

The Sentinels gave chase, and took out the vehicle. As expected, it contained some guards and Tu Tsui-fang. The latter was injected with the nanotoxins and the cortical stack removed. It was then taken to Urashima for his enhanced interrogation techniques. This revealed where the drive factory was located (in a M-285 Urban Battle Tank, in Fuxingmen) and where Zaizan Bosshard was located (Janks-Yao, a middle class suburb), and the name he was operating under (Guo Eckner). They went to the location, which was mainly unused, and discovered a small collection of the drug hyperdrive, and a cognitive prediction machine, SKULD - which was booby trapped, but the demolitions skills among the Sentinels disarmed them.

The Sentinels are faced of how to deal with the cognitive machine and the Drive factory in the tank.

14.5 The Lilypads

The Sentinels were left with the issue of what to do with the Drive-producing tank. Using the information provided by the unfortunate ego of Tu Tsui-fang its location was tracked down in Fuxingmen and the Sentinels sent drones to review the situation. Based on their review they determined it was an eight-legged M-285 with jump capacity and additional armour. Contacting Firewell, indicated that they could provide 2 anti-tank plasma missiles to take out the vehicle. Herman considered that this was insufficient. Nuhai felt that diplomacy was a better option and attempted to communicate with the tank in the hope that Zaizan Bosshard was there. The conversation was short; Zaizan was not present and the tank was neither conversational, nor did it appreciated being disturbed from its drug-producing and delivering habits. It obliterated Nuhai with its three cannons and squashed the remains underfoot.

Herman took this as an opportune moment to call up the the Olympus Infrastructure Authority and let them know where the illegal Drive was being produced, and left it in their hands. Their use of anti-tank gun emplacements proved to be very effective indeed.

Proxy 21 contacted the Sentinels again through the Thousand Heavens MARG. The message was initially poetic, but an encrypted translation was provided. An employee of Prosperity Group has stolen valuable data and is going to give it to
Oversight (the Planetary Consortium's auditing body) at Diantimen. The data is on physical media and the characters are to steal it and take it to the Olympus Mountain Temple for destructive analysis by a data retrieval analyst, Scuzzy. The employee's name is Chiara Capirossi, an unexceptional Prosperity Group accountant in an common Ruster morph. She is scheduled to arrive at Rail Eos Public Station in Diantimen at 15:00 and she will be leaving on the space elevator at 17:00.

At the same time the Sentinels are contacted by their old friend, the interrogator Shinobu Urashima. He asks for a small favour; at approximately 15:00, a woman named Chiara Capirossi will arrive on a maglev train at the Rail Eos Public Station. Biometric data and images are provided. Chiara has a data chip. Somewhere between the station and the elevator security checkpoint another woman, this one named Lily or Lilium, will approach Chiara, using a fake ID. Lily will attempt to retrieve the data chip from Chiara. She will likely do this by persuading Chiara to give it to her. While persuading her Lily will be making physical contact with Chiara. This is how the Sentinels will be able to identify Lily. The Sentinels task is to follow or track Lily to wherever she is staying and report that location, as well as any other information they have on Lily, back to Urashima.

With effectively two employers, the Sentinels started their research on Prosperity Group. Apart from obvious public information it was also revealed that they were one the major backers of the ban on advanced nootropics and combat drugs for public safety reasons.

Arriving at the station, Herman placed himself at the restaurant Oeufcoque, whereas Adrien wa near the railway entrance, and Nihai on the mezzanine level shopping mall. Vivian remained at the station's parking lot. A dozen microdrones were purchased to provide a continuous feed into the Sentinels tacnet.

As expected Lilly bumped into Chiara and apologised; future kinesic analysis suggest that this was not accidental. In the process, Chiara handed something to Lilly, who was then pushed away by two Case morphs, which then assaulted Chiara, attempting to frisk her as she screamed. Another woman nearer the station, attempted to intervene but another two Case morphs prevented her. Nuhai came down to render assistance, but was prevented by the OIA officers, who were on the scene. The Case morphs surprisingly fell limp at this stage, and Chiara was taken away for questioning. Meanwhile, Adrien (finishing is four-star creme d'escargot soupe avec croutons), gave chase on the train system, until it became clear he was following Lilly, and lost her after being pulled up by OIA officers.

Fortunately the bugs contained their surveillance, and Vivian remained in contact. Lilly enters an adult entertainment venue called Vorhaul and visited a private room. Shortly afterwards she took the train to the Olympus View Housing Complex. Meanwhile, Adrien went to Vorhaul where he met another morph that seemed identical to Lilly. Lilly2 then went back to the private room in Vorhaul, and another female morph existed. Using facial recognition systems, it was determined that this woman was named Angel, whereas the Lilly-morph that went to the Olympus View Housing Complex was Sally Young.
What do fantasy authors, game developers, and cinematographers have in common with dungeon masters? World building: that is, creating a predictable, cohesive, engaging backdrop for their character to exist against. Some worlds require a bit more suspension of disbelief than others do, of course, but even good fantasy worlds are predictably based on the real world to some degree.

Good world building is not the end-all, be-all of DMing, but a well-built campaign world is essential to ‘polishing’ the campaign and can contribute significantly to the audience’s feeling of engagement and enjoyment. A good campaign setting not only finishes the campaign, though: it helps hold the player’s interest, activate their imagination, encourage participation, and may even inspire them to pass on the fandom to others.

Good world building may sound daunting, but it is possible if you keep some salient terms in mind – and this series hopes to help with world building, from the macro scale of entire continents or worlds to the micro scale of individual cities. Think of it as Worldbuilding 101.

World building in an earth-like setting goes from the ground up – literally. While the geography of a region can be shaped by many things—tectonics, subsidence, even meteor impacts—it is how geography interacts with water that has the greatest impact on human(oid) civilization. Assuming that life in your campaign is earth-like, then water will determine what happens, and where, more than anything else. The first step, then, is to think about how water behaves.

First, water flows downhill, following paths of least resistance, as far as it can. Icecaps melt, meltwater runs downhill to temperate climates, and eventually joins oceans and lakes. There, wind and sun evaporate it and move some of it over time to some other mountaintop, where it freezes and falls as snow—and this “water cycle” starts again. Of course, some water does not make it that far, and falls as precipitation somewhere in between. Where that occurs is also immensely important, as the Great Plains of North America and the steppes of central Asia show: in both cases, these remarkably arid regions exist because a mountain range disrupts the water cycle. One one side of the Rocky Mountains or Himalayas you have temperate rain forests or monsoons, on the other dry grasslands. Earthlike life is dependent on water. Where that water is, and in what form, depends on weather.

Fresh water is essential to life in one way or another; water equals vegetation, and vegetation equals animal life. Even life and human activity in arid regions depends on water. Desert oases in North Africa and resacas in the southwestern United States are good examples, but an even better, and extreme, example is the Okavango region of Botswana, part of the Kalahari Desert. This region looks like dead, dry desert for most of the year, but during the rainy season rainfall far away in the Serra de Chella Mountains flows into and transforms this desert into a lush, green inland marsh. The grasses that the rains bring prompt thousands of herbivores to migrate constantly. As the rains recede toward the mountains, the herds follow—and when the heavy rains flow back into the Okavango the herds return to the marshes. Imagine how such a migration of water and animals affect humanoids in the area: most likely, they would follow the herds as well. Any permanent settlements would be located near springs or other constant sources of water, and the people who live there would be forced to stockpile supplies for the dry season. This would provide water and possibly food, as wild animals would be attracted to those water sources as well.

Water not only changes the landscape in ways that have remarkable effects on living things; it also builds and destroys. Water carves valleys like the Grand Canyon, it creates lakes like the Great Lakes of North America, and it even creates vast underground river systems. The Yucatan peninsula of Mexico does not have a single surface river, yet at least three civilizations thrived there through the ages thanks to cenotes—deep natural wells connected to freshwater aquifers.
in the porous rock. Water creates not only rivers, but also oxbow lakes, marshes and river deltas. Waves can either erode the land or create barrier islands that may eventually connect to the mainland. When world building, consider how water moves, how it acts, how it creates and destroys, and how that might affect plants, animals, and humanoids.

Water is also valuable to civilization because it does work. It provides transportation, for one, sometimes in unusual ways. For example, Avenue O in Galveston, Texas, United States of America, was once a canal, used by dredges transporting fill material when the entire city was raised and backfilled after a deadly hurricane in 1900. More common examples are the many navigable waterways of the world (such as the Mississippi, the Rhine, the Yangtze, the Mekong, or the Volga), and canals still in use today like those in Venice, the UK, and elsewhere. Water has powered mills, irrigated cropland, facilitated trade and travel, and provided defense throughout human history.

If flowing, potable water is not present, then it is still useful to imagine how those things occur without it. If there's not enough water to fill a moat around a desert castle, what else might the local nobility do to add an extra layer of protection? If there's too much water, how do locals do any farming, and what do they grow with water everywhere? If it snows for half of the year and lakes and rivers ice over completely, how do those people adapt? Thinking about what might happen if geology, or weather, or water aren't amenable is a great way to add a little color and interest to the setting.

If at all possible, humanoid settlements on an earth-like world will most likely be located near water for many reasons. However, that is only part of the picture. Settlements will also be located near valuable resources in proximity to water. In The Image of the City, Kevin Lynch described how urban settlements are made of nodes, paths, edges, districts, and landmarks. Imagine how those same things exist in nature, and how they affect human settlements. Districts can be landforms or biomes. Edges appear where those landforms and biomes meet. Paths appear along courses of least resistance – rivers, valleys, coastlines, and the like. At some point in prehistory, before humanoids used those paths, animals probably established them first. Landmarks such as mountains (or edges) help navigate the landscape by providing recognizable way points. Nodes result when one or more of these paths intersect. Pre-industrial cities are likely to be located on these nodes, especially where paths to other places (be they overland or along rivers) intersect near resources such as fertile cropland, valuable minerals, plentiful woodlands, and so forth.

Here's some things to keep in mind when designing the geography of your campaign world:
Natural terrain and weather patterns dictate where water will be in a useful form. Wherever there's fresh water, there's life. Water is the lifeblood of civilization, regardless of terrain, for a variety of reasons. When water is located near valuable resources, settlements will likely be there. Think about the campaign world as a series of nodes, paths, edges, districts, and landmarks created by water and land interacting and influencing life and humanoid settlements.

There is one important caveat to all of this, though: it applies primarily to pre-industrial civilization with no access to mechanized transportation. In a post-industrial setting, watercourses and overland paths between them no longer dictate where settlements occur, because rail and highway go where it needs to go – not where nature says it should go. To take the concept further, what effects might flight or teleportation have on trade, travel, and settlements? Why suffer the expense of carving a railroad through a rugged mountain range when an aircraft- or flying beast of burden-can go over?

Once you have a good idea of how weather, geography, and water interact, you have a good idea of where settlements will be- and why. In the second part of this series, we will look at how and why settlements themselves develop.

Reading List:
AD&D Deities & Demigods

Deities & Demigods is the fourth supplement in the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 1e line. There are essentially two printing lines available, one which included the Cthulhu and Melbionean mythos (via Chaosium) and those without. The history of the various printings and the reasons for the difference is well known. This review assumes the inclusion of the two, not least in part to cite further admiration to the surreal genius of Erol Otus in his two portrayals of Shub-Niggurath - and for the Egyptian composite piece in later editions. Otus is also responsible for the excellent cover art, and is nicely supplemented by eight other artists in the volume all of whom provide quite acceptable pieces, with a notable quantity of naked breasts on display (huzzah!). The physical standards of production are at the same excellent height as the Players Handbook and Monster Manual. The layout is mainly two column justified throughout, the writing quite clear and the organisation quite acceptable.

The book effectively consists of three main components; a short introductory bloc, the various pantheons, and an appendicies. The first bloc includes the editor's introduction, divine abilities, clerical relations, omens, and reaching divinity. The pantheons are presented in alphabetical order; American Indian, Arthurian, Babylonian, Celtic, Central American (i.e., Mayan and Aztec, no Incan), Chinese, Cthulhu, Egyptian, Finnish, Greek, Indian, Japanese, Melnibonean, Newhon, Nonhuman, Norse and Sumerian. The final section consists of further elaborations on the Planes, a useless random chart of temple trappings, a useful clerical quick reference chart and a short reference collection of very average quality (which explains a few things...) . It's a pretty good range, but immediately noticeable is the absence of some major cultures (the Slavs, the Inuit, all of sub-Saharan Africa, the Indo-Chinese region, the Austro-Pacific), the monotheistic religions (especially given the description of Clerics in the Players Handbook) and shamanic or druidic traditions.

The editor's introduction denies that the book is like the Monster Manual, despite appearances to the contrary, rather it is for expanding DMs campaigns. This is instantly largely contradicted by the Explanatory Notes that follow. The expansion to the ability scores is undoubtably highly desireable, but the range of 19-25 is pitifully weak in terms of scale. Hastur the Unspeakable is described as being some 600' tall, but because the scale tops out at such a low level, he still has a 10% chance of failing to open a stuck dungeon door. Indeed, one gets the distinct impression that the scale is perhaps better for high-powered human and demihuman characters rather than deities themselves. Some of the nicer touches include the immunity to illusions at high Intelligence, charm-spells with a high wisdom, and the awe/horror power from high and extremely low charisma. Following this is a list of standard divine abilities, some rather overly verbose notes on DMing divine beings, and some good notes on the role of clerics (especially the capacity to grant spells). The notes on omens is more confusing that useful, however the material on mortality, immortality and divine ascension is both clear and useful.
Whilst the preface states the work is "a simple statement of historical and literary details", it must be strongly stated that the historical pantheons are so full of errors to be virtually useless as any sort of document of that sort. Whilst many of the details are have been obviously made up to suit the game (e.g., assigning character class levels on abilities), there are numerous errors in the non-game details in each and every chapter. There are so many that one will have to take it on trust that I have checked each and every historical deity in Dieties & Demigods and found it extremely wanting. Let me at least cite some of the biggest problems:

The American Indian deities, a homogenised group, provides no input from major cultures including the Hopi, Ottowa, Sioux, Iroquois or Cree (there are a few Navaho gods). The Arthurian legends chapter makes no attempt to deal with the rather important issue of Christianity, let alone its various sects and heresies. The Babylonian/Sumerian chapters confuse Anu - the Sumerian deity ("An" = sky, heaven) and father of Enlil - as a Babylonian deity and neglect their magnificent contribution to the invention of astral theory. Dahak in contrast is neither Sumerian or Babylonian, but rather is Zoroastrian. Also among the Sumerian deities, the inclusion of Ki is dubious at best. There is no evidence that this being was ever worshiped (sort of a requirement to be a god, really) and her inclusion in creation texts is inconsistent at best. Although this said, the authors did state that their Babylonian/Sumerian chapters may have errors.

The description of Arawn as a "greater god" in the Celtic chapter is ludicrous; he was only noted in Wales, and even then a minor agricultural deity stole his prize possessions (a bird, a deer and a dog) and bested him in combat. On the other end of the scale Brigid is described as a lesser goddess with no high holy day, which is pretty impressive for one worshipped through continental Europe during the Celtic period, and even today is venerated every February 1st ("Imbolc" in the old language) as St. Brigid by the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and many Anglicans. In that same mythos, the relationship between Luggh and Nuada, the king of the Tuatha De Dannann isn't mentioned, let alone the "trivial" royal title. Dunatis is oddly described as a destroyer of forts, when actually he was a protector of forts, the important Cernunnos has to be interpreted as the Master of the Hunt, and the Romanised name is given to Secellus (Silvanus).

Although the claim is that the Central American gods are Aztec and Mayan there are exactly zero Mayan-specific gods described. Tlazoleletol's role as the midwife and final confessor before death is neglected in favour of an emphasis on vice which is the extent of the importance and number of deities in Aztec culture dedicated to sensuality and excess. In the Chinese pantheon none of the common deities or immortals are present with the exception of Shang-Ti. The representation of Ma Yung as a god-killing chaotic evil humanoid lizard is particularly odd; in reality, he was a mortal general who achieved fame - and indeed apotheosized in S/W China and northern Viet Nam - for his military endeavours. Even more strange to the point of being surreal is the presentation of Shan Hai Ching as a greater god; as a matter of fact, this is a two-thousand plus year old book of mythologies and something that should be obvious from the title; it translates as "Book of the Mountains and the Sea".

Even in a pantheon as reasonably well known as the Egyptian mistakes are abound. Bes is described as god of luck when his domain was protector of the household. Nephthys had a fiery breath, not twin death-rays from her eyes. Perhaps understandably, the role of Ra - or more specifically Atum-Ra - in creating the universe is neglected. Rather than light, Seker was the god of the necropolis and the separation of body and soul. Set was originally the god of the desert; when the Hyksos invaded Egypt they adopted Set as their own and following that he certainly achieved a bad name among the locals, even displacing the evil Apep (perhaps it would be more appropriate to describe him as the "god of imperialism"). In the Finnish mythos, Hiisi is described as the god of evil, when in actuality they were a tutelary race of minor malignant spirits, rather like Anglophone goblins. Loviator is described in the Kalevala as the bringer of the nine diseases and is described as the "ugliest of Mana's children", but in the text both these features are ignored; indeed, she is given a Charisma of 24! Surma, described as the demigod of death is actually as Ceberus-like figure, Ukko uses a hammer as his primary weapon (not a sword) and it is renowned for striking with lightning (not fire).

Among the Greek pantheon, the punishment of Atlas is not mentioned, and he's described as being absolutely honest which is utterly contradicted by his notorious dealing with Heracles. Of the twelve Olympians Hestia is quite forgotten,
and Demeter is described as a lesser goddess despite being prior to the Olympians and worshipped throughout the Hellenic world. Tyche is incorrectly described; it was a tutelary city-deity of many forms. Among the Indian deities Rudra (aka Shiva) is in a much-reduced role, as is Vishnu the Preserver who is, in some interpretations the Supreme Being. Krishna, his earthly avatar, is quite absent, as it Brahma, the creator deity in the Trimurti. Indra is given a sword when, according to the Vedas, his weapons are a thunderbolts and bow. Poor old Yama is described as merely a demigod, which is impressive given that he also appears in Buddhist, traditional Chinese and even in Japanese religions as well.

On the topic of the Japanese, the distinction between Taoism and Shintoism is not made. Even then, only two of the main seven Tao gods of fortune are mentioned and only two of the three main deities of Shintoism. Poor Hachiman, the Shinto god of war, protector of all of Japan and the Japanese people receives only the status of demigod according to D&D - never mind the fact that even today there are thirty thousand shrines dedicated to him. In the Nordic section, there were three Dwarven tribes, not two. Baldr being the son of Odin is not mentioned and it erroneously suggests that he is the father of Forseti, the Lawgiver, who is one of the oldest of the Norse deities. Hel's realm is incorrectly described as nilfheim (hel is within nilfheim), Sutr's realms is incorrectly located as Jotunheim (that's for frost and stone giants - his is Muspelheim, the fire giant's realm), Tyr was actually the deity of heroic single combat and Vidar the silent was the God of vengeance. Also, any mention of the runes of these fatalistic people? I have less expertise in the contemporary literary (Lovecraft, Moorcock, Leiber) pantheons than the historical although I did notice straight away that Dagon and Hydra were absent in the Cthulhu section, but Deep Ones, whom they rule, were included. Likewise absent were the magnificent Dholes, and the delightful Hounds of Tindalos. In the Melnibonean section, Elric's lover Cymoril is absent as his companions. Others will no doubt note serious absences in the Nehwon mythos, of which I have had very little exposure to. The Non-Human deities section isn't anything special although I do note that Dispater isn't listed as one of the lesser gods among the demons and devils. Lolth is notable for receiving one and half columns of combat abilities.

Now whilst it is obviously not possible to include everybody and everything of note, this is a matter of textual efficiency; and this brings to issue one of the most-maligned features of Deities & Demigods.... Sweet Jesus, it's full of stat blocs - like the spiritual expressions of billions of people over the past thousands of years are just another monster to kill. The only thing that's missing is their treasure type and the experience points. Rarely is there any mention of genealogical relations, personality and the like, although conflicts do get a guernsey at times. There is a little that needs to be said about this; sure it's OK to say "this god specialises in war and magic" and even "they are the equivalent of nth level in these abilities", but there is no excuse for the MM-like presentation. On this note; the levels strike one as being, well, a bit low. Even to minimise cultural contexts and suggest, for example, that Raven is was the creator of the lands and the bringer of sunlight starlight, water and fire of the NW region of North America rather than to all, doesn't that seem rather more than what the levels indicate?

Finally, moving on to the Appendices there's the evocative planes of existence elaborated from the tantalising hints in the previous publications. Of particular interest is the allocation of outer planes according to alignment with cultural titles. Olympus, the historical Greek pantheon is chaotic good, whereas Nirvana, the historical Buddhist state of being, is Lawful Neutral. The titles are questionable at best, but even more to the point the homes of the deities are alignment-based rather than according to pantheon, although there are evident cultural biases. It just reads rather odd that the Japanese Oh-Kuni-Nushi resides in Gladsheim. This is followed by random encounter tables and planar combat notes which would include some nice environmental effects as plot devices, rather than strictly random encounters.

Deities & Demigods is a source of joy and frustration; it is both grandiose and terrible, a work of imaginative genius and myopic idiocy. If the purpose of the product - as explicitly in the Forward and in the Editor's Introduction - is to provide information on deities, their relationship to clerics, religion and the multiverse, then nearly all this information is contained in pages 8-11, the introductory paragraphs to each pantheon, most of Appendix 1, and an edited Appendix 3 (a grand total of less than twenty pages, even if you include the higher characteristic charts). If the purpose is combative challenges for a party of characters from levels 25 or higher with a religious flavour (and a cavalier

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disregard for history) then the book is extremely useful. Despite Schick's self-conscious denials this is a Monster Manual of Gods and it certainly fulfils that role quite well (assuming a Monster Manual should be just about martial combat opponents). In terms of what was being attempted here there is nothing short of a standing ovation; the combination of the world's polytheistic gods and heavens into a roleplaying game supplemented by literary contributions. It is magnificent that such a text was produced. In terms of the actual execution the work simply does not deliver by any stretch of the imagination. For its stated purpose Dieties & Demigods is, at best, an amazingly inspirational work to encourage readers to take an interest and learn about other history, cultures and religions - but not to be used as it as written.

**Rolemaster Campaign Law (1984)**

Rolemaster Campaign Law is the last of the core 1st and 2nd edition Rolemaster products ("Rolemaster Classic"), although one could genuinely argue that at least Creatures & Treasures should be included as well. As mentioned in the review for Character Law, it was originally published as a separate product which included the Loremaster module Vog Mur. Following the first printing, it was produced in a single cover with Character Law but as a distinctly separate product.

The original cover art is an excellent piece of some rather foppish travelers in a swamp which was charmingly concluded by some orcs in a similar-looking spot with a face-prone venturer with a crossbow bolt in their back. In latter editions the artistic (and binding) comments on Character Law apply. The second style of printings come with the unfortunate scheme of small black (thankfully serif) text on a grey background.

There are essentially two parts to Campaign Law; (a) how to build a game world (b) and how to run a campaign. The organisation of the text begins with an outline/checklist, setting up the cosmological and physical structure, flora and fauna, sentient beings and culture, starting a campaign, handling play, campaign development, and ending a campaign. The style of Campaign Law is pretty dry but it doesn't waste words either. Nevertheless, the content is directed to the "dull medium" and the highly factual with the sections on religion, for example, being particularly unevocative. Magic which one could be forgiven as thinking as fairly important in a fantasy RPG world, is barely mentioned.

The cosmological comments are a mere few paragraphs and a rather obvious. However the lengthier sections on the physical development of the world are excellent. Campaign Law states quite explicitly and clearly where mountains occur, why they occur and what sort of geographical features are likely; where rivers and lakes occur, what they have in them and how the seas affect temperature, how currents react to winds and so forth; how temperature curves change according to climate and what sort of variations (wind patterns, coastal forces etc) can occur. Later in the text a couple of pages is dedicated to random geographical generation which seems to largely correlate with the principles established.

With the single annoying feature of the temperate precipitation section of a chart not correlating at all with the equivalent temperature chart, these few pages are a rich source of solid information on the basic principles of geography and climatology. It is a personal peeve of mine to read fantasy novels (let alone gameworlds) where the authors haven't bothered to ensure that their mountain ranges are placed somewhere sensible or to ensure their rivers

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actually flow down hill. On this basis alone Campaign Law should be required reading.

The section on flora and fauna is likewise a solid piece of information. Basic vegetation types are noted along with their differences according to climate. For storyline purposes, exotic plants (rare, healing, dangerous etc) to "add adventure" are recommended. The fauna section describes what wild beasts live where, what sort of population can be expected, and the possibility of domestication. An thoroughly reasonable animal distribution chart cross-references terrain and mean precipitation with regional temperature. A very brief mention is made of monsters (to paraphrase 'enchanted beasts without cultural organisation') before moving on to the sentient beings and culture.

Campaign Law recommends that sentient beings are considered last because, due to their social organisation and intelligence, they are the top of the food chain and have the greatest freedom of choice; one wonders then why the Gods were placed first. This aside, the initial discussion concerns body shape and colouration and their relationship to geographical regions and population movements. This moves on to cultural descriptions themselves, starting with the sensible emphasis on physical resources and subsistence patterns, before moving on to kinship, language, religion history and symbolism, and technology (largely using the three age system, class specialisation and military system. Again all these features are sensible and quite detailed.

The second part of Campaign Law concerns with the actual operations for a setting; as it correctly states: "when the GM starts a campaign he puts the world in motion". From noting likely sources of conflict (everything from the Gods to unique individuals), the flow of events shifts its focus to the "Core Area", being where the PCs make their initial impressions. Heavy interaction between GM and players during character generation and the opening scenario is recommended (as it sets the tone of the campaign).

A key noted theme in Campaign Law is to "Avoid a Sense of Contrivance", which means detailing high priority areas and likely avenues of travel, and using this detail to assist in surprise situations. The principle is further applied to the section of campaign dynamics which, after making the well-known distinction between game-time and real-time, applies this to the three levels of game activity; "world activity" (the big events outside the PCs immediate ability to affect environment), "strategic activity" and "tactical activity". Strategic activity is largely the "daily routine" of travel, camping, information gathering and recuperation, whilst "tactical activity" is the largely real-time decision making and direct conflicts. To supplement the strategic activity an encounter table based on avoidance and activity is provided. The last section briefly distinguishes the differences in ending a "free-flowing" or "quest-orientated" campaign.

I've have on occasion met Rolemaster GMs who have mentioned that they've never used, let alone even read Campaign Law. In a sense this is understandable because the entire product virtually has nothing to do with the Rolemaster game system and none of it is required as such for said game. However, in my opinion it is a terrible shame, as it is perhaps the best roleplaying supplement on the market to provide a extremely good grounding on designing a gameworld which doesn't offend verisimilitude, and for putting - and keeping - a campaign world in motion. This said, it is stronger on the world-design rather than the campaign-momentum section and there is no significant information at all for player-GM interaction, narrative development or practical advice for actual play (the gaming environment, troublesome players etc). Nevertheless, at a mere 24 pages - this is an excellent aid of those who want gameworld and campaigns that simply make sense.

Gods of Glorantha (1985)

Gods of Glorantha is a a supplement for RuneQuest (3e) which describes 60 major religions for that well-known fantasy world. The boxed set, with below average cover art, comes with four booklets; a Prospaedia, What The Priests Say, a Gloranthan Calendar and the heftiest text, the 82pp cults book. The latter comes with an exceptional table of contents and an appendix of new spells and skills and allocated per diety. Layout varies according to the booklet in question (e.g., three column ragged right for the Prospaedia, two-column justified for the cults book) with highlighted regions for sidenotes, and cultic skills and spells. The writing is clear, formal and quite dense; there's a lot of words here and few are wasted. A nice touch in the cults book is the inclusion of the runic affiliations next to the god's name.
The artwork throughout is quite competent and appropriate to the text.

The Gloranthan Calendar is just that, or rather the Theyalan calendar in particular. It is presented in a contemporary style with one season (five seasons, eight weeks, seven days) per double-page with a relevant image. The seasons are Sea (spring), Fire (summer), Earth (harvest, autumn), Dark (autumn-winter) and Storm (late winter) followed by the Sacred Time of fourteen days. The calendar also marks the holy days for various cults. It’s both extremely cute and very useful.

In a similar manner, the What The Priests Say booklet is very useful and entertaining, especially for new players and those not familiar with Glorantha or with how different answers and mythic perspective can be given to meaningful and metaphysical questions can arise. Seven fundamental questions are answered by representatives of the Dwarf, Eastern, Elf, Lunar, Malkioni, Orlanthi, Pamaltealan, Praxian and Troll pantheons which pretty comprehensive in the Gloranthan scheme of things and convincingly supplements the outlooks already provided in the main rulebook. A few extra pages however should have been dedicated to the Hsunchen (primitives), the Mermen and Yelm (sun god) to give a comprehensive account for all pantheons.

The third book, the 20-page Prosopaedia, can be a little annoying. It is supposed to represent a brief “Who’s Who” among Gloranthan deities, including name, pronunciation, pantheon, deity’s role, representation and history and includes three times as many deities as the main cults book which each given, on average a couple of paragraphs of detail. This is all fine, as the Cults Books is pretty hefty already and must be handled with care as the 82p booklet is prone to falling apart with naught by saddle-staples holding it together. However, with the inclusion of some information in the Cults book and some in the Prosopaedia does leave the situation of jumping between the two. As a production method and for usability purposes, it would have been much better to combine the two into two, say, 52pp booklets.

The Cults book begins with the excellent Jrusteli monomyth which combines the various divergent mythologies of Glorantha into a sequence of “Godtime” events. It discusses the events that lead to creation, the creation of the world, plants and animals, the elder races (Dwarf, Elf, Troll, Dragonwights, Mermen, Broos), early battles, the creation of humans, the age of golden harmony, the storm age of conflict, the great darkness and the challenges of survival and the compromise of the deities which established Time and the three Ages since then. Simply put, it is a beautiful and evocative potted history.

Following this is a description of the thirteen Gloranthan pantheons, the associated deities, and maps of their distribution throughout the world. A chart describes the basic relationship (enemy, hostile, neutral, and friendly) between members of the different pantheons (e.g., everyone is an enemy of Chaos except for Lunars who are neutral). Before moving on to the cults themselves, a universal format is explained; name, runic affiliations, cult description, Initiate membership, spirit magic, Acolyte membership, Runelord and Priesthood, and High Priests. Supplementary notes also describe the acquisition of cultic spirit magic, the effect of iron and rune metals, rune lord ranks, the form and requirements for allied spirits, elemental identifications (colour, metal, weapon, phyla and elemental), membership in multiple cults and notes on creating additional cults.

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The bulk of the booklet is the various cults, with each receiving roughly a page of text with the occasional graphic. The detail is primarily practical; the spells the cult teaches, how to join, how to advance, benefits and limitations, however these invariably add to the descriptive detail in an appropriate manner. The Aldrya (Elves) for example learn the minor spirit magic spell "Food Song", which is cast when they eat plants so the plant-spirit is not offended and Waha teaches "The Peaceful Cut" for animal food. The war god Babester Gor, teaches spells which aid in combat abilities. Uleria, the goddess of love teaches the delightfully named "Erotocomatose Lucidity". New skills are likewise allocated; the dragon mystery cult teaches "Charismatic Wisdom" and Humakt teaches the gift-only "Sense Assassin". Associated cults also provide additional spells. The new skills and spells seem to be largely balanced with each other with perhaps a couple of exceptions ("Waste Lions" and "Sever Spirit" being the same divine cost for example).

Gods are not described as greater or lesser or anything like that. Their Power (capital intended) is dependent on their worshippers, which is sometimes stated quite explicitly: "If Aldrya were not worshipped, forests and woodlands would wither and die" - which gives a clear indication of the value of symbolic power in Glorantha and, as the name should indicate, in RuneQuest. Nor are gods provided a list of combatative or other abilities; the equivalent is represented by their runic affiliations. Flamal has Infinity and Plant runes; it gives one good idea of what the Father of Seeds can do. Occassionally, deities have double-runic affiliations which indications specialisation and power; Chalana Arroy, the Goddess of Healing, has two harmony runes and fertility.

Despite a couple of gaps this is indeed an epic document. It certainly does lack the focussed detail and storytelling style found in earlier publications (e.g., Cults of Prax, Cults of Terror) but makes up for it in scope. Whilst it is primarily and obviously a sourcebook for those using Glorantha and, in particularly Glorantha with RuneQuest, it is certainly worth a read for others who have an interest in how to express religion and mythology in their gaming. As is typical with most things RuneQuest in the AH period, it is the production standards that really hurt this supplement limiting what would otherwise be a better style rating. Nevertheless, it is very good product overall and an absolute necessity for any Gloranthaphile.

**GURPS Religion (1994)**

GURPS Religion is a hefty book whose cardstock cover comes with an average cover illustration by Pat Morrisey. The two female authors (yes, it is notable in this industry) appear to be well-suited for the task of describing "Gods, Priestly Powers and Cosmic Truths", as the book's subtitle. One is an archaeologist and the other the co-author of GURPS Fantasy. The book comes with a comprehensive table of contents and index, along with an appendix/checklist, a fairly good bibliography and glossary. Text is laid out with the standard GURPS two-columns of main text and side-bar and with a good sized serif-font with excellent use of white-space. The art however is quite average which is disappointing given the subject matter. The writing style is pretty dull, with further negative elements elaborated in the rest of the review.

The text consists of eight chapters which, as the Introduction states, can be considered in three parts. The first is the creation of religions (The Cosmos, Deities, Development), the second for clerical characters (Symbols, Clerics, Divine Magic, Traditions) and the third Sample Religions. An irksome and unnecessary moment of the Introduction is the description of science as a type of religion and two pages later with cosmology describes as a set of beliefs (true for religious cosmology, not so for physical cosmology and perhaps partially true for metaphysical cosmology).

The Cosmos chapter suggests, obviously enough, to start with creation myths and recommends some alternatives; deus faber, sexual myths, by-products and "first victim" stories along with cosmological creation stories through the efforts of several entities and some common motifs (the cosmic egg, patterns and numbers) and fatalistic endings. The lengthy sidebar gives the Hopi Indian creation myth. Following this is defining the divine forces, such as nature, time, entropy, fate, karma and the abilities of divination and prophecy from these forces. Finally, the chapter deals with the creation of life and its purpose, the common fall from paradise motif, death and the transition and immortals. The sidebar at this
The second chapter, on Deities, begins with discussing different origins, before moving on to attributes (archetypes, extent of power (the various omni-types and limitations), physical form (humanoid, animal and abstract), domiciles, attitudes (benevolent/malevolent, meddlesome/indifferent, observant/oblivious, forthright/mysterious, codal/random) and their relationships with other deities (allies, enemies, shifts in the godly balance of powers). The first sidebar discusses GMing deities, and makes the obvious statement that active deities should be active, followed by some rather useless non-advice on creating deities as GURPS characters. The second sidebar gives a range of animal motifs with some good examples, and the third with the "food and drink" of the gods (e.g., ambrosia, soma). The sidebar on apotheosis is obvious, and is followed by related sidebars on faded gods, the power of faith, and (undifferentiated) quests and geases. These are descriptive and contribute little to game-play. This is followed by SF deities and deities of horror, and finally the character interaction with deities; in their home, as avatars, as temple guardians and with divine messengers; this is quite good. The chapter concludes with a discussion on demigods as the semi-divine (either degenerated gods or ascended humans).

Following the Gods is the development of religion. This chapter, with comments on tenets of belief, scripture, religious hierarchy and recruitment, the relationship between church and state, and is followed by sidebars (about four paragraphs) on the Druids, the Inquisition, the Reformation, Zoroastrianism, Messianic Religions, Death and Resurrection, Fanaticism, Prolesytising, Martyrs, Paragons, Monasticism and - oddly enough - returns to religious examples of Sikhism and Ancient Egypt. In all cases, both in the main text and the sidebars, the information provided tends strongly towards the descriptive, with the specific historical examples providing much better information than obvious statements (e.g., "People often wonder what happens when we die...")

Religions have symbols which, apparently, "are of utmost importance"; more so than theology? Divinity? Power? This stated, the chapter moves through, again in a totally descriptive fashion, various symbolic expressions in religion; appearance, acts, buildings, ceremonies and rituals, rites, prayer, sacrifice and dance, pilgrimages, holy times, and sacred items. The first sidebar is thirteen example historical symbols followed by design notes for new symbols. Notes are given for symbolic birthdays and twins (nothing on numerology), a few paragraphs on knots and feng shui, followed by symbolic scarification, blood, ashes, mistletoe and cakes. This is followed by a number of originally religious sayings embodied in common use and a lengthy description of common symbolic representations and their meaning.

The fifth chapter, on Clerics, is a mere ten pages and is one of the few examples where the text and the game system actually interact. Even in this case it is often descriptive and suggestive, with clerical character types listed. However significant space is dedicated to elaborating existing advantages, disadvantages, skills and so forth and providing new examples. New advantages (Blessed, Power Investiture, World Sight) tie in with the new clerical magic system of the sixth chapter, Divine Magic which runs for some twenty-five pages. Power to cast spells varies according to the sanctity of location, time or holiness of objects. Further elaboration is provided for Ceremonial Magic and a number of spells from GURPS Magic and a listing is provided for "Cleric-only" spells along notes on miracles and divine intervention and mostly descriptive sidebar information for various forms of Divination and Excommunication. Almost a dozen pages are dedicated to shamanism which discusses the worldview and spirit conflicts, shaman methods, accoutrements, epilepsy and charlatanry and finally a short lists of spells.

The seventh chapter is a short discussion on religious traditions. The text follows standard anthropological religious development, from animism to totemism/ancestor veneration, and to polytheism. For some indecipherable reason, it stops there, neglecting the entirety of monotheism which is pretty significant in religious life - not to mention spiritual forms of atheism. Following this are brief notes on religious traditions according to geographical location; African, Native American, South Asian, Melanesian, Polynesian and Australian Aboriginal. One may notice there are more than
a few gaps.

The final chapter is six sample religions taking up almost thirty pages. The T'Si'Kami are a fairly stock naturalist bunch, not unlike Shinto traditions. The Flatliners are a group of 'net shamans perhaps not unlike the Rastafarians from Neuromancer. The Kalm are the religion of a sentient feline species but they don't "feel" particularly cat-like. The Disciples of Change are supposed to be a religious application of scientific reasoning, but apart from the psionic aspect there is little that is religious as such in their doctrine. The monotheistic Dhala comes across as the creation-destruction cycle of parts of the Hindu faith with a definite emphasis on the latter. The Gods of Bethany have a strong medieval-chivalric orientation. This is the only sample religion described in sufficient detail taking up some eleven pages.

Whilst others have given this a positive review in the past I cannot agree. From my hefty GURPS collection, this is perhaps one of the worst books in the extensive range from a line that usually produce extremely useful and interesting sourcebooks. The text suffers from numerous cases of "weasel words" (e.g., "many believe", "others believe", "some say", "a common motif" etc) in lieu of substance and is hardly an exciting read. Statements of fact are trivially true and the response to core questions contribute little. Only a handful of historical deities are mentioned and invariably these are in passing although some detailed examples are given, as mentioned in the review. Apart from the fifth and sixth chapter, there is is almost zero integration with descriptive passages and game system mechanics. On the positive side, some of the historical information is of passing interest and, if one is completely unfamiliar with the diversity in various religious practises, the descriptive paragraphs are of some use. Overall however it is fairly slim pickings and this is quite unexpected given the calibre of much of the other material in the GURPS line.

Style: 1 + .4 (layout) + .4 (art) + .3 (coolness) + .4 (readability) + .5 (product) = 3.0

Substance: 1 + .2 (content) + .3 (text) + .1 (fun) + .2 (workmanship) + .2 (system) = 2.0

Pantheon and Other Games (2000)

Introduction and Physical Product

As a very rules-light narrativist game, Pantheon is a thin product - a simple 24 page saddle-stiched A4 book with a cardstock cover. The cover art and internal art is of the same standard, competent and contextual, but nothing particularly notable. The content is provided in two-column justified text and well written with the especially dry humour that Robin D. Laws presents. In particular, the author takes some delight in arguing whether the game constitutes a roleplaying game. It is, under some definitions, but it is not a traditional RPG and fits more in the "storygame" category, and of the competitive subcategory. The book contains a simple set of rules and five games, each of which can be used for an evening's single play, and designed for 4-6 players.

The Narrative Cage Match System

The basic rules of this competitive story telling-game is where each player adds a sentence to an ever-expanding story, and "wins" by accumulating the most points based on the plot devices, tropes, motifs etc of a particular scenario and genre. The ability to add a line depends on a simple bidding process, where the highest bidder has the right to add to the storyline.

The starting player starts by narrating an opening scene provided at the beginning of the scenario, in media rens, and contributes an openin sentence. Play progresses in turn which each player contributing an additional sentence. Each sentence includes the name of the player's character and as each character describes the actions progressing the story. Each player must mention their character in their sentence contribution and may name no more than one other player's character, and no all-encompassing terms ("and everyone dies from eating the salmon mousse). Additional (supporting) characters can be added that become part of the story.
If one players disapproves of the sentence, and this should happen often, they may issue a challenge, and can undo the sentence with a plot twist. The mechanic involved is rolling 6d6 in secret, aiming for identical results. Bidding is based on fifty-three tokens ("beads" in the rules, or alternatively, "coins, jellybeans, real beans or other sort of counter"); fifty of normal, and three special values. The winner of the bid selects a number (1-6); the person who has the most rolled values of that list then has the option to determine whether the original statement remains, or they can alter it, using the same PCs mentioned in the earlier sentence and at least one other noun or verb used in the original proposed sentence.

The three special tokens are nominally green, white, and black. A green token allows the player to automatically the auction, white allows the player to select another player to win the auction, and a black token cancels another player's sentence, removing it entirely from the developing storyline. The scenario ends when there is only player who survived or has any regular tokens left. Afterwards the winner is determined by calculating the points assigned in the scenario. This certainly does not necessarily mean the surviving character, but rather the player who invoked the most relevant tropes to the scenario.

The Scenarios

The first and second scenarios provides a substantial introduction, describing the characters to be used in depth and the situation. The other scenarios are more open-ended, with the final scenario is the most open-ended of all, which begins with "In the Beginning, there was nothing. Now what do you do?" The first scenario is "Grave and Watery", "action and horror in an undersea base with a killer aboard", then "Boardroom Blitz", "high drama and big money clash in a battle for control of the family megacorporation", "The Big Hole", "modern-day gangsters meet in a tale of crime, blackmail, double-crosses and revenge", "Destroy All Buildings", "there's a panic in Tokyo as giant monsters converge on the city to fight!", and finally, Pantheon, "your chance to create the universe anew and mess with it".

The scenarios and characters are well-established and the scoring mechanism captures most of the genre-appropriate tropes, including those specific for each character. In the first two scenarios the characters are fully described with a range of character relationships and quirks. In the third scenario a much longer cast is provided with a more minimal description, but to be fair, they have a high degree of similar motivations. In the third scenario, special rules are provided which ensure that their monster is gradually revealed as the story progresses, and has an associated secondary human who primarily acts in those initial turns. As for the final story, well, it's really anything goes. But to score well, ensure that the character that you develop does the things that we would expect to be godly.

Evaluation

In actual play this game is a lot of fun. It works best when the players are absolute fiends of the genre they are trying to emulate and are prepared to let their characters take the fall when they are supposed to. Players who treat "winning" as their characters surviving may find, in some genres, this is simply not how the scoring works. However, it is not without some limitations. As with similar GM-less narrativist games, encapsulating the competitive side into a bidding and random resolution process means that complete nonsense can be introduced which can break the immersive spell. Likewise, it helps if the players are absolute fiends for the genres being explored in question, and are known to fritter away hours on sites like tvropes.com (unpaid advertisement). The game are obviously one-shots as well; once someone knows the scoring of the scenario they know how to win - which gives the owner of the rules an advantage. Again, perhaps with a twist or two, this could and perhaps should be a GM-moderated game, who can introduce new stories, new sentences, and call 'foul' on anything that's a deal-breaker.

Overall however, for a mere 24 pages one gets five nights of rules-light, content-rich, genre-immersive fun.

Style: $I + .5 \text{(layout)} + .4 \text{(art)} + .8 \text{(coolness)} + .7 \text{(readbility)} + .5 \text{(product)} = 3.9$

Physical Product and Introduction

The Exalted RPG is a high-powered high-fantasy game by White Wolf Publishing. The physical product is an hefty hardback book, around 400 pages, and well-bound, although insufficiently so for the size and weight of the book. The cover and full-colour interior art is fantasy-anime which befits the setting and style, but is only vaguely contextual and best, and average in terms of creativity and technique. The inside covers have a two-page map of the setting which is fairly attractive but lacks detail.

The major chapter breaks are separated by a short comic which makes a nice change of pace. There's an inexcusably sparse table of contents (chapter headings only) and a more detailed (3 page) index. Pages are differentiated with page numbers and chapter titles in the bottom margin, and less than useful "oriental-styled" differentiating script in side margin. The text is presented in a two-column justified serif font with a decent amount of whitespace. It's pretty heavy going however; Exalted is the sort of game which incorporates a large level of fluff and crunch and when the two are combined you get a long and wordy text which uncomfortably switches between the formal and informal.

Exalted is a game that claims to be inspired by various world mythologies and fantasy anime, all of which are combined into a complex gameworld - sufficiently complex that a 3.5 page setting lexicon is provided in the opening chapter. A core difference between Exalted and other fantasy RPGs is the starting power; PCs are former mortals who are of epic power levels (hence "Exalted") and will be engaging in world-changing activities. Following a lengthy introduction, the chapters are "Setting", "Character Creation", "Traits", "Drama and Systems", "Charms, Combos, and Sorcery", "Storytelling", "Antagonists", and "Panopoly".

Setting

The first chapter, "Setting", goes into some detail about this situation, starting from a Wyld of Essence, from which came Primordials and the antagonistic Fair Folk. The former established Creation with elements, and then created the major gods, whom they toyed with. The Gods, led by the Solars, created the Exalted, successfully rebelled against the Primordials, and imprisoned them. The Solars themselves were poor rules, and were subject to rebellion by the Sidereals and the Dragon-blooded, which led to the Immaculate Order, followed by a great plague unleashed by the Deathlords (ghosts of the dead Primordials and Solars wearing grumpy pants), an invasion by the Fair Folk, and the destruction of the latter by the one of the Dragon-blooded who then declared herself the Scarlet EmpressScarlet Empress (and ruler of the world, naturally). The Empress has, however, disappeared, the Solar Exalted have returned, and civil war is now brewing.

Frankly, this is just an awful and infantile backstory, and is regrettably hard to avoid. This said, the rest of the setting isn't so bad. The world is quite acceptable and its reasonably clever in having Elemental Poles based on geographical locations (centre is Earth, north is Air - and cold, south is Fire, East is Wood, and west is Water). A lunar calendar is used and seasons match the elements. There is a Solar system (pun intended) of the Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars,
Jupiter, Saturn, and of course Gaia. There is extensive descriptions of locations and daily life, social classes (patricians, citizens, peasants, slaves, disenfranchised), and various orders, military and religious and so forth. It is actually quite a good syncretic combination of Oriental, Occidental, and Semitic influences of antiquity, with even hints of the Americas (to the wooded east) - all of which is a little weird given the poor the historic and mythic backstory is.

**Character Creation and Traits**

Characters are mortals that have recently become Exalted, with an assumed default of Solar Exalted. It begins with a character concept of a few sentences which elaborate on their human past. The first major in-game choice however is the selection of Caste which roughly equates with character class in other systems. The titles are solar-based, Dawn (Warriors), Zenith (Priests), Night (Rogues), Twilight (Wizards) and Eclipse (Leaders).

Non-Exalted characters, i.e., ordinary humans, have no Caste. Players must select an epic motivation for their characters. The motivation answers the question: "Why will the character become a legend?".

Characters are also defined by their Attributes and Abilities. Attributes are rated 1 to 5, whereas Abilities are rated from 0 to 5. Physical Attributes are Strength, Dexterity, and Stamina, Mental are Intelligence, Wits and Perception, and Social are Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance. Players allocate points according to the Attributes for their characters with 8, 6, or 4 points across each group. Abilities represent training in skills and knowledges and are categorised by Caste; players can select an additional 5 abilities outside the character's Caste Abilities. These are the character's Favoured Abilities. Caste and Favoured abilities are assigned 10 points to Caste and Favoured Abilities. Favoured Abilities must receive at least 1 point. They then can assign 18 points to any Ability (including Caste and Favoured), however no Ability may be rated more than 3. Specialities in Abilities can be purchased with bonus or experience points.

To further flesh out the character, 7 points are received to distribute among the 11 Backgrounds. The Backgrounds are: Allies, Artifacts, Backing (by an organisation), Contacts, Cult, (Anima) Familiar, Followers, Influence, Manse (pure items of an element Essense), Mentor, and Resources. In addition there is also receive 10 points of Charms, of which 5 must be from Caste or Favoured abilities. For want of a better word, Charms are like magical feats. Five points may be added to the four Virtues (Compassion, Conviction, Temperance, and Valour). No Virtue may start at above 4 without spending bonus points. Choose one Virtue as the root of the character's Virtue Flaw; this must be a Virtue rated 3 or more. Virtues both add when acting with the virtue, and one must fail a roll to act against that virtue.

To finish off character creation, a character's Willpower equals their two highest Virtue ratings. Temporary expenditure of a Willpower point can create an automatic success. Characters start with a number of Intimacies (proper, collective, or abstract nouns) equal to their Compassion. An Exalted character's Essence starts at 2 and may be increased with bonus points. Their Personal Essence pool is equal to their (Essence*3)+Willpower and their Peripheral Essence (Essence*7)+Willpower+Virtues. Characters also start with 15 bonus points. An increase in Attribute costs 4 points, an Ability 2 (or 1 if Caste or Favoured), a Background is 1, or 2 if already 3+, a speciality costs 1 (or 2 per 1 if Caste or Favoured), a Virtue costs 3, Willpower costs 2, Intimacies 3 to increase to Willpower + Compassion, Essence costs 7, and Charms cost 5 (4 if Favoured or Caste).

**Game System**

The core system is pretty contemporary Storyteller system. Success in tasks are acheived by a test against an attribute plus an ability, plus bonuses, which provide a dice pool of d10s; with 7+ required for a success and with a 10 counting as two successes. A number of successes is neeed equal to the difficulty of the task to succeed (‘1’ being standard, ‘5+’ being legendary), and the number over that (or below) represents a degree of success or failure. In any division, Exalted characters always round up, whereas Mortals round down. A “botch”, or critical failure, occurs if the character rolls no successes and has at least one “1”; additional ”1” results make the botch worse (with the curious result that the larger the pool, the greater the opportunity for very bad botches). For repeat checks a penalty of -1 success is usually applied.
Characters may use a point of temporary Willpower for an automatic success, or activate a Virtue for an extra die (limited by the Virtue rating per story). As the character's Willpower declines they become increasingly under control of their Virtues, rather than the player's direction. Characters will find that certain circumstances challenge their Virtues, requiring a check. Each Virtue Flaw also has specific limit condition that, when met, forces the character to roll that Virtue and gain limit equal to that amount. Suppressing successes on the Virtue to engage in a preferred course of action adds to Limit Break. When this value reaches 10, the character becomes dominated by their Flaw in a self-destructive course of action.

In addition to the basic tasks there are rules for extended rolls for ongoing tasks, resisted rolls for contests, combining actions, reflexive actions, teamwork, and Stunts where bonuses are added for descriptive flourish. In addition there is detailed rules on various non-combat tasks (climbing, disguise, holding breath, academic knowledge, evaluating goods, treat wounds, thaumaturgy, etc), both Attribute-based and the standard Attribute-plus-Ability combination. Combat situations are also described. Exalted uses one-second combat rounds with most characters engaging in an action every three to six seconds ("ticks") or so, with precise and flowing checks required by the Storyteller.

**Combat**

Surprise is determined by a contested skill of Dexterity+Stealth vs Wits+Awareness. Under such conditions Dodge and Parry have a defensive value (DB) of 0. A Join Battle (Wits+Awareness) check is required for initial initiative. The character with the highest count goes first on second 0, and everyone else starts after that based on the difference on their roll and the highest count (with a maximum of 6). When a character's 'tick' is reached, they must choose an action. Speed is a tick counter; after a character's action, they must wait a number of ticks equal to the Speed of their action before they can act again. The Defence Penalty is a penalty applied to your defences for taking the action. The penalty lasts until their next action. Actions include aim, attack, dash, flurry, guard, and move.

To attack, a character rolls their Accuracy pool; Dexterity + Relevant Ability + Weapon's Accuracy. A Defense Value is subtracted from the number of attack successes. Defense is typically either Dodge or Parry; dodge DV is equal to half the character's Dexterity + Dodge - Armour Mobility Penalty. Parry DV is equal to half of the character's Dexterity + Ability + their weapon's Defence. Shields and cover provide a DV bonus. Receiving multiple attacks on the same tick reduces DV. There are special rules for grappling, called shots, and mass combat. If there are more attack successes than defense value, a hit has been scored. Damage is equal to the Damage rating of the weapon + character's Strength + excess successes. Damage is differentiated between "bashing" (blunt trauma), "lethal" (edged, piercing), and "aggravated" (supernatural). "Lethal" is the most common. If a character received more base damage than their Stamina + Resistance, they may suffer Knockdown, requiring a reflexive (Dexterity or Stamina) + (Athletics or Resistance) check with a difficulty 2.

The base damage is compared to the defending character's Soak value of the same type. Soak is based on the character's Stamina and Armour against the different damage types; mere mortals cannot Soak lethal damage with their stamina. Exalted can. Armour has an aggravated Soak equal to its lethal soak. A relatively common weapon bonus, armour piercing, halves the Soak of armour. The minimum damage caused is the Permanent Essence of the attacker (typically 2 for stating Exalted or 1 for Mortals), or the minimum damage rating of the weapon, whichever is higher. The final damage value is rolled with a number of successes (ignoring botches and 10s) equal to a number of wounds, marked on the character sheet as /, X, or * (to represent bashing, lethal, and aggravated wounds). Wound penalties apply on the degree of damage. A character who suffers more health levels of damage in a blow than their Stamina may be stunned. Mortals also suffer the joy that if they received 4 or more wounds in a single blow, they have suffered a disabling wound.

There are also rules for social combat, which follow a very similar approach, including "surprise social attacks", guards, social flurries, etc. If a character is struck by a Social attack they may either accept the results, or pay a Willpower to avoid them. If it goes against the character's motivation, they must spend the Willpower. Additional
successes of the attack have no effect on the Willpower required. Social charms have a variety of effects such as building or eroding intimacies, compelling behaviour, etc. There are also rules for social attacks between units of organisation (applied through the leader).

**Charms and Sorcery**

Charms are the basic magic tricks; all Exalted and supernatural creatures have Charms. Each Charm requires Essence to be channelled. Charms generally supplement an action, and cost Motes, derived from the Essence score or Willpower. Usually only one can be used per action. Notably, some Charms can be used as mental or social influence (e.g., compulsions, illusions, servitude etc). Every Ability has three Charms known as Excellencies (thus, Archery Charms, Integrity Charms, Craft Charms, Athletic Charms, Bureaucracy Charms etc). Characters may one, two, or three of these Charms for each Ability. However there is not an equal distribution of Charms; Melee, for example, has 19, while Stealth has only 4. In addition Exalted have two Charms to to enhance their Excellencies.

Charms, like weapons and actions, have a Speed rating. Unless otherwise noted they have a Speed of 6 and a DV of -1. Charms have a cost on Motes; small units of Essence. Each Exalt three Mote pools; personal Motes are easily spent without inviting unwanted attention, peripheral Motes are those the use of which flares the Exalted anima. Finally, there are committed motes. Whenever a mote is spent on an ongoing effect, move motes from one of the other two pools to the Committed pool. Motes cannot be regained whilst Committed. Spending Motes from the peripheral Essence pool cause the Anima of an Exalted to appear. Peripheral Essence is regained by rest, through an attuned Manse, by a Hearthstone, or with an active Cult. A Charm is limited in the bonus it can give to a dice pool by the relevant Attribute plus Ability, or half that for static ratings. Only one Charm may be used per action, however "Combos" may be used which compound Charm effects with the expenditure of Willpower; these are time-consuming and difficult to learn.

Whilst Charms are available to all Exalted, Sorcery is somewhat more difficult to learn, "more transcendentally powerful and difficult" as the rulebook says. It involves a five-part initiation trial based on virtues (humility, tutelage, journey, courage, sacrifice), and requires in game-terms, learning the sorcery Charms. Each spell must be individually learned as well, and the spells are separated into different circles (terrestrial, celestial, solar). All this said, only a handful of sorcery spells are provided in the core rules. Sorcery spells tend to take a while to cast compared to Charms (ten combat rounds) and are expensive in Motes.

**Storytelling, Antagonists, and Panoply**

The last three chapters are sufficiently rules-light to be dealt with quick sequence. The first, Storytelling, is a mere 18 pages, which describes the formation of a group, rule changes, gaming styles, setting locations (including detailed travel times and modifiers), character connections, developing a story series, running sessions, and awarding experience. In complete contradiction to the rest of the game, this is one chapter which really required more elaboration, especially for various techniques for speeding up the resolution, combat, the mountain of charm choices etc.

In comparison the Antagonists chapter is quite, lengthy, almost 80 pages. It starts with a range of mortals, including ordinary citizens, seasoned soldiers, heroes (on a mortal scale), elders, and “god-bloods” (half-deities). Like other antagonists in the chapter these are provided a pretty comprehensive set of game-relevant statistics. Along with the long-suffering mortals, there is also beastmen, creatures of the wyld (a chaotic environment, and so populated) and the terrifying Fair Folk, Spirits, and various folk Gods (mainly integrated in the game system for summonings and divine powers). Samples of the latter two are given with the Dog of the Unbroken Earth, a forest spirit, and Gri-Fel, God of the Imperial City, and Sikunare Storm Mother. In addition there are truly mighty elementals, numerous demons and undead, Deathlords, and other Exalted from other sources (terrestrial, lunar, sidereal, abyssal etc), including their anima manifestations and charms. The section follows mundane and fantastic “beasts of creation”, only moderately described at best, then the curious diseases, which are virtue-based.
The final chapter is a detailed summary of the use of money and resources in the game with variation in coinage and equipment, including weapons and armour. There is also a description of various magic items, gems, etc. The “Jade Standard” is presented as a regular coinage and script, with silver coins used elsewhere & etc. There is too much discussion on the currency system and the finance system, but not enough on basic economics and trade. Still, for characters there is an abstract method that makes use of the Resources value and various personal items of equipment, and a few items of larger property. In addition there are several pages weapons and armour in tabular form, providing the essential game characteristics, along with various magic items differentiated as “everyday wonders” (potions, salves, herbs), “lesser wonders”, “hearthstones”, and “greater wonders”, “earthshaking wonders” etc.

Evaluation

Stylistically there is nothing in Exalted that even rates as average. The layout is difficult to work with, the art is largely uninspiring, it oversells the importance of the key themes, it's a turgid read to get through, and the physical product is below standard. None of these, one hastens to add, are especially bad (with perhaps the exception of the general readability). It's just the entire book could be attacked with a red pen to make it shorter (which would help the product's physical strength), more legible, easier to use and so forth. On the other hand, the game does better in terms of substance. The content provides above average coverage, although the signal to noise ratio could be improved. It is difficult to actually run with far too much die rolling, which sucks a lot of the fun out of what could be an otherwise workable system that is shows fairly good scope.

All this said however, Exalted does what it says on the tin, insofar it does provide a high-powered anime-fantasy system, a detailed setting, that is in a period of crisis. A Storyteller determined to run this game should develop a series of optional rules to reduce the steps involved in conflict resolution for example, although there are some parts of the game - the mighty collection of Charms for example - which would be a little more difficult to simplify. Overall, it's a somewhat frustrating trip, but a determined group will be able make a workable game out of it. Most of the problems are not in what is provided but rather how it is provided.

Style: 1 + .4 (layout) + .4 (art) + .4 (coolness) + .3 (readbility) + .4 (product) = 2.9

Substance: 1 + .7 (content) + .3 (text) + .4 (fun) + .5 (workmanship) + .7 (system) = 3.7
GURPS DEMIURGE

by Karl Brown

Part 1: In the Beginning…

This article requires GURPS 3rd Edition Basic Set. Use of the 4th edition of the GURPS should be possible but this article was written for the 3rd edition and the author is not familiar with the latest edition.

Ever wanted to play god?

This is your chance. This supplement uses GURPS’ point based mechanics to allow a group of collaborating players to create their own custom universe during play and beginning with nothing. Other games promise gods as PCs but fall short of the creative power true deities should possess. This is because they try to create god characters within the normal RPG framework either by making more potent versions of normal PCs or by scaling the entire system to the deities power level. Here we remake how an RPG is played to allow for these characters by jettisoning the usual roles of referee and player. It used to be said that in a game the referee is god; what if everyone was a referee and a player? This premise is the basis of GURPS Demiurge.

The player characters are the gods or other Powers of this universe. These Powers can be obvious active agents in the universe (good for high fantasy campaigns), natural or historical forces, or operate entirely ‘offstage’ reduced to a mere meta-game tool for players (as in a hard science fiction campaign). Even if you think that Powers are not part of your desired genre you may wish to reconsider. Dr Manhattan of the Watchmen, the Monolith of 2001, psychohistory of Asimov’s Foundation universe, and Lady Luck invoked in Westerns are all Powers.

What it does not provide is wish fulfillment for power gamers. You cannot use this supplement to create massive point value Supreme Beings in regular GURPS games. Gods here can cost as little as 100pt (don’t believe me? Skip forward to character creation and take a look). To play gods your gaming group has to accept the ‘whole package’, start a new campaign, and run it in the way described here.

The first draft of this article was written nearly a decade ago. The current version draws on the experiences from two cooperative GURPS science fiction campaigns ‘The Colony’ and ‘Krononauts’. Additionally, I have decades of experience running rpg campaigns in a variety of systems driven by player character motivations. Finally, my experiences on various committees fed into this article. That all said this has not been playtested and I’d love to hear form people who give it a try.

Building a universe, bit by bit

One problem with collaborative world building is players becoming bogged down in endless discussion until they agree on details. Demiurge solves this problem firstly by using procedures to speed decision making and secondly by creating the universe bit by bit.

Players begin by following easy steps to determine the ground rules, called a Compact.

Then launch into creating the universe by each spending an allotment of points in a cyclic manner. The basic idea behind these rules is that everything in a GURPS universe can be assigned a point cost. Roleplaying and adventures emerge seamlessly because even creating the universe is roleplaying.

Before Starting
Every player needs to have read this entire document carefully. You must be aware of the procedures used to speed universe creation and run the game. If all players are not aware of these rules the game will quickly become bogged down in long arguments or tedious discussions.

For the first session someone should bring a timer or alarm clock. This first session will run smoother if players have prepared proposals ahead of time.

**The Compact**

Before the game can start a basic discussion needs to occur and the results of this discussion recorded. The document generated is the Compact. In a game where players are to be gods the ‘Compact’ has roots in fantasy literature, often there are rules even the gods must follow. In fantasy novels the rules of the Compact are only ever hinted at. Our Compact is a metagame tool it should be precise and clear. In the game if there are gods they may refer to the Compact ‘in character’ but usually not its details. Don’t worry about specific rules at this point just answer these questions to apply a ‘broad brush’ that will generate guidelines so a consistent universe will be made.

**Sharing the load**

Unlike a standard rpg a GURPS Demiurge campaign can be run without a referee. You can also choose to have a referee or some other intermediate power-sharing arrangement. This is done by assigning Powers to players, each Power is a vote in how the game is run during the rest of the campaign and possibly a divine character. Your distribution of Powers is the distribution of control and workload for the rest of the campaign. There is no right way to do this but it should be discussed and everyone in the group needs to be happy with the discussion. For a true collaborative effort assign each player the same number of Powers (usually one). For a traditional referee and players set up the referee is assigned more Powers than there are players. The more Powers a referee has the more control they will have over the game. In practice controlling more than about ten Powers is unwieldy. Between these two extremes there are a large number of Power sharing arrangements.

You could have players who are assigned no Powers. These players would simply act like players in a normal rpg. They will generate mortal PCs. This option is not recommended.

_This italicised style of text is used for an on-going example of Demiurge play. Three players (Abe, Bob, and Cath) decide to build a universe. They all wish to contribute equally so each player is assigned one Power._

**Voting**

The discussion of how many Powers each player will have is the last unstructured negotiation. From now on the rest of the Compact and all ‘out of character’ disputes are resolved by voting or averaging.

The vote is a general procedure used often in Demiurge. It is used to speed the creation process that would otherwise get bogged down in discussions trying to reach consensus. When a vote occurs players can generate any number of proposals up to the number of Powers they hold. Proposals are written down in secret then all revealed at once. A player can choose to not put forward a proposal. Players then vote for proposals. A player can cast one vote for each Power she holds, she need not use all her votes on the same proposal. If a draw occurs roll 1d6 for each proposal in the tie, highest wins. Remember every Power you hold is a vote. Later the people with the most votes will be doing more work.

For those not used to formal meetings this may seem a little artificial at first. Cast your mind back though to your first roleplaying session, it took a little time to get used to the structure of referee with players and the systems of combat.
but these soon became familiar. The features of Demiurge such as voting will soon become familiar too. **The voting procedure is designed carefully to avoid protracted discussion, confusion and arguments. It should not be changed or watered down.**

**Averaging**

In some instances a numerical value must be chosen by the group. In these cases each Power secretly writes one value on a piece of paper. All are revealed at the same time, the mean found and the result rounded up to a whole unit ($, pt, Q or whatever).

**Deadline**

Players first set an amount of time they wish to spend creating the Compact. Each secretly writes a number of hours on a piece of paper. All these proposals are revealed at the same time and the mean taken, round down. After the vote time starts. Hint use an egg timer. If time runs out then remaining items use the lists of default proposals and votes are taken. No more proposals are allowed to be generated.

**Genre**

Are you going to have a set genre or mix and match shamelessly? Do you want to play hard SF, epic fantasy, western, ancient Rome but with vampires and other horror elements, Victorian era with an alien invasion? Discuss, generate one or more proposals, then put them to the vote. **All proposals should include a base TL**, whether higher TL than the base TL is allowed is covered later. **Genre proposals must be no more than 5 words long** not counting the chosen TL. Record the decided genre in the Compact. Later if someone tries to create something that another player feels is out of genre and should be disallowed a vote can be called to decide the matter. A genre is not a straight jacket but it is polite to discuss anything out of genre with other players first to avoid a vote. If you prepare something out of genre and it is voted out you have wasted effort.

The three players each generate one proposal each. Abe wants a ‘generic fantasy TL3’, Bob a ‘hard SF set in 2100AD TL9’ and Cath ‘Mythic Greece TL1’. Bob and Abe vote for their own proposals, surprisingly Cath votes for Abes. She feels she can still use Greek influences within a generic fantasy. Bob may not be pleased with this result but being a ‘good sport’ is part of any game.

**Powers**

What are the Powers going to be? Will the players simply share in the creation of the universe at a metagame level or will the Powers take an active role in the world. Will the Powers intervene, create miracles, act through their followers, or are they gods that can manifest in the universe? If Powers are simply players at a metagame level then a Power is not a character. If Powers are characters what kinds of Powers are allowed? Can a PC be a god, a natural or philosophical force, a historical trend? a religious teaching devoid of a deity? If you are intending to propose that Powers are a metagame feature only you may wish to consider allowing forces, trends, and philosophies as a way of getting some inspiration when you are creating and providing uniting themes for the campaign.

As with genre generate proposals and put them to a vote. **Each proposal should specifically state whether Manifestations or Avatars are allowed or even required.**

Each of our players has one Power can put forward one proposal. Abe suggests “Powers include both abstract ideals and forces or gods”. Cath proposes ‘Powers are required to be gods that are allowed to Manifest and have Avatars’. Bob proposes ‘Powers are a meta-game idea only they do not have Avatars or Manifest’. Seeing a compromise all three vote for Abe’s proposal.
Limits
Is the scope of the campaign limited to a city, a continent, world, several worlds, a plane of existence, a multiverse of parallel universes? The limit can exist because the Powers are limited, or because while the Powers are assumed to be doing things beyond the region but the narrative of the game is focused there. For example, the PCs are the true gods of a whole universe but game-play is restricted to a single continent.

Seeking to salvage some of his ideas Bob proposes ‘a solar system of thirty worlds and moons’. Abe proposes ‘a single continent’ and Cath a ‘typical fantasy world’. Bob is surprised when everyone votes for his idea. It seems everyone can see an advantage in having several worlds to play with.

Start State
Does the campaign start at the beginning of the cosmos? 1973? The 3000th year of the Empire? Put forward proposals and vote.

Abe proposes ‘nothing at the dawn of time’, Cath ‘pseudo-medieval fantasy’, and Bob the ‘3000th year of the All Worlds Empire’. Cath and Abe vote for Abe’s proposal which defeats Bob’s single vote.

Interval
How quickly will time pass in the campaign. This is covered by how quickly time passes in ‘down-time’ between periods of action. It will cost a Power to have dull time pass. For an action packed campaign an hour is a good interval, for a campaign tracing the epic history of a galactic civilisation a century might be more appropriate. You may wish to have a long interval for a number of starting rounds to gloss over history then a shorter interval. For this reason do not average but generate proposals and vote.

Abe proposes a century for the first five Cycles and then only an hour from then on. Cath declines to make a proposal. Bob suggests a year. After the vote Abe’s proposal wins.

Physics
GURPS universes generally follow laws of physics similar to our real universe because the game system’s designers’ reality check their rules. It is not recommended that you change this basic premise. You could run a universe without gravity but this would require you to re-examine a lot of game rules. That said your universe need not be constrained by the mundane. Will the campaign be cinematic? Have magic? Use psionics? Allow supers or supernatural powers? Is there technology above the base TL? If so list a maximum TL. It is assumed that literate is standard at TL4+ and illiteracy is standard before this. If literacy differs from these defaults note that also. Generate proposals and vote.

Abe wants ‘cinematic action and high magic’. Cath suggests ‘magic and psionics’. Not giving up, but seeing which way the wind blows, Bob proposes ‘high technology hard science TL9 and magic’. All three players vote for their own proposal. This is a tie so each rolls one die. Cath rolls the highest and wins.

Absolute Natural Law?
Are the Powers required to act within the natural laws above or can they create anything that fits the genre whenever they want? If it has already been decided that Powers are only metagame factors then the answer is ‘yes they must act within the natural laws’ and players need only vote to determine if Powers are restrained by probability, see below. If the Powers are in game entities then player’s proposals should contain one of the three levels of Absolute Natural Law and any exceptions:
1. No, they are not limited by natural laws
2. Yes they are limited by natural laws
3. Yes and restrained by probability

At the first level the Powers are unrestrained they can produce anything out of nothing as long as they have the Q for it. This level is needed if the Powers actually are the creators of the universe. This absence of Natural Law is only really suited to Fantasy games.

At the second level the Powers can only act within the Natural Laws of the universe. They can use use psionics, magic etc if these are facts of the universe but do not simply have carte-blanche to create whatever they can imagine and pay Q for. A stereotype of this kind of universe is the Powers striking blasphemers with bolts of lightning, a natural but unlikely event.

At the third level of Absolute Law not only must the Powers act within the Natural Laws but find it hard to make unlikely events occur. To create an unlikely circumstance, such a lightening strike on an unbeliever, a DU check is required. If the other players decide an event is extremely unlikely (resolve by vote if necessary) then a critical success on this roll may be required.

Proposals can also describe exceptions. Some common are: allowing exceptions or higher restriction to be bought as advantages and disadvantages respectively; a ‘Godtime’ of a fixed number of cycles during which Absolute Natural Law is suspended; an Armageddon where at any point a vote can begin the ‘end of the world as we know it’ and Absolute Natural Law is suspended. Players could easily invent other proposals.

Bob proposes a blanket level 3 absolute natural law, Abe a simple level 2, and Cath level 1. Cath’s proposal is voted in.

Canon

Compile a list of GURPS books, supplements, and house rules documents that are in use. Do not vote on proposals as such, vote yes or no for each book. Record those voted out as well as those that are in. Don’t get too involved in this, more books can be added later. About one to three books per player should generate a useable list. However, a game could be run with this article and the Basic Set only. The Basic Set is assumed to be Canon. For a short Demiurge campaign you only need GURPS Lite pdf available free from Steve Jackson Games and this article.

After this process the following lists are made. ‘In’: Basic Set, Magic, Compendium I, Low-Tech. ‘Out’: Space, Ultratech, Robots.

Characters

Each Power writes down a character point total and a base starting wealth (round down to whole $ or pt). You may wish to consult the Basic Set for guidance on base wealth (B16 sidebar). Find the average of these and record for the Compact.

These first two details set the average against which all PC’s and NPC’s will be measured against. Players can add other details if they wish as proposals to be voted on, one per Power. Some of these other details might only apply to PCs.

Note that Power PCs do not need greater point totals than mortal NPCs, their godly powers are outside of the point system.

Example 100, 125 and 150 character points are suggested therefore the average 125pt will be used. Base wealths of
$1000, $2000, and $15000 are proposed, $5666 will be used.

Out of Time

When time is up, determine any outstanding features of the Compact by voting on the default proposals from the following lists. No more proposals may be created.

Genre
1. Stone age low-fantasy TL0
2. Mythic high fantasy TL1
3. Historical 550BC TL2
4. Generic Fantasy TL3
5. TL4 Historical Age of Exploration
6. TL5 Pulp Adventure
7. TL6 Atomic Horror
8. Super heroes TL7
9. Near future science fiction TL8
10. Cyberpunk TL9
11. Science Fiction TL10
12. Space Opera TL11
13. Science Fantasy TL12

Powers
1. Metagame tools only
2. Natural, historical or philosophical forces. Avatars but no Manifestations
3. Deities who may have Avatars but not Manifestations.
4. Deities who may Manifest and act through Avatars.
5. No restrictions.

Limits
1. A city
2. A nation
3. A continent
4. A planet
5. A solar system
6. Several star systems
7. Several planes of existence
8. The galaxy
9. The universe
10. A multiverse of infinite planes of existence.

Interval
1. An hour
2. A day
3. A week
4. A month
5. A year
6. A decade
7. A century

Physics
8. nil
9. Low mana magic
10. Magic
11. High mana magic
12. Psionics: Telepathy only
13. Psionics: Telepathy, ESP, and Anti-psi only.
14. Psionics All
15. High tech +1TL
16. High tech +2TL
17. High tech +4TL

**Absolute Natural Law?**

If it has already been decided that Powers are only metagame factors then the answer is ‘yes they must act within the natural laws’ and players need only vote to determine if Powers are restrained by probability.

1. No, they are not limited by natural laws
2. Yes they are limited by natural laws
3. Yes and restrained by probability
4. No, they are not limited by natural laws but can choose as disadvantages.
5. Yes they are limited by natural laws but can choose as an advantage not to be or the disadvantage of being restrained by probability.
6. Yes and restrained by probability but can choose advantage to negate the restraint of probability
7. Yes and restrained by probability but can choose advantages to negate absolute natural law and the restraint of probability

**Canon**

First you must vote for the rules set used. Pick only one. The Basic Set is recommended if you have it.

1. Gurps Lite
2. Basic set

Then vote on supplements. Any GURPS book you have with you today can be voted on.

**Characters**

The default for characters is always 100pt and starting wealth as recommended for TL (B16).

_Since the example group finished before time they are not forced to use any of these default proposals._

**Record**

Once all the details of the Compact are recorded on the appropriate worksheet you are ready to start creating in earnest.

The Compact is something like the constitution of a club. The decision to change it should not be taken lightly. To change the Compact a player makes a proposal this is circulated to ALL of the other players along with a deadline, at least two weeks. At the next session after the deadline those present can vote using the usual procedure of one vote per Power etc. .

---

**Compact Worksheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sharing the Load</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example Compact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sharing the Load</th>
<th>Three players each with one Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Generic fantasy TL3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powers</td>
<td>Powers include both abstract ideals and forces or gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits</td>
<td>A solar system of thirty worlds and moons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start State</td>
<td>Nothing and at the dawn of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interval</td>
<td>A century for the first five Cycles and then only an hour from then on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Magic and Psionics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Natural Law?</td>
<td>Not restrained (level 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannon</td>
<td>‘In’: Basic Set, Magic, Compendium I, Low-Tech. ‘Out’: Space, Ultratech, Robots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>125pt $5666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 2: Power Characters

The Power and the Glory

I you are using GURPS Demiurge ‘only’ as a meta-game tool to collectively create and run a game then skip this section and go straight to . For tests of DU assume all metagame only Powers have a DU of 10.
If you are going to play Powers as characters then you need to create these ultimate PCs (and NPCs if you have a referee). To create a Power you have the normal starting point value for the campaign, usually 100pt...Wait a minute a measly 100pt? Yes, that’s right. The reason is that a new Power is unlike any other PC you have created what you are creating is first and foremost a personality. Ability scores, physical advantages and many other things PCs usually have can come later if your campaign uses avatars or manifestations. Think about it you are a god you can’t be permanently killed (well at least not by mortals), also your Power is not Omniscient but is very close.

Common traits of Powers

Most of the traits of Powers are not Advantages defined in the GURPS system but knowledge, and creative ability that
is normally firmly in the meta-game level.

Powers are generally assumed to have access to all the knowledge about the game universe that the player has. For this reason it is most important to keep player and character knowledge as close as possible. If you are planning a surprise keep it to yourself.

The creative and control capabilities of Powers are handled by the Cycle process. They are beyond the scope of GURPS magic, psionics etc. They cost no points since all PCs have this capability in equal measure. A Power with a Manifestation (see later) could pay points to have magic, psionics, or superhuman advantages as well.

Creating a Power PC

This is done in two stages. First create all the character’s intrinsic mental and spiritual traits including IQ, DX, mental advantages and disadvantages, psionics, magic, skills, and other intangibles. Set the new attribute DU at this time. These intangibles will be all you begin play with. Record how many free points remain. Saving points for later use is strongly recommended.

Next create the extrinsic physical and societal traits of the character including wealth, status, social stigma, allies, enemies, etc. If your Power is going to have a physical presence in the universe in the first session you should also read the up on avatars and manifestations. Detail the Power’s Manifestation (if it has one), and perhaps a favorite Avatar. This second group of traits will be introduced during play you do not begin play with these traits so record them separately to your main character sheet for now then transfer them once they have been introduced.

Let's consider Abe’s Power character ‘Halkoron the Majestic’. Abe want’s Halkoron to be a proud god of a warlike empire after the Roman mode.

Attributes

Powers begin with only mental/spiritual attributes IQ, DX representing quickness of thought, and a new attribute Demiurge (DU) described below. If you are going to have a physical body this comes later but you will probably want to put some points aside now if you are in a hurry to Manifest (p15).

Demiurge

There is one attribute that all Powers have covering the drive to create and the ability to react relative even to other Powers. This is determined partially by personality traits such as ambition or creative energy but mostly by the infusion of quintessence, the very stuff of creation. The point cost for Demiurge is the same as for any other attribute. Mortals never have DU, possessing even one point defines an entity as a Power. There is no limit to DU but the point cost increases by the standard method creating a practical limit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Point Cost</th>
<th>Suggested Values (DU)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-80</td>
<td>A forest’s spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-70</td>
<td>Demigod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-60</td>
<td>An emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-50</td>
<td>Small god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>-40</td>
<td>A stereotype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>-30</td>
<td>Godling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Halkoron’s intrinsic spiritual/mental attributes are all he will begin play with. Abe decides on IQ 12, DX 9, and DU 13. He would like DU to be higher but wants to save points to Manifest. Attribute cost is 55pt.

First of All
If it is important to anyone who was the first god then roll a competition of DU among all Powers. The Powers appeared in order most successful to least. Ties appear at the same time. Write these numbers down for use in the first Cycle (p13).

The initiative for the first Cycle is established; Pacimon, then Aspiration, and finally Halkoran.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Megalomania Megalomania (B34) and it’s prerequisite Fanatic Self (B33) are more common among deities than mortals.

Mortal A mortal PC (not NPC) have the 4th level of the Natural Law disadvantage (~40pt) for the campaign and a DU of zero. This Natural Law Disadvantage does not contribute to the usual 40pt limit on disadvantages (GURPS basic set page 26). This limitation is for players playing normal PCs and not contributing as Powers. It does not apply to Avatars.

Natural Law Some Compacts may allow a Power to be more or less restrained by Natural Law than her peers. Each level below the base level of Natural Law for the campaign is a +10pt advantage; each level of higher restraint a -10pt disadvantage. The levels of Natural Law are:
1. No, they are not limited by natural laws
2. Yes they are limited by natural laws
3. Yes and restrained by probability
4. Mortal
Note that mortal characters always gain the disadvantage restrained by Natural Law because the 4th level defines a non-Power.

Allies Dependents and Enemies. Allies, Dependents and Enemies are usually created later when the universe is more formed. Of course NPC Powers could take this role straight away. Mortal NPCs can be Allies and Enemies of Powers but generally can never have ‘unusual reach in time and space’ compared to Power PCs. Allies, Dependents and
Enemies carry the normal cost or bonus in character points. These Allies, Dependents and Enemies are available during other Power’s cycles unlike most of your NPCs. The use of allies, dependents, and enemies for a PC requires an agreement between the two players who share the responsibility. These NPCs are automatically part of the maximum allowance of Creations the player (A) may ‘control’ but control is actually given over to another player (B) who may use their own allotment to introduce the NPC into the game. The NPC does not count against B’s maximum allowed Creations they control. It is B who also secretly rolls the dice before each Cycle to see if the NPC becomes involved. No player may control more than their own character’s point value worth of friends and enemies type NPCs.

Abe’s Power, Halkoron has the following starting advantages Alertness +1, (5), Charisma +2 (10), Literacy (10), Strongwill +2 (8). Advantages subtotal: 33.

He’ll need some Disadvantages if he wants a decent Manifestation. Abe aims for the -40pt plus five -1pt quirks allowed. His list is: Bad Temper (-10), Megalomania (-10), Fanatic Self (-15) and Stubborn (-5). This makes -40pt. This leaves no space for starting physical disadvantages but Abe has decided the Halkroon will have none. He also chooses two quirks Proud and ‘Not Subtle’. He intends to add some physical quirks when he Manifests. Currently, Halkoron is worth 56pt, leaving 79pt for skills, social advantages and Manifestation.

Physical Appearance These only apply to Manifestations and therefore can be bought latter.

Wealth and Status These are also paid for later, often during the first few Cycles.

Skills
Powers have the same selection of skills as mortals.

Abe is worried that Halkoron is running out of points so he decides to aim for the basics: Axe/Mace, Bard, Broadsword, Carousing, Detect Lies, Economics, Heraldry, Intimidation, Law, Leadership, Shortsword, Strategy (Land), Tactics. He simply puts 1pt into each of these. Cost of skills is therefore 13pt.
He has 66pt left.

To Manifest or Not

Manifestations and Avatars are actually introduced after play begins but are discussed here for the sake of clarity. Many players wish to put character points aside for physical bodies and items when creating characters ready for later introduction. A Manifestation is a permanent physical presence in the universe. Temporary physical bodies are called Avatars and are discussed later. A Manifestation is paid for with character points not Q. When creating a manifestation begin with a standard GURPS human or human equivalent body onto which Advantages and Disadvantages can be applied. For this reason many if the basic state is nothing Powers choose to manifest after creating the air, earth, waters and animals since and continually starving or suffocating is agony. If a Compact requires Manifestation this is done on the second Cycle. Of coarse a Manifested Power is not limited to her physical senses and still has access to all the common traits of powers described later. If a manifested body is unconscious or killed the Power is still conscious and can still create and act as a Power. Manifestations are restored to full hits at the end of each turn in a Cycle.

Of our three players only one has opted to give his Power a Manifestation. Abe begin by adding three -1pt quirks: booming voice, uses the sword as his symbol, and considers red ‘his’ colour. The latter two are arguable mental traits but this doesn’t matter. Abe decides to set his Powers physical appearance at Handsome (15). Abe now has 69pt to spend. He decides on ST13 (30) leaving 24pt. Abe decides to save these to spend on Status or Wealth later. Other than his athletic strength Halkorn’s body is equivalent to a normal human. Of coarse Halkoron can come back from the dead regularly and has access to the creative advantages of being a Power so it would be very foolish for a mortal to take him on.

Avatars
An avatar is a character that a player controls during another Power’s Cycle. Unlike a Manifestation an Avatar costs Q.
An avatar’s point value may not exceed the character point value of the Power playing it (including any undefined/unspent points of the Power). The Q cost is normal for an NPC. The normal foreshadowing limit does not apply to one active Avatar per Power but does apply to any additional Avatars after the first if multiple are concurrently played during the same cycle. The Q cost of an Avatar counts against the Powers allowed Q for her next Cycle. A player who wishes to spend most of her time playing and not refereeing could spend the maximum allowed Q on an Avatar. Those who wish to have more refereeing input will find a Manifestation or ‘average Joe’ Avatar more Q cost effective.

Part 3: Creation
Before time there was nothing then…

Creation begins, each Power is assigned a tiny amount of quintessence and begins creating. This font of creation wells up gaining potency and a universe takes shape.

The basis of Demiurge is the Creative Cycle or Cycle. The Cycle is central to how Demiurge manages collaborative roleplaying and Power PCs. It imposes enough order to prevent chaos while allowing the game to flow freely. If Power PCs are used creating the universe can become a roleplaying exercise as the Powers work together or compete to shape the universe to their liking. The ‘Godtime’ could be full of politics, seductions and battles.

During the game each player takes turns to introduce Creations in a way similar to the way combat is played out in most game systems. Once the scene is set roleplaying occurs throughout the cycle also. This strict order prevents players from interjecting elements too randomly or at too rapid a rate for the game to be easy to follow. It allows the players to stage short sequences of events or build detailed locations without too much interruption. Though elements introduced by other players may remain active and are controlled by their owners during another player’s turn, as a matter of etiquette these elements should not be used as an excuse to interrupt the player whose turn it is unnecessarily. For example, a timed bomb won’t wait, but your NPC shouldn’t ‘grandstand’ during another player’s turn. Use common sense, a degree of uncertainty for everyone is part collaborative gaming.

The Creative Cycle
Cycle Initiative
This is a simple competitive DU roll before each cycle to determine the order in which Powers take their turn. Ties are rolled again between the tied Powers.

The initiative for the first Cycle has already been established: Pacimon, then Aspiration, and finally Halkoran.

Frequency Rolls
After determining initiative roll Frequency for any items that require it for all PCs.

Creations
Everything that appears in game-play must be paid for by Q or character pts.

At the start of a Cycle all the players secretly write down all the Creations they are going to use in that Cycle. Players then take it in turns to introduce a ration of Creations of Q value up to 2x the mean character value for the party plus the individual Power’s DU. You may find it easier to record each Creation on its own index card. Each card should have the Q cost of the creation in the top right to allow players to quickly tally up a hand of creation cards. Only when every Power has put down his or her whole ration is another is allocated and a new Cycle started. It is the responsibility of each player to announce when a Power they control has introduced its ration for the cycle so the next Power can begin. Creations carried over from the last Cycle count against the controller’s ration; you must exit an element before the start of the next Cycle to avoid this. Another reason to exit your creations before the start of the next Power’s turn. Creations introduced previously can be brought into play again but must be written down at the start of the Cycle. Q cannot be saved or pooled with other players, as this would allow some players to take control of the game.

Usually an Creation may be valued at less than (starting average character value) Q; higher value elements can be
introduced by use of the foreshadowing rules described latter.

As well as a rate of introduction, characters have a quota, a maximum amount of Q they may control. This is equal to 10x the mean character value for the party. Players should keep an up to date list, their Dominion, and notes detailing their quota at all times.

Creations can be removed from the Quota if they are destroyed. Powers can also permanently retire a creation from the region or narrative of the campaign (or have events outside of the game play destroy it) at a Q cost equal to that of the Creation retired during a turn.

Q costs vary depending on the type of element.
- Avatars: 1pt=1Q but see below for limitations.
- NPCs: 10pt = 1Q and use point cost of relationship to a player character (if any) as per Friends and Enemies in GURPS. The total must be at least 1Q.
- Items cost 1Q per 10% of base starting wealth of value for personal equipment, including small single person vehicles = 1Q.
- Populations: if a population is to have a role beyond background colour it should be created and owned. A population cost is 10Q multiplied for group size, power and frequency as for Allies.
- Armies, if using the Compendium 2 mass combat rules then Q = (TS x number of troops) + Strategy skill of Leader (if not a PC or NPC paid for separately).
- An 'environ' costs 10Q for a dull environ such as a rolling plain or featureless room; 50Q for a safe recreational environ such as a café district or tennis court; 100Q for a medium level of danger or utility such as a ore rich mountain range, bonfire, orchard or kitchen; or 200Q for a very dangerous or useful environ such as a sea of lava, the vacuum of space, workshop or library. Note that an environ cost is based on an empty location without its residents or unusual events. Environ can be of any scale and can be nested within each other.
- An event's value is dependant on the level of risk involved and the number of players likely to be affected. Trivial/no danger 1Q per player, minor 5Q/player, medium 10Q/player, major 50Q/player. Guaranteed fatal events are not allowed.
- Passing time is a story element in its own right if nothing interesting happens. Long uneventful journeys, typical days at work, relaxing holidays, days floating in a lifeboat or trapped at the end of a collapsed tunnel, and other such times can be glossed over. Cost is 1Q per interval in the Compact.

Cath decides that Pacimon simply creates a huge ocean. Cath describes these primal waters “and lo, Pacimon brought the waters to fill the void, a vast ocean tossed with tempests and massive waves.” The ocean is a terrible danger to anyone venturing on it 100Q. Pacimon's allowance is 2x125 plus Pacimon's DU of 16, total 266Q. Pacimon has 166q left.

NPCs
Avatars and Manifestations are the closest thing to a traditional PC in Demiurge; part or all of their Q cost is replaced by character points. NPCs are to be created as in the GURPS rules but a Power must pay the full Q cost. NPCs need not share and attributes, advantages, disadvantages, or skills with the Power paying Q for them. There are no Power NPCs beyond those defined by any referee in the Compact, all Powers are treated equally in the rules, they cannot be Created and therefore you cannot pay Q to buy Powers.

From Nothing...
The first cycle is important to set the scene. Note that this is not necessarily the beginning of the cosmos. For example in a game of modern day werewolves a Power could choose ‘Creations’ such as New York City and NYPD. In such a game the rest of the world is still there but is not important until someone ‘creates’ it. Typical creations for this first cycle are continents, nations, cities, forests, oceans and other broad brush items. However don’t be afraid to interject with short encounters and roleplaying opportunities. The main point to remember is that if something makes an appearance in the game then a Power must have it on her list of Creations. The first cycle is also the first opportunity to
introduce your characters social Advantages and Disadvantages such as Wealth and Status. These cost no Q, only character points, but you will need to create the populations these apply to first.

**Interrupts**

Interrupts cover situations where one Power’s creations impinge on the Turn of another. This includes items like timed bombs, NPCs accompanying the party (other than those paid for with character points), and deities wishing to use their creative powers during an adventure. If an interrupt is not paid for then the Power whose turn it is assumes that these impinging creations are ineffective; the NPC wanders off, the bomb mechanism fails, etc.

Only one Interrupt attempt is allowed per Power per Turn, i.e. Several in a Cycle. If an attempt fails then another cannot be tried within the current turn. To perform an interrupt takes a manifestation or avatar one second (combat round) of game time. To perform an interrupt make a competitive DU check against the owner of the current turn. If beaten then the interrupt fails. If successful then Q equal to the degree of success or the Powers DU, whichever is lower may be spent immediately. If an interrupt is successful as well as allowing Q to be spent any new items from character points can also be introduced.

At this point the impatient Abe decides to stage an interrupt. Pacimon and Halkoron roll against DU. Abe succeeds by 4 and Cath succeeds by only 2. Halkoron can stage his interrupt and may spent 2Q. He can also introduce any item he has paid character points for provided it has not been previously introduced. Since this is the start of the campaign nothing of Halkoran’s character has been introduced. Halkoron uses his allowed starting wealth for the campaign (he can create $5666 of possessions for 0pt and no Q cost) to buy a boat. He described the boat as of European style but equivalent to a Maori war canoe ($4900, he has $766 of value left). Abe is keen to begin having adventures so Halkoron recklessly manifests in this small boat. He introduces all his skills, attributes, and advantages as described already. Halkoran can’t sail the boat himself so with his 2 Q he creates a Ally Group (as in GURPS Compendium I) that appears fairly often (20pt worth = 2Q).

**Foreshadowing**

Foreshadowing is a mechanism to produce plots in the story. For elements with a value over 100Q foreshadowing must be used. One or more previous elements hint at the existence of the larger element. Before an element over 100Q in value is introduced two prerequisites must be satisfied. First the total value of the foreshadowing elements must be at least equal to the value of the foreshadowed element. Secondly, the number of foreshadowing elements must be at least equal to the value of the foreshadowed divided by 100 round down. Record these details on a separate sheet of paper then reveal this sheet when the foreshadowed creation is introduced.

Cath decides that the Ocean is home to a unique monster the Tsunami. Cath decides to foreshadow this creature to enable Pacimon to put more Q into it. So she describes an event “and Pacimon created the creatures of the deep large and small who fed upon each other” (3pt, one Q per Power). Another event “a great fin like unto a mountain broke the surface before vanishing to the depths”. Abe reminds Cath that Halkoron is adrift somewhere on this ocean. Cath decides that the manifested Power is near enough to be caught in the wake made by the great fin. Halkoron (directing his crew) must make a boating roll at -4 to stay afloat. Halkoron fails the roll and is his boat is swamped. Halkoron makes a swim roll to reach his swamped boat and cling on. This event is dangerous event that effected a single player (50pt). Cath keeps creating but decides to not include any more foreshadowing this turn.

Cath records the all the items from this turn as Foreshadowing the Tsunami, who is to be a 280pt monster. It will some time before Pacimon’s allowed Q for a turn will enable the introduction of this beast. The rest of the Powers then take their turns to introduce their quota of items.

**Barter**

Control over a story element belongs to the Power that introduced it into the game unless the player swaps control over that element with another player. All swaps must be for total equal value and be of elements already introduced. If ‘market forces’ were allowed to operate this could result in unplanned discrepancies of control beyond the distribution of Q.
of Powers. Barter can only occur at the start of a cycle before the players write down the elements that they are going to use that cycle.

**Destruction**

After bartering players may wish to remove a few Creations to avoid exceeding their quota. “off-screen” the Creations die, are burned down, broken etc. This is essentially a number of free minor events and is also a way of generating happenings in the ‘greater world’ beyond the adventures of the PCs.

**Experience**

Since no referee exists to award experience the easiest solution is to award 2xp every time a cycle is completed. DU can be increase just like any other attribute.

**Cycle Sequence.**

1. Frequency rolls made
2. Creations to be introduced recorded.
3. Cycle initiative.
4. Players take turns to introduce creations. Each bows out of the cycle when their ration is reached. At the end of each of these turns any Manifestations are returned to full hits.
5. After all players have introduced their ration, all PCs are granted 2xp. The Cycle ends return to barter stage.
6. Barter (not available on the very first cycle)
7. Destruction of unwanted Creations

**Definitions**

**Creation:** An object, character, event, environ or passing of time that is part of the story. Creations are valued in Q and their control carefully distributed amongst the Powers.

**Cycle:** The concept at the centre of Demiurge game play. The cycle operates in a way analogous to the combat round with each player taking turns until everyone has had a turn. During their turn a player has greater control of the environment the player characters find themselves in and the development of the story.

**Dominion:** The list of all creations a Power currently controls. The maximum value of Q a Power can control at a time. This is equal to 10x the mean character value for the party.

**Environ:** A story element that is loosely speaking at ‘place’. Every room is an environ but out of doors the concept is more plastic. For example the outside of a building is typically an environ but the second balcony may be an environ in its own right. The environ is a place with its own importance to the story; a forest may be considered at a single environ in its entirety, but if a player introduces a point of interest, such as a clearing with a pool this is also an environ and must be paid for separately to the rest of the largely homologous forest.

**Event:** A transient occurrence that is not an action of a character or object with which the players can interact. Events include weather, phases of the moon, and dreams. Less obvious events are those that involve objects or characters that are out of the PCs reach. A dragon is an creature, but a dragon passing far overhead is an event as long as the player can't reach it.

**Mean Character Value for the Party:** the total pt value of all the PCs divided by the number of PCs

**Personal Gear:** gear up to an agreed value, which does not count against the number of Creations allowed usually the normal starting equipment for a character.

**Ration:** The amount of Qs a player can introduce in a cycle. This ration is 2x the mean character value for the party plus the individual Power’s DU

**Q:** Quintessence. The unit of value used to moderate the introduction and control over elements of the story.

**Turn:** the portion of a Cycle under the control of one Power

**Value:** The value of an object, character, event, environ or passing of time in Qs.

**Conflicts**

There are many ways that Powers in opposition can fight each other. The usual rules for combat and mass combat can be used to resolve some conflicts. Powers can also use Creations, particularly events, to further their ambitions during their turn in a Cycle.
Shargash is a throwback. Even in the God-Time the Dara Happans had moved on to war-chariots and phalanxes and soon after the dawn had adopted light cavalry and horse archery to contest with the Pentans. Shargash is a tribal warrior god from the days when bashing your opponent with a rock on a stick was the last word in military technology and head hunting was a popular hobby.

When Yelm fell out of the sky and the great darkness stole over the land Shargash became Emperor, a brutal god for a brutal time, and his all encompassing rage and hatred was all that kept humanity from extinction. And the later Emperors magnanimously allowed his cult to keep going just in case such apocalyptic times come again. And besides if there's one thing the bastards are good at it is handing phalanxes their own backsides on a platter, often quite literally, how could they stop them?

There is no denying they are good at what they do, but wanton massacre, scorched earth and sadistic oppression are just not the current fashion in the heart of the modern Lunar Empire. At the frontiers maybe, but even there you have to leaven it with 'hearts and minds' missionary work to get those Sartarite and Praxian yobs to see the truth that 'We Are All Us.'

So go visit Alkoth while it still has that Old World charm that comes from being literally in Hell, full of thugs beating drums with the thighbones of their foes and liberally sprinkled with the ashes of burnt human sacrifices. It won't be around forever.

**Mythos and History**

Shargash is one the sons of Yelm and Dendara. After Yelm left the sky in the gods age, Shargash took over as Emperor and let his lust for war and destruction take over. This was appropriate for the time, as without Yelm all kinds of monsters came out under the now sunless sky and caused no end of trouble. Much murder later, Shargash finally found himself with no surviving foes, so he killed himself and went to hell, but was sent back by Yelm to fix the mayhem he had caused. However Shargash has always had one foot in hell ever since, and was appointed ruler of the realm by the Re-Ascended Yelm. Only within his Hell are people totally free of the threat of Kazkurtum, the Empty Emperor who rules without centre, without laws, without justice.

Among his many deeds was the slaying of Umatum, the Rebel God. At first Shargash merely turned him away, cursing him and his followers so that even today they cannot walk in a straight line, then they fought at fields of Senetum and wounded each other. Umatum treacherously slew the White God Zenfel, Shargash’s brother, and his planet fell to earth. Shargash turned black with rage and created the power of Janata, the Killer Bolt, to destroy him once and for all.
Umatum was shattered into the myriad squabbling air gods of today and his corpse was used to prop up the sky.

Alkoth is his city. It lies in Hell and all who pass through it’s gates must be ritually slain to gain entry. It is full of grim temples with walls adorned with skulls and the severed heads of Shargash’s foes, and Shargash himself lies chained beneath the largest one under orders from Yelm himself, lest his destruction be unleashed before it is needed. His city follows the divine laws of Yelm scrupulously, lest their passions get the better of them and they destroy all that has been made in the name of the Dara Happan Empire since the Re-Ascent. The city has never been taken, though besieged many times. Only the Red Goddess conquered it, commanding Shargash to leave his city and abase himself before her.

**Runic Associations ✡ III †**

Fire/Sky, Mastery and Death. In Dara Happa he is given a special rune called Shargash, a special rune which has connotations of Hell and Destruction combined. It is Shargash’s own and is used by himself and his heroes only.

**Life after Death**

This IS the life after death! Shargash killed everything and everyone, we are but ghosts and the descendents of ghosts. When Yelm rose into the sky at the first dawn of time it transformed hell into the land we see today, all but Alkoth, his holy city. ‘Life’ there IS death, the inhabitants are all dead, and when Shargash decides one of he parolees outside the city should do so, he will keel over and stop moving and be transported back there. His is a city of tombs, some inhabited by those walking and talking, some by those who don’t and are bones, skulls and ash, but all are dead. Whaddaya mean it makes no sense? Come here and say that you coward!

This gives his warriors a certain sense of indestructibility - there is nowhere down from here, this is hell, they are already dead, it doesn’t get any worse than this. If you end up mangled on a battlefield you are just going to end up going home.

**Nature of the Cult**

A: **Reason for Continued Existence**

As long as Alkoth exists, Shargash will be its deity, protector of its people and smiter of its foes. When wanton destruction is justifiable (and quite frequently when it isn’t), the inhabitants of Alkoth will temporarily suspend the polite and civilised culture of Dara Happa and emulate their god’s mythic fury. Few enemies make the mistake or raising their ire more than once.

B. **Social/Political Position and Power**

Within Alkoth the god is all encompassing. The majority of Alkothi men are at the very least lay members, many are initiates and the priesthood rule the city from within the sacred precinct of the Green Wall. The role of High Priest of Shargash and King of Alkoth are inseparable.

Beyond Alkoth and its immediate area Shargash is mythically important, but not really worshipped, just invoked by traditionalist Dara Happan soldiers when things look desperate and it’s time for one last suicidal stand. There are a few Alkothi nobles who own land outside their traditional area, but they are never given any powerful offices, and there are companies of Alkothi mercenaries, though their tendency to bloody excess and wanton massacre makes them unpopular unless you really hate your enemies. The Lunar Army has a unit of Alkothi called the Feathered Axe regiment who specialise in using great axes to carve their way through enemy shield walls.

Within Dara Happan or Lunar military units there is the occasional Shargashi, usually solitary nutjobs who while admired for their bravery are feared for their recklessness and uncompromising bloodymindedness.
C: Particular Likes and Dislikes
The Alkothi have all the traditional prejudices of Dara Happa. They don’t like the southern barbarians as they worship the storm gods that killed Yelm and unleashed the Great Darkness; unruly peasants and born troublemakers and thieves. They don’t like non-humans, they are prudish about sex, they are misogynist and think women should be subservient to men, they look down on the Lodril worshipping Pelorian lower classes.

They do not trust the Lunar Empire. It’s egalitarian ways drive these die-hard conservatives up the wall, for all that Shargash was forced to bow down to Sedenya and admit her superiority. But they grudgingly accept it. The Red Emperor is legitimate Dara Happan Emperor too and tradition dictates that they accept him and Alkothi are nothing if not traditionalists.

But they really hate the Darjiinites. The Alkothi have fought them numerous times and utterly despise their depraved fertility rites, sex obsession and dominance by women. Even though Alkoth and Darjiin are now just neighbouring districts in a multinational empire they will not have anything to do with them and the ordinary Alkothi in the street is just waiting for Imperial order to relax enough for another war to break out.

Organisation

A: Inter-Cult Organisation
Almost all the temples of Shargash are within the Green Wall of Alkoth, enshrining different violent aspects of the god, with shrines to him in other Dara Happan cities and towns but as noted they have few worshippers. The King of Alkoth is his sole High Priest, though there is a coterie of Chief Priests of these various Temples who form his court, and the odd mercenary band that has taken to wandering may have a Priest who operates more or less independently.

B: Intra-cult organisation
The King of Alkoth is Shargash’s High Priest, beneath him are sub cults whose Chief Priests fulfil some of the traditional roles of a Dara Happan king’s court. These positions are hereditary, and can be only passed on to members of a noble’s family. The bulk of the priesthood and the initiates aren’t much bothered by the aspects and their antique titles.

C: Centre of Power
Alkoth obviously, there are no others.

D: Holy Days
Shargash is a red planet that crosses the sky in 28 days, and each Zenith is a Holy Day, the last Zenith of the year being a High Holy Day. Each is marked by ritual combats and sacrifices, and on the High Holy Day a huge general melee/riot is held in Alkoth where combatants vie for the honour of being human sacrifice to the god for the year and burnt alive on the pinnacle of his ziggurat. (If truth be told, most don’t fight that hard and merely exchange a few club blows, while some poor schmuck singled out by the priesthood is given hallucinogenic drugs and allowed to ‘win’).

Lay Member

A: Requirements to join
All members are male, at least 14 years of age, and either have to be born citizens of Alkoth, be the son of a Shargashi or adopted as such. Adoption as an honourary Alkothi is not easy to come by unless you have fought for the city or in service to one of its noble families and slain a good few enemies in its name. There are a few members of the Hengarl peasant levies raised in Alkoth’s hinterlands who are deemed to qualify though service. To achieve this honour roll (STR+CON)/2 + number of ordinary enemies slain x 5 + number of Darjiini slain x 10.
B: Requirements to belong

Lay members are required to serve in the city militia for a whole year, with one month training per year thereafter up to the age of forty. The militia are trained to use medium shields, spears, slings and maces and are expected to provide one hand weapon of their own. They must sacrifice one item of livestock per year at least, though Shargash is not fussy and will take anything, even a chicken.

If a summons is issued by the king then the lay member is required to report to the city ready for war as soon as possible and is liable for service in the military until the king deems fit to release them. In practice this isn’t used indiscriminately, only a part of the lay membership is called up at any one time, and if the city is in trouble there are generally plenty of volunteers.

C: Mundane Benefits

Lay members are allowed to be residents of the city if they are not already, are taxed at a slightly lower rate and/or are liable for slightly shorter terms when corvee labour is required compared to the hapless run of the mill peasants and plebians. They receive free militia training and may seek further training from the weapon masters of the temple in the following skills at half price: Mace, medium shield, 1H spear, sling, Dancing. Favoured initiates who have the knack for it may be trained as chanters and musicians and be trained in Singing and Play Drum as well. They are also trained in use of Fanaticism 1 and Bludgeon 2 at half price (higher points are at full price).

Initiates

A: Requirements for Initiation

Must have been a lay member for at least 5 years and be 21 years of age or over, have one weapon skill at 50% or greater and know the spell Fanaticism 1. The exam is fairly easy: (STR+CON+CHA) x 2 + 5 per enemy slain +10 per enemy head taken and returned to a temple or shrine for dedication to the god. This often means being used as a building material; shrines of Shargash are made of the skulls of defeated enemies.

B: Requirements to Remain Initiated

As per lay members plus double pow sacrifice per holy day and if a son of the initiate does not himself join the cult this is a matter of grave dishonour. The initiate is demoted to lay member and must do five years penance, or the son slain for disloyalty by his father’s hand.

C: Mundane Benefits

Initiates are eligible for positions as militia officers if they meet the equipment requirement. A potential militia officer is expected to bring: two hand weapons (his choice, may include a shield), one missile weapon, a helmet and breastplate of at least 3AP and a slave or camp servant. Initiates happy to serve amongst the rank and file need not bring this.

They may train in any weapon taught by cult masters at half price - this may be anything, the cult prides itself on being able to kill anyone with any weapon, and there are boxing and wrestling masters too. The most common ones are 1H Mace, Great Axe, Kopesh (broadsword), Sling, Javelin, 1H spear, Medium Shield. They may get half price training in the following spells to any level: Bludgeon, Strength, Protection, Fanaticism, Demoralise.

As followers of death and destruction the cost to learn Healing is doubled; This applies even if learned from another cult, Shargashi take twice as long to get the hang of it so alien is the concept of fixing people to them as opposed to hurting stuff. They may sacrifice POW for one use rune magic, and if they take a defeated foe alive to a temple or shrine they may sacrifice them to regain one use of a rune spell they have already sacrificed POW for on a POW+CHA or less roll.
Rune Lord

A: General Statement
Rune Lords of Shargash are berserk killing machines. They serve as officers of Shargashi warbands but are expected to lead from the front, wading into combat to destroy as many enemies as they can with extreme prejudice with no care for their own lives. The rest of the world regards them as dangerous lunatics, they are unsubtle and quick to anger, rarely back down from a fight, have a prickly sense of honour, almost all drink heavily and are not unknown to carry around uncouth reminders of just how dangerous they are in the form of skulls of their favourite enemies and necklaces of teeth and dried ears. This tends to mean being shunned by Lunar polite society, though they affect not to give a shit.

Shargashi and Zorak Zoran worshippers rarely meet, but when they do they either get along famously or are trying to rip each others throats out within minutes.

B: Requirement for acceptance
Must have a POW of 15 and 90% in two weapon attacks (including Brawling and Wrestling) and one weapon or shield parry, plus two from the following list: Weapon attack, weapon parry, shield parry, Oratory, Speak Firespeech, Dance, Play Drum, Climbing, Jumping. He must also have 14 Cha or 90% Oratory as a substitute. He must convince the examiners with a roll of STR + CHA + 1 per enemy slain in the service of Alkoth, +2 per Darjiinite, + 5 per enemy sacrificed at a temple, +1 per 100L worth of weapons and armour donated to the defence of the temple +/- up to 20 based on social status within Alkoth. Peasants get -20, with sons of the King +20 and various gradations in between.

C: Restrictions
Allied Spirits of Shargash can only be bound to a weapon, a horn or a drum. Rune Lords must never refuse a direct challenge to a fight, must obey the commands of their High Priest/King even if it means being ordered into a suicide mission (they are the best kind!), must never disguise themselves as a woman or wear women’s clothing, must never cut their hair or beard, must dye their hair and beard black if it isn’t already (signs of age like grey hair are NOT acceptable, the initiates will look at you as if you are fit for retirement and start answering back).

If required to serve the king in war they must bring all the gear an initiate officer has to, plus another four slaves/camp servants, a helm and breastplate of at least 5 AP and a mule/pack horse or equivalent loaded with supplies. Any healing spell cast by a Rune Lord takes twice the normal battle magic POW. They are destroyers, not healers.

D: Benefits
Automatically given command of a warband under the king, may petition the king face to face, gets all the loot acquired by his warband minus the ‘King’s Portion’ (though he’d better parcel it out if he wants them to stay loyal), is exempt from corporal punishment (though must supply a stand in to be whipped on his behalf), can claim the right to trial by combat under Alkothi law, and may administer discipline within a warband as he sees fit without recourse to law. As an Initiate a Rune Lord may sacrifice for one use rune magic and regain that spell by sacrificing an enemy at a shrine or temple on a (POW+CHA+3d6) roll. May learn the spells Fireblade and Vigour at half price.

Rune Priests

A: General Statement
Rune Priests are just as dangerous as Rune Lords, masters of the arts of destruction and just as liable to go screaming berserk on the battlefield and lay waste to anyone in their path. They too may lead a warband, and are second only to Rune Lords in eligibility for such a position. They are limited by the fact that the higher positions of Chief and High Priest are monopolised by Alkothi high noble families, but don’t care overmuch as long as there are enemies to slay on the battlefield.

B: Requirements for acceptance
A Rune Priest must undergo the same examination as Rune Lords, and must have POW 18+, CHA 14+ OR Oratory 90%, Dance 50% or Sing 50%, Speak Firespeech 50% (they need not be literate and the Alkor cult handles temple
Priests must also be married and get +5% acceptance per son dedicated to the cult.

**C: Restrictions**

Allied Spirits of Shargash can only be bound to a weapon, a horn or a drum. Their physical skills are limited to DEX x 5% as usual, but may practice one weapon attack and maintain it at a higher level and even exceed 100% with it as a Rune Lord can. Shargashi priests are at least adequate warriors. They may also never disguise themselves as a woman, wear women’s clothing or cut their hair, though they are allowed to have hair that is not black. In fact some younger priests dye their hair with streaks of grey or dust it with ash to give themselves that ‘wise and grizzled warrior’ look.

They must also bring equipment of an officer as noted under Initiate with no opt outs. Failure to report with the appropriate gear results in demotion to Initiate. Any healing spell cast by a Rune Priest takes twice the normal battle magic POW. They are destroyers, not healers.

**D: Benefits**

Rune Priests are second choice after Rune Lords as warband leaders, may petition a Chief Priest face to face, gets all the loot taken by his warband minus the ‘King’s Portion’ (though as noted above he’d better redistribute it if he wants men to stay loyal). He may be asked to serve under a Rune Lord, but has the right to dispute his orders and is immune to corporal punishments handed out for disciplinary offences, but must provide a scapegoat to take his whipping for him. They are also allowed to dispute the orders of the king, though they had better be glib with their excuses and not make a habit of it or they will end up toasted on the altar of Shargash. May learn the spells Fireblade and Vigour at half price.

**E: Rune spell compatibility**

May use all standard rune spells, but may not summon elementals. Shargashi fight their own battles, and consider it dishonourable to get one of Shargash’s spirits to do it for them.

**F: Cult special rune spells**

*Ignore Grievous Wound*

1 point, 15 minutes, Range: One Shargash worshipper per point, reusable, stackable
Doubles the HP of all hit locations temporarily, but not total HP. Enables a warrior to fight on despite location damage that would otherwise incapacitate them, though they will collapse in a bloody heap when it ends.

*Berserk*

2 points, 15 minutes, One Shargash worshipper, reusable
Slightly different to the Zorak Zoran spell, Countermagic 2, Fanaticism and Strength all rolled into one, but stackable with Vigour and not extra-effective against chaotics. As with the ZZ version if the subject runs out of enemies to bash they must roll their INT or less on d100 per round or carry on fighting anyone near at hand until the spell wears off.

*Howl of Fury*

1 points, Duration: 1 round to fifteen minutes, range touch, reusable
A priest may inspire a worshipper or himself to make one furious blow that doubles his damage bonus, and if he makes a successful Sing skill roll and sacrifices 1 temporary POW he can turn it into a howling death dirge that enables him to do so again the next round, and with another skill roll the next and so on. A critical Sing roll maximises the damage bonus. This can last a maximum of fifteen minutes. Can be combined with Berserk.

*Burning Soul*

1 point, 15 minutes, range 80m, non-reusable
Makes any Disruption spell do 1d3+1 damage rather than 1d3 and gives it the effect of an Ignite spell to boot. Very nasty when combined with Multispell.

*Shield Smasher*
1 point, Duration 15 mins, range 40 meters, reusable, stackable up to 4 pts
Any attack with a slashing or crushing weapon that is successfully parried by a shield will result in damage to the shield 1d4 per point of spell. If the attack is successful and the shield parry a fail then the user may opt to attack the shield rather than the target and do 2d4 damage per point. Useful in beating your way into a phalanx.

_Drum of Panic_
3 points, Duration 1 battle or one day, range 80m, reusable
The Priest beats on a war drum with a human thighbone and this must be his sole occupation for the duration of the spell. Every enemy who hears it is affected by a Demoralise spell as if cast with a POW equal to the Priest’s Play Drum skill/5 and if the Priest rolls a success on his Play Drum then the POW is equal to Priest’s POW (or the POW of his allied spirit if bound to the drum), an impale adds half again to the POW and a critical doubles it. Any attack on the drumming priest requires a Drumming skill roll to maintain rhythm and keep the spell going, and if his right arm is disabled or he drops the drum it ends. The spell is tiring, and the priest loses 1d4 HP per 15 minutes of drumming; it is usual to have an initiate on hand to keep healing him and pouring water in his mouth to keep him going.

_Dance of Victory_
3 points Duration 1 battle or one day, range 80m, reusable
The priest leads the warriors in a war dance for at least one hour before battle with much shouting, mock fighting, blowing of horns and bloodcurdling screaming. If a warrior makes his Dance skill roll then any Fanaticism spells cast by him that battle will last 1 hour, a special skill roll 3 hours, a crit all day. If the Priest fails his Dance roll then the skill roll of his followers is halved, if he makes an impale half is added again, a crit doubles it.

_Firey Aura_
1 point, Duration 15 minutes, range self, non-reusable, stackable up to 4
A special version of the Shield spell that acts as Protection 1 per point and does 2 damage per point to any weapon that is used against him and adds 1d2 fire damage to any blow he does (1d4 for two points, 1d6 for three and 1d8 for four points, not stackable with Fireblade), and he may ignite objects with a touch. It protects against fire damage at 4 points per point, even Sun spear and Fire Elementals. Not stackable with Shield.

_Skybolt_
2 point, instant, range 80m, non-reusable
Shargash stole this power from a storm deity he defeated in the God-Time wars. It calls a bolt of lightning out of the sky which hits a single target for 3x1d6 damage ignoring any metal armour, but blocked by magical protection or leather armour. May be boosted with magic points to overcome Protection spells at 1mp per point overcome. Can only be used outdoors.

_Sunspear_
3 points, instant, range 80m, non-reusable
A blessing from Yelm himself, this does 4d6 fire damage to the target’s CON, halved if a CON save is made, and ignores armour. A point of Divine Intervention may be stacked with it to add an extra target. Can only be used outdoors when Yelm is in the sky.

_Earthcrack_
2 points, instant, range special, non-reusable
Stolen from some barbaric earth deity, this enables the caster to use a two handed blunt weapon to smash the ground itself causing it to shake in an earth tremor. If the attack roll succeeds (you can always hit the ground, it’s hitting it _just right_), then the damage done by the blow is matched against the DEX of anyone within 3m x the damage range. If they fail they fall over. An impale increases damage by half again, a crit doubles it. Unfortunately this is a pretty indiscriminate spell and affects people of the casters own side as well. Damned good for knocking cavalry off their horses though, and cracking fortification walls.
Janata the Killer Bolt
3 points, instant, range 160m, non-reusable
Only usable by the High Priest himself, this spell will kill anyone who fails a POW roll against him, and he can up his chances of slaying you by 5% per battle magic POW he puts into it, and if he is pissed off enough with you to use it, you can bet he’ll back it with some hefty magic.

G: Chief Priests
There are five chief priests of Shargash, each the head of a noble family of Alkoth and official of the King’s court. This is an honorary title, they need not have the 15 points of reusable rune magic, though quite often they do. Each is master of his own Temple, though it makes little difference which one ordinary members sacrifice at. Each is guardian of a scared implement of destruction. The five are:
- Priest of Shargash’s Drum - in charge of camp followers and supplies, though the logistic corps actually just steals and forages on the march.
- Priest of the Horn of Destruction - master of siege engines and engineering.
- Priest of the Bronze Belt - in charge of the defence of the city against attack and repairs to walls and buildings.
- Priest of the Red Planet - divination, haruspication and the treasury
- Priest of the Bloody Kopesh - head of justice, chief executioner, internal secret police

Generally other priests who reach this level of prowess are encouraged to go on to become Priest-Lords and Generals of Alkoth, destroyers of all they survey.

Associated Cults
A: Biselenslib
The wife of Shargash, goddess of the Henjarl marshes and mother of the rice growing river people. Biselenslib is quite definitely considered to be the lesser deity in Alkoth itself, which adheres to the traditional Dara Happan patriarchy, but out in the rice paddies that feed the city she is the greater goddess and Shargash rarely mentioned. Sons of the rice farmers can get called up as auxiliaries by the King of Alkoth, and may be invited to join the cult of Shargash if they are deemed to do well, but their loss is mourned by their mothers.

There is a more aristocratic version worshipped by women in the city itself and she has a temple within the Green Wall. Carvings there celebrate the time Shargash killed her, regretted doing so and went back to retrieve her from hell to bear him many sons. Such is romance in Alkoth. She is depicted as a woman with abnormally long legs and a prominent nose, quite definitely NOT a heron, and anyone suggesting a connection to the accursed heron-cult of Sur Enslib will be beaten unconscious with stone clubs and chucked in the river.

By tradition the wife of the king is considered her High Priestess, at least once she has borne him a son. If she fails to do so within five years of marriage then standard Alkothi practice is to have her name expunged from all inscriptions, her name never to be mentioned again and any word that sounds like her name to be banned from use and replaced by a synonym and the records altered to show that the king never in fact married, while the lady herself disappears. Yelmic law frowns on divorce, so it just doesn’t happen okay?

One shrine of her temple bears a remarkable resemblance to the Temple of Uleria, where masked acolytes serve as temple prostitutes. That these are ‘barren’ women seeking to conceive a son before their husbands ditch them is a secret they try and keep from the men, who actually would rather not know.

B: Alkor
Son of Shargash and Biselenslib and god of the city. The cult of Alkor is the preserve of certain clans within the city and it is not considered a great dishonour for a son of a Shargashi to join it if he should prove a bit of a wuss when it comes to being a berserk bloodthirsty warrior. The Alkori are the civil service of the city and do most of the real work of administration while the heads of the Shargashi temples stomp about, feel self important and hit people with sticks.
The High Priest of Alkor is the King’s right hand man and chief advisor, though he has no official place at the King’s council.

The palace gossip makes it pretty clear that the High Priest of Alkor has a good chinwag with the Priests serving the other senior Shargashi clergy behind closed doors as to how to advise their superiors to petition the king and on what, while he advises the king on how to deal with those petitions. If you want something done in Alkoth that doesn't involve braining people with a mace, he’s the man to go to.

The Temple of Alkor again lies within the Green Wall, a small ziggurat full of ancient records. They maintain good relations with the cults of Buserian and Lokarnos and increasingly with the Lunars. The current First Prince of Alkoth is a typical Shargashi oaf, but the Second Prince has joined the temple of Alkor. One nasty accident and the political implications could be quite interesting...

It is also the duty of the Temple of Alkor to provide charity for the widows and orphans of deceased warriors, and sometimes this support can be very personal. The term an ‘Alkori marriage’ is sometimes heard on the streets, and in more violent times some priestly houses were positively swarming with widows employed as servants and hordes of children. Scandalous in prudish Dara Happa, but politely not mentioned as it was tacitly accepted by the kings that the population had to be maintained if he was to have warriors to throw into the front line. It doesn’t happen so much these days, only the warriors of the Regiment of the Feathered Axe see much action and the Lunar Army charitable fund supports their dependents.

**Miscellaneous Notes**

*A: The Shargashi Way of War*

The Shargashi are throwbacks. Even in the mythic God­Time the Emperors of Dara Happa had moved on to war chariots and phalanxes and quickly developed light cavalry horse archers and lancers after the Dawn to contest with the Pentans. Shargash is a primitive tribal warrior god from the days when bashing your enemies with a rock on a stick was high technology, and many Shargashi still use stone headed maces to this day.

As individual warriors the elite Shargashi are comparable to Humakti and Zorak Zorani in skill and aggression, but as soldiers they are an undisciplined mob. Their tediously predictable tactics make them vulnerable to more subtle light infantry using hit and run tactics like the Darjiini, their supply lines (such as they are) are forever being cut off, they move slowly on the march due to the need to forage, their camps are a collection of troops sleeping in heaps as few remember to bring a tent and their king doesn’t issue any.

They are not absolutely terrible at sieges though. They know how to make a good battering ram and have a fair grasp of gravity catapults like the trebuchet, but torsion engines are beyond them. They also tend to run out of supplies quickly and then try escaldes, which given their psychotic fury at close quarters often go well but at the cost of high casualties.

In the field they are also more than capable of tearing apart a phalanx, using beserkers with great axes coming in from the flanks, but their own commanders tend to be bit head on and it takes a non-Shargash officer to deploy them in the right place at the right time. The Feathered Axe regiment of the Lunar army has Alkothi officers who have forswn the old ways and studied the methods of the Lunar war gods.

*B: The City of Alkoth*

The Green City of Alkoth consists of the central district containing the temples, the palaces of the nobles and favoured townsmen serving them directly and is surrounded by the famous Green Wall, a single stone that has eleven gates dug under it. This district is the one that is technically in hell and is home to ghosts and demons as well as humans. Outside is a more conventional Dara Happan city with neatly laid out gridded streets and symmetrical building and worshippers of other Solar Pantheon deities such as Lokarnos and Buserian among the Shargashi. Many districts of this outer city...
are becoming quite Lunarised with temples of the Lunar deities cropping up on the outskirts. Though the ultra conservative Alkothi don’t like them much, there is not much they can do, other than gripe and grumble and have the occasional riot over violations of their cultural sensitivities.

A small but growing minority of Alkothi are ‘moving with the times’ and giving up their citizenship of Alkoth to become Lunar citizens instead. As many as a 20% of the male population have no connection to the traditional cults anymore and 35% of the women, as the Lunar Way gives them far more opportunities. Since traditional Shargashi men don’t tend to get along with assertive women some are remaining unmarried and taking slave concubines, and children of slaves are not allowed to join the cult. Shargashism is slowly dying out.

And it is all so bloody peaceful. The Alkothi haven’t had a chance to stomp over to Darjiin and crack a few heads for over a century and the few hundred who get to join the Feathered Axe legion much envied. The primal urge to be a bloody hooligan is still there though, and gladiatorial combats much followed and admired in this city, with plenty of amatuer nights where local townsman can work off some of their violent urges very popular. Street gangs are beginning to emerge, and the internal politics of Alkoth is being decided in internecine brawls.

C: Shrines of Shargash

Outside of Alkoth there are no temples to Shargash as such, but in noble houses of rural Shargashi and in the few permanent bases of Shargashi mercenary bands or Shargashi gladiators you will find a shrine. They are square rooms or small free standing buildings of stone lined with skulls and with an altar of skulls. The skulls are collected by the congregation from enemies slain in battle, from the pyres of those formally burned alive at the stake as human sacrifices and from fallen Shargashi. The ones of fallen Shargash warriors are painted with the Shargash rune, but that is all the distinguishes them. The mortar is mixed from the burnt ashes of sacrifices, human and animal, and the ash is stamped into the floor and pots of it kept in the temple.

No woman is allowed to enter, and if one does the shrine is deemed polluted and must be demolished and rebuilt on another spot. For each ten skulls in the structure it’s guardian spirit has 1 POW and for each 20 skulls 1 INT up to a maximum of 18, and a shrine of any reasonable age may have hundreds. The temples in Alkoth of course have thousands and the enchantments supporting it’s mighty Green Wall are unbreakable (except by Sedenya as it turned out, but she was a goddess after all).

The guardian spirits may cast Demoralise on any who enter not of the faith and Protection on the defenders, and may sacrifice POW over 18 for Shargashi rune magic though they may not leave their shrine. Inside a fire is kept burning at all times, usually small, often just a lamp (made from a skull of course), and it is from this that any sacrificial fire must be lit.

The shrine in Pavis is in the basement of the barracks of the Lunar garrison and is currently abandoned as no members of the three units currently stationed there, the Marble Phalanx, the Silver Shields and the Antelope Lancers have any worshippers. It was built seven years ago by an auxiliary unit from Alkoth, mercs hired by the Provincial Army to apply siege engines to the walls of New Pavis, do one of the famed Shargash assaults if necessary and scare the crap out of the locals as occupation troops. They only stayed a year before the new governor bowed to the City Council’s request to send the hooligans packing and they only added a mere thirty skulls to it, giving the guardian spirit there a measly 1 INT and 3 POW. It can barely say boo to the rats.

Polemarch Hucipites, commander of the Marble Phalanx, is a Dara Happan, though of a Lunarised bent, worshipping Yanafal Tarnils as well as Urvairanus. He knows the old wargod and though a bit sniffy about the crudity and barbarity of it all has ordered the shrine be preserved and has locked it up, just in case the Provincial Army sees fit to send any further Shargashi units to Pavis, though he can’t see why they ever would and the City Council would kick up a stink if they did. Beating the crap out of citizens for nothing and decapitating them in the street didn’t exactly endear the cult to the locals.

You’ve got to be fucking kidding me. What is Ridley Scott on?

What’s his major malfunction? Why is this the story he needs to tell? He could be doing anything instead of this. Literally anything else. He could be making The Contrabulous Fabtraption of Professor Horatio Hufnagel or an adaptation of Adaptation or a new version of Birth of a Nation, but instead he makes this?

Continuing the pointlessness that started with Prometheus, which I initially thought was pretty shit but now looks better compared to this flick (not by much), Ridley Scott continues in his strange crusade to fill out the gaps no-one knew existed or even cared about regarding the origins of the terrifying creatures usually referred to as xenomorphs, made popular by the creepy HR Giger design.

It started with Alien. Reached its apotheosis with Aliens. Wasted our time with Alien 3. Confused the universe with Alien: Resurrection. Delighted no-one with Alien Vs Predator. Angered everyone who watched Alien vs Predator: Requiem. Then we got some horribly pointless backstory with Prometheus, that showed some bald species of albinos seeding a planet that was probably Earth with, I dunno, their DNA or something, for the purposes of… something. Humans and an android stumble across something ages later, and it’s meant to mean that an alien species they refer to as the Engineers probably had something to do with life starting on Earth, on other planets, and they probably created the xenomorphs (vicious reptilian acid-blooded chomping legends) too.

Well, whatever it was that happened in that previous flick, and whatever the reason was that Scott demanded that story be told, here he is elaborating upon it, like a drunk sitting next to you on a plane telling you some well-polished anecdote from their past that they’ve forgotten why they started telling you, and you never started caring and just keep hoping that the plane will crash so that you don’t have to listen to it any longer.

I saw this flick while I was travelling, and I paid good money to see it, and I have to say, though I rarely joke about stuff like this, but I feel like Ridley Scott personally owes me my money back. There is just so much about this and the last film that I find inexplicable and pointless, so much so that I wonder as to what’s going on in Ridley’s head neurologically speaking. There is a strange layer of religious bullshit going on as well. I’ll get back to that in a sec, but it adds to my utter bafflement in the face of this.

A spaceship, presumably far into the Earth’s future, travels to a Brave New World, with a whole bunch of colonists on board, and a stack of embryos as well. It’s a colony ship, crewed apparently or at least by a Christian (Billy Crudup), who constantly keeps complaining that people don’t take him seriously because he’s a Christian. Next thing you know, the aliens start their War on Christmas by ripping people’s guts out.

I am happy, in fact I feel obligated to spoil as much of this goddamn film as I can to dissuade the unlikeliest of readers who stumble randomly across this review, if invective and criticism enough isn’t enough to stop people, maybe
advanced spoilage might.

There were two survivors from Prometheus. One of them is... I dunno? I think she was dead, but they never make it expressly clear, especially since she was strangely preserved for a ghastly serial killer like tableau by the real villain in this. Who is the 'real' enemy in this? Why it’s David (Michael Fassbender) the Android OS from the first flick, who has, like all robots and artificial intelligences in movies, gone mad and decided to kill not just any humans he finds along the way, but maybe his long term plan is to wipe out all of humanity. Why? Well, I’ve got no fucking idea, and I watched the flick sober.

There’s a flashback right at the beginning of the movie which gives a bit of an origin story for David as some kind of motivation for his genocidal tendencies: his creator (Guy Pearce) tells him to make tea. This hateful imposition of servility that David has to obey apparently was enough to engender an all-consuming hatred for our species, such that he takes an organism as lethal as the vicious aliens we’ve come to know and love, and made them even more vicious and lethal for shits and giggles.

At the start of this flick, when the pathetic puny humans are tricked into deviating from their course and travel to a place that David has turned into a murderer’s paradise (the Aliens infect people through microscopic spores or something, bursting out of their chests a few hours later?), people start dying really easy and real cheap. There’s a different kind of android with the crew that looks exactly the same as David, but is called Walter and talks with an American accent (also Fassbender). No-one really at first thinks it’s that weird that a robot has grown their hair long and is acting really fucking creepy, including trying to sexually harass female members of staff. All the humans do a lot of weird and profoundly dumb things in an environment they should have treated as hostile in the first place anyway. But even the other robot doesn’t see how ridiculous all this is.

David also talks in this way that only serial killers talk, at least in movies. I’ve seen interviews with stacks of serial killers, and I assure you, none of them talked with as much creepy menace and supernatural poise as Anthony Hopkins in Silence of the Lambs. But that’s what David does here, and yet no-one notices until way, way, way too late. The scumbags in our world who do these evil things usually talk with the same lack of affect of a bus driver who’s been driving his bus on the same route for far too long. They don’t have the luxury to construct elaborate personae or amusing affectations. They’re too busy planning genocides and posting misogynistic comments online and such.

See, the murderousness of the evil aliens isn’t enough for David. He has a kind of organic flesh envy thing going on, and what he resents the most is that humans can procreate (or fuck I guess), and he can’t. Not only doesn’t he have anyone to get down and dirty with, but he doesn’t really have the parts for it either. So the next best thing, he figures, is genetically engineering these things that were genetically engineered to kill lesser characters in sci-fi flicks, but to do it in a way so that we don’t really care what the outcome is. Or at least I didn’t.

Quite often, I’m not going to care about what happens in a flick because, seriously, sweethearts, too many movies, too much to care about. But some directors, like this one here for some inexplicable reason, go out of their way to alienate their audience. I honestly think Ridley Scott was saying to people “eh, it’s not like they’re going to care anyway. Let’s have more robots quoting Marcus Aurelius or something in the next flick, and more Danny McBride as well.”

Danny McBride? Putting him in an Aliens movie is like putting Donald Trump in a Sharknado movie: all I would ever want to see in such a scenario is them eaten slowly, then faster, then slowly again, as soon as possible. When other characters die, and a shmuck like Danny McBride lives, you are proving that the flick your universe is set in is a cold, sadistic, horrible one where nothing deserves to live.

Honestly, both of these films provoke one feeling more than any other: Despair. Not despair because of the bleak ending: despair because I don’t care and I don’t appreciate the non-existent nuances of stuff that clearly means a fuckload to Scott but absolutely nothing to me.
As far as I can work out the only reason they go on and on about the captain character’s religiosity is because when he actually dies we’re meant to find it extra ironic that the one character that prays for something good to happen dies most brutally early on. Any of the efforts of any of the characters to be meaningful and to get any kind of personality across just pales into insignificance in the face of the pointlessness of where the plot goes. I would argue that it doesn’t make a lot of sense anyway.

It’s hard to fault Fassbender, or any of them, really, because they’re just doing what they’re told. I can still bear a grudge, though. Any script that requires most of the characters to ignore basically obvious stuff, and to act slightly miffed or confused when something really obviously dishonest or dangerous is happening (the fact that everything David says sounds creepy; when he changes his appearance to look exactly like Walter and everyone notices and looks slightly quizzical, but doesn’t say a word about it to themselves or each other; the fact that they trust anything he says at all even though he’s acting like a heavy breathing pervert trying to lure children into a van with a bag of lollies).

What’s to care about? Was anyone surprised by the downbeat ending? Did anyone care? As if I’m going to feel bad for any character played by Danny fucking McBride ever… I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I fucking hated this film. I don’t get where they’re going, and if Ridley Scott lives long enough to make another one of these, I might watch it, but it won’t be with an open mind. I think it’s called hatetwatching, or at least that’s what the kids call it these days.

I definitely hate watched the fuck out of Alien Covenant. Avoid at all bloody costs.

4 times maybe they need more Fassbenders in the next one out of 10 [ED: I’d never rate a film I hated with 4/10 – that’s almost a pass]

“Don’t let the bedbugs bite. I’ll tuck in the children.” – and yet they never could have predicted he was nuts – Alien Covenant.


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