

RPG REVIEW

Issue #4, June 2009



THIS IS THE VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT— A BOOK, ALLEGEDLY 500 YEARS OLD, WRITTEN IN AN UNRECOGNIZED SCRIPT. IT'S SOME KIND OF VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IMAGINARY PLANTS AND UNDECIPHERED "RECIPES".

IT COULD BE A HOAX, A LOST LANGUAGE, A CIPHER, AN ALIEN TEXT, GLOSSOLALIA — NO ONE KNOWS.

NO ONE? BUT IT'S OBVIOUS.

... OBVIOUS? LINGUISTS AND CRYPTOGRAPHERS HAVE BEEN STUMPED FOR DECADES.

THEY FORGET. HUMAN NATURE DOESN'T CHANGE.

JUST IMAGINE SOMEONE FOUND A BOOK FROM OUR TIME, FULL OF LISTS, ILLUSTRATIONS, TABLES, AND LONG, DRY DESCRIPTIONS OF NONEXISTENT WORLDS WRITTEN IN AN INVENTED LANGUAGE. WHAT HAVE THEY FOUND?

... DEAR LORD. IT IS OBVIOUS.

500 YEARS EARLIER:

FORSOOTH! I CONCOCT AN ELIXIR OF COURAGE.

NAE! THE SOURCE BOOKE SAYETH THAT REQUIRES SOME WOLFSBANE!

YOUR DRUID DOTH LOSE TWO POINTS.

**Sorcery & Demons Designer's Notes ...
Dennis Sustare ... SLURPS for GURPS ...
Age of Fable ... Empty Chambers, Spent
Shells; A Feng Shui Western ...
RuneQuest Tribes of Eyha ... Young Gods:
A Hero System Campaign With D&D
Supplements ... Industry News**

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ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL

Well, RPG Review has made it to four issues - that's a year's worth of the journal, sixty-four pages every issue, about a thousand people reading every issue (thank you AWStats), released more or less (*cough*) on time. Now this has not been the easiest thing in the world. My layout and editing skills are hardly exceptional by any stretch of the imagination, but I've been lucky to find a good core of people who are prepared to write and draw for nothing but the pure interest in seeing RPG Review succeed. I am very much in the debt of those people.

Perhaps the hardest thing in getting RPG Review together has been to maintain a sense of balance. This was the objective of the 'zine when it was first released and it continues to be a problematic, although highly enjoyable, dedication. Wanting to see a 'zine which catered for both mainstream and independent, retro and contemporary, plus providing a dash of related cultural activities (such as computer games, movies) is rather like walking the tightrope whilst not wanting to jump the shark.

There are some big changes coming up at the RPG Review. For starters we're moving all our content on to the site itself as well as being available as the single-file PDF. As someone who has always expressed the superiority of open formats this should have been done a long time ago. Secondly, between this and the fifth issue, there will be a real print publication, a compilation of the first four issues with a more professional layout and some proper editing. Finally, we are also putting together an English translation of the French-language comedy roleplaying game "Insectes & Compagnie" (Insects and Company) which will be available on the RPG Review website in the very near future thanks to a great deal of work by Fabrice Odefrey; comments on this game plus a campaign(!) will be provided in the next issue.

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This particular issue includes a long and very interesting article by B. Dennis Sustare, whose contributions to roleplaying and computer games in the late 70s and early 80s are certainly deserving of more widespread recognition and acclaim. Consider this to dovetail with the Bunnies & Burrows article in the last issue and with a Heroes of Olympus/Swordbearer scenario in the next.

Karl Brown makes a move on the bell-curve in GURPS with a linear system which, true to form is called SLURPS. I remember doing something quite similar some fifteen years back, but Karl has given it quite a lease of life. In other system-related modifications, I have designer's notes on a new roleplaying game, the first in the Mimesis line of systems, called "Sorcery & Demons". My other main contribution to this issue is a campaign outline for Champions which uses a multicultural mix demigods with an ultimately bittersweet story. On a similar theme, Kevin Powe provides a *huge* fully-fledged scenario and campaign for Feng Shui but with a western setting; this game was extensively played at the first Gen Con Oz and was a huge hit among all who played. It's a bit of an experiment for RPG Review; previously we've kept to fairly short articles.

In gaming-related, but not traditional table-top pens, paper and dice variety, we have an interview with James Hutchins who explains the components and running of the (free and open source) excellent Age of Fable web-based RPG. and Andrew Moshos does another reviews with Star Trek XI and Mingshi keeps up to date with her gossip column and of course Lord Orcus offers his superb advise and information. Finally, Jensen Schmidt again grace the pages with his excellent cartoons.

The front-cover for this issue is from Randall Moore's superb webcomic XKCD (yes, we have permission). Apart from being very funny, it is interesting to acknowledge how pervasive RPG culture has become. What will historians think of roleplaying books in five hundred years time? What long term contribution are RPGs making to human culture? "Just a game"? Anything that denigrates gaming needs to have a reread of how games contribute to learning and imagination needs to get into Bateson, Huizinga and Marcuse. We are *homo ludens*, and play is a natural activity, older than the species itself: "Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing." Experimenting, modeling, even engaging in flippant parody and satire, the various types of play that we engage in has synthesised with *commedia dell'arte* and improvised scripting. What an extraordinary combination!

I hope you all enjoy this very diverse issue of RPG Review and this it keeps you going for the next few months. Don't forget to write!

Lev Lafayette, lev@rpgreview.net

LETTERS

Insectes & Companie

Bonjour et merci de votre intérêt pour notre travail et de votre proposition.

Tout d'abord nous sommes ravis d'être connus et appréciés "down under" !

Quoique bilingues, le temps nous a tjs manqué pour faire des traducs de nos jeux, et nous passons régulièrement des appels au peuple pour trouver des traducteurs bénévoles car c'est vraiment dommage de ne pas être lisibles par la + grosse population rôliste au monde... Jusqu'ici, on nous a proposé plutôt des textes qui semblaient sortir d'une traduc automatique :(donc on n'a malheureusement pas de version anglophone d'I&Cie à vous transmettre.

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Nous sommes très intéressés par votre proposition : vous allez nous rendre un fier service. Merci donc par avance. Nous sommes naturellement à votre dispo pour suggérer des termes, revoir le tout, etc.

De plus, en bon centre de recherche sur le JdR, nous connaissons et apprécions rpgreview.net et serions très honorés d'y être critiqués. Tant que vous y êtes, n'hésitez pas à vous pencher également sur le reste de notre collection : <http://imaginez.net.free.fr/jeu/telecharger/telecharger.htm> ! Tiens, 2 de nos membres étant respectivement président et vice-président de la Fédération française de JdR, on va faire un peu de pub à rpgreview.net en France.

Un immense merci donc; bon courage et à votre dispo pour toutes précisions.

A très bientôt.

Très cordialement,
l'équipe d'Imaginez.net.
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For non-Francophones, Thomas remarks that he is very pleased that we are doing an English translation of Insectes & Company. They know and appreciate RPG Review and recommend that we have a look at their other material on the website specified. Their group includes the President and Vice-President of the French Roleplaying Federation.



HOT GOSSIP INDUSTRY NEWS

by Wu Mingshi

Hosei bo Mr. Lev,

So four issues now, that one year of RPG Review. Yes, you bad though, very late on issue. But OK, make good excuses and I can now write about *HeroQuest*; chin-chye! Also special hello out there in livejournal world to sodzilla who originally mistake me in some way due to funny language. But all sorted now, chin-chye again! But Mingshi must say, all language is funny as story will tell..

At my home, we have big rich government politician, Loo Choon Yong, who say that we should work on Saturday because people not making babies - "procreation talent not our forte", he say. What he not say because everyone playing *Dragon Warriors* at Adrian and Christopher's house. But maybe Mr. Politician show eye-power in special read-mind way. My big sister have strange conversation of with mother. Mingshi swear every word true!

Mother: So? Got baby yet?

Big Sister: (stifle weary sigh) Hello, Ma.

Mother: What? Still no baby, is it?

Big Sister: NO, Ma.

Mother: Wah, so slow, you-all! How long you try?

Big Sister: Five months.

Mother: Peww! And still nothing! Maybe something wrong with you!

Big Sister: Aiyah! Ma, five months is not that long.

Mother: Chee! I get pregnant much faster than that. I am very fer-TILE, you know.

Big Sister: What about your son? Get him to give you a grandchild!

Mother: Cheh, he! No girlfriend, even. Anyway, he is a bloke, no need to worry. No biological clock. But you, better hurry up. All my friends grandma already.

Big Sister: Maybe my biological clock tong-tong-tong already. Womb shrivel up like raisin, nowhere for baby to grow.

Mother: Chee! Don' talk rubbish. Raisin my foot. You, not so old yet. Women in our family very fuckened.

Big Sister: ! (...)

Big Sister: Uh, Ma... I think you mean fecund.

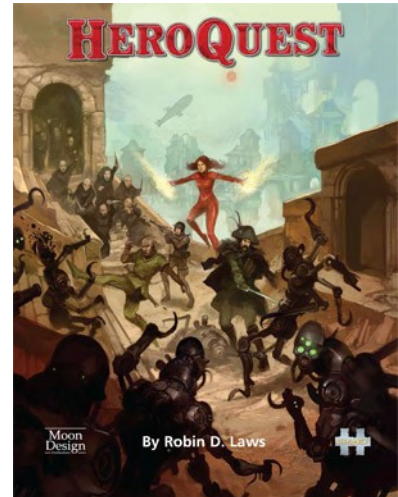
Mother: Yaaaah, very fuckened. Me and my sisters, got babies everywhere! Next time you better have more sex.



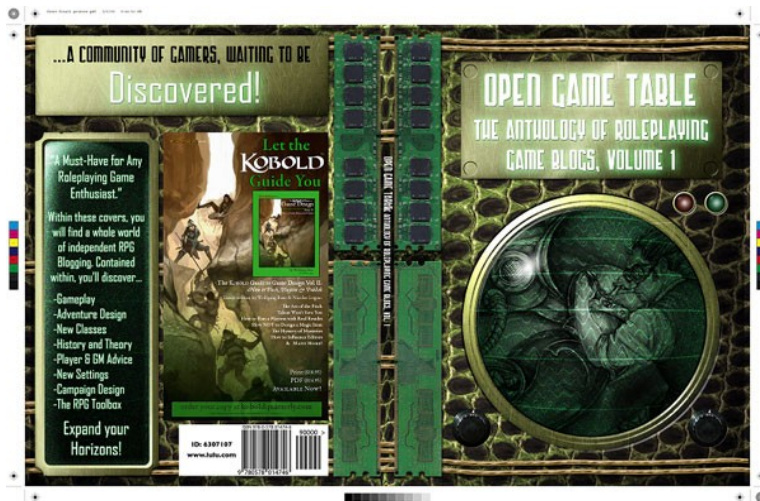
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Funny language! OK, Mingshi talk about games now. First big news is Origins Awards, *Mouse Guard* win award for best roleplaying game! Hey, good choice Mr. Lev for cover of last issue, lah? It was good competition too, because D&D 4e *Players Handbook* and *Trail of Cthulhu* also in competition. *Serenity Adventures* win best roleplaying supplement. Mingshi also fascinated by best Game Accessory award, the *D-Total* by Lou "I love dice" Zocchi's Gamescience. The *D-Total* is design by Dr. A.F. Simkin and is 24-sided dice that can be a d2, d3, d4, d5, d6, d7, d8, d10, d12, d20, d24, d30, d40, d50, d60, d70, and a d80! Mingshi wants!

Next big new item, is the *HeroQuest* second edition has just been released. This is great game, first edition all Glorantha but new edition does everything. *HeroQuest* is game that tries to be more like movie than wargame, so all important contests are about making story. Also it use same resolution system throughout entire game. Mingshi notices that when *HeroQuest* first come out this was new and innovative. Now everyone wants to do it. There was funny monkeys going on for a while with downloads, but no problem now. PDF very expensive (\$20), but maybe cheap for best game in the world? Go to glorantha.com (hey, old website name!?) for more information.



Cubicle7 who score brilliant license now says that Dr. Who roleplaying game with very tasty picture of David Tennent on box will be found in stores in October. Yes, you read Mingshi right. A roleplaying game in *box*. No see one those since I a little *ah lian*. Inside box is 144 page Gamemaster's Guide, 86 page Player's Guide, 30 page Adventurer's Book, 4 page Quick Start, Pre-Generated Characters, Blank Character Sheets, Gadget Sheets, Tokens and Dice. Mingshi can't wait for the supplement that does crossover of *Dr. Who* RPG, *Torchwood* and *SLA Industries*.



Jonathan Jacob has published book called *Open Game Table: The Anthology of Roleplaying Game Blogs*, which bring in one place lots of big name writings from across the Internet, but no RPG Review [ED: Maybe because it's a 'zine, not a 'blog, Mingshi]. But that OK, many articles in various categories, nice table of contents, no index though. Most of it is D&D related, and artwork is pretty funny, lah. It bring together material that is found all over the place already, so maybe not such great value for money, unless you value you time! So Mingshi say this is good book and you should all buy.

OK, that's all for this quartering!

Mingshi! mingshi@rpgreview.net

DENNIS SUSTARE INTERVIEW & MY LIFE IN GAMES

by B. Dennis Sustare

INTERVIEW

B. Dennis Sustare made a modest, but highly significant, contributions to the early days of role playing games which have left a lasting impression. The original source for Druid character class in *Dungeons & Dragons* his name has received lasting recognition in the spell "Chariot of Sustarre" (which brings, to my mind, a certain poem by William Blake). In addition he was the author of *Bunnies & Burrows* (1976), an off-beat adaption of *Watership Down* which has since been republished as a highly successful GURPS supplement. Another contribution was as chief author of *Swordbearer* (1982), a *RuneQuest*-like game which included magic from pure samples of elements and used a variation of the ancient humours for spiritual magic. Also Dennis authored *Heroes Of Olympus* (1981), a game which replayed Greek myth and managed to combine roleplaying and wargaming aspects of play in a highly innovative manner. There are also contributions by Dennis in *Acute Paranoia*, *Citybook IV*, and *Citybook V* as well as in *Wargaming*, *Different Worlds*, and others.

In addition to his contributions to table-top roleplaying games, Dennis also designed a number of board games, *Intruder* (1980), *Kung Fu 2100* (1980), *Adventure Game Starter Set* (1981), and *Star Smuggler* (1982) Dennis was also the principal Game Designer at Coleco, designing video games for some classic platforms including *ColecoVision*, *IntelliVision*, *Atari 2600*, and the *ADAM* computer. After this post-doctoral diversion in game design he worked for *BAE Systems* for 20 years and is recently retired.

Question: Firstly, thank you for agreeing to this interview. My first question is probably one which many readers want read about; can you tell us the circumstances that lead to the development of the Druid character class in *Dungeons & Dragons* and the naming of the high-level spell Chariot of Sustarre? You get a brief nod of recognition by Gary Gygax in the Preface of the *Player's Handbook*.

In Wisconsin, we started playing D&D before there were even thieves (i.e., before Greyhawk was published). We were experimenting with classes other than fighters, clerics and magic-users, though, and I thought a druid would be interesting, as a nature cleric that had some combat ability. I drew up a set of rules for us to play-test, and mimeographed them for our group (pre-Xerox days). After some play-test, I modified them in a second version of mimeo, but only distributed them among our players. Since we did go to early sessions of GenCon, one person in our group showed them to Gary, and with my permission (and some further editing), they were published in the Eldritch Wizardry supplement, in April 1976. The Chariot of Sustarre was added by Gary (or perhaps by Tim Kask); it was not in my original rules. I believe the changed spelling of my name was deliberate. I did not get paid in cash, though Gary did give me some freebies; I was just happy to get the new class added.

Question: You completed your PhD in biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1976. This was the same year that the first edition of *Bunnies & Burrows* was released. This is obviously too coincidental! Did your studies contribute much to the idea of animal intelligence and specifically lagomorphs? What was early reception to the game like?

Please note that Scott Robinson was the co-author of B&B. We were both grad students in the Zoology Department at

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U Wis - Madison. He was studying ground squirrels, and I started with a study of orb-weaving spider ecology, but switched to the sensory physiology of frogs and toads, under Jack Hailman. Neither of us were studying rabbits, but were both involved with animal behavior. We spent many hours designing and play-testing B&B, and occasionally brought in other players for specific scenarios. Scott Bizar was very encouraging about the game, and published the first edition in 1976, with an old caver buddy, Charlie Loving, providing the illustrations. Of course, at the time FGU was determined to publish as many different RP games as possible, so maybe it wasn't too surprising that it got published. But it was received well even very early, and I was requested to run games at small conventions, such as in Schenectady. Pleasantly, I am still receiving royalties from B&B (the GURPS version, brilliantly adapted by Steffan O'Sullivan).

Question: People still play Bunnies & Burrows, or at least Steffan O'Sullivan's GURPS adaption of the game, albeit it is somewhat of a fringe diversion. Are you surprised by the lasting popularity? Were there any difficulties in having it republished as a GURPS game from a FGU game?

Not surprised, since there is great fun role-playing characters that are physically weak, where you must use your wits to succeed. I get bored with characters who have already slain all the gods, and are starting to destroy galaxies for fun. And no difficulties for me getting it adapted to GURPS, since Steffan did all the work! He is a really, really smart guy.

Question: Both *Swordbearer* and *Heroes of Olympus* are also considered to be innovative roleplaying games, both when they were released and by more contemporary reviews, but they seem to have been largely lost in the mists of time. Neither came out with a great deal of support material; there was one supplement for *Swordbearer* and an adaption of *Heroes of Olympus* for *Thieves World*. Are you disappointed that these games didn't take off, or were they more experimental with the sufficient satisfaction from their critical, if not popular, recognition?

Swordbearer was released when Heritage was already in some trouble. Also, my original design for it was more radical than the final result, since I was forced to modify it to meet Heritage's need. For example, my original race designs were all original, but I had to force them to fit the Heritage lineup of metal figures, which were Tolkien/D&D style races. But they did keep in a number of the design features I really liked, such as eliminating gold and the standard Monty Haul dungeon.

Heroes of Olympus was clearly a niche design from the start, but I tried to include both board game elements as well as roleplay. I tried to include much of the mythological Greek adventures, including the voyage of the Argo and key monsters. I was pretty happy with the results, but did not expect it to have large sales. Task Force Games was a joy to work for (and I still miss the old FYEO). Adapting it for Thieves World and an expansion for Egypt was fun.

Question: In addition to roleplaying games, it seems that boardgames like *Intruder* retain a degree of contemporary popularity as well. What design choices did you make with these games to give them this lasting recognition?

Intruder was actually designed in my sleep. I woke up with virtually the entire game in mind, and rushed to write it down before I forgot it. Other than some adjustments after playtest (which some claim are still not enough), there was little done to it after that first frenzied session. Kung Fu 2100 was done in response to a magazine contest by Steve Jackson. He liked my contest entry well enough to ask me to write a complete game for publication. Star Smuggler, for Heritage, was done to provide them with another small stand-alone game, and it was my first paragraph-style game, though done with some physical components as well. It was recently re-released as a pdf game.

Question: Can you describe some of the games that were designed under your wing at Coleco?

I did each of the sports games using the Super-Action Controller (Baseball, Football, and Rocky Boxing). Had a patent issued for part of the baseball design, though I don't believe Coleco ever defended it, when some other companies infringed. I also did multiple versions (for different platforms) of arcade knockoff games such as Looping, Frenzy, Ladybug, Rock 'n' Rope. Due to the different requirements for these platforms, these amounted to completely distinct game designs. For example, ColecoVision is simply nothing like the Atari 2600, and designs had to start from scratch. I did a nice adaptation of Dragon's Lair, considering we were not using a laser disc to accomplish it. I also designed a couple of the Smurf games, one of the 2010 games, Destructor (one best forgotten), and several others.

Question: In the first issue of Different Worlds (we did this to Steve Perrin as well), you described a model of 'dungeon-design' whereby the random rolls for monster population and treasure allocation forced you as a designer to make up stories to justify their presence. You described this as 'puzzle-solving' and contrasted it with 'monster-slaying': "If the main difficulty in acquiring a treasure is figuring out how to find it, or how to recognise it [sic] you've found it, or how to make use of it once you've found, rather than how to kill the guardian of the treasure, then you are basing the game primarily on the ingenuity of the players". Despite its game-heavy language as puzzles to be solved it seems that you were referring to narrative puzzles. Was this an nascent form of what is now termed 'narrativism'?

Well, I don't know. I'm not familiar with the discussions and forums on GNS Theory. But I do know that the FRP games I most enjoyed playing was with more mature players who emphasized roleplay over character advancement. We appreciated intricate plot and story development, with the GM and players cooperating, as opposed to slaying vast numbers of monsters and hauling off trainloads of gold coins. I always found it more interesting to play with third-level spells or lower, rather than tenth-level spells or higher. When Myst came out, it was like "Yeah! This is what we should have been doing, rather than never-ending fights." Setting, atmosphere, character interactions, mutual story-telling... all these were key. After all, we thoroughly enjoyed playing Paranoia, even though not only did our characters not advance, they usually all died! But we had such fun doing it.

MY LIFE IN GAMES

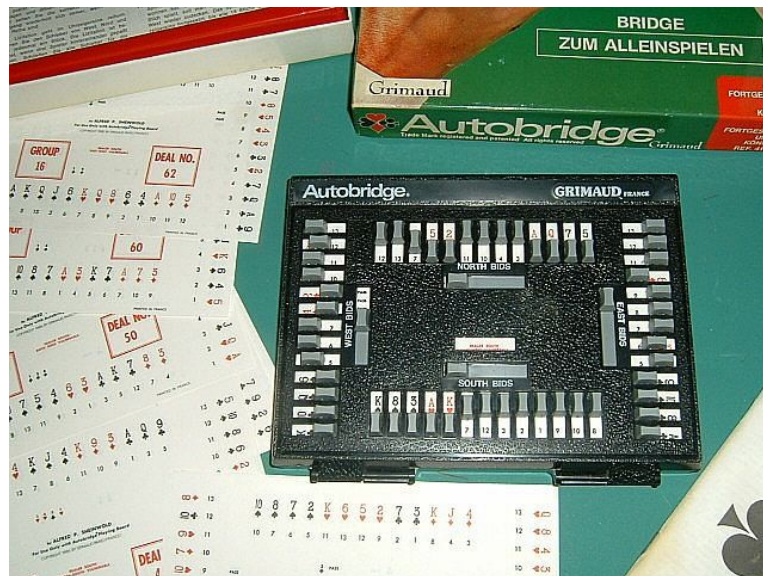
It seems as though I have been fascinated by games and puzzles my entire life. As early as I can remember, my parents and grandparents played games. My grandmother, "Giya", taught me Pacheesi, Chinese checkers, rummy, 麻將 (Mahjong), canasta and bridge. I quickly learned to play on her Autobridge game.

With my cousins, we played card games and Sorry, but usually made up the rules of games we played outside, with Carole changing the rules on every occasion. We did elaborate roleplay during the late 40's and early 50's; that is, when we weren't in the ocean, blowing up plastic armymen with firecrackers, or running down the street in the fog behind the mosquito truck. And my Mom taught me cribbage.

I didn't learn chess until I was 13, but quickly became obsessed with it. Barry Stern and I would leave school and go down to the chess club, to test our skills against old patzers who had a wealth of knowledge of traps and pitfalls. So my game acquired little in the way of book play, but much in tactical intricacies. I loved the books by Reuben Fine and Fred Reinfeld, but hated memorizing. And to this day, I have never been able to play back a chess or go game from memory.

By the time I was an undergrad at Caltech, I was well into board games. I had discovered Tactics II and Gettysburg (version 1!), and played them to the detriment of my studies. Once I dropped out of college and joined the Navy (as an electronics technician), there was nothing to keep me from playing board games more frequently, and on the ship we played all those early Avalon Hill games; Chancellorsville, Afrika Korps, Civil War, U-boat, Bismark and Midway, with the three naval games being particularly popular. It was impossible for me not to learn pinochle and acey-ducey on shipboard. While in San Francisco, I acquired a knowledge of go, though in retrospect I was never playing it properly

then. And I married a wonderful woman in 1962, who is still my beloved. Our games will not be discussed... (well, except that she has always been my master in backgammon).



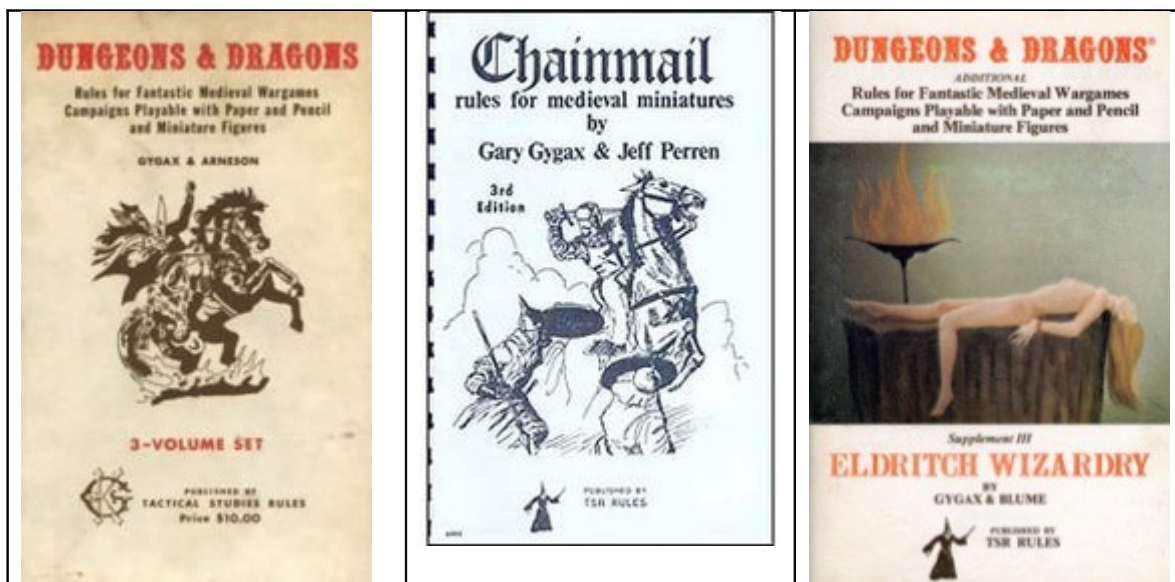
Once I got out of the Navy, I went back to college, this time at the University of Texas. I was much more serious about my studies this time (could the service have matured me?), and I didn't really play games much. Went spelunking in Texas and Mexico, and made friends that I still have today (much closer than any friends in high school or the Navy). Some of them were very interested in military history, and I started reading lots in that area, though not spending time with wargames. Well, except with Charlie. We played games like Guadalcanal, and even devised a way to play it with hidden movement, *a la kriegspiel*. Charlie was a cartographer, and that was the first time I really started designing games. He would draw maps, I would write rules, we would handmade counters, and then attempt to play the games. Our most successful creations, though, were variants for Panzerblitz (and later, Panzer Leader). At this time I concluded there were no 3-player wargames, so I designed a game of the American Civil War in New Mexico, with the three players being the Union, the Confederacy, and the Indians (with semi-hidden movement). The Indians were a logistical nightmare for the regular armies; they avoided direct combat, but were good at raiding supply wagons and depots. Victory conditions were different for all three sides. I never tried to sell the design, but actually found the pieces I had handmade when I was gathering stuff for Paul to sell!

After graduation from Texas (BA zoology), on to the University of Wisconsin (Madison) in Fall 1967 for grad school in biology. After my years in the Navy, the atmosphere on the Wisconsin campus was startling in its difference. Radical politics, radical environmentalism, drugs, free love, The Doors, left-wing professors, and the Union Terrace. In the summer I biked to campus; in the winter I skated there, on frozen Lake Mendota. As an environmentalist, I worked with Senator Nelson to create E-day, and made it into Newsweek. As a unionist, I went on strike with the Teaching Assistant's Association to gain worker's rights for TA's, and nearly got clubbed in the head by a cop at a rally. As an anti-war enthusiast, I learned the smell of tear gas when the National Guard came on campus. After the bombing of Sterling Hall in 1970, I picked up pieces of the exploded van from the roof of adjacent Birge Hall, where my office was located. Not surprisingly, after that event things got somewhat toned down and more conservative on campus (Madison

still remained more liberal than every place else in Wisconsin), though Paul Soglin did his best to keep things active. And our beautiful daughter was born.

But what about games? Simulations Publications Inc. (SPI) was created, and started publishing an amazing series of games. I quickly became a subscriber, to get as many as I could, even if some never got played. One of my favorites was *Winter War*, which I played too many times to count, with a fellow grad student from Lebanon (who also taught me much about the incredible political, social and religious complexity of that country). Gen Con was a great influence, much closer to home. I missed Gen Con 0, but I think I attended every one from then on, as long as I lived in Wisconsin (and a couple of times after I left). The Lake Geneva Horticultural Hall had a special, intimate charm. I remember playing naval minis on the floor using Fletcher Pratt rules (or was that at the American Legion Hall?). I was disappointed when it was held at the Playboy Resort, when I discovered the Playboy Bunnies were no longer there. By the time it got to Parkside, it seemed like the Con had just grown too huge to be manageable. Surely it could never get bigger than that!

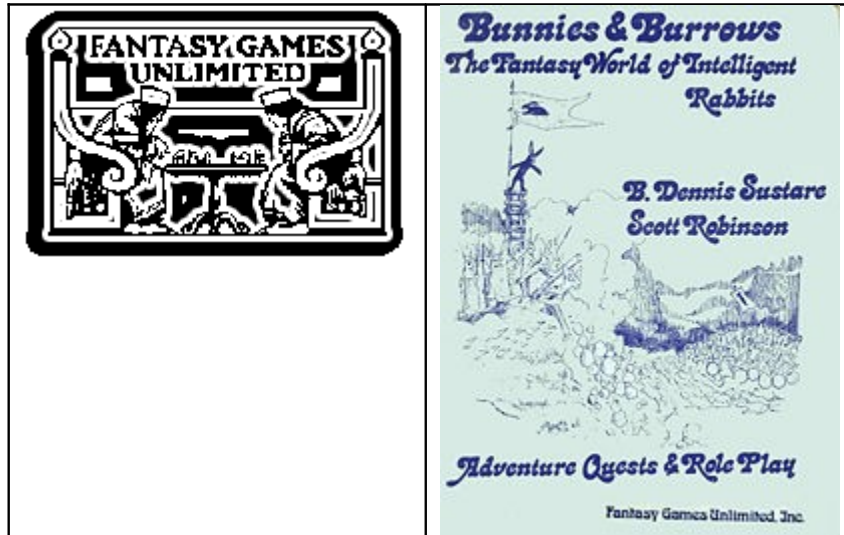
I got to meet (and play with) lots of TSR folks, not suspecting that in years to come I would be working with some of them at Coleco. Too bad Jim Ward never came there; he would have been fun to have around. And I got to meet the interesting MAR Barker (good job, Phil). But my serious roleplay investment was to occur back on the UW-Madison campus, as a small group of grad students would get together to play hours, and hours, and hours of early *D&D*.



We used *Chainmail* for combat, and my first GM said I had to paint one miniature for my character before I could play. (A lot of lead has passed under the bridge since then, if that's not too odd a metaphor.) The core of this group was Skip Schiffer (astronomer), the lovely Linda Schiffer (biochemist), Bill Herdle (chemist), myself (biologist), and Gary Gherke (lawyer and motocross racer). It was in the course of this gaming that I created my version of a new character class, the Druid. (yes, children... once upon a time there were only fighters, clerics, magic-users and, with *Greyhawk*, thieves) I made a few mimeos of the druid rules, someone showed them to Gary Gygax, and with my permission, he published a version he had edited in the *Eldritch Wizardry* supplement, in 1976. I count that as my first game publication, though *Bunnies & Burrows* came out in the same year (1st edition, FGU). Scott Robinson, another biology grad student, had the original idea, and we worked together to develop and playtest it. Scott Bizar was enthusiastic about it, though he seemed intent on flooding the market with roleplay games with as many settings as possible. But Scott (Bizar) was a true fan of Rafael Sabatini, so I always felt he had most love for the games reflecting the swordplay from the many Sabatini novels. Incidentally, Scott (Robinson) stayed in biology... well, now in the psych department at U of Iowa. Close enough. I still have more recognition from *B&B* than from anything else I have ever done, in or out of

games. I got to meet a huge number of game designers and artists through FGU, including Scott himself, Jeff Dee, Lennie Kanterman, Ed Simbalist and Wilf Backhaus, Tony LeBoutillier, Nick Marinacci, Mike Gilbert, Adam Gruen, Bob Charrette and Paul Hume. Alas, don't think I ever met Lin Carter. Thanks, Scott, for bringing so much RPG to the public!

For those who are interested: 1st edition, more pages, looks typewritten, cover by Charlie Loving (who is a very interesting character; he has been a meteorologist, sports commentator and columnist, cartographer for the French in the Angolan war, drove through the Sahara in a 2CV, Vietnam vet who is now on full disability, spelunker, political cartoonist, announcer at chicken-flying contests, related to Russian expat nobility, television producer, and slayer of feral hogs on his spread in Texas). 2nd edition, half the number of pages, typeset, cover by Jeff Dee. The excellent GURPS version (SJ Games) is by Steffan O'Sullivan, not me. Oh, and I still have my *B&B* minis.

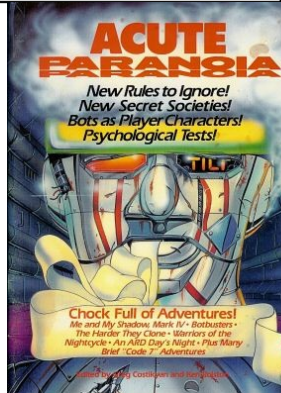
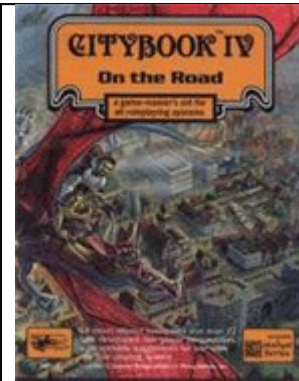
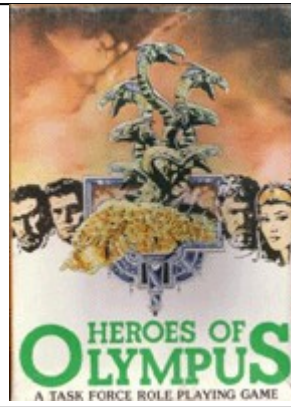
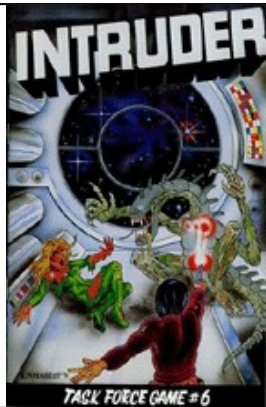


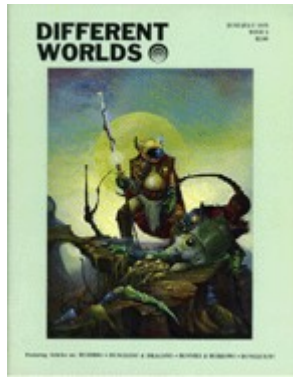
In the Rathskeller (part of the Wisconsin Union), I learned go the right way, partly from a 5th Dan in the mathematics department, but mostly from various 1st-kyu through 3rd Dan players that hung out there at all hours. I grew to love go so much that I really stopped playing chess. I knew "atari" before Nolan named his company! There was also a drugstore/restaurant near campus that let us play go there, at least until five or six games were going at once, and there was no room for customers. At Wisconsin, I also learned whitewater kayaking, and made some fun trips. While camping under the stars in the UP (Upper Peninsula, that is; of Michigan, for you geographical weaklings), I couldn't get to sleep... no artificial lights, perfectly clear skies, no moon... just auroras, meteors, and so many stars that it was impossible to discern the constellations. About this time we bought the orange Karmann Ghia that we were to drive for 18 years.

By 1976 I finally graduated (PhD thesis: *Comparative Electoretinography of Anuran Amphibians*), and moved to upstate New York to teach biology at Clarkson College. I still GM'd RPGs, though now with professors and spouses as players. And still played go, and painted minis, and accumulating more games (especially from SPI). But my real time-destroying game became Diplomacy. Not F2F games, but PBM games! I had maps of games in progress all over my wall, and must have spent a huge amount on stamps (fortunately, mail was real cheap back then!). This was before the popularity of play-by-email. I recently looked around for my two boxed versions of Diplomacy, but couldn't find them. Probably lent them to people decades ago. Rounding out the events of 1976, I think my first visit to Origins was that year, in Baltimore.

By now (and in the next few years) I was getting to know game designers from a wider range of companies than just

FGU, including some I would work with later. Paul Jaquays, Arnold Hendrick, John Butterfield, Eric Goldberg, Greg Costikyan, Steve Jackson, Allen Eldridge and Stephen Cole, Joe Angiolillo, many others... what a talented bunch. I started cranking out game publications as we moved into the 1980's. *Intruder* (1980, Task Force Games), *Kung Fu 2100* (1980, Steve Jackson Games; this was the outcome of a contest entry from the magazine, that Steve liked well enough to ask me to write up a full game version for him to publish separately). *Heroes of Olympus* (1981 1st ed., Task Force Games; 1983 2nd ed.), and from Heritage, *The Wizard's Bane*, *The Cleric's Quest*, *The Woman Warrior*, *The Fighter's Fury*, *Star Smuggler*, and *Swordbearer* 1st ed. (1982). The 2nd ed. of *Swordbearer* would be published by FGU after the demise of Heritage. During this time I also published a bunch of scenarios and articles for *Runequest*, *Citybooks*, *Paranoia*, and in *Wargaming*, *Different Worlds*, *The Space Gamer*, *Wyrms' Footnotes*, *Nexus*, and perhaps others I've forgotten. Some had design features I was really proud of. *Heroes of Olympus* captured some aspects of Greek mythology that I loved, and *Swordbearer* was probably too innovative to become popular, although Heritage kept out some of my more far-out ideas, and forced me to include many standard races so as to cover their miniature lines, which excluded some of my more imaginative race ideas. Sigh...





When I did not get tenure, I saw an ad for a game designer at Milton Bradley, and arranged for an interview there. I also contacted Paul Jaquays (who was at the new electronic games division of the Connecticut Leather Company, which had become known as Coleco). As long as I was driving down to Massachusetts, why not stop by Hartford and interview at Coleco as well? I wasn't offered the MB job, but did get the job at Coleco, at a salary better than my assistant professor's salary. We were placed in an apartment building across the street from the old downtown office of Coleco. My daughter would peek out the window at night, and asked why the women in funny clothes would walk up and down along the sidewalk, and then talk to drivers and get into cars that would stop for them. Fortunately, Coleco soon moved to its new digs in West Hartford, and my wife found us a bungalow in historic Wethersfield.



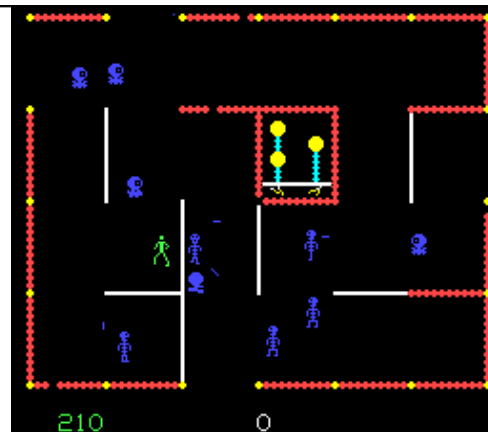
Up to this point, I had been an amateur game designer, though with an ever-increasing list of credits. But at Coleco, I became a professional, with the title of Principal Game Designer. I worked for Paul Jaquays, who worked for Eric Bromley. The staff at Coleco soon became (in my opinion) the strongest group of electronic game designers and developers in the country, and perhaps in the world. We turned out some great games, which stretched the limits of the technology, made more challenging by the fact that each platform had different constraints and quirks. We produced games not only for ColecoVision (CV), but also Atari 2600 (2600), Atari 5200, Intellivision (IV), Commodore C-64, Apple II, and ADAM. Most of our titles were licensed from standup arcades, and others from movies or sports. Sadly, we were not given the opportunity to produce many games based on the original concepts from our design staff.

I was principal designer/project leader on *Looping* (CV, IV, 2600), *Super Action Baseball* (CV), *Rocky Super Action*

Boxing (CV), Super Action Football (CV), Dragon's Lair (ADAM), Smurfs Save the Day! (2600, Gemini KidVid), Frenzy (CV), Ladybug (IV), Roc'n'Rope (CV, 2600), 2010 Strategy Adventure (ADAM, Apple II, C-64), Destructor (CV), Smurfette's Birthday (CV), and Sword and the Sorceror (CV). I was designer for SmartLOGO (ADAM), LOGO Step-by-Step (ADAM), Smurf Paint and Play (CV), Cabbage Patch Kids Adventures in the Park (CV), SmartWriter (ADAM), Pinball Construction Set (ADAM), and Wargames (CV). I was design supervisor for Front Line (CV), Time Pilot (CV), 2010 Graphic Action Game (CV), Dr Seuss Fix-up the Mix-up (CV), Wizard of Wor (CV), and Pepper II. I contributed to the hardware design for the Super Action Controllers (CV), the Roller Controller (CV), and a keyboard (Apollo). With Eric Bromley, I was awarded a patent (4,672,541 "Video Game with Interactive Enlarged Play Action Inserts").



Looping



Frenzy



Ladybug



Roc'n'Rope



Super Action Baseball



Rocky Super Action Boxing



Dragon's Lair



Super Action Controllers

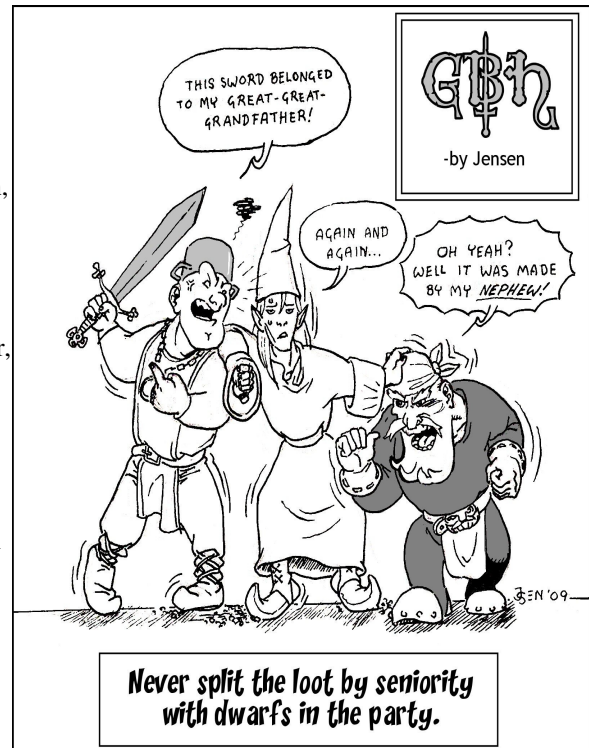
Sometimes, Coleco was a fun place to work; sometimes not so much. As Toy Fair or the Consumer Electronics Show approached, we would start to work longer and longer hours, living on pizza and cola, and trying to decide whether we could call the remaining bugs “features”. Our programmers were amazing in squeezing value out of the last few bytes in a cartridge. Our artists were amazing with their abilities to find solutions around platform limitations. Our musicians were amazing with the quality of sound they could get from systems never designed to be musical; and the sound effects they generated greatly enhanced the gameplay experience. Our writers... not so amazing... (just kidding!). We also managed to find fun in the limited time we were away from work. Such as the backyard battles of “Dinos vs. Army Men” at Lawrence Schick’s, where plastic armies fought plastic dinosaurs, assisted by our fine collections of rubber monsters. Or the fireworks at Tom Fulton’s, where one year my daughter almost got her head taken off by a bottle rocket. Or the parties at Paul’s, the wargaming at Joe’s, the design bull sessions at my place. And of course, the research of new arcades was both work and entertainment. We would never get documentation or specs for the arcades we had licensed, so we would play them for hours, taking notes and gathering images. Some of us got pretty good at the arcades, and also got pretty good at our playtesting of the subsequent videogames. Our emphasis was not to duplicate the arcades, but rather to capture the playing experience, so the game felt the same to the player. In some cases, we were able to exceed the arcade. For example, the *Frenzy* arcade had only 64,000 levels (enough for most players,

admittedly!), but my CV version had literally billions of levels. And in spite of the CV sprite limitations, by using pattern-plane animation I was able to get a much larger number of robot enemies on the screen than would have been possible with sprites. Though this might surprise some people, that game was one of my proudest achievements at Coleco. Dave Johnson told ColecoNation he thought it was the best arcade translation... thanks, Dave! I also liked *Looping* a lot, but I seem to be in a minority there.

I also designed each of the sports games using the Super Action Controllers; for baseball, football and boxing. For their time, I think they worked out pretty well. Super Action Baseball was named one of the Ten Best Games by Omni magazine, and Super Action Football was named Best Sports Game at the Summer 1984 Consumer Electronics Show. And even though I did not work on them, I thought the execution of *Zaxxon*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Donkey Kong Jr* was brilliant.

But Coleco panicked when Atari began to bury 2600 carts in the desert, decided the videogame era was over, and they decided to go back to their core business of plush dolls and plastic pools, shutting down the electronic games division. As we all know, within a very short time Nintendo took the lead with over a billion dollars in sales. Sort of depressing to think of what might have been... Some of the Coleco staff scattered to other game companies, some to new jobs outside the brutal game industry, and a few of us (including Paul Jaquays, myself, and Rob Harris) went with Eric Bromley when he formed his new company, Penguin Products. Eric had some good ideas there, but the products never caught on and the company went bankrupt in a few years. Rob Harris would go on to be a star at Electronics Arts. Paul did some freelancing, then back to TSR for cover art, and on to Id Software and Ensemble Studios, as well as helping found the Guildhall at SMU, producing a future generation of game designers. As for me, I got into the aerospace industry and soon moved back to Texas.

That pretty much marked the end of my game design efforts. Oh, I did design for some MUDs and a MUSH, GM'd some RPGs, and did some simulations for work that almost amounted to games, but nothing serious in the gaming area. Spent way too much money on Magic cards (which I eventually traded to Rob Harris for a custom gaming computer; he got the best deal by far, but I'm still using that computer). Got back heavily into chess for fun (no tournaments), since it was easier to finish chess games at lunch than to finish go games. And my reactions no longer tolerate twitch games the way they did at Coleco... turn-based only for me from now on. And I still love puzzles. I decoded the Mars code on both Spirit and Opportunity, and won a Lego model of the rover, and a membership in the Planetary Society. I work sudokus every day, as well as the Jumble in the paper. Got acquainted with the wonderful Scott Kim after I started solving his magazine puzzles (and winning T-shirts). I still wish he would port *Heaven and Earth* to the PC (I disposed of my Mac years ago).



Sorcerers & Demons - Mimesis Designer's Notes

by Lev Lafayette

Background

Sorcerers & Demons is a new roleplaying game that has come from two entirely different projects that have merged. The first has been a long-term experiment with historical-fantasy, where real-world history and mythology supplements a historical game. The argument primarily being that for the purposes of telling of a story about a historical period necessitates a certain degree of false enchantment to properly reflect the mode of consciousness of those premodern times. This began over a decade ago and followed through with three *Dungeons & Dragons* campaigns; two based in North-Western Europe during the eleventh century, another in the Balkans during the eight, a *RuneQuest* play-by-email based in the Malay archipelago in the 16th century, an early version of the *Mimesis* game system based in Transylvania around the same time, an *Ars Magica* campaign in southern France, and most recently a *GURPS* Time Traveller campaign which specialises in turning points of history.

(Image of St Anthony plagued by demons, by Martin Schongauer, 1480s)



The second relates to several short-term campaigns based in the continent of Castofan for the game *Barbarian Kings* which first appeared in the SPI magazine *Ares*. Written by Greg Costikyan this product included more than a modest amount of geographical realism plus some requisite humour that always comes from said author; the common currency of the land is "the sequin", there are Vikings who raid with airships and last but not least, are are species of sentient frogs who form war frog units. One of the events of a game is that a Mage can raise a dead army into a zombie army; however there is a chance that said zombies go beserk - being eaten by your own recently raised zombie warfrogs is not a pleasant experience, believe me. The short-term campaigns based in Castofan included games of *DragonQuest*, *RuneQuest*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Stormbringer*, and *Swordbearer* with *DragonQuest* famously providing its demons from the Lesser Key of Solomon and *Swordbearer* with a magic system based on nodes of pure elemental essence and psychic humours.

In many ways the combination of games and location was not always the best fit. The demons from *DragonQuest* were not necessarily a good fit for the world of *Barbarian Kings* which was a little technologically askew as well with most of the games being best suited for a dark ages and beyond period whereas Castofan was, by the descriptions of the societies, at an iron age period of development (indeed, increasingly *Rolemaster* seemed to be a particularly good fit). Indeed, the idea of developing a *Barbarian Kings* game system strongly derived from *DragonQuest* and *Swordbearer* seemed to be a bit of a waste, given the mythic realism of using such beings as the Key's demons and the magic system of elementalism and humours should also be included in any game that claimed a degree of historical narrative.

A solution lay in the game of *Demons* by SPI which used the same beings from *DragonQuest* but as a small-scale

hexgame based in Armenia during the 1000s. The general idea was that each player was a wizard searching for the Ring of Solomon that could provide control over diabolical powers. To aid them in this quest, the wizards had various shields that they could use to summon and hopefully control those beings they summoned. The demons had appropriate powers as per the Key, such as "Cause Women To Show Themselves Naked" and "Create Warfare Between Two Parties" etc. Various secular forces would scour the countryside in search of Wizards and if they found them engaged in them in a short but deadly combat.

The pieces at this stage fell into place. Originally the idea was publish according to the *GURPS* model; have one set of core rules plus supplements. Instead, it is deemed preferable to use the Chaosium model; whereby a set of compatible, but not identical rules are provided according to each temporal context thus allowing both in-depth concentration on the setting on-hand and ensuring that a degree of elegance in the game design.

Theme & Setting

The theme of the game is about the quest for supernatural power. The PCs are wizards or loyal allies who are engaging in the quest for the powers of Solomon in medieval Armenia during the eleventh century. In this quest for power they have access and at least nominal control over supernatural demonic forces, although some may be quite unfriendly. These demons are derived from the Ars Goetica section of the Lesser Key of Solomon and other, related, texts (e.g., *The Complete Book of Magical Science*, 1573) which provide for archangels and Olympian spirits.. These forces will

utilise their magical abilities but require the release of psychic humours through sacrifice. Thus the greater the quest for power the more depraved the character's become until they either (ultimately) reach the power that they so desire or find within themselves a solution.



The setting is in the first half of the 11th century in medieval Armenia. During this time, the old independent kingdom under the Bagratid dynasty was on the wane with pressure from both Byzantium and the Seljuks; historically the former took control of the region in 1045 and the latter in 1064 with the remains of the dynasty moving to

establish the Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia in 1078, which was not part of Armenia at all, but populated and controlled by a large number of Armenian refugees and provided important support to the Christian Crusaders until 1375. It should be possible in a properly designed chronicle to include all administrations in the course of the story development.

The Mimesis System

Impressed with the social and physical realism in *RuneQuest* and *GURPS*, yet also equally so by narrative-orientated games like *HeroQuest*, an attempt to merge the two directions in the form of the *Mimesis* role-playing system was developed. In many ways this game follows a traditional structure; there are relatively stable attributes largely derived from innate abilities, there are professions (with levels, no less) which include a collection of skills and knowledges, there are lists of equipment and so forth. The system is simple, but with a great deal of potential and complex elaboration (think in terms of the variation that is derived from the core mechanic in *Over The Edge*) and easily understandable within the existing tradition of roleplaying games. Insights in this particular were also gained by other games such as *Sorcerer* which emphasised the narrative tension with possession and *Kill Puppies for Satan* which pushed a model of "junkie" wizards constantly trading evil for magic from "pusher" infernal powers. Conversations

with fundamentalist monotheists explaining their notion of demons also proved helpful.

The first distinctive element is the game is a sharper and systematic clarification between players and characters. It is well-known that games like the *Hero System*, *GURPS*, and *HeroQuest* which provide bonus character points for the player's roleplaying activities encourage roleplaying in a systematic sense. But by the same token they confuse player rewards with character rewards; thus the Mimesis Role Playing System distinguishes between player points and character points. The former is a transferable value for players to invoke narrative elements; the latter is a representation of the character's power. A player may have many player points, but within the role of a weak character; a powerful character may be assigned few player points for narrative input. Characters will gain character points according to game-time and training, whereas players will gain player points during real time.

The attributes of the game are Strength, Dexterity, Agility, Perception, Intelligence, Spirit which are based with a human range of roughly 5-15 in the normal distribution and 3-18 in more extreme cases. The actual normal deviation varies in species and sex, but player-characters are built from a point-based method and as such, they are not subject to such statistical distributions. The attributes themselves were chosen with consideration of actual attributes, such as attempted in games like the rare *All-Adventure Roleplay Game* and *Little Fears*, both of which had attributes like Hands, Legs, Brains etc. The problem with this approach was that a degree of abstraction is necessary; consider the elephant's trunk - is that strength or dexterity or both? The latter is the true answer, but the representation has to be encapsulated in both attributes.

By the same token, attempts to correlate the abstract attributes with real attributes did mean developing what is believed to be a better sense of balance than a lot of games. With an unsurprisingly human-orientation for a game based around historical-fantasy, the *RuneQuest* trio of linked physical attributes; Size, Strength and Constitution seemed a little excessive and variations between such attributes could be better expressed as enhancements (e.g., dense musculature) and handicaps (e.g., overweight), as well-established by *GURPS*. Speaking of said game, it suffers a similar problem in the other direction; by fourth edition the editors have realised how overpowered IQ and DX are in that game - part of an early design flaw from the days of *The Fantasy Trip*. Instead in the Mimesis system Dexterity is split into Agility and (Manual) Dexterity, given that the two can and do vary significantly in a person and likewise Intelligence into Intelligence and Perception; the same applies. One may give a nod towards *DragonQuest* for being one of the earliest games to make both these distinctions (although it didn't have a Intelligence score as such). Intelligence is pure cognitive ability; it does not include skills, or general knowledge. The Spirit attribute takes up the role of communication ability, empathy and willpower and magical capacity.

Attributes are loosely coupled with skills and knowledges in the similar way to what is used in *Feng Shui* (yet another design credit to Robin D. Laws). For example, if a person has a skill in Writing, they have this ability as their ability to write, the knowledge of writings and a social circle of writers. Sometimes the appropriate attribute to the skill or knowledge will be Spirit; at other times Intelligence. The occasional case may arise where Perception or even Dexterity is the right attribute to link to the skill. Further to this the relative contribution of the attribute or skill will also vary. The *New World of Darkness* is one of the few games that gives some recognition to these differences by varying the default level among physical, mental and social skill groups. The fact of the matter is, however, that the ability to perform some skills (such as athletics) are very much dependent on physical attributes, whereas in many knowledges (such as Egyptian hieroglyphs) the contribution of innate Intelligence is slight at best. The Mimesis role-playing system varies the contribution of attribute and skill or knowledge depending on the type of action performed.

Like many games, from *Traveller* onwards *Mimesis* uses a roll versus target number system for successful completion of unopposed actions and a contest for opposed actions. This is a universal, yet adaptable, resolution method used throughout the game for all activities and conflicts. Taking a visceral note from *Earthdawn* (rolling different-sided dice simultaneously is interesting) and acknowledging (like *FUDGE*) that random implies positive and negative possibilities from the base score, the Mimesis game system provides variable positive or negative randomness based on rough estimation of environmental circumstances that are either unknowable or just too boring to calculate exactly in actual play. Thus an action could have a target number of 15 with a character with a base ability of 13. The positive modifiers

could provide an additional 1d8, whereas the negative modifiers a 1d6. Character points can be thrown in at this stage to give an additional plus or minus d20 - it's on the edge of plausibility, but allows just enough beneficial random possibilities for the *players* to get excited.

With a roll-over system with values the game system has no special need for criticals and fumbles, as these will be built into the results themselves. Further, there is no need for secondary rolls for effects as these will be derived from multiples from the degree of success. No more hitting your opponent by five over the required number then rolling a one for damage! There is a large degree of narrative input from both player and narrator as specific results rather than table look-ups and the like, and active encouragement to improvise results. Deriving from *HeroQuest*, the actual amount of dice-rolling is based on the narrative importance of the scene rather than the quantity of actions; an entire battle can be resolved in a single conflicted dice-roll and a negotiation with a merchant can take several with the haggling for the an item critical to the story going back and forth.

History and Cultural Anthropologies

A roleplaying system which emphases historical narratives will make use of story-telling mechanisms and especially the way that myths are formed, such as the distinction between synchronic and diachronic in Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology and modes of consciousness suggested by Jürgen Habermas. These narrative approaches are complemented by historical research in the actual practise of magic, as investigated by Bronislaw Malinowski, Sir James Frazer, Marcel Mauss etc.

A distinction is drawn between the paranormal, supernatural and psychic which equates to roughly the terms used in *Rolemaster* for Essence, Chanelling and Mentalism and the professions in *RuneQuest* such as Shaman, Priest and Wizard. Actual historical documents, like the "recipe-book" magic, protective amulets, Babylonian demon bowls and *defixiones* serve as examples to a the general principles of sympathetic magic, contagious magic, divination etc. As mentioned, these become tied to elemental and humour traditions which remain within their cultural contexts as being incommensurable; there is no attempt here to force particular instances of magical thinking to fit a universal game abstraction, rather the model must fit the reality.

On a wider scale, the Mimesis line of game products seeks to invigorate an interest in history with a narrative perspective. By concentrating on particular turning points (or would be turning points) and typically with a more exotic outlook players and GMs will be engaging in 'depth hermeneutics', putting themselves in the historical context and mentality of the people of an age.

There is no attempt here to do everything. The line of Mimesis game products does not pretend that it will be able to produce good games based on fantastic or science fiction and nor is it going to try. It will concentrate entirely on historical fantasy; that will its niche market as it were. Hopefully, it will contribute to making history and cultural anthropology interesting again.

SLURPS for GURPS (Semi-Linear Universal Role-Playing System)

by Karl Brown

These rules were written for the third edition but the core concept is valid for both latter and earlier editions of the game. SLURPS is a variant of GURPS that **instead of 3d6 uses a d20 for success rolls**. Still use d6s for all rolls not against a skill or attribute such as reaction rolls and damage rolls. This has three advantages:

1. Firstly, not having to add three die results together speeds play just that little bit.
2. Secondly, it increases the range of the numbers from 3-18 to 1-20 which may not sound like much but with characters like tiny pixies and strong apes this can make a huge difference.
3. Finally, SLURPS is linear. Discussion of this makes up the bulk of this article.

3d6 is much more likely to roll in the middle of its range (so the difference between 3 and 4 is much greater in terms of probability than the difference between 10 and 11) but attributes in GURPS are *linear* in all other respects (a ST 20 character can carry twice as much as an ST10 one). This means that a ST3 character is more likely to fail (less than 0.5% chance of success) than the ST10 one (50%), much more than the 7 difference in the attribute would indicate. If a d20 is used the die roll is *linear* and the chances of success or failure are back in proportion to the attribute values. Problem is this makes both critical successes and critical failures much more common, but wouldn't that even out? No, because in combat a critical success to attack may not be defended against. The other problem is the feel of the game changes if critical failures and successes seem much too common. Both of these problems are solved if the *probabilities* for criticals are returned to their likelihoods under the core GURPS rules.

To preserve the original probabilities in GURPS critical successes only occur if your effective skill is 15 and you roll a 1, or for skill 16+ rolls of 1-2. Critical failures follow this progression: effective skill 6, roll of 20; skill 5, roll of 19 or 20; skill 4, roll of 18-20; skill 3, roll of 15-20; skill 2, roll of 13-20; and skill 1, roll of 10-20. Note that under the original rules the chance of a critical success or failure with skill of 7+ or 14- respectively was less than 2%, since a an increment on a d20 is 5% these criticals have been removed and are replaced as follows: For all effective skills on a roll of 1 roll again, if the second roll is a success or a 1 you score a critical success. Similarly, on a roll of 20 roll again if that roll is a failure or a 20 your result is a critical failure.

To apply the critical success combat rule for high power campaigns (CII 73): Effective skill 20+, 1-4; skill 25+, 1-6; skill 30+, 1-8, skill 35+, 1-10. Again these figures have been worked to reproduce the probabilities from the official 3d6 version of the rule. I apply these chances of criticals for high skill to all fields of endeavour.

Critical Table

Effective Skill	Critical Failure	Critical Success
1	10-20	1 with another success.
2	13-20	1 with another success.
3	15-20	1 with another success.
4	18-20	1 with another success.
5	19-20	1 with another success.
6	20	1 with another success.

7-14	20 with another failure.	1 with another success.
15	20 with another failure.	1
16-18	20 with another failure.	1-2
19-20	20 with another failure.	1-4
21-25	20 with another failure.	1-6
26-30	20 with another failure.	1-8
31-35	20 with another failure.	1-10

Attack and Defence Rolls

Use the same rules as any other success roll. A critical attack always hits. A critical defence always defends *except* against a critical attack.

Will

Effective Will (after adjustments for the circumstances) may not exceed 16 (was 13). This includes the use of Will for alcohol consumption (CII165).

Rule of 20

This rule is unchanged. As per B87 attributes over 20 still are treated as 20 for calculating defaults.

Rule of 12/14

In SLURPS this becomes the Rule of 14 CI174. Ideally this would be noted in a species template.

Rule of 14/18

In the Basic rules regular contests are altered slightly if both of the characters involved have 14+ effective skill (B87). In the d20 GURPS this rule applied when both effective skills are 18+ ie. "...reduce the higher one to 18 then subtract the same amount from the lower one". Since both skills now must be over 18 this also has the advantage that the rule will not need to be applied as often. However, this rule becomes highly non-linear if there is more than a few points separating the opponents. For a better rule see below.

Scaling

From the following rule from Fantasy Folk should be applied to any attribute or skill not just ST:

"Contests of ST for Very Small or Very Large Creatures"

When resolving Contests of ST between two beings who both have ST scores of less than 6 (2 for SLURPS) or greater than 18 (20 in SLURPS), the ST scores should be scaled up or down by some constant factor to yield numbers within the range of a 3d roll (d20 in SLURPS), typically to around 10 or so. These "effective" ST scores should be used in the Contest in place of true ST. In this way, the relative ST of the two beings is what matters, not the absolute difference - which may be huge for large ST scores that differ by only a few percent, or negligible for small ST scores that differ by a large percentage.

Example 1: a ST 50 being is wrestling a ST 60 being. The GM reduces both ST scores by a factor of five - to 10 and 12, respectively. This makes the Contest a lot closer! This makes sense for beings whose ST differs by only 20%.

Example 2: a ST 2 being is wrestling a ST 1 being. The GM increases both ST scores by a factor of five - to 10 and 5, respectively. This makes the Contest a sure thing for the stronger being - which makes sense, since he is twice as strong."

If a particular species with very high or low attributes is common in a campaign it may be useful to pick a constant factor pre-calculate factored skills and attributes and record them on the character sheets.

Point Costs

Point costs are unchanged. A character twice as strong or smart pays more points because the population is a bell curve, most people they take on will be close to average, so the character will come out on top much more often.

Conversions

Since most GURPS rules rely on rely on the core mechanic, and we just changed that, not many other conversions are needed. If you do come across other rules that compare skills or attributes to a fixed number that need conversion here's a dandy table:

Conversion Table

3d6	Y : 216	%	SUM %	d20
3	1	0.46	0.46	0
4	3	1.39	1.85	0
5	9	4.17	6.02	1
6	12	5.56	11.57	2
7	15	6.94	18.52	4
8	21	9.72	28.24	6
9	23	10.65	38.89	8
10	24	11.11	50	10
11	24	11.11	61.11	12
12	23	10.65	71.76	14
13	21	9.72	81.48	16
14	15	6.94	88.43	18
15	12	5.56	93.98	19
16	9	4.17	98.15	20
17	3	1.39	99.54	20
18	1	0.46	100	20

Aging in SLURPS

Aging is conducted as per the usual rules (B83) with the conversion above, except that there is no chance of loosing 2pt from an attribute (17 or 18 on 3d6 is ~0.5% therefore no chance on a d20).

Animal training in SLURPS

Animal training (BE71) can be in blocks of days to reduce the number of rolls but if a roll fails multiple days can be lost as below:

Block size in days	SLURPS d20 roll = number of lost days
10	20=2
20	19=1, 20=4
40	18=1, 19=2, 20=6

Age of Fable: Online Text-Based Roleplaying

by James Hutchings

Question 1. When did the Age of Fable project start? Who has been involved?

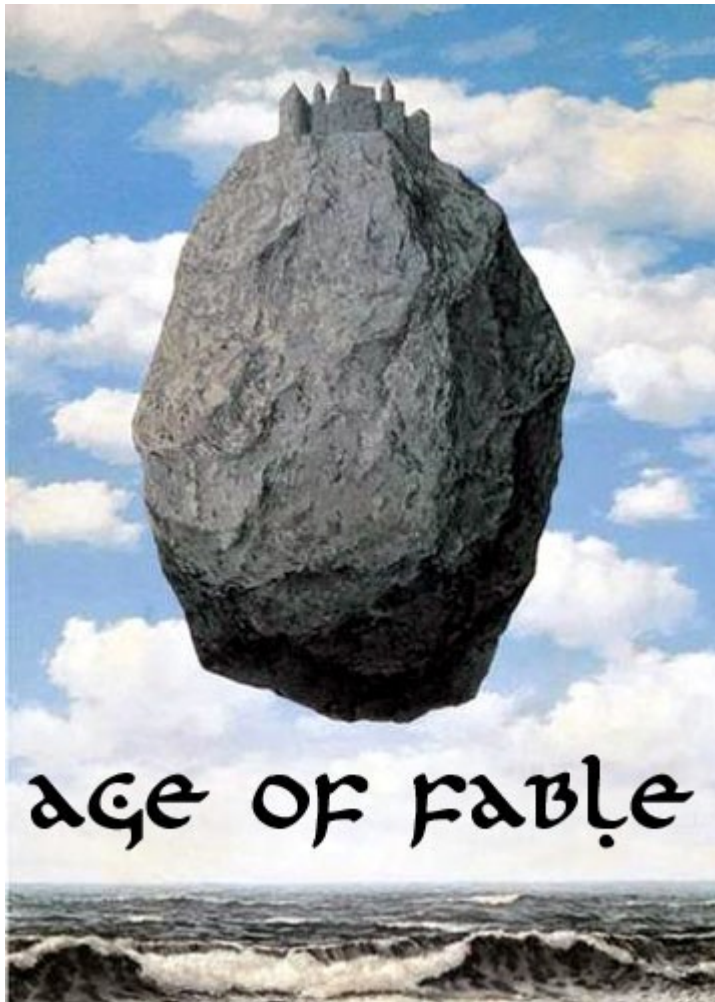
2006 . Just me. It is available at <http://www.ageoffable.net/>

Question 2. Can you explain the basic setting and plotline? Are there any dominant themes in the story?

I've tried to avoid having all three!

If I'd decided, for example, that the tone would be 'grim and gritty', then I couldn't use any pun ideas that I had. Or vice versa if it was going to be entirely joking. As it is, it has some pretty grim elements and some jokes, and I think it's better for it.

The same comments apply to the setting. The aim is to be able to put in any idea I have that I like, and not worry about whether it fits the setting. So in some ways it's a 'vanilla' Tolkien-via-D&D setting with elves, dwarves and hobbits.



However it often looks very Middle Eastern (due to a lot of the public-domain artwork I use), and there are elements from Ancient Greece and the 'Golden Age of piracy' in there as well.

One thing I've definitely tried to do is have a "fantasy setting rather than a D&D setting". So for example I've tried hard to have classes that are generally recognisable, but aren't taken from D&D. Thus you can be a pirate, fairy, talking cat, or amazon. In the same way I had a priest class but I got rid of it, when I realised that it was mostly in there because of the D&D cleric class. Similarly the barbarian and bard classes aren't particularly based on the D&D versions. In D&D terms a lot of the classes would probably be some combination of fighter and thief/rogue with high Charisma. But that's true of fantasy writing too, so I don't see that as a flaw.

Wanting generally recognisable types was also why I have 'racial classes'. You're a dwarf rather than a 'dwarf warrior' or whatever. Basic D&D got this right in my opinion, it makes 'fantasy sense'. Ask someone who's seen the Lord of the Rings movie what Legolas is and they'll say 'elf', unless they take the question as asking "what would Legolas be as a character in a role-playing game".

So if there are any themes, they arise as a result of what I'm interested in, rather than a decision to have a theme. That's probably why there are

anarchist rebels in there I suppose.

Question 3. Is the underlying game engine based on anything previous RPG or choose-your-own-adventure game?

It was originally based on two series, both co-written by Dave Morris: the 'Fabled Lands' series, and the 'Virtual Reality' series of gamebooks - especially 'Down Among the Dead Men.' The Virtual Reality series, by the way, has nothing to do with virtual reality, that was just a gee-whiz phrase at the time. In fact most of the series is fantasy.

Some of the names of the attributes are the same as in 'Down Among the Dead Men': 'Seafaring', 'Roguary' & 'Streetwise'. Also I originally had 'Brawling' and 'Swordplay' as the combat attributes.

The original pre-generated characters were converted fairly directly from those in the Fabled Lands series

More generally, both series freely mixed 'skills' and 'attributes', where most pen and paper role-playing games will separate them. So in the Virtual Reality series 'Agility' or 'Cunning' is treated in the same way as 'Seafaring' or 'Spells'. I used the same approach in Age of Fable. This works fine for a gamebook-style game, because of course I can control exactly how much each attribute is used. In a pen-and-paper game you'd probably find the broader 'attributes' being used all the time, and so being too good.

The actual system that the game uses is very simple, and found in many pen-and-paper games as well as in gamebooks (I think first in Tunnels & Trolls): the system 'rolls' 2d6 and adds the relevant attribute, comparing the result to a target number.

I deliberately didn't add anything to that, not even a combat system (which most gamebooks will have). This was partly in reaction to Fabled Lands which has an attribute called 'Combat', which is quite unbalanced, and so unfortunately playing a warrior-type is much easier. Likewise in Fighting Fantasy, if your combat abilities aren't towards the higher end you can be doomed regardless of what choices you make. Also not having a combat system forces me to think of more interesting things to happen. I can't just go "oh, then some orcs attack you" to make it 'harder'.

Another thing I got from Virtual Reality was the use of keywords (they're in Fabled Lands as well). In particular situations you get told to note down a particular word, then later branchings might depend on whether you have that word. It covers 'plot' elements, for example if your boat is leaking, or if you've befriended or made enemies of a non-player character. I think Fighting Fantasy sometimes does the same thing in a more informal way; for example "if you've already met the vampire, turn to..." Anyway it allows for a lot more interesting connections between different encounters. For example in at least one case in Age of Fable a character can come back seeking revenge for something you've done.

'Fabled Lands' was unusual for gamebooks in that you had a lot of freedom to wander around. The downside was that it could be quite hard to 'get into an adventure'. So I tried to avoid this with Age of Fable.

Like most people with any experience of gamebooks, I've read a lot of Fighting Fantasy. Having 'Stamina' as the 'Hit Points' attribute is taken from there. Probably the idea of a 'Luck' attribute did as well, although Tunnels & Trolls also has one.

I've actually reacted against Fighting Fantasy to a great extent. One thing I don't like is having to go through the same bits again before you get to something 'new'. This seems to be most people's preference. So I've done two things to try and minimise that.

Firstly, the order in which you have various encounters is highly random. So choosing to 'explore the city' might get you to any number of different places, whereas in a gamebook you'd usually find that if you leave encounter A and 'turn left', you get encounter B (they could have multiple possibilities by having a table which you roll on, but they almost always don't). This also minimises meaningless 'choices' like "go north or go east", which is really just a random decision in disguise.

The second thing I've done is to minimise the number of good choices and bad choices, Instead, which choice is better

usually depends on the state of your character, especially their attributes. So if you play the game again with a different character, and end up in the same place, you can't just remember that "ah, I'm supposed to attack the goblin, which will give me the key. Then I go left at the junction and use the key on the locked door..."

Question 4. The source-code for Age of Fable is open. Are you aware of any other online games of this nature which are derived from this code?

Unfortunately no, I don't.

I think maybe it's partly because of another project, ffproject.com, where the maintainer will code people's homebrew Fighting Fantasy adventures. I guess this is an easier option for most people.

Also there are a number of programs for writing gamebook-style adventures, which generally require no programming knowledge.

And finally, of course, a lot of people just write things and put them up as text files, rather than as files you can play in a browser.

So I guess there are just easier options out there.

The reason I made the code open-source is that someone wanted to use it as an example file in a game-creation program they were writing. But whether that ever got released or not I don't know.

Tribes of Eyha: A RuneQuest Story

by Chris Gilmore

INTRODUCTION

This is an excerpt from the Tribes of Eyha campaign log, a campaign which is currently being played by four players plus gamemaster. The campaign can be classified as a Bronze Age fantasy campaign which draws inspiration from many sources, both historical and fictional. The specific inspiration for the first session comes from an episode mentioned in the tales of Sindbad from the 1001 Nights. A similar myth is also described in the travels of Marco Polo. The inspiration for the second session comes from a creature created by Tony Den (the Razor Shells) and featured on his website (www.runequest.za.org). The inspiration for the third scenario is the Fritz Leiber tale "The Howling Tower" which appears in "Swords Against Death" published by Ace Fantasy.

Characters: Baran and Clovis are two Tribelander from the distant north. Baran is on a quest to discover something of the strange tattoos which adorn his body. Clovis, his brother, has come along as his protector. Clovis was a respected March Warden of the Tribes, and likes to blow his Warden's Horn before charging into battle. Eshubir and Lugesha and both agents of house Suzur in the southern city of Pavonis. The two Tribelander helped them out with a spot of trouble in the City of Pavonis, and they now travel together. Maram, a slave girl of unknown origin, is a non-player character recently rescued from scorpionmen.

Location: The Kingdom of Assaria which, landscape-wise, can be likened to Iraq in our own world. This story takes place in the summer, and so the weather is hot and dry.

Background: In previous sessions, the party had been travelling westward, following the course of the great river. After a series of adventures in the hinterland of the Empire of Pavonis (which involved freeing slaves from the larder of Scorpionmen in an ancient desert city and a desperate chase on the river by pole-propelled reed barge) our Heroes have finally crossed the border into the Kingdom of Assaria, where they hope to finally be free of Pavonian political intrigue. This session begins in a small Assarian village not too far from the border. There is a merchant's enclave here where the heroes have put up for the night where they hoped to sell two of their donkeys to earn some money.

In this village, the Heroes were introduced to Pap Hallu, a small Assarian man with a long beard, and who offered to purchase their donkeys. By means of payment, he offered a small handful of crystals which, upon inspection, turned out to be uncut diamonds. Eshubir estimated that these were worth more than the donkeys and so the group was naturally intrigued by the whole transaction. After some discussion, Pap Hallu offered to pay them yet more diamonds if they would perform a service for him. Needing money, they agreed to meet him the next morning in the village.

SESSION 1: THE VALLEY OF THE DIAMONDS:

The next day Pap Hallu was waiting for our heroes in the village with one of the two donkeys he had bought from them the day before. He led the group away from the village on foot, trailing the donkey with a tether. They travelled in a vaguely southeast direction, passing through fertile and irrigated farmland with young crops of corn, wheat, flax, and barley. The Assarians, like the Pavonians, have dug numerous canals in from the river to assist with the growing of crops. After some hours, the farmland gave way to a tall grass savannah, and they followed what they took to be a game trail through the grass. Lugesha, the tallest of the party, was given the task of scanning the horizon looking for beasts or other things that Pap Hallu called 'dancing sticks' (evidently the long spears of Zalamaran tribesmen, when seen over the tall grass in the distance, look like dancing sticks). Luckily they did not see anything except for an occasional flat-topped tree on the horizon.

By mid afternoon the little band of travellers could to see an elevated piece of ground in the distance, and by late afternoon they were climbing up the sides of some sort of old volcanic plateau. Nothing grew on this rock outcrop except for the sparsest of weeds, and there were signs of small animal life and birds. Pap Hallu led them to a small, roughly circular valley near the middle of this plateau where a jagged chasm cut across the floor. He set most of the

party to keeping a lookout in various locations while he proceeded to kill, skin, and butcher the donkey he had brought. Baran and Clovis, who had the most experience with these things, helped him. When finished, Pap Hallu threw the pieces into the chasm at various points while the rest of them watched. He then instructed everyone to keep a lookout in the sky and said that soon great birds called Rukhs would come. He explained that these great birds would fly into the chasm to retrieve the donkey meat, which would now be studded with uncut diamonds from where they grew on the bottom of the chasm. He said that the bottom of the chasm was inhabited by dangerous snakes, so this was the only way to retrieve the diamonds. Explanations done, he crouched under a rock, sheltering from the hot sun while our heroes stood on the rock ledges and watched.

After a while Clovis noticed some birds approaching and called to the others. Everyone descended from their lookouts and hid near Pap Hallu in the shadow of the cliffs. Soon five very large birds arrived and perched at various places on the cliff-tops which circled the valley. The Rukhs stayed there for a while, looking around apprehensively until they determined that it was safe to descend. Then one by one the giant birds left their perches and flew into the chasm, and one by one they re-emerged with a large hunk of donkey meat in their talons and returned to the cliff tops. Once back on the cliff tops, they set to tearing at the donkey meat with their colossal beaks. At this point Pap Hallu told Adventurers it was time to climb up, in pairs, and kill the birds and to be sure to bring back the donkey meat when they were done.

Baran and Lugesha chose to attack the bird on the west side of the valley while Clovis and Eshubir chose the bird far to the southeast. Maram the slave girl and Pap Hallu remained below, under cover of some rocks. While Baran and Lugesha were climbing up the west side, Clovis and Eshubir began to attack their bird from the bottom of the valley by launching arrows and slingstones at the bird. This drew the ire of Pap Hallu, who came out of his shelter to scold the two - telling them go up on top and fight like men so that they could bring the donkey meat back. Slightly chastened and slightly annoyed at this bossy little man, Clovis and Esh began to haul their bodies up to the top of the cliff.

Baran and Lugesha reached their bird first and, while Baran distracted the bird by limping around, Lugesha threw his combat net over the bird's head, preventing it from flying away. The two then quickly killed their bird with a few quick blows from their spears.

Meanwhile, Esh and Clovis had reached the top of their cliff and drew their melee weapons. From their cliff-top vantage point Clovis surveyed the surroundings and noted the four remaining birds scattered about, tearing off pieces of donkey, and he also saw that Baran and Lugesha were already engaged with the fifth bird far on the other side of the valley. A familiar idea formed in Clovis' mind.

He drew out his March Warden's horn from its case. He held it up above his head and let it catch the light of the afternoon sun for a moment, admiring it. It was a family heirloom, won by a distant ancestor from the King Ram of the Mountains in a bygone era. The bony ridges of the horn had been worn smooth by the hands of generations of esteemed March Wardens, and the marbling of the bone was clearly visible in the western sunlight. Both ends of the horn were plated with bronze, and the bronze was in turn embossed with raised images depicting the victories of Clovis' ancestors. The horn sat comfortably in his hand, like the breast of Mother Noahe Herself. It was like an old friend, a mentor, a lover, and a reminder of the nobility and greatness of the Tribe. He smiled at the horn and it smiled back at him.

Clovis arched his back and drew in a great breath of air. Then he put the horn to his sweaty, eager lips. It had the taste of blood, and of victory. With a great exhalation, he blew into that horn for all he was worth, and from it came the sound of Mothers of the Tribe crying over lost sons, of lambs bleating in the folds, of waves crashing onto the shore of the lake, and of all the proud songs of tribesmen rolled into one. It was the sound of home, and it brought a tear to Clovis's eye.

And the moment he blew that horn, the great birds caught a frisson of fear that told them a mighty warrior was nearby, and one by one they put to flight, lazily winging their way toward the west and taking their hunks of diamond studded meat with them. Only the bird that Baran and Lugesha had killed remained behind, slumped over the cliff top.

Well, needless to say neither Pap Hallu nor Clovis' brother Baran (who held the party's purse) was very pleased with

Clovis. Both gave him a stern talking to for foolishly scaring away the Rukhs and tried to make him see the error of his ways (which, I think, he did). And the group stood about for a minute looking at each other, wondering what to do next, for most of the diamonds they had risked their lives to get had now flown away.

And then Baran said "I have an idea." Everyone looked hopefully at him.

"What is it?" asked Clovis, hoping that this would mean the end of the negative attention he had been getting.

"First, let me see that horn" Baran replied, stretching out his hand."

"Sure" said Clovis, handing it over.

And what followed will forever be etched in Clovis' mind, for with a rebel yell, Baran heaved the priceless horn over the brink of that demonic chasm, and it tumbled into the depths to lie like a fallen warrior in eternal silence amongst the poisonous snakes and precious diamonds at the distant bottom.

What followed was the kind of argument that only brothers can have. Clovis accused Baran of abandoning tradition for the sake of a little money, and Baran pointed out that Clovis blew that blasted horn each and every time they needed discretion (which was most of the time), warning the foes that the rest of the party was trying to sneak up on. It seemed the rest of the group sided with Baran and so Clovis was cowed and apologized, saying that what he had hoped to do was to scare the birds away, but thought they would leave their meat behind.

Luckily for the group, Eshubir thought he had seen where the birds had gone to, so as a group all four of the warriors scrambled over the broken, volcanic landscape for a difficult hour to find the Rukh's nest in the west on a flat-topped pillar of rock. Maram and Pap Hallu followed a little way behind

The four young Rukhs were now perched safely in their nest and were finishing off their meal of delicious (if gritty) donkey meat. So the four adventurers tried to climb up the side of the rocky pillar and into the nest to grab what they could of the diamond-studded flesh from the Rukhs. Esh was up first, being the nimblest, and Baran next. But Esh took a blow to the head early in the battle and was knocked unconscious. Clovis climbed up next and he and Baran fought the birds for as long as they could, killing two of them. Lugesha, in the meantime was stuck halfway up the side of the rocky pillar, not being able to find a foothold to move any further in any direction.

Then with a lucky scan Clovis spotted an even larger bird approaching from the distant west, the Mother Rukh, and called for a retreat. He picked up the unconscious Esh and was about to attempt to leap down to the ground with him (or throw Esh down first - this part of the tale is not clear) while Baran fought off the other two young birds, scaring them to take flight out of the nest. Baran then called on the spirit of Elienna to heal Eshubir, and Clovis and Esh climbed down. Baran picked up what scraps of meat he could still find in the bottom of the nest and followed seconds later. While Baran was still climbing down, Clovis killed one of the circling young birds with an arrow from the ground, and as the great mother bird approached, all three of them were running for the shelter of the cliff face. They looked back only to notice poor Lugesha still clinging to the cliff face, unable to find his way down.

At that point, the great bird arrived and circled the great rock pier on top of which the nest was perched. It grabbed Lugesha by the head with a single great claw and tried to lift him into the air. But Lugesha is a big boy, and the bird struggled with the dangling warrior who writhed beneath. Lugesha grabbed at the leg of the bird and held on, which was lucky as he was unable to see very well. Seconds later the great bird was filled with arrows (and sling stones), for Baran, Eshubir, and Clovis had returned to rescue him. The great bird was knocked unconscious by an arrow to the head, whereupon it let go of Lugesha who dropped to the ground and sprained his ankle. Half a second later the great Rukh fell on top of him. Luckily, Lugesha escaped being wounded by this as it seems most of the bird's bulk was feathers. Lugesha killed the great bird with a spiteful blow, but it was decided not to take souvenirs since they might cause more trouble with the local tribes (who held them sacred) than they were worth.

They harvested what remaining diamonds they could and made a camp for the night in a sheltered location. The next day they returned to the village and Pap Hallu gave them another handful of diamonds for their trouble. They parted

ways amicably enough, but they could not help feeling that Pap Hallu would be hiring other people the next time he needed Rukh hunters to do a job for him.

INTERVAL:

The party of five then proceeded to the west, entering the City of Assaria a few days later. It was here that, through a chance encounter, Eshubir and Lugesha found their old employer from Pavonis, the traitorous Procurer Sagga Mal. With the help of a rival agent from their own house (a man named Sharuris the Shucker for his habit of leaving fish-eyes (pearls) as a calling card with his victims) they finally put an end to their political troubles back home. They decided to reward themselves to a stay in the city of Assaria, and to hire a master to train their bodies to greater strength. The master's newly developed 'Beer Swilling Technique' looked promising...

SESSION 2: THE RAZOR SHELLS

Having trained for 7 weeks with no result in an effort to build up some muscle tissue (which they hoped would allow them to carry their heavy armour better), Baran and Lugesha decided they needed to give the training another go. Unfortunately the first bout of training depleted their funds, so their trainer introduced them to a friend of his who was willing to hire them for a service. This man was named Gigiris - a chariot maker.

Gigiris' business had been very busy lately, with a lot of Akkanians wanting to purchase chariots. In a normal year he would collect all the young wood he needed for the chariot rails in the winter, but this year he ran out early so he sent his young apprentice (Amar) and a labourer (Degdega) to go and cut some more. These were cut from a specific cospe of Dimshilum trees located about a day's travel out in the Savannah to the southeast of the city. Unfortunately, it had been a week ago since he had sent them and neither the boy nor the labourer had come back. Gigiris' business was about to stall, his client was getting anxious, and the apprentice's father was starting to ask questions. So Baran, Eshubir, Lugesha, and Maram agreed to go and look for them. They tried to find Clovis to go with them, but he wasn't around - probably out with his latest girl - so they left on this venture without him.

The party made their way south into the savannah by foot. They camped the first night in the long grass and carried on in the morning, following what appeared to be a week-old wagon trail. By noon, the shoulder height grass of the savannah started to become shorter and then rapidly fell to nothing. They had come to a clearing in the tall grass that was about 300M across. The floor of the clearing was caked with mud which was dry and cracking on the surface but still moist down below - it appeared to be an ephemeral lake which was now drying up. Annoying flies of all types buzzed around the place, never settling long enough to swat. Clear tracks of a man on foot, an ox, and a four wheeled cart led straight into the heart of the clearing, and at it's centre could be seen a wagon lying on it's side, and in front of it a dark lump which appeared to be a dead ox.

The group started to walk out into the clearing toward the wagon when first Baran and then Lugesha felt a sharp pain in their foot. They had not been wearing armour due to the heat of the season, and whatever had stung them cut right through their skin. On looking down they found that they had each been pierced with a small barb attached to leathery tether that disappeared in the mud. The tethers had the appearance of tough intestines and were about 2M long when pulled taught. Baran reacted first and tried to run back to the edge of the clearing, but was almost tripped up by the tether which held him fast to the place where it emerged from the mud. So instead he hacked at the tether with his axe until it broke, and then ran for the edge of the clearing with Maram still at his side. He was narrowly missed by another barb as they ran, but she was struck and cried out in pain. Baran rapidly cut her tether and the two of them dove for the edge of the clearing where they gingerly removed the barbs and healed themselves with magic.

Lugesha had a harder time of it. Armed only with his spear and net and lacking a good cutting edge, he decided to try to pull the offending dart-launcher from under the mud while the barb was still stuck in his foot. After several good heaves, though, he couldn't dislodge the culprit (though he could see the mud heaving slightly where it was buried), so he resorted to yanking the barb from his foot instead, causing himself more pain and leaving a large purple wound. He limped to safety at the edge of the clearing. Meanwhile, Eshubir, being light of foot, managed to avoid getting barbed at all and sat on the side of the clearing shouting advice to the others.

Rather than attempt to cross the mud again, the group circled the clearing to the west. After travelling around about a third of the way, they discovered a flattened spot in the grass - a place showing signs of recent activity by many people. Examining the ground here, they also noticed a series of small, round holes leading out towards the fallen wagon. These holes were about 2-3" in diameter and 6-12" deep, but the party could make no sense of them. The party then followed the flattened grass as it lead away from the clearing to the west came to a north-south running game trail. They followed the game trail north for ways, then south and found that it led to a copse of trees that had been pollarded for the harvest of many supple young stems. This was apparently the place Gigiris got his wood. Upon seeing this, Baran had the idea to cut two long straight stems with his axe. He then drove one knife into the side of each of them at about waist height, tying the knives in place. He held the posts upright and stood on the horizontal knife handles and found that they just might hold his weight and, with some agility, he could walk on these artificial legs, which he called 'stilts' after his uncle Stiltibris back in the Tribelands who had long legs.

They returned then to dried up pond and Baran coaxed Esh (who was the most agile of the group) up onto the makeshift 'stilts'. Esh practiced a bit on the makeshift legs and then walked carefully out into the mud where he could hear the occasional popping of a dart beneath him. He made it to the fallen wagon without incident and upon investigation found it to be empty. The black ox, though, was clearly dead and was laying on its side and was still harnessed to the wagon. A thick cloud of flies hovered over ox, buzzing angrily when Esh came near. From this vantage point on top of the 'stilts', Eshubir could see a single set of human footprints heading from the wagon to the opposite (east) side of the clearing. Judging by the tracks, whoever had made them must have fallen about halfway across, then got up and continued but this time dragging something behind them. Esh shouted his discovery to the others and, wiping the sweat of the afternoon sun from his brow, set off on the stilts again to the east. The others ran around the south end of the clearing and joined up with him. Lying in the long grass a few yards from the edge was a human body - probably that of Gigiris' labourer, Degdega.

The body had been dead a few days, too. One of the sharp barbs was stuck into the inside of the upper thigh and this connected to a two yard long tether. Attached to the other end of the tether was an oblong object caked in dried mud. It was about 1M long and 20cm wide and 5cm thick and seemed to be made of two hard shells held tightly together with a round protuberance at one end from which the tether extended. Baran pried this thing open and found it to be fleshy inside - like the inside of a clam from the lake near his home in the distant Tribelands.

He cleaned out the insides and fashioned a makeshift pair of ski-like shoes, tying them to his feet with rope. He was about to set off again toward the wagon when Eshubir spoke up.

"Hey - wait a minute. Didn't they see that those tethers are about 6 feet long? Those shell shoes of yours aren't going to protect your groin! Look at this poor sap lying here dead, pierced in the upper thigh!" he said, pointing to Degdega's body.

"You're right." said Baran, and so took off the shoes and donned his armoured pants, then put the shell shoes back on, and at last marched out toward the wagon.

On the way, he could hear the pops of more darts, but nothing penetrated his pants. He reached the wagon just at the moment that the ropes holding his shoes on fell apart, and so he jumped into the wagon and tied them up again. Then he hopped back to the ground and untied the ox harness and, with a great heave, righted the wagon. He then took hold of the harness and, walking backwards, slowly dragged the wagon about 3M closer to the edge of the pond, whereupon he hitched a rope to it and, with the help of those on the edge of the clearing pulling on the rope, pulled the wagon the rest of the way. In the last few yards he heard a 'POP' sound and a dart nailed him in the groin, just piercing his armoured pants through the seam. With a yell he cut the tether and leaped for the edge of the grass where he once again lay down and healed himself.

The group spent the rest of the afternoon hauling the wagon through the long grass to the copse of trees and set up camp there for the night. The next day they awoke to find that all those who were stuck by the barbs had a fever, and deduced that they had been weakened by a poison which came from the barbs. One of the effects of this poison (besides a physical weakening) was a loss of memory which seemed to impact Lugesha the most. They spent that whole day recovering from the poison and taking turns (when they had the energy) cutting stems with Baran's axe and piling them into the wagon. On the third day in the savannah, they set off north again, this time following the game trail they had

previously discovered. It was a tough slog, but taking turns they managed to make progress. They camped one more night in the open, and on the last day they came across a party of Zalamaran nomads coming south, their long spears seen dancing high above the top of the grass long before they themselves were seen.

Eshubir seemed to be able to communicate best with them, despite not speaking their language. First he tricked them into selling a number of exotic striped animal hides for a pittance, and then he seemed to get across to them that they were looking for a boy - one who might be injured. At this, the Zalamarans gestured that they had seen just such a boy and rescued him (making stilt-like walking motions) and brought him to some farmers at the south of Assarian territory. With that, the two parties left, the Zalamarans continuing south and our Adventurers heading north.

Soon the adventurers arrived at a small farm on the edge of the settled lands of Assaria. Sure enough, they found the boy in the care of the farmers and so they took him back to Gigiris. The boy, it seemed, had been so impacted by the poison of the razor shells that he had forgotten who he was and where he belonged. Gigiris was happy to have his wagon load of wood (and paid the adventurers fairly for it) but not too glad to hear about the death of Degdega and to now have an apprentice who couldn't remember any of what he had learned. "At least," said Baran "he also doesn't remember his bad habits." Gigiris only sighed and paid them their money. Our party then departed to get a good night's rest in a reasonable bed and look for Baran's brother Clovis, whom they had not seen now in four days.

SESSION 3: THE POTION-MAKER

Upon returning back to the 'inn' (so called, it seems to the Tribesmen, because these camps are located 'in' the city) from the escapade with the Razor Shells, Baran was hoping to find Clovis, his brother, in the room they shared. But there was no sign of Clovis having been in that day, nor in fact for any of the last several days. The boy Baran had paid to give a message to Clovis hadn't seen him, so Baran started to worry and expressed his worry to his friends Eshubir, Lugesha, and Maram. They agreed to look for him.

First they went to this 'inn' with the dancing girls that Clovis had been frequenting. They spoke to the owner there and a few of the girls and found that the girl that Clovis had been seeing, one Ilati, had also not been seen in several days. When they suggested that maybe foul play was afoot, the owner of the establishment agreed to help them. Together, they convinced one of the girls who knew Ilati to lead the adventurers to Ilati's house, where Esh discretely climbed over the roof, let himself in a window, and then let the others in the front door.

A thorough search of the place revealed a broken sandal strap under the bed apparently from Clovis' sandal because it matched one from Baran's sandal, and they had purchased them together in the now distant town of Telpa. They also found a number of small containers on a shelf, most of which were empty but one of which had a bit of lemon-smelling liquid in it. They asked the girl who led them to the house about the vials and she said it clearly wasn't perfume - in fact it could have been a love potion which she believed Ilati might have been using on Clovis. When asked where Ilati might have bought a potion like this, they were directed to a seller of elixirs in the fashionable east end of Assaria.

Taking the potion to this seller, she recognized it immediately as being the shoddy work of one Geshpapalis, a potion-maker who had tried to sell his poor work to her on numerous occasions. She didn't trust this Geshpapalis, however, and refused to deal with him, so she consequently didn't know much about him. The party asked if she could direct them to a reputable potion-maker to identify the ingredients and tell them whether it was addictive or not (which she did) and also to a less reputable shop-keeper who might agree to sell Geshpapalis' poor potions (which she also did).

Here the party split up. Eshubir took the sample of love potion to the reputable alchemist and found out that it would take many experiments and more of the sample potion than was available to suss out the actual ingredients, but a quick sniff of the stuff led him to believe that it likely wasn't that addictive over the short term (which had been one of their fears). Esh (keeping the remaining love potion for his own potential use) left and returned to the 'inn' where our heroes were staying and waited for the others.

Meanwhile, Baran and Lugesha went to the disreputable shop keeper in the west end to inquire after Geshpapalis. After warming the man up by purchasing some Crotch Crab ointment, they finally offered him a small amount of money to reveal the location of Geshpapalis' workshop out in the country, which the man gladly took. As they left, Baran turned and said threateningly to the man "And remember, we haven't been here."

To which the shopkeeper jingled his newly earned bag of shekels, smiled a toothless grin, and replied with a wink "And

they remember that I ain't been here, neither".

With this new information, Esh, Baran, and Lugesha marched out into the country that evening to find this Geshpapalis. Following the disreputable shopkeeper's directions, they came across a lonely wood-and-reed house in the middle of a wooded area surrounded by bushes and date palms. There they heard the faint sound of Jackals attacking prey as they approached. Esh crept up to the window of this house and looked inside – and the sound of jackals grow louder as he did so. Peering in, he saw that the room was hung with dried herbs, animal intestines, and other parts of things less easy to describe. The walls were lined with clay amphorae and there was a variety of smaller containers on shelves on the walls. A man was puttering inside over a copper cauldron. When Baran and Lugesha tried to sneak up to the window, this man apparently heard them and made a hasty retreat out the back door, leaving it open. Esh watched him as he slunk across a fenced in enclosure and into another, smaller hut on the other side of the yard.

Baran and Lugesha entered the main house and looked around for a moment before following the man out into the fenced yard and to the door of the smaller hut. Esh, meanwhile, crept around the outside of the yard and climbed onto the roof (ever the refuge of a small man) of the hut. When they entered the fenced enclosure, Baran and Lugesha heard the sound of the Jackals quite clearly, but still there was no sign of any such beasts to be seen. The hesitated only briefly at the door of the hut and then, with two hasty kicks, they broke in the door while Esh listened from the roof. What they saw inside startled them, for Baran's brother Clovis was lying unconscious on a bier in the middle of the small hut and was swathed in bandages, some of which were bloodstained. As they looked on in horror, they saw Clovis' body jerk and a fresh patch of blood spread across an otherwise clean bandage. The potion-maker, Geshpapalis, stood behind the bier looking at the two intruders over Clovis' body..

Baran and Lugesha circled the bier on either side of the tiny room and trapped the man between them. Esh, meanwhile, dropped down into the open doorway and blocked all escape. And so they put the question to him: "What in the name of the Great Spirits is going on here?"

Geshpapalis stammered out an explanation, saying that Clovis was here to do a job for him. But a little threat of violence can often straighten a man's tongue and the truth came out:

Geshpapalis had been selling a love potion to Ilati to help her in her amorous conquests. It wasn't a particularly good potion, so she had to buy a lot of it. One day she told him about this fierce northern barbarian who she was seeing and Geshpapalis developed an idea. Instead of love potion, he gave her something to knock this barbarian unconscious for a few days. Sure enough Ilati came running to him worried she had given Clovis an overdose of the potion and that he was dead. Geshpapalis told Ilati that he would "take care of it" and that she should go into hiding for a week or two. Geshpapalis then loaded Clovis into a cart and brought him home, tied him to this bed and fed him another potion to send him into the spirit plane. Geshpapalis explained that he was haunted by the ghosts of the jackals he had captured, mutilated, and killed over the years in this very enclosure, using bits of them for his potions. He had sent Clovis's spirit in alone to fight these jackals, while he watched over the body and healed its wounds as well as he could.

Baran looked down on the body of his brother. It jerked occasionally and his lips were pursed as if blowing into a phantom horn. At that moment another bloody patch spread across a bandage and Baran realised Clovis had been lying here for days now and this travesty must be stopped. He told Geshpapalis to put an end to it now, but the potion-maker explained he couldn't bring the body back so simply - the only way for Clovis to come back was for him to kill all the jackals. He then said that, if Baran and the others would be willing, there was enough potion left to send the adventurers into the spirit plane to help Clovis fight, and that this would end the battle sooner and ensure victory. Geshpapalis would take care of their bodies while they were gone, so they needn't fear. Baran and the others stepped outside the hut to confer a moment while Geshpapalis dabbed at one of Clovis' fresh wounds with a healing compound.

In conference outside, the three friends agreed to go into the spirit plane if they must, but said that Geshpapalis must be forced to go first. So they re-entered the room and told the alchemist they would do as he suggested. Lugesha then took the potion and, at that moment, Baran reached across for Geshpapalis in a grapple. Unfortunately, he missed the wiry old man and grabbed Lugesha's arm instead. Alarmed, the alchemist climbed onto the bier and dove for the door of the hut, intending to knock Eshubir aside and run away. But Esh kned the man in the groin as he did so, causing him to fall to the ground in pain and the three friends pounced on him and forced that potion down his throat.

As soon as Geshpapalis swallowed the potion, the baying of the Jackals grew wild and large gashes started to appear all over the alchemist's body. He writhed in pain as his flesh was flayed by ghostly teeth, and in moments it was over. The alchemist lay dead, and Clovis woke up. They explained to him what had happened and tended to his wounds.

Afterwards, the party spent a little time searching through the alchemist's belongings for valuables. They found a number of vials and skins of suspicious liquids, as well as a number of dry ingredients. They took these, hoping to get some money for them from another alchemist in the city, and then they left to return to the 'Inn' and finally get that good night's sleep.

No-one noticed as Clovis, lingering behind in Geshpapalis' house for a moment, pocketed one item of particular interest from the potion-maker's apparatus. It was apparently some sort of bronze tube-like instrument with a long, straight neck and a flared end down which liquids would be poured, apparently useful for getting liquids and powders into small-necked jars. Clovis gave it a quick rinse in a barrel of water and wiped off the small end of the funnel. With a twinkle in his eye, he put this narrow end of this object to his lips and held the other end up high. But then a wiser thought crossed his mind, and he quietly tucked the instrument into his pack and left to follow the others with a smile on his face. He was sure it would come in useful later.

From here, the Adventurers eventually travel into the lands of the Akkanian Empire where they fall into the clutches of the Amalnukris, the Sharru of Kish, who imprisons them and puts them to work in the Lirum, an ancient arena where gladiators fight beasts of legend and race chariots around. It is in the catacombs beneath this arena that they will learn something of the strange tattoos which adorn Baran's body...



Empty Chambers, Spent Shells: A Feng Shui Western

by Kevin Powe

THE WORLD

The world here is not like ours, and yet is. There are some things you must know, traveller.

The world has moved on, first and foremost. The world is falling into disrepair and ruin, falling from past grandeur. There are relics of earlier times, of the Old Ways, littered throughout the world like bones of long-forgotten creatures. Most do not work. Those relics that are left are treated with mythical reverence – like ominous trickster gods. Time is no longer a reliable constant. It is more an elastic thing, given to its own senile whims.

The time of civilisation is gone. The great cities are lost, destroyed by the Great War. Their names slipping from the memory even of those who grew up amongst their vast spires, who walked their streets bathed in the glow of Electric Light.

The time of Gunslingers is passing. Trained from youth, these men and women were schooled to become living weapons, their pistols extensions of themselves. Calculating, steely killers. But now the Circle is lost – the place where Gunslingers were made by the trial of combat. Once, Gunslingers were a reminder of the order at the heart of things. Now, they are rarer than charity, though their powers are still legendary – even more so in this dying time.

The Great War saw an end to most of the Gunslingers. It may have burnt out two years ago, it may have been ten. Difficult to say with time being what it is. For most who survived it, it was a faroff clamouring, a source of gossip. For those who served, it was a bloody chaos that spent the last of the world's grandness. It ate the secrets of Old Ways, with countless machines and those who could operate them lost to battle, it eroded the numbers of the Gunslingers, and it swept through the great cities, laying them low. A hungry mouth that fed until the world was dry of glamour.

Sorcery has always been something whispered about - a rumour living in shadowy groves and in the heads of wise women, but in these dying days its presence is felt more strongly, and it is difficult to think of it as anything less than a reality. As the world moves on, low men can sell their souls for scraps of power... and do great and terrible things.

OUR CAST

Elijah Chambers: The Father Patriarch of the Chambers family. Father to James Lee and Nathaniel, brother to Cord. Elijah has been running the Bar K, such as it is now, with hired help for some time now. (*note: Elijah is a challenging and potentially uncomfortable character to play*)

Cord Chambers: The Gunslinger Brother to Elijah, and a living legend. Cord has not set foot in the Bar K since Lucy Chambers died.

James Lee Chambers: The Good Son Son of Elijah. James Lee has been making his own way in the world for some time now.

Bethany Allbright: The Follower Of Old Ways James Lee's companion – the two seem quite close. She is unknown to the rest of the Chambers family.

Nathaniel Chambers: The Wayward Son A name of some infamy. Nathaniel has not been seen by the Chambers family since he ran away from the Bar K in his teenage years, and is now by reputation a very dangerous man.

Miriam Goodweather: The Empty Wanderer Miriam Goodweather is a complete stranger to the other characters save Elijah.

CHARACTERS

BETHANY ALLBRIGHT: FOLLOWER OF THE OLD WAYS

You want to make a mark in the world. Something that will last beyond yourself, some proof that you were here, and lived, and loved. Something someone else will find as they pick through the bones of the world, just as you do now yourself. Finding markers of the passing of people long before yourself in the rare bits of gristle you unearth from the bones of the world. Signs of the Old Ways.

The Old Ways We have fallen far. The world, as they say, is moving on, and things are not as they once were. Nor will they ever be. In amongst far ruins hidden amongst the vast open nothingness, or in places as mundane as long forgotten tunnels nestled against people's dry cellars, you find signposts. Clear markers that show you the path from then to now.

That's the true magic in what you do. Seeing the indicators that lead from one point to another. Not the parlour tricks of the tools of the Old World. That's what fascinates you, and you wonder at how people cannot see the obvious signs. Why they fixate on the superstitions instead. Venerate and fear what you do, to the point where you can hear the capitalization in Old Ways.

The Old World was a place of such incredible potential... that was pissed against a wall. Information raced across nations and between continents through an elaborate series of tubes... mechanical labour was assisted by harness like machines... moving pictures held within glass... machines that speak... hot and cold water on a whim... exotic food available from whatever far-flung corner of the world you could imagine...

You've seen evidence of all these things, or read of them in preserved manuscripts from the Old World. Not as great revelations or developments, but as a matter of course. Taken for granted. And from what you've gleaned, people chose to be little more than cattle, for the most part. With all this responsibility and potential, they handed the course of their lives over to greedy callow men who willfully ignored the warning signs, the first tears in the hem of the world.

And now here we are. No single person sees anything from this world without fighting for it, hand over fist. People think that the lore you know... the old knowledge you have dug up, is some sort of magic. But it's not. It's breadcrumbs from the feast hall of a greater time.

A Family So, in amongst all of this impermanence, this falling into ruin, you want to create something, rather than just picking away at the ruins of other people's lives. A family. A place of your own, as a sorting box for happy memories. Children. A husband, to stand side by side with, the both of you to fight for it all, together as equals.

And that's where James Lee comes in. A few years ago James Lee moved to the town you're based out of, to replace the last sheriff, who apparently had the misfortune to be sleeping in his house when it burnt down. Sleeping hogtied.

James Lee turned the town around quicker than you'd thought possible. And while you spend most of your time scouring the vast empty places, it didn't take very long for the both of you to fall into... whatever you want to call it. Kindred spirits in a town of mostly human flotsam.

For quite some time, you've been living as man and wife, in all but formality. Formality ain't worth having to wait for what happiness you can claw from the world. You've even fallen pregnant several times, but... things haven't worked for you and James Lee in the past.

Three times now you've miscarried, and each time he's taken it harder than before, somehow taking the fault of it on his own shoulders. You're not sure what would happen if he had to face it again, and that's putting aside that there's your whole side of the painful mess, which you've had to deal with privately, while trying to support him as best you can. Which is an ugly, tense, uncomfortable situation. So you haven't told him about this time yet. Best to wait and see. It's just bad timing, with that damned letter coming now.

The Letter James Lee received a letter from his father two weeks ago, asking for some sort of help. Without even considering what it meant to do it, he put aside his responsibilities as Sheriff, making arrangements to leave as soon as possible, to go to his father's side. Given that James Lee has always been about the Right Thing, it was jarring... almost shocking to see him turn about like that. What kind of hold can his father possibly have over him?

Your man doesn't talk about his childhood much, if at all. You've seen the cracks appear in him when he does... you don't know much more than the fact that his mother died shortly after he was born, and it took a long time to find that out.

So, you're worried about him heading back into that big grey area. You'll be damned if you're going to lose your man to his past, so whatever it is he has to do, you're going to be alongside him the whole way, whether he likes it or not. You can't afford to lose James Lee, and even in the state you're in now you'll risk danger for him.

The Glaumer Man Once or twice, in rare moments of vulnerability, James Lee has asked about the Glaumer Man, saying that his brother mentioned him as a child. You told James Lee, after some more detailed research, that the Glaumer Man is a myth, a folk tale. Stories and sightings dating back to the origin of the myth spread (as far as you can tell) back hundreds of years, and it's humanly impossible to live that long.

In some cases, incidents blamed on the Glaumer Man are across such vast distances in such short periods that even if they were accurate, they could not possibly be the same man.

The Glaumer Man is an interesting oddity, but more in terms of what the myth says about the people who believe in him, rather than the idea of some shadowy boogey man being real.

The Chambers Family: Elijah Chambers Elijah is not a measured man. While it's good that he clearly loves James Lee, his favoritism is blindingly obvious. You wonder how much of the way that he treated Nathaniel as a child is responsible for the man he is now. What kind of man treats his sons so unevenly?

Elijah seems to assume, if not openly demand, a lot of the people around him, as well, and this frustrates you no end. Another peculiar thing? Elijah seems taken to spells of appearing rather ashen... you wonder if he might be ill in some way?

Elijah is a signpost, an indicator to James Lee's past, and a troubling one, when you follow it to what it might mean to your partner now.

The Chambers Family: Cord Chambers Cord Chambers is a living legend – one of the last Gunslingers. From what you hear, the Circle has been broken, and there will be no more Gunslingers brought into this world, which is more than a shame. It's a sign of things ending.

While Cord is capable of great and terrible things, he seems cold and dead inside. There is nothing to him. Is it worth being Cord Chambers if you can't feel anything? You worry about this lack of emotion, and James Lee's clear adulation of his uncle. Cord Chambers is another troubling indicator to James Lee's past... a puzzle piece from a time he's hidden away from you.

The Chambers Family: James Lee Chambers James Lee is the light of your life. One of the things you respect in James Lee is that he is his own man, and so often makes his own decisions, albeit with the counsel of others. Quick and decisive. It pains you to see him brought back into the shadow of his family, particularly when things seem so toxic. To see him bury himself within the entanglements of his past, and fall into step behind his father and Cord so quickly.

It's uncomfortable to see how he treats his brother as well, despite the fact that Nathaniel's reputation is almost as foul as Cord's is fair.

The Chambers Family: Nathaniel Chambers While he may be a murderer, and worse things, you can't help but feel pity for him as a fellow outsider in all of this. You can't imagine what has happened here in James Lee and Nathaniel's childhood, but this - the Bar K - is a dark place. Surely that has had something to do with the man he is now. There's also something open and alluring about Nathaniel – a wanton spark you're not normally drawn to, but can't help but find attractive. Like a roguish version of James Lee.

The Chambers Family: Miriam Albright Miriam seems a little scattered, and you're a little worried about what's going on in her head. You're also worried about what Miriam indicates about Elijah... he apparently took her in "out of kindness", but he's put her to use around the house without any qualms, just like James Lee. Is this woman a surrogate wife for Elijah, a replacement for Lucy? Not that you'd begrudge anyone happiness however they find it, but she doesn't quite seem up to making her own decisions.

Your hook James Lee has, out of some sense of honour, been dragged back into family business. For fear of losing him, or having him get caught up in the ghosts of the past, you won't let him do this thing alone. James Lee has an obligation to you as well, to your future together, and you won't let him forget that.

Appearance You've always thought of yourself as handsome more than beautiful. You've never been a wilting flower – always willing to push to get what you want, and cursed strong to boot. Your experience in travelling alone through dangerous places shows through in how you carry yourself.

When We Start You've been staying with James Lee at the Bar K for nearly a week now. Elijah summoned his son to the ranch, and then wouldn't say what he needed help with. James Lee's father has been eyeing you off like some kind of snake that's crawled into his boot. It's been mighty uncomfortable: you, James Lee, Elijah and Miriam together. Particularly with James Lee being put to so many odd jobs, leaving you without him.

The place unnerves you. The feeling of a place can tell as much of a story as particular artifacts, and the Bar K feels bad. Not that that sort of thing is your area of expertise. Sometimes, Elijah will just sit for hours and stare out at the marker for his wife's grave.

Now, finally, someone is coming to the Bar K. This can't make the situation any worse.

Things To Remember You're pregnant, but you want to keep that information from James Lee for now, to save him from pain. You want to protect James Lee from getting embroiled in his past. Something big is happening here.

Body	8 Move, Strength, Constitution, Toughness
Power	0 Fortune 2, Grit, Magic
Mind	7 Charisma, Intelligence, Perception, Willpower
Reflexes	5 Agility, Dexterity, Speed

Schticks

Databanks: You can find relevant information (Rules reference: p43) Due to the volume of information you have available, and you have researched in the past, you can spend a Fortune chit to have significant information on hand to overcome an obstacle. You have a number of rare (possibly unique) books in your leather satchel, and a rare and wondrous artifact indeed; An electronic datapad. A device storing more information than you've encompassed, powered by some unknown internal source. Despite your burning curiosity, you haven't been willing to dismantle it to see its inner workings, and you only use it sparingly, lest its power source be exhausted, and its secrets lost forever.

Equipment Bowie knife, Leather satchel, Books, Datapad
Wealth Level: Working Stiff
Skills Repair 15, Riding 9, Shootin' 13, Info/History 15

CORD CHAMBERS: THE GUNSLINGER

You're a gunslinger. Trained from an early age not just in the ways of killing, a steely core of will to accompany hands never more comfortable than when they're carrying a pistol. A noble and dying tradition that makes a man more than just a fool with a pistol. A Gunslinger is a living weapon, his irons an extension of himself.

That's what people see when they look at Cord Chambers: they see a machine, an answer. A man who entered The Circle in a faroff city that no longer exists, that most people couldn't recall the name of, if they ever knew.

They don't see the coldness for what it is - a man shut off from feeling. When you open yourself up to people, you get hurt far worse, and far deeper, than any shot or knife could do. You've loved once, more deeply than most men do, and lost once. And that's more than enough for you.

Lucy Lucy was a free spirit – a summer shower on desert sands. Impulsive, but full of life to bursting when the mood took her. Constant she wasn't, but you take each person on their strengths. You don't ask a minnow to fly, or a sparrow to swim.

She may have ended up your brother's wife, but you loved her first. And more than Elijah ever did. And that made putting a bullet in her all the more painful, but that's getting ahead of things.

You saw her first, loved her first. Even pointed her out to Elijah. But while you have an instinct, a sense when it comes to killing, or the things that lurk in shadows, you've always been at sea when it comes to women. And while most folk wouldn't countenance it, being Cord Chambers made that all the harder. But Elijah? Elijah may not know people worth a damn, but he's always been sure-handed and handsome, with a smile to charm a polecat.

He won her over quick enough, and set about weaving a net around her, trapping her in a life that didn't fit her. He didn't have no business marryin' her, or saddlin' her with child. She was too young and fragile for that. Any fool but Elijah could've seen that. She weren't the marryin' kind.

In the times before the end, she'd flee the Chambers Bar K for days a time, taking respite in Millhaven, (Back then, it wasn't the cesspool it is now) On more than one occasion, you crossed paths with her when she sojourned. In truth, not by accident.

But that was before the beginning of the end. You watched her wither and die inside, under the weight of all that responsibility, that definition.

And then the Great War started. A burning fever to go along with the sick rot in the world. And the Chambers family was called to war: one son from each family, and you answered. What choice did you have? Elijah, after all, had a family.

New Calvary Hill You were at war five months, you think. Five months too long. Those months are a jumbled memory of the stench of death, screams and the report of gunfire. The War was a thing that ground men together, to leave a mess of beggar's meat and gristle... a hungry maw that never stopped eating.

It all ended for you with New Calvary Hill – a major strategic target, crowned by a fort and enough rotary cannons to make taking it suicide. You saw countless men die that day, some of them friends, a few Gunslingers. You near died yourself. A shot creased your skull, and when the blackness lifted, the battle was spent, and you were lying among a carpet of the dead.

Having lost your taste for war, you left the field, not knowing or caring who had claimed that God-forsaken place. You left for the Chambers Bar K, leaving behind the cloying stench of cordite and death.

Time Time, as folks are fond of saying, is not what it was, and there is no greater proof than this. When you made it back to the ranch, Elijah swore that near two years had passed. The second of his and Lucy's children, James Lee, was proof that you couldn't shout down – a sickly babe somewhere near his first year. Almost a year ago for them, a rider had come, bearing news of your death. The war, and something else had robbed you of critical time.

Elijah had lost patience with Lucy and her malaise – fallen out of love with her, by your reckoning. By that point Lucy couldn't manage much more than lying abed, although Elijah did mutter something on occasion about her being on the mend.

Something had been haunting Elijah's ranch. You knew less about hunting things in those days, but you resolved to do what you could. It had been killing cattle, and smearing obscenities in the Old Tongue on their corpses, the dusty earth, and sometimes even the outside walls of the ranch itself.

That Night With you there, after a few days of settling in, and once the old arguments started, Elijah took the chance to have an evening to himself. He headed out to do God knows what. Not that you cared by that point – you had a big ol' load of hate on for Elijah, for taking the love of your life and ruining her.

You remember you were seeing to the boys. James Lee had a nasty bout of colic – he always was sickly child. You remember Nathaniel just staring silently at you, and then you heard a noise out near Lucy's room.

You were still wearing your pistol belt (you learned early in life there's a very short list of reasons to take it off) so you headed straight to Lucy's room, only to see her heading out into the night toward the cattle. It was strange enough to see her up, but up and out of the house at night?

Worried that she might end up getting taken by whatever'd been around, you ran out to bring her back in. When you caught up with her, she was already at the pens. She turned when you called her name, to look at you with such life, such intensity. It was the Lucy you'd fallen in love with.

Lucy asked you to kiss her first, just once. You did – it was long, and ardent. Everything you thought a kiss should be. Then James Lee’s crying broke the moment. You almost went to kiss her again, weak and hungry. It was only the cattle being spooked that saved your life.

Something inside Lucy lunged at you, from between those sweet lips, at the same time as one of the cows ran away from your side of the pen, goring itself on a bull’s horns and starting a stampede. As you came back to your senses, Gunslinger’s hands were already at their deadly business. You shot by instinct, clipping Lucy in the shoulder and spinning her, saving you the sight of some sick spidery thing climbing out of Lucy like she was a glove for a hand.

You fired all of both pistols, but the thing moved too fast, leaping for the night and dancing across the stampeding herd that was grinding itself apart in the pens. All you succeeded in doing was putting more holes in what was left of Lucy, and spooking the cattle worse. You didn’t see the cow that side-swiped you – it was only being so close to the fence that saved you from being killed right then. The last sight you remember before Elijah dragging you inside is the sight of Nathaniel at the window, watching.

The next day, you dragged yourself to your feet, ignoring broken ribs and the still-present taste of blood in your mouth, to help Elijah bury Lucy, and the last of your humanity. Then you left, vowing never to see the Chambers ranch again.

The World Moves On With Lucy dead, and you wanting to put the Bar K and Elijah as far behind you as you could, you took your responsibilities more seriously. You stopped finding excuses or reasons to go back to that cursed place.

You spent your time wandering the vast open spaces, hunting things that seemed to be more and more commonly found in the shadows, behind people’s troubles. Not that you could give a spit of chaw what people think, but you earned yourself a name as a man who could deal with things most people would rather not give a name. From what you heard, the War burnt itself out a few years after you deserted, but the damage done echoes still.

Haunted by a feeling that the thing inside Lucy was still out there, you kept an eye and an ear out for any sign, never quite knowing how to go about finding it. You want it dead for more reasons than one – it was only after you went to kiss Lucy that it came after you. This thing knows a secret that you’d as soon see buried.

The Glaumer Man Over the years, Elijah sent letters on, begging you to come back and help him settle this thing. If the handful that got to you (to be casually skimmed and burnt) is an indication, he must have written countless letters.

You only ever told Elijah that something had attacked Lucy – some other force. Not that she’d been eaten from the inside out. Eventually, whether it was from desperation, or thinking that it’d more likely bring you back, he mentioned The Glaumer Man, saying that as a boy, Nathaniel had mentioned him, that he’d ignored him at the time. But that maybe he was responsible?

The thing is, the Glaumer Man is the kind of story you’ve heard at least twenty, thirty times. The kind of story you use to keep your children saying their prayers: a Man of God who sells his soul to dark powers, to live forever and work black magic, lingering in the shadows at the edge of folk’s lives?

You’ve never seen anything to make you think an actual Glaumer Man exists, and you’ve seen plenty. But then, you think back to the scrawl in cow’s blood, and wonder if the thing inside Lucy did that, or some other agent?

A Dying Wish Several months ago, you got the letter. You’d ignored Elijah’s offers over the years, not wanting to go back to the past. But Elijah is dying, and he wants to find the thing that killed Lucy. Problem is, you’ve found out a thing or two about the likely nature of the thing: somehow, a folk’s depression, or worry, or anxiety can grow inside them. And with a little outside help from dark magic, become something real.

Something that eats a person from the inside out, wearing their skin. The seed is shifted by someone with foul power into that thing, but it takes a real heartsickness to create that seed – the kind that’d leave a person finding it hard to reconcile themselves to living.

So the problem is that, if Elijah’s looking for the person that killed his Lucy, he’s got good stock in that blame. The next place to look past that is whoever worked the Suit that changed her.

Then, there’s you. Lucy is a part of your past you buried a long time ago, and the thought of dredging that up isn’t one you relish. Lucy was your first and only love, and... you might not have killed the thing inside her, but you did your damndest to fill Lucy full of lead.

There’s some weighty reckoning coming. But family’s family, and you ain’t denying your brother’s last request, no matter where it’s going to lead.

Elijah’s Family: Elijah You, you’ve always picked yourself up the hard way when you fall down – by your own grit.

Your brother is a weak man who’s always relied on the strength of others to prop him up. Elijah’s a sure hand with a pistol, and he’s raised two boys, but that don’t change that he’s a selfish sonofabitch who’s never had to face the loneliness of the vast open spaces between the small pockets of human companionship. He’s never faced true hardships.

For anyone to describe serving in the War, and the life of a Gunslinger as lucky? When all he’s done is reap the harvest of his own poor decisions?

His sense of entitlement – of being owed something by the world – has always made you see red.

Elijah’s Family: Nathaniel You never trusted Nathaniel as a boy. There’s always been an animal cunning, a too sharp intelligence behind his eyes, even as a stripling. One of the things you learn as a Gunslinger is that the eyes betray the soul, and his have always seemed not quite human.

Nowadays, Nathaniel Chambers is a name whispered in certain circles – by all accounts he’s a dangerous sorcerer and a murderer at the least of times. Despite all of that, you’ve taken pains to cross paths with the little toad after getting Elijah’s letter, and collecting him.

He might be dangerous, and he certainly knows a thing or two you’d rather not see brought to light, but he most likely knows useful things you don’t, and is also tied up somehow in whatever’s coming to a head here. It feels like maybe, everything from that night so long ago is coming to a true close.

You’re not sure if it’s your hatred of Elijah, or thinking back over the old days, or something else, but you can’t help feeling a little defensive toward Nathaniel watching how Elijah and everyone else rounds on him. You understand what it’s like to feel so completely different, even if it’s for vastly different reasons. It’s a little confusing, and hard to reconcile with Nathaniel’s nature.

Elijah's Family: James Lee James Lee is a stark contrast to Nathaniel. He’s working currently as a tinhorn in a roughneck town, doing his share. Grown from the sickly child he was into a strong man... maybe a little too strong.

There’s a hardness behind his eyes, particularly when he sets eyes on his brother, that don’t want to go away. You wonder a little whether James Lee’s temper might be given to taking the bit in its mouth on occasion. Maybe starting a family’ll settle him some.

Elijah's Family: Bethany She seems like an even enough woman, and she’s got more than dust on her to show that she, like you, is no stranger to the open spaces. So a level head is a good one. But you can’t see that her being here is going to settle matters any. There’s something in Nathaniel’s eye that makes you wonder if another generation of Chambers boys aren’t going to come to grief over a woman.

Miriam Goodweather What in Creation is Elijah thinking, taking a stranger into his home? What you’re doing here is too important to have some random factor like her. She doesn’t seem quite right, but Elijah doesn’t seem to have let that stop him putting her to work. True to form.

Your hook Help your brother see this through to the end, no matter where it leads.

Appearance Cord is worn and lined from years of rough living. His gear is old and weathered, but expertly cared for. He sits whipcord straight in the saddle, and there is a constant, subtle awareness to Cord. He doesn’t appear shifty, or tense, but his eyes always see more than most people’s.

When We Start You’re riding into the Chambers Bar K, a place you swore you’d never set foot in again, with Nathaniel trussed up over your saddlebags. It is up to Elijah to decide what to do from here.

Things To Remember Elijah wants to keep his sickness a secret. You’re here to help your brother, but not to coddle him. Nathaniel knows things you want kept quiet and you might have to lean on him a little. That could be dangerous, depending on how powerful he is. You loved Lucy first; she was your anchor, and all of that was taken away from you.

Body: 7 Move, Strength, Constitution, Toughness
Power: 0 Fortune, Grit 4, Magic
Mind: 5 Charisma, Intelligence, Perception 6, Willpower
Reflexes: 8 Agility, Dexterity, Speed

Schticks

Cavalry Pistols; +3 to damage with your signature weapons (Rules reference: Page 62 Signature Weapon) Your Cavalry pistols have seen you through the War, and have put down many a thing that ought not to have been walking this earth. Using them is less than a thought – it’s instinct. This coupled with their fine craftsmanship gives them a +3 to damage (this is A LOT) This has already been factored in.

Veteran’s Senses; +4 to Perception Checks (Rules reference: Page 62 Hair Trigger Neck Hairs) You have a finely honed sense of danger, thanks to your training as a Gunslinger, and your time in the War. You gain a +4 bonus to Perception Action Values for spotting danger, which the GM will factor in automatically. Also, if reacting by firing a gun or dodging is appropriate (which it often is) you apply this +4 bonus to your roll.

Both Guns Blazing; better damage against tough critters Rules reference: Page 62 By firing both pistols at something in a hail of lead, you can do more damage. Because of your experience with your Cavalry pistols, using Both Guns Blazing effectively gives you: 28 – (Opponent’s Toughness x 2) + your outcome for damage. This is, again, a LOT.

Hypnosis; you can dig up memories (Rules reference: N/A) By twirling a bullet through your fingers, you can help a willing subject enter a hypnotic trance, making the recollection of repressed or distant memories easier. People in this state cannot lie.

Equipment Horse, 2 x Cavalry Pistols (Damage 14), Bowie knife, Rifle (Damage 13), Saddlebags, Wealth Level: Poor
Skills Intimidation 9 Riding 11 Shootin’ 15 Info/Critters 7 Fix-It 7 Leadership 7 Investigation 7

ELIJAH CHAMBERS: THE FATHER

You, Elijah Chambers, are dying. You know this for a surety. The Growing Sickness is fast upon you, raising hard lumps where soft flesh once reigned, and giving you blood sometimes where there ought’n’t be any.

And pain and weakness like you’ve never known. Sometimes, nausea washes over you with such a force you swear the firmament itself is being rocked like a boat in bad waters (not that you’ve ever set eyes on the ocean yourself).

Before this thing gets you though, there's one thing you'll set right, or be damned. You'll make up for the night you weren't there, and your poor desert flower was killed by something... Something you know still stalks the Earth, such as it is in these times.

Your Desert Flower Life plays some cruel tricks. Lucy, your love, your life, your wife, was a woman you loved from the moment you set eyes on her, in that yellow sundress. So vibrant, so alive! And, you discovered all too late, too frail. Lucy would have these bursts of such incredible life and vibrancy, only to wither like a desert flower. Withdrawn, morose, listless, *not there* until whatever force sustained her saw fit to fill her again.

Sometimes, when things got real bad, she'd run away to the nearest town for a spell, without a word to you. The last pure moment you remember with her was her wrapped in your arms, on the wagon back to the Bar K, your home and the Chambers' Ranch for four generations.

It wasn't so bad at first, but over time those short bursts got longer and longer between visits. And with a child, crops and animals needing tending, and a house needing seeing to, it's hard to keep an even face when your wife can't rouse herself from bed.

You learned, the hard way, that you can't drag someone else through life. You can't fix them yourself – not through patience, nor love, nor ire, nor reason... *nor neglect*. You'll love Lucy until the day you die (which ain't too far comin') but a part of you can't help hating her for denying you the best of herself for so long. And while you know Lucy loved you, you can't help but feel that she never really respected you.

You wonder as well, too, if part of you doesn't hate yourself for not being there the one night it mattered. If wishes were horses, and you could saddle them with regrets, the biggest and strongest of that herd would be wanting to take back that night.

Body: 7 Move, Strength, Constitution, Toughness
Power: 0 Fortune, Grit 4, Magic
Mind: 5 Charisma, Intelligence, Perception 6, Willpower
Reflexes: 8 Agility, Dexterity, Speed

Schticks

Fast Draw; +2 to Initiative if you use a gun (Rules reference: Page 62) At the beginning of each sequence, you get a +2 to your Initiative roll if your first action is shooting.

Eagle Eye; easier to shoot small targets (Rules reference: Page 62) You've always had a sharp eye for detail. You can ignore any personal armor a target may be wearing, and 4 points of difficulty due to range or cover.

Saw It Comin'; Power Cost 1, Shot Cost 1, can dodge well (Rules reference: Page 95 Breath of the Dragon) "Saw It Comin'" lets you add +5 to your Dodge value, as a defensive action. (normally, an Active Dodge only gives you a +3 to Dodge)

Your Weakness

Growing Sickness; -2 Impairment for a short period (Rules reference: N/A) On occasion, you are stricken by incredible pain in your innards, causing a -2 penalty to your dice rolls (this is a LOT!) The pain will be evident to those around you. The GM will signify this by handing you a shiny new Fortune chit in return for your sufferings.

Equipment Horse, Saddle Bag, 1 Colt Pistol (Damage 10, unreliable* - will be explained by GM), Rifle (Damage 13), Wealth Level: Poor
Skills Shootin' 14, Fist Fightin' 10, Ranchin' 10, Sabotage 9, Intimidation 7, Riding 12

JAMES LEE CHAMBERS: THE GOOD SON

The proper path is a hard one, but it's one you hold yourself to, every waking moment. But the world is such a flawed place. You are such a flawed man. The world is moving on, and the men of your generation are pale shadows of the ones who have come before. What truer sign could you hope for that the world is coming to an end?

A Vision of Red Sometimes (well, let's be honest, a lot of the time) a red rage builds in you, and strums up and down your spine so tight and so hard that it's all you can do not to ring someone's neck, or pole-axe them so hard their head spins. You feel your vision reddening, and you almost shake with the desire to hurt something. You're clearly not a well man. Part of you has wants nothing more than to settle, raise a family and live a simple life with Bethany. But there are so many things in the way of that.

How can you be so selfish as to want to start your own family, when the example of your Uncle Cord's sacrifice stands before you? A man who roamed the open spaces, to fight the coming darkness? One of the last great Gunslingers... Or your father, who raised yourself and your brother with a broken heart after the death of your beloved Mother.

Poor Seed You and Bethany have been together for some time now, man and wife in all but name. Bethany has grown pregnant several times, but each time the child has been lost. There can be only one logical explanation: your seed is weak, broken. How can you raise a son when you have so much to fix in yourself? You're not your father, and you'll never be, but you can try. It's just that, so far, you're failing, and failing so obviously.

Each time you've watched your woman silently suffer because you're not enough of a man to give her children, the pressure on you has mounted further. You don't know what will happen if you have to face that again. You feel the constant strain of it, your responsibility to Bethany, and to your family. But you hold yourself up to these examples, as impossible as it might be. The world may be passing on, but in the dying light you'll be damned if you don't try to provide a good example.

So you've worked as a lawman where you can, eking out a meager living going from town to town, and holding the line. After the Great War, there were a lot of hard, bitter men looking to scratch out some form of survival, or just to hurt some people. It was never the bandits that got to you though – it was the small grains of evil in people's selfish choices that made you see red. There's more than a few folk you've beaten bloody for nothing more than lacking common sense, and... there might be a few folk -who certainly deserved it - that you've had to bury under the light of a killing moon.

But that isn't important now. Pa sent word that he needed you. Said he was going to settle up on the Chambers Bar K, and move on. So you've come back to your childhood home to do what you can. A man's work. Bethany insisted on coming along, and there's not a force on this Earth that can turn her from her mind. So here you are, back where your mother died.

Your Mother's Death It happened when you were just a baby, and Nathaniel wasn't more than two or three. Pa never talked about it much, so you've pieced together things from stilted conversations, or from what Nathaniel said when you were younger, and still listened. Having known your beloved Mother Lucy, if only for a few sweet years, Nathaniel never really spoke of her save to quietly call her a monster. He stopped once you grew large enough to beat him for it.

Your mother wasn't well at the time it happened – hadn't been for a long time. Uncle Cord was home from the Great War – there had been some sort of confusion or false word of Cord being dead. Your mother went out to the cattle, while Cord was watching over you and Nathaniel. Cord went out to bring her in, because it was dark, and something had been lurking around the ranch for a while at the time. Something (possibly the same something) attacked and killed Mother, and nearly killed Cord as well. Your father came back to the ranch in time to save Cord.

There are some things about that night, about what you've been told, that don't sit quite right, but you've left well alone. You learned at an early age not to ask the wrong questions. But you want to move on, to build a family of your own, so amongst everything else that is happening, you want to find out what really happened that night. Understand things like, where was your father, if not at home with his family?

The Glaumaur Man When you were little, Nathaniel used to say that the Glaumaur Man was responsible for it all, that he had been haunting the ranch for years. The thought used to terrify you as a stripling, and make you furious at the same time. The Glaumaur Man is a story that folks use to keep their children quiet and abed. The thought of him lurking outside your ranch? As you grew older, you saw it more as preposterous.

Once or twice though, when you've been burying secrets in the dead of night, you've seen a silhouette of a figure in the distance, and you would swear it was watching you, even in the darkness. And you wondered... You've even, when your better sense has failed you, asked Bethany about the Glaumaur Man, to see what her opinion is, which is that he's a folk tale. Happily, most of the time you don't need to reach conclusions about these sorts of things. Most of the time.

The Chambers Family: Pa Your father raised you and your brother by himself while running the Bar K as best he could. That takes real sand, particularly after Mother's death. That's a man's decision. You love your father dearly - not that you'd ever say as much openly. Not many people get to grow up with a role model like Elijah Chambers. Honest, responsible, fearless. A loving husband and father. Whatever it is your father needs, you'll help see it through. Because he's given you that example to live up to. You don't want to think about what kind of man you would have been without it.

The Chambers Family: Cord Another fine example to grow up admiring. Cord Chambers is one of the last Gunslingers – a living weapon, trained to unthinking action. Your father's brother never really visited the Bar K while you were growing up, but word of his exploits spread far and wide. The things you could learn from this man... You envy his self-control, and his sacrifices. In the face of a life spent so selflessly, how could you think of something so selfish as raising a family with Bethany, not matter how much you love her?

The Chambers Family: Bethany Your light, your love, your hope. Bethany is a counterpoint to everything that is rotten in the world, in yourself. All the darkness around you goes up in vapour when you look in her eyes. You want to be the perfect man for Bethany, but that just tends to wind the rage tighter. You've been lucky enough to know her for over two years now, living in the same small town, under the same roof, and you've tried to keep the anger, the redness at bay. And yet that rage has still eaten at your attempts to make some kind of future together. You wanted to do this thing – helping your father – alone, but Bethany wouldn't hear of it. And one of the things you love about her, even at times like this when it's so exasperating, is that Bethany is her own woman, to be sure.

The Chambers Family: Nathaniel Nathaniel has been given every possible opportunity, every advantage, and squandered them. Born first, he has turned out weak, whereas he should have set the example. Nathaniel left the Bar K little more than a boy, running away in the night (to become a meal for wolves, you hoped at the time) and you'd frankly hoped never to see him darken its doorstep again. Nathaniel is a wretch, a snake, and if rumour is true, a dabbler in dark magic. But, if Cord has brought him back here, it's for a reason. And that also makes your brother a tool. Possibly even a useful one, if he can be kept in line.

Miriam Goodweather Miriam passed through your town some time ago, but seemed a different woman to the one staying with your father now. She was ill, and weak, and withdrawn. Fearing some contagion, the townsfolk moved her on. Lucky for them Bethany wasn't around, or they might have found that decision a damn sight harder. And while Miriam doesn't seem to be all there, she looks to have landed on her feet after all. It's just a damned shame that she's landed on her feet at the Bar K. Is she trying to replace your mother? Is your Pa trying to replace your mother with her? It's not your place to say who belongs where, but this is your family's home. You can't see your way to how that includes her.

Your hook Your father needs your help, and you'll do anything in your power to help him.

Appearance You are a handsome man, and would be even more popular with the ladies were it not for the hard edge that often comes to your features. When a cloud of rage comes over you (which is often) your eyes are sharp and cutting, and your features are a cold mask. You have a tendency to be frugal with movement – your stride is quick and purposeful, your drawing of a pistol even and unhurried.

When We Start You and Bethany have been waiting with Pa at the Bar K for nearly a week now. For what, Pa wouldn't say, save that answers were coming shortly. You can't help noticing that the Bar K has run down – what livestock remain are light on for flesh, and the place is in need of repair. But, like folks say, the world is moving on. This is just one more sign of it, nothing more. Now, dust clouds out on the horizon have sharpened into your uncle, Cord Chambers, and a shape draped over his saddlebags.

Things To Remember Your rage is difficult to control, but you don't want Bethany to see that side of you. You're not sure how you'd deal with it. Pa and Cord are men you look up to. You're not some pup following them around, but they're strong men, dauntless. There is nothing in all of Creation you hate more than the sight of Nathaniel Chambers.

Body: 8 Move, Strength, Constitution, Toughness
Power: 0 Fortune, Grit 4, Magic
Mind: 6 Charisma, Intelligence, Perception 6, Willpower
Reflexes: 7 Agility, Dexterity, Speed

Schticks

Listen To This Then: (Grit Cost 1, Shot Cost 3) a punch that hits harder than your gun! (Rules reference: Page 84 Claw of the Tiger) "Listen To This Then" is a hand-to-hand attack that does a total of 11 damage. When you get riled up, you can sure hit hard.

Retort (Grit Cost 1, Shot Cost 0) hit back after being hit (Rules reference: Page 84 (Tiger Stance) "Retort" lets you hit back with a free attack after being hit and damaged by an opponent in hand to hand fighting.

Not Twice, You Bastard: (Grit Cost 2, Shot Cost 0) hit back after being attacked (Rules reference: Page 84 Unyielding Tiger Stance) "Not Twice, You Bastard" lets you make a simultaneous attack when an opponent makes a hand-to-hand attack against you.

Your Weakness

Red Rage your temper is hard to control (Rules reference: N/A) Sometimes you can't keep the beast in check, and your rage gets the better of you. The GM will signify this, in times of pressure, by giving you a Fortune chit by way of apology for the fact that you're about to snap.

Equipment Pistol (Damage 10, unreliable*), Wealth Level: Working Stiff

Skills Riding 13, Shootin' 10, Fightin' 14, Sheriffing 11

MIRIAM GOODWEATHER: THE EMPTY WANDERER

You had a family once. You swear. There was a family, and a ranch. Yes. And a shadow in the shape of a man. You lost your family first – the shadowy man took them, but you can't remember why. You... can't remember their faces, except in dreams. Why can't you remember them? Gods... what's happening with you? There are three facts you cling to like talismans, memories that haven't been eaten away by whatever is eroding you, like the creeping sands of the desert.

Your Name Your name is Miriam Goodweather. You liked (like?) being a Goodweather.

The Shadowy Man The shadowy man is responsible for everything that has happened to you. You've tattooed that thought on your mind – made sure you haven't forgotten it. He took your family (left you to bloom like a flower) and came back to Put Something Inside You. You've been wandering the towns and open spaces, trying to find him. You want nothing more than to see his face scoured from his skull, to hear him scream down to a ragged whisper. It's difficult to keep to that purpose though – it's difficult to keep a train of thought at all.

Not Well You are not a well woman. You feel something stirring inside you at times, scraping at your skin like a cage, like a sack. You try not to think about it, but sometimes you wake with a rank, meaty taste in your mouth, and feel a little more swollen than usual. Sometimes you wake walking in another town, parched of thirst and not sure where you are or how you got there. You don't like whatever's happening, and yet sometimes you sense that there's a power involved, and if you could somehow harness it, connect to it... after all, something is getting you across distances that no woman should be able to cross alone, so scattered.

At the same time, you like where you are right now. There's a sense of (déjà vu?) in being here. Maybe you've done this before. Maybe you had this before. But there's a rightness to it. You like being at the Chambers Bar K. You like being useful, and helping out where you can. You are right where you should be, and it's important to you to stay here, to be part of something.

The Chambers Family: Elijah You think he reminds you of your husband. He seems like a good man in some ways. But you think he's also not well. Like you, but not like you. He seems very proud, and you think he thinks that his sickness is a secret. So you won't tell anyone. (tell them what?)

The Chambers Family: Cord Dangerous. Lean. You think that this man would, given the slightest reason, kill you. And you don't want to think about it too much, but you suspect there might be a very good reason.

The Chambers Family: James Lee You think you've met this man before, once. Or does he think that? Either you weren't yourself then, or you were more yourself then than you are now. You're not sure. You remember kind faces and unkind words though.

The Chambers Family: Nathaniel You like this boy, a lot. Despite what Elijah might think of him. Talking to him seems to have an uncanny effect

on your mind, clearing it like morning mist under sunlight, and you start remembering things. Nathaniel reminds you of someone else, but you can't quite put your mind to who. You're not quite sure you want to put your mind to that thought, either.

Bethany Allbright You like this woman. She seems nice. But at the same time, she seems worryingly sharp, and you're concerned about what those eyes of hers might see. What is there to see, though?

Your hook You want to find the shadowy man who ate your life, and make him pay. At the same time, the life you've stumbled into here at the Bar K is important to you, too, and you don't want to risk that.

Appearance You are a solid, handsome woman in your late forties. Your body shows the signs of someone unafraid of hard work. Your features though, are a mask of worry and confusion most of the time, due to your confused state.

When We Start You've been staying at the Chambers Bar K for a while now, helping out where you can. For the past week, Elijah's son and Bethany have been here, as well. Apparently, more people are coming.

Things To Remember Your name is Miriam Goodweather. You liked being a Goodweather. The shadowy man is responsible for everything that has happened to you.

Body: 6 Move, Strength, Constitution, Toughness
Power: 0 Fortune, Grit, Magic 8
Mind: 3 Charisma, Intelligence, Perception 1, Willpower
Reflexes: 10 Agility, Dexterity, Speed

Schticks

Feeding you... drink blood? (Rules reference: Page 102 Blood Drain) By choosing deliberately to feed on someone (a successful Fightin' check, then a successful Things That Ain't Right check against their Chi or Magic rating) you can, instead of doing damage permanently steal one point of a skill you and your victim share for yourself (so they go down 1, you go up 1)

Temporarily steal particular memories of your victim This will look rather disturbing to anyone who sees it – an insectoid appendage will protrude from your distended mouth, burrowing into the victim. Clearly, something is very not right here.

Corruption whatever is happening, you can spread it (Rules reference: Page 102 Corruption). Any victim who suffers more than 25 wound points from hand to hand attacks from you in a single fight has a chance of becoming something else

Teeth Everywhere do more damage unarmed. (Rules reference: Page 102 Abysmal Spines). You do 12 damage for hand to hand attacks rather than 6 (more damage than you inflict with a pistol)

Equipment: Clothes, Wealth Level: Poor

Skills: Things That Ain't Right 13, Fightin' 12, Shootin' 10, Ranchin' 6

NATHANIEL CHAMBERS: THE WAYARD SON

You are damned, cursed. There is no shorter way, no words more capable of cutting to the quick than that. No amount of praise, acceptance or love can fill the hollow centre that sits at the heart of you now. You are always incomplete, and feeling that ache.

Poor foundations You grew up in a nightmare. You have memories of your mother, some of them vague. You have dim memories of a happy woman – that she would come and go, and be happier in the going than the coming. You remember brief moments of love, warm like afternoon sun. You remember the last time she left, and knowing somehow when Father came back that the woman who had given birth to you had died inside somehow. That Father had dragged her back to the Place That Kills Dreams, and it had done her in.

Your memories of her are much clearer past that point. Burnt like branding into the flank of your mind. Bed-ridden mostly, and listless, but something you would never forget. She would ask for you sometimes, and Father would make you spend time with her, keeping her company. She was your Mother, after all. And she would whisper things that no boy should have to hear from his mother. Things that open doors a boy should be able to keep closed until it's time to be a man. You tried telling Father, once. Father had a way of resisting things he didn't gel with. He called it Beating the Truth into you. Who does that? Who hurts a child so young, so vulnerable? Who bullies someone a fraction of their size into line?

The Glaumer Man It wasn't long after Mother got very sick that the Glaumer Man started haunting the place, a shadow out there amongst the darkness, staring in at Mother, staring in at you. You tried telling Father about the Glaumer Man once. He threw you to the hardwood floor and broke one of your ribs. You remember the night the Glaumer Man stopped being a shadow, and stole into the house, quiet as an apology to Do Something To Mother. It was around that time you realized something.

You were alone, but somehow special. Father, one half of the people who brought you into the world, may not love you, and Mother may have died where it counts long before she stopped breathing, but you were special. You could feel things, see things. People were (particularly Uncle) fond of saying the world was moving on. Sure. And you could see the exposed, tattered edges left from the decay. It scared you, for a long time. You're still not quite sure what to make of it.

That Night You remember the night that Uncle watched you while Father went off Elsewhere. You can't have been more than three, but you see things all too clearly. Uncle watched over Mother, mostly. Staring at her with a tenderness he lost somewhere off in the War, or perhaps in the open spaces. you watched when you could, careful to avoid being cuffed out of the way.

When Uncle went to tend to James Lee, who was but a baby then, Mother Went Outside Into the Darkness, quick and nimble as a sharp at a deck, with a hungry look in her eye. Uncle ran back and out to find her, and you remember them kissing, then gunfire. And the cattle making the most horrible noises. You stood at the window and stared at the outline of Mother, still. And Uncle, crawling back toward the house. But you didn't dare go outside. Father forbade it at night. When Father came back home, and dragged Uncle inside, you remember, even on the brink of death, a fire in Uncle's eye, a warning to keep silent. Who would listen anyway?

You left that place as soon as you could There was nothing there for you. You dragged that empty hole with you, and tried to fill it with whatever you could, stumbling from sensation to sensation, doing your best to drown the chatter in your head. Gambling – putting your fate to chance, led to liquor, which led to women, which kept you busy for quite a while. You found something in the exchange, staring into the electricity of someone else's eyes, that almost filled the hole for a while.

The Hem of the World Then the emptiness led on to drugs, and then you made a most incredible discovery, in the darkest dives that the most dead-end towns had to offer. A loose collegiate of the most dedicated sinners and diabolists existed, practising sorcery. Not parlour tricks, or sleight of hand, but pulling at the hem of the world itself with black magic. You also discovered, not long after this, a natural aptitude. You've fucked up or just fucked most things, but sorcery is something you feel an almost limitless potential for. And more than anything you've experienced, there's real temptation there you find hard to resist. With your hands wrapped firmly around the reins of reality, no man can idly put a hand to you ever again... you've felt on the verge of becoming something else ever since that night, and you wonder whether the next step forward is your destiny.

Spectacles A year ago, you crossed paths with a man you'd swear was the Glaumer Man of your youth. You'd never seen the Glaumer Man's face, but you didn't have to. He offered you an apprenticeship... to show you things beyond your nightmares and you balked. You felt this was a choice that would damn you irrevocably... send you sliding down a gravelly slope there was no coming back from. And what if Father and Uncle were right? What if you were just an annoying, evil little shit? Could you add to the weight of the things they set themselves against, even more?

You've done things... the shapes are blurry, but you're sure amongst the haze you've killed, a number of times. And other trespasses besides. To add this final choice to them? Perhaps even worse than anger, the Glaumer Man's response to your hesitation was reserved patience. He said that, whether you wanted it or not, he'd give you just a taste of the power that was yours for the asking.

Since then, when you remove the spectacles you had taken to wearing, you can see all too clearly. The smudges in your sight resolve into hellish truth, and the strings of the world would show themselves, naked for you to pluck at. The Fires of Hell you see burning around you are reflected in your eyes, and your face shows the temptation and hunger.

For the last year, you've tried to drown that temptation in bourbon. The feeling of power you get when you open yourself up scares you, and you don't want to see those sulphurous flames reflected again... you think.

Father Being around this man terrifies and confuses you all at once. You feel three years old and helpless, despite the power that sorcery sends humming through you. You would love nothing more than to hear Father admit that he fell short of being a man – that his cruel, selfish nature sent you along the path to being what you are now.

Uncle It's so ludicrous in some ways it gives you the opium giggles. Cord Chambers, one of the last Gunslingers, your uncle. Uncle has spent his life hunting things like you. He fought in the War to the last, and has spent his life since tracking through the open, empty spaces, trying to hold back the darkness that men like you bring into the world willingly. You fear Uncle – his eyes are the cold, packed hardpan of the desert at night. And yet, at the same time, Uncle wasn't smart or sharp enough to ever see the Glaumer Man, or what had happened to Mother. And you know a secret you'd wager a full bottle that he'd rather keep quiet.

James Lee You envy James Lee. Not seeing so far, nor so well, has protected him. His ignorance has shattered him. Your brother still holds himself to the example of men who do not in truth exist – versions of Father and Uncle you have never seen. Perhaps it is this precarious illusion that is responsible for the thick vein of rage inside him. James Lee is, from what you have heard, both an upright and a deadly man, and it's obvious to you that he's never far away from boiling point. Imagine though: a childhood knowing that your father was proud of you, never having to hear your Mother whisper those things.

Bethany You feel some kinship or empathy or something like that toward this woman. Bookish, she has delved into secrets that cannot be easily shared or understood. She has a strength and easy calm you envy, too. At the same time, you can't help wondering what her face looks like at the moment where the first wave of orgasm breaks.

Miriam Goodweather Heh. You have a suspicion as to what's happened here. History has a way of repeating itself, and it's rare that a certain flower will bloom only once. You could be wrong, but all the same, it's hilarious if right under the nose of your father, the very same thing had happened again. Or he'd ushered the same thing into his house. Does anyone else suspect? Does she?

Your hook You're not sure who has done you wrong here – The Glaumer Man, or your family. This could be a great way to figure that out, along with the kind of man you want to be.

Appearance Your posture is hunched, defensive and defeated most of the time, and you're given to starting at loud noises. Your long, lanky hair hides features that are becoming a cruel mask. You think you could have been handsome, and wonder... is it too late?

When We Start Your recollections are hazy, and you're only just coming to, but you vaguely remember a day (two?) ago, amidst a numbing cloud of bourbon, people scattering like crows from the bar you were haunting, and the hilt of a pistol coming down to strike like a rattler. And now, it seems that it was Uncle who found you, and while it's a miracle you've still drawing breath, he's taken you back to The Place That Kills Dreams.

Things To Remember You've done things in the past that you're not proud of, but are shady on the details. Because of childhood memories, you fear both Father and Uncle. You're sorely tempted by the lure of sorcery and what it can do. When you take your spectacles off, bad things happen.

Body: 5 Move, Strength, Constitution, Toughness
Power: 2 Fortune, Grit, Magic 8
Mind: 7 Charisma, Intelligence, Perception 9, Willpower
Reflexes: 7 Agility, Dexterity, Speed

Schticks

The Reins of the World; powerful sorcerous attack (Rules reference: Page 62) When you take away your spectacles, you can see the strings of the world. By yanking fiercely on strings attached to people, you can inflict grievous harm, more grievous than your pistol. Compared to the AV of 11 you have with a firearm yourself, this attack has an AV of 15 (four points better! That's a HUGE difference) and has a Damage Rating of 10. So powerful...

More?; you can get more Sorcery schticks (Rules reference: N/A) You sense that more power is out there, within easy reach. You're just not sure what happens if you claim it. All you have to do is ask; you will receive additional powerful Sorcery schticks, but at some price. For example...you can feel this one on the tip of your mind, and it could be yours.

Do As I Say; make someone obey a single instruction (Rules reference: Enchantment, p96). You can make a subject obey a single instruction. The difficulty is based on a combination of the subject's willpower (highest of Power, Magic, or Will) and how willing they would be to do what you're saying. For example, something they would rather die than do is +12 difficulty, on top of their willpower. and that's just for starters...

Equipment: Pistol (Damage 8, unreliable*), Wealth Level: Rich
Skills: Sorcery 15, Info/Creatures 11, Shootin' 11, Riding 9

THE LETTER

Dear Brother,

Following many others, this will be, one way or another, the last letter I write to you. May my words find you in good health. With your lack of burdens, I should imagine this to be the case.

I can only hope fervently that you have, while not answering, read some of the past letters I have written, and have some measure of fond thoughts for your brother Elijah.

I am dying, Cord. The Growing Sickness swells within me, and my days are numbered. I wish to finally find and put down this thing that killed Lucy. I believe it still walks the Earth, and cannot go to my rest with this affront unanswered.

I need your help, Cord. You owe me this much.

And please, speak of my illness to no one. I would die a man.

ZERO – SETUP

Explain: Fortune Chits and Unreliable guns (doubles on any roll is a chance for it to jam or explode)

One – Home On The Range

The scene starts with three of the five characters at the Chambers Bar K. Cord and Nathaniel appear during the boxed text.

Note: before beginning the boxed text, take **Elijah** aside and explain that he'll be setting the pace for the first scene.

The Chambers homestead squats, hunkering on the edge of a vast, featureless desert. The heat here is a physical force, a constant hammering. The sun blasts everything about. Fences jut like old crooked teeth, bleached colourless by the onslaught. What livestock remain – a few listless cattle and not much more than a hand of horses all stand

resigned, their ribs jutting like half-finished barrels.

The heat shimmer is a cruel irony, looking like nothing more than the undulations of a waterfall. It hides the giant metal towers that stretch into the distance, purposeless and left to rust in their precise formation. Each progressive monolith further down their line becomes thinner and shorter, shifting and writhing amongst the warbling air.

From within the twisting shimmer a rider appears on horseback. Riding straight and true, his silhouette is a graven fact etched into the world. He is Cord Chambers, one of the last true Gunslingers, and he has come home.

Strapped across the back of his saddle, trussed up like a mewling calf, a thin-spun, spidery figure flounces and jars against the natural rhythm of the horse's trot. His spectacles catch the fire of the sun every now and then, winking like starlight fresh from some distant and alien place. Nathaniel Chambers, a craven buzzard of a man whose name is whispered in dark corners of low places.

In the shade of his front porch, Elijah Chambers watches, unmoving. The man who has kept the Chambers Ranch alive, kept the Chambers name alive, in the face of the Great War, and in spite of the world moving on. A man who has raised a family, buried a wife, all on this very firmament. At the sight of his brother Cord, his eyes crease slightly, almost imperceptibly.

In his shadow stands James Lee Chambers, wet with sweat from the work of the day. Son to Elijah, sheriff to the town of Muleshoe, companion to Bethany. At the sight of his brother Nathaniel, his eyes come afire, and his hands twitch toward one of the two irons at his waist.

Next to James Lee stands Bethany Allbright, attention divided between the coming party and James Lee. She almost looms over her man, face unreadable, her hand resting on the leather satchel strung around her neck.

In the doorway of the Bar K hovers Miriam Goodweather, half in, half out, and seemingly unsure of what to do. She looks to Elijah for a cue, but to no avail – his attention is given solely to his brother. Lost for direction, she watches that winking light bounce off Nathaniel's spectacles, momentarily hypnotized.

Whatever it is that is happening, it has begun, in the dying light of day, as Cord Chambers approaches the front porch.

What are we doing here?

The first scene is a walk-in scene for all of the characters, and a chance/challenge for Elijah to set the pace going forward. The walk-in scene at the Bar K gives the characters a chance to rub issues. The players should, eventually, arrive at a decision to move forward on Elijah's quest to find Lucy's killer, but be unsure as to how to proceed.

AT SOME POINT during the first scene, Elijah should be struck with fatigue and weakness, and a powerful need to turn in for the night. This pushes into the dream, **AND** gives the other characters a chance to interact without Elijah being present.

The Dream

Overnight, Elijah will have a dream/vision from The Glaumer Man. The purpose of this is a bit of foreshadowing, and to push Elijah's quest forward. The dream starts with the Glaumer Man appearing at the foot of Elijah's bed.

This dream is also the first of the erosions of Elijah's world view, as it confirms that there was someone/thing lingering about the Bar K – Nathaniel's attempts to tell his father this were not lies. Nathaniel will be at the back of the bedroom, almost in shadow. Both Elijah and Nathaniel will remember all of the dream. Nathaniel can spend a chit to force interaction inside the dream, as well.

The following information should be imparted:

- The Glaumer Man (Harris) has a genuine outrage at Elijah's choice to pursue him. Harris has no family or sense of belonging himself, and sees the fact that Elijah is still willing to sacrifice all of that to blame him completely for Lucy's death as a huge affront.

"You think that losing your wife has left you wretched? You come at me like this, Elijah, headlong, and I will show you just how much you have to lose, just how far you have to fall. I will strip the scales from your eyes, and you'll wish you spent out your last here."

- The Glaumer Man could also allude to Elijah's cancer. (the Growing Sickness) to give Nathaniel some leverage, and start this secret being outed, if Cord hasn't said anything yet.

The Glaumer Man

Points about the Glaumer Man's personality and motivations.

Has no sense of family or belonging himself, and envies that greatly. This is part of why he hates Elijah so much – Elijah has taken this most precious gift and frittered it.

"The flesh is willing, but the spirit is weak." Is spiritually tired, having lived for hundreds of years. His body is physically able, but the spirit is tired, having lived longer than any man should.

"My hypocrisy – like all men, I want a son to continue in my works... to walk further down the same path."

Compulsion/lack of self-restraint when it comes to sorcery, amused at skepticism when it comes to magic. Had a name, and can dimly recall it when asked (Harris). The Glaumer Man serves intelligences that gnaw at the hem of the world – that want to see things pulled apart.

"I am both coming closer and moving farther away..."

"I have seen things... I've hung from the tree, pierced my side, given up my eye for secrets so great, so terrible, that I would not see them lost."

Wants Nathaniel as an apprentice, to continue in his path, and in his image.

The Glaumer Man does not have blood coursing through his veins, but the sand of the desert.

A genuine sense of outrage at Elijah deciding to come after him.

Hates Elijah for not making the most of what he had.

Has little but contempt for James Lee for being a copy of his father in the making.

Wonders why James Lee should get to live when all the people he's buried – don't why he gets to start a family.

Fears and respects Cord as a worthy rival, and at the same time wants to see him dead, because the things that the Glaumer Man serves are opposed to Cord's aims.

THE GLAUMER MAN WAS AT NEW CALVARY HILL

Pities and mocks Miriam for trying to find what he can't have – family and belonging – by replacing her own family with The Chambers (like a parasite) Also, is surprised and a little concerned that she hasn't turned out as expected.

Pities Nathaniel for having suffered, even though he is incredibly special in the Glaumer Man's eyes.

Sees himself as a surrogate father-figure for Nathaniel – the only person who has cared for him and truly understands him.

Respects and pities Bethany for being tangled up in all of this.

Wants her out of it, because of her intellect.

Finds the idea of using her unborn children against her amusing.

Secrets Checklist

Each of these secrets should come out, every session.

Check	Tasty Secret
	Elijah is dying of a debilitating illness
	Bethany is pregnant with twins
	James Lee has, in the past, killed people under dubious circumstances
	Elijah was visiting another woman the night that Lucy was killed.
	Cord kissed Lucy the night that HE SHOT HER. CORD SHOT LUCY. AND KISSED HER.
	The nature of exactly what was inside Lucy, and how it got there.
	Miriam is not entirely human, and has something inside of her.
	Miriam should, at some point, regain full coherence, and remember everything she's lost, and how she's lived as a monster in the vast open spaces.

Location: Grave Site

The grave site is visible from the front porch of the Bar K – a simple marker for Lucy Chamber's grave.

Cold *Worn* Blank *Still, Sterile* Homely, sun-worn marker, name etched by Cord

Location: Paddock

The paddock is visible from the window of Nathaniel's room, and contains what livestock remain.

Listless, bony creatures *Fence posts like crooked, rotten teeth* Churned earth *Warm, sweaty air*

Location: Field

The field is at the rear of the Bar K, containing sickly pumpkins and the remnants of corn growing.

Sparse, thin *Crumbling* Sickly *Dry* Ground like a crust *Meagre pumpkins, more buried than growing*

Thin, weedy vines

Scarecrow – thin, hungry, leathery

Location: The Barn

The barn contains the rusted remnants of tools used in better days at the Bar K.

Dark, shadowy *Oppressively hot* Bones of a farm

Silent, as if waiting

Location: The Well

The well for the Bar K sits between the homestead and the barn.

Stinking, muddy Meagre *Sickly*

Shadows shift at the bottom of the well

Location: Desert's Edge

At the edge of the Bar K, the desert begins. The exact line is hard to gauge

Whispering wind *Sand in the face* Staring at the encroaching void

Feeling that void has overtook you while standing there

Coyotes howling in the distance

Five – Fight in the Field

Eventually, the Glaumer Man lures the group into the field, where the Scarecrow waits.

A good lead into this fight would be someone actually seeing the Glaumer Man walking from the barn to the field, rusty scythe in hand. Or, a scythe appearing in the field, planted blade up.

Throughout the escalation of events, a murder of crows has gathered within the field, fat and gluttonous, hovering about the scarecrow.

He quickly moves out of site in the field, and things continually shift in nature:

- 1) the field stretches larger than it could possibly be
- 2) the crop of corn within the field becomes thicker than it has ever been, filling the field
- 3) the sickly pumpkins lying in the field become corpses, mostly buried beneath the crumbling soil, grabbing at people (AV 8) to hold them for a -2 to their Dodge Value

The nature of the fight itself is against the Scarecrow, who will be noticed to have suddenly disappeared from his cross, and the crows, who will swoop at the PCs, clawing and biting faces.

Crows	AV 9, Damage 7
The scarecrow can move freely through the field, and because of the combination of speed and cover, has a constant +2 bonus to difficulty to be hit (Eagle Eye negates this)	

Swooping black shadow *Gouging scratch* *Claws biting deep*

Blurring swipe of scythe Rustling of corn stalks Glaumer Man pulling someone aside

Scarecrow

Body: 5	Power: 0	Mind: 3	Reflexes: 10
Move	Fortune	Charisma	Agility
Strength	Grit	Intelligence	Dexterity
Constitution	Magic 8	Perception	Speed
Toughness		Willpower	

SCHTICKS

Insubstantial	can move through the field	Rules reference: Page 106 (Insubstantial)
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The scarecrow can move freely through the field, and because of the combination of speed and cover, has a constant +2 bonus to difficulty to be hit (Eagle Eye negates this)

Armor	tougher to hit	Rules reference: Page 84 (Armor)
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Resists 2 points of damage from each attack. (Eagle Eye negates this)

Maggot Breath	sprays maggots on victim	Rules reference: Page 84 (Rancid Breath)
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Requires a successful Martial Arts attack, and inflicts 13 damage.

Deadguard	protected by spirits of the dead	Rules reference: Page 84 (Spirit Shield)
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After being attacked, if the Scarecrow can exceed the attack result with an Arcanowave Device check, one of eight spirits guarding it dissipates instead.

EQUIPMENT

Scythe (Damage 16)

SKILLS

Arcanowave Device 13
 Shootin' 13
 Fightin' 13
 Creature Powers 13

Six – New Calvary Hill

As the adrenaline of the fight clears, the group realize they are no longer within the field, but somewhere very different – halfway along New Calvary Hill, as the last light of day is fading.

Air humid, like foam of a rabid beast

Trees long and thin, jutting like finger bones

Fire at top of hill, flickering in the darkness *Air thick with the stench of cordite*

Bodies lying in shallow graves, dirt draped like bedsheets Almost stirring in the twilight

What are we doing here?

Here the Glaumer Man makes the last of his deals, wheedling for some measure of leniency from the players, and here Elijah gets his answers. Predominantly, the Glaumer Man wants Nathaniel, and to move on.

Once the players reach the Glaumer Man, he waits outside a small hut at the top of the hill.

Before acknowledging anyone else, he will appeal to Nathaniel as his true father and the only one who really cared for him. “Boy, I’m the only one who sees you for what you are even after you turned me down once. I’m askin’ again – leave this whole Chambers thing aside”

If the party are violent, then the Glaumer Man will warn them initially that all of his power is being used currently to stop the dead from rising, which is not an easy task. Killing him removes that protection, and unleashes Hell.

The Glaumer Man will placate the group after this, telling them that everything that they have done, he can take Elijah’s cancer away, he can soothe James Lee’s temper once and for all, he can ensure that Bethany’s children are born hale and hearty, he can give Cord Lucy, as he remembered her, he can give Miriam another family... And all he wants in return is Nathaniel.

He could also offer Elijah a chance to talk with his wife again, to ask her whatever he wants. The Canker is nearby, having taken the shell of a young woman recently. Both Nathaniel and Cord could vouch for the fact that the Canker remembers everything of Lucy’s life. Depending on how this gambit goes, the Canker might even press its luck, trying to kiss Elijah. (“If you close your eyes, I can still kiss like she did”)

The Glaumer Man will offer Elijah a chance to take his cancer away. (“Maybe its time for it to grow somewhere else, like you’d shift a plant from a pot too small. Oh, the things I could do with that...”)

If nothing has come of it yet, The Glaumer Man will out Cord’s infidelity with Lucy. He will raise the question of what Lucy got up to that put such a smile on her face every time she went to town, and how convenient it was that Cord came through more often in those days.

The hut that the Glaumer Man is near is a munitions depot. Outside nearby is a rotary cannon. It’s old, and in disrepair, but a solid Guns + Fixit check will put it back into use. It would be possible for someone to scout this out without the Glaumer Man noticing with a decent Reflexes check.

If attacked: “Is that what you came all this way for? Through the hip-deep gore of Millhaven, across the desert to New Calvary Hill, just to fill me full of lead?”

The Glaumer Man will point out to Elijah, asking either Cord or Nathaniel to explain the nature of the Canker, that he had an equal share in Lucy’s death. Oh, and that his brother shot her.

For James Lee: “A lot of dead here, buried in shallow graves, Chambers boy. Make you feel homesick?”

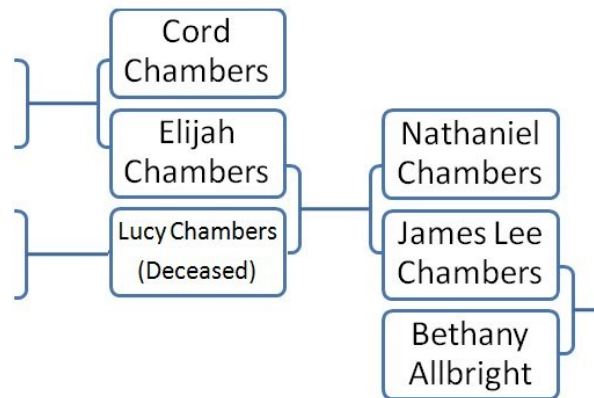
Seven – Checklist of things

These things need to happen throughout the game. As they do, crows should continue to gather in the field.

Check	Thing
	Elijah’s Dream
	The Glaumer Man should talk to Nathaniel to console him
	The Glaumer Man should find a way to talk to Bethany, alone

	The Glaumer Man should find a way to talk to Miriam alone
	The Glaumer Man should try to warn James Lee off
	Lucy should appear to Cord, taunting him

The thing that was within Lucy Chambers was a Canker. A physical creature created by sorcery that can only exist in a host already overcome with heartbreaking grief, sorrow, depression or anguish. The Canker consumes a person's organs from the inside, and gains their memories and personality, allowing them to act as that person without discovery.	You're not sure how to proceed from here right now. You feel that sleeping on what has been discussed to this point might be the prudent course.	The writing etched into the marker of Lucy Chamber's grave is Cord's, not Elijah's.
The Chambers Bar K is not the place you grew up in – there are clear signs of disarray here. Even in these times, your father has not been keeping the ranch. This has become clear from your work over the week	There is every possibility that Bethany is pregnant.	



YOUNG GODS: A SUPERHERO CAMPAIGN USING CHAMPIONS, AND VARIOUS D&D SUPPLEMENTS

by Lev Lafayette

Superhero games are often based around 'superscience' characters. "Bitten by a radioactive spider", "A Man of Steel from an alien planet", "A Caped Crusader millionaire with gadgets and workshop", etc. Even when this is not the case (such as Marvel's "Thor, The Thundergod") the setting is almost invariably contemporary or futuristic. Yet from a different perspective, one that more accords with a mythic and polytheist mode of consciousness, superheroes were more spiritual and magical beings as real as the Gods whom they worshipped. This particular campaign outline makes use of this mythic and fantastic setting to explore the possibility of player-characters as "young gods".

The campaign ruleset is designed around the Hero System (5th edition) rules, although it would be easy enough to use an earlier edition (such as the famous fourth edition "Big Blue Book") or even another appropriate gamesystem (such as Marvel/FASERIP, DC Heroes/SAGA, Mutants & Masterminds), as the specific rules for the game are less important than the story. Recommended supplements to aid the campaign include the recent Champions supplement "The Mystic World", which outlines some important history in the official Champions universe, *Dieties & Demigods for (Advanced) Dungeons & Dragons*, *Planescape* and *Manual of the Planes* and finally *Spelljammer*.

Setting & Character Creation

Characters must be designed from an historical background; from the original *Deities & Demigods* appropriate choices include American Indian, Babylonian/Sumerian, Celtic, Mayan, Incan or Aztec, Chinese, Japanese, Finnish, Hellenic (Greek and Roman), Egyptian, Norse, Finnish etc. The Arthurian, Cthulhu, Melnibonean, Nehwon and AD&D Nonhuman mythos is not appropriate. The characters must not choose a pre-existing deity, who will all be NPCs; instead they should choose a child or creation from an existing God (perhaps of divine and human parentage). Discussion between the players beforehand is encouraged to ensure a balance between abilities and a diversity of cultural backgrounds.

The core motivation for the PCs coming together is to form an new, multi-cultural alliance with a universal morality that transcends cultural contexts. Tired of such conflicts between their differing bodies of worshipers, some of the "young Gods" have noticed that there are good and bad individuals in all cultures and that nationalistic loyalties are allowing wickedness to spread.

In this universe, the various planes are not located according to alignment and nor are individual deities located as such. Rather deities of all moral and legal alignments will be found in whatever place is appropriate for them; the plane of Olympus, for example, will be home for Zeus, Hecate and Dionysus. Between these planes of existence is the vast astral sea which is rather like the phlogiston of *Spelljammer*; "turbulent, unstable, multicolored, fluorescent gas". The distance between these planes should have some semblance to the travelling (not literal) and cultural distances between nationalities on Earth; "as above, so below as the saying goes", of course the mighty ships used by the Gods should travel at least ten times as fast as an earthly vessel! Earth, unlike *Spelljammer*, is the sole world, "prime material plane", and it is the centre of the universe, Sigil, if you like; and it is where the powers of the Gods are at their weakest. In all other planes the Gods should have some sort of regenerative power (the equivalent of say, 1 BODY/day) due to the power of earthly worshippers engaging in sacrifices etc. This is a free power and does not cost any points. On earth itself however this does not apply - the prime material is the mortal plane.

Characters should start as standard powered superheroes as per the *Champions* rules (p15, 5th edition), like D&D heroes. Lesser Gods (in D&D terms) would count as "High Powered", Greater Gods as "Very High Powered" and the

leaders of pantheons who are also Greater Gods would fall under the Cosmically Powerful. At the start of the campaign disallow power frameworks; they will be introduced later.

The following stats give a guideline;

Char 10-40, SPD 3-10, CV 7-13, DC 6-14, Active Points 40-80, Skill Points 25-80, Skill Roll 11-15, DEF/rDEF 20/10

The team should also make a decision of collectively purchasing a base and a ship. The base can be a planetoid in its own right, but should be located both near and roughly equidistant from where the PCs originate from. Remember that the "heavens" have a map that is not entirely dissimilar to the earthly equivalent. Picking a base on a plane that is the equivalent to Antarctica, in a stellar sense, will be safe but disadvantageous if the PC party consists of an Egyptian, a Greek, a Celt and a Babylonian. The GM will also have to assign a nominal distance between the planes of astral space and earth; related planes will have points where the borders are thin indeed; the equivalent of providing the Extra Dimensional Movement power (p111).

Ships should be more like the earthly equivalent of the bronze and iron age, when polytheism was at its height, rather than the science fantasy versions that exist in Spelljammer. Using the vehicle construction rules (p314) a set of ships such as galleys, brimres, triremes, junks etc should be provided as alternatives, depending on how many character points the PCs wish to use to fit out their ship and what modifications they wish to make to it.



Plot Development

The first few scenarios should be a bit of a potted tour of the different planes of existence and the astral phlogiston that exists between them with the appropriate climate, flora and fauna, culture and NPCs. Use various mythic tales as example stories and settings for the characters to participate in (for example, the Odyssey, Beowulf, the Ramanyana etc). An cultural antagonist who holds a position of power and respect in the relevant plane of existence is a particularly good choice, especially as they will accuse a related PC of engaging in treason against their nationality. If possible the solution to a particular scenarios problem should be something that goes against a culturally-specific virtue (e.g., A Norse superhero requiring humility, A Chinese superhero having to disrespect their elders etc).

After several adventures the PCs should begin to become sufficiently well-known that the plot can move from a more episodic travel tour to one of a increasing narrative trajectory. This should occur in a manner that seems as natural as possible; events in earlier scenarios begin to influences those in latter scenarios, "villains" become recurring, and old allies reappear in the nick of time to

save characters from potentially disasterous situations. The most exciting discovery towards the end of second plot arc is the discovery that two new planes of existence are beginning to form; one of universal good "positive" energy, and one that denies this virtue and prefers a conflict between national values, a "negative" plane of energy.

The penultimate plot arc should begin with an increasing concentration of forces between "good" and "evil" and

exploration of the powers of the positive material plane on the behalf of the PCs. This can be applied as allowing power frameworks into the campaign and also allowing PCs to retrospectively design their characters as appropriate. The conflicts between the PCs and the antagonists of past scenarios will become greater; a particularly nasty villain will be one who has tapped deep into the negative material plane and discovered a power framework before the PCs.



"As above so below". Whilst this is occurring, changes will also be occurring on earth. Human prophets, philosophers and religious thinkers (e.g., Amos, Socrates, Siddhartha Guatama) also begin to argue in favour of universal principles and against nationally-bound loyalties. A number of scenarios can be based around these conflicts on earth, some successful, some not so (e.g., the trial and death of Socrates).

The final plot development involves two related instances; first there is a universalistic human who refuses to reject accusations that he has become a god and second is the literal disappearance of the polytheistic planes of existence in favour of a growing prime and negative material plane. The discovery that the PCs have, inadvertently, set in motion the destruction of their own homes, friends, families and

existence is no doubt one that should be played over several sessions at least, as they desparately try to find a way to stem the tide and fight off those who (rightly!) accuse them of bringing destruction to the polytheistic faiths. How this concludes is certainly up to the individual campaigns. Perhaps some of the gods will have to be integrated and converted to mere sainthood (e.g., Bridgit of Kildare). Maybe others will find hidden pocket planes where a small coven of worshippers on earth continue the necessary worship to maintain their god's supernatural status. Inevitably the PCs will, however, have to deal with the fact that their advocacy of the universal has transcended the power of the contextual and as such, they have been both the harbringers of destruction and midwives to a new age. As a parting shot, a GM may decide if the PCs integrate themselves in the new planes of existence they may even find the seed of its destruction; somewhere, down below on the prime material plane, a tiny group of atheists is meeting for the first time...

Sample Character: Ech tinh thần, Frog Spirit of VietNam

Val	Char	Base	Points	
15	STR	10	5	HTH DAMAGE 3d6
10	DEX	10	0	OCV +3 DCV +3
20	CON	10	20	
10	BOD	10	0	
30	INT	10	20	Perception 15-
30	EGO	10	40	ECV +10
30	PRE	10	20	Pre Attack 6d6
10	COM	10	0	
10	PD	3	7	ResPD 0 Total PD 10
10	ED	4	6	ResED 0 Total ED 10
3	SPD	2	10	Phases 4, 8, 12
10	REC	7	6	
60	END	40	10	
30	STUN	27	3	

Skills, Name & Power	Points	END
Swimming 17-	15	0
KS: Zen Buddhism 18	10	0
Leaping (20")	20	4
Ego Attack 8d6	40	8
Mental Defense 10 points 10	0	
Mental Illusions 8d6	30	6
Mind Control 6d6	30	5
Mink Link (Monks, dimensional)	15	3
Mind Scan 6d6	30	5
Experience	1	0

Disadvantages	Points
Looks like a Giant Frog	15
Psych Lim: Pacifist cannot kill	10
Reputation, 8-	5
Dependent Water, 1d6, 20 min	10
Social Limitation: Major, 14-	20
Others (player decides)	90

149 Characteristics + 201 Powers = 350 = 200 Base + 150 Disadvantages

STAR TREK XI MOVIE REVIEW

by Andrew Moshos <http://movie-reviews.com.au>



Organised by rank, and by how much they probably got paid

Excitement might have been high in some quarters; dread might have been higher in others. The prospect of a new Star Trek film might have seemed inevitable to some, and downright puzzling to most. After all, the Trek flicks, either the ones with the ancient crew or with the still quite old Next Generation crew never really made that much money (certainly not blockbuster numbers), and the last hurrah critically and financially was back in the 90s.

And yet they kept putting out films as if there was a burning need in the public to see these same weak characters age poorly and deliver groan-worthy jokes that seemed outdated even back in the era where the only form of mass entertainment were cave paintings and hitting each other over the head with clubs.

As with a whole bunch of other franchises, properties, brands recently, they decided to bring it all back and to undertake a reboot / reinvention in order to rekindle interest in a largely apathetic public. And they handed the responsibility for directing this, the eleventh, or XIth, if you want to get all Roman numeral and classy, entry in the franchise to J.J. Abrams, the guy who, amongst other crimes, created the television shows *Felicity*, *Alias* and *Lost*, and directed the third *Mission: Impossible* flick.

I will admit to not being a fan of any of those shows, but I am a fan of Star Trek in all its forms, permutations and combinations over the years. Not a dress up and go to conventions kind of fan, not a buy-the-commemorative-merchandising kind of fan, not a true keeper of the flame screaming zealous murder against one flavour of Trek over the other kind of fan. But a fan all the same.

A fan who didn't look forward to new films or reboots or anything to do with Trek anew because the material itself, the characters and the depiction of this kind of space opera was just too tired and stale to ever appeal to me again like it did when I was younger. The films, as far as I'm concerned, should have ended with *First Contact*, because that's the last time this shit looked even vaguely credible on the big screen. Even then I probably would have been happier if they'd never made any further films after *The Wrath of Khan*.

The films since they started making them with the Next Generation crew, as well as the various Trek series that have floundered about, boring and frustrating even the faithful to the point where none of us (I feel that I can confidently speak for all of them) ultimately cared if Trek finally died for good.

But no product, no franchise can be allowed to lie dormant, since income streams need to be guaranteed, massive profits need to be protected. And then Abrams came along, with a budget and relative creative freedom, and the latest iteration of Trek was born. Latest, meaning, they just had to go back and redo the origins of the whole Star Trek franchise with new actors (excluding one notable example) playing the original characters of Kirk, Spock, Bones,

Uhura and the rest.

It sounded like a mistake to me, but what do I know.

It has all worked out pretty well. The story makes no sense, the technobabble elements are abundant, Eric Bana as the main villain is beyond generic and banal, and the trademark Abrams elements trying to make it all relevant to the kids of today who are all getting jiggy with it, apparently, are mostly grating. And a scene where a character haphazardly drives a 1950s convertible playing *Sabotage* by the Beastie Boys is inexplicable at best and crap at worst, especially since, considering the timeframe involved, it's the equivalent of James Bond joyriding in a horse and carriage and playing a madrigal on his dulcimer at the same time.

Whatever, it introduces us to the character of James T. Kirk, who grows up to be a sullen and violent Iowan who clearly hates the Starfleet Academy jerks who drink at his townie bar. We get an inkling as to why in the high-action bit depicting his birth, on a shuttle, fleeing from the USS Kelvin, which is being destroyed by a ship captained by an angry guy with facial tattoos calling himself Nero (Bana). Kirk's father saves the day but dies in the process, leaving his son fatherless.

Jeez, lucky that father figure substitute Starfleet Captain Christopher Pike (Bruce Greenwood) comes along and guilts / shames Kirk into joining Starfleet to live up to his father's legacy (of dying on the job).

Young Kirk, post driving a vintage car off of a cliff, is as much of a hound dog skirtchaser as his original William Shatner incarnation. But he's charming amidst the arrogance, whereas Original Shatner Kirk used to occasionally act like if the object of his pursuit didn't put out willingly, he was going to use the 23rd century equivalent of drink spiking to get his wicked way.

This Kirk, who's just as charming and arrogant (played by Chris Pine, who is not a familiar face and thus well cast to play such a well known character), seems like he wouldn't be above begging for sex as a last resort instead.

In short order we are also introduced to a young Spock on the planet Vulcan, being hazed by other Vulcan children due to his mixed human / Vulcan parentage, and the gamut of other well known characters, like Uhura, Bones, Chekhov, Sulu and Scotty (eventually), when the evil vessel captained by Nero reappears and starts destroying planets just for laugh.

The USS Enterprise is launched with many of the people on board we'd expect, in a manner that is meant to establish one thing and one thing only: why Kirk is the right man for the job of captaining this ship in virtually any situation, and how inevitable it was that this crew would come together even with vast changes to the timeline due to the appearance of Nero's nasty ship.

There are people who are predisposed to disliking this film, and they're the kind of people who (like me) can't help themselves when they watch a story that doesn't conform with what's known as the canon, or the established history / timeline of a story universe. It's this knee-jerk response that kicks in and compels you to think stuff like "but that's not right, they're not supposed to meet Romulans until blah blah, and there shouldn't be hot green women from Orion at Starfleet yet, and what's with transporting people light years onto ships at warp, and black holes aren't the same as wormholes, and what the heck is red matter supposed to be anyway, and sending dilithium warp cores into black holes wouldn't etc etc". So continuity nerds and dogmatic sticklers will be driven to absolute distraction by this flick.

Which would be a shame, because it's the best Star Trek flick since at least *First Contact*. It eschews the dowdy high seriousness that arose through the Next Generation flicks, but it also doesn't embarrass its actors with attempts at levity and humour completely inappropriate to the actors and the situation. It does the funny stuff well and the action stuff even better.

Sure, so it doesn't really make sense why any of the overall plot is happening for any other reason apart from as an overarching explanation for what we're seeing, as if the average punter gives a damn as to why this "origin" story is being told, and why it differs from the established story. No-one except the nerds who are going to nitpick this to shit give a damn anyway.

Really, why this flick works is because the actors, remarkably, do such a good job with their characters. Even actors that I expected absolutely nothing decent from. As surprised as I am that Karl Urban plays Bones, Dr McCoy, so well, considering the fact that he's only ever used one facial expression in all of the flicks he's ever been in, Zachary Quinto does a superb job with a young and fiery Spock.

I have a deep-seeded revulsion towards Quinto arising irrationally from having watched him play the supervillain in the television series *Heroes*, and I never thought I could accept him playing a character as iconic in science fiction as Spock. He not only does well, he's a great Spock without having to give an impression of Leonard Nimoy. My misgivings evaporated pretty quickly after initial uncertainty as he soothed my concerns with his confidence and style, just like my last trip to the proctologist.

The film wisely, in my opinion, spends more time sowing the seeds of the dynamics of the relationships, especially the dynamic between Spock, Kirk and McCoy, the big three, instead of wasting time on a plot and on a villain that just don't matter.

Kirk is, I think, and this flick reminds us, a one-of-a-kind character, though it doesn't mean only one man can play him. It's not like the Bond films, where a new actor can play Bond in a completely new way, with "Bond" being little more than a job title.

Kirk is the sui generis ship's captain, harking back as he does, as the series did, mixing its naval metaphors with its Western – pilgrims – settlers spreading throughout the galaxy themes. Even here, even with a new young lad playing the role he continues to exemplify the burden of command; the have-at-them eagerness to attack any enemy no matter how much more powerful; the willingness to get his hands bloody personally; the trust in his senior officers; the ability to synthesise disparate bits of information into a tactical and strategic framework; the supreme confidence; all without having to make a big deal about it. It makes me shake my head and chuckle to see this character resurrected again, reminding me as he does of some unholy cross between Admiral Nelson, Captain Jack Aubrey, Horatio Hornblower and a young Elvis.

Shatner, for all his virtues (or lack of them) was always a ham of the highest order, and his lack of contribution here is not missed at all. Chris Pine does a wonderful job of reminding us of the character of Kirk, without having to imitate the actor. He can do brash and driven without getting smarmy or annoying, and hopefully he won't grow into the scenery-chewing, scenery-fucking and co-star alienating monster that Shatner became.

This kind of character, and this kind of rendering of the Original Series redone, trying to make it more physical and less cerebral (credibly), is certainly entertaining enough as a re-introduction to the crew of the Enterprise. If every flick is like this it'll get boring fast, but it's more than fine for now. The deep philosophical and humanistic ideals that permeate the decades of *Star Trek* in its various forms can take a background seat for a while.

Even as a re-booting, there's almost a tragic amount of detail meant to satisfy the most tragic of Trek obsessives. The quintessential no-win situation that we've been hearing about since *Wrath of Khan* actually gets a fair amount of play here, as we get to see a very happy with himself Kirk take on the simulation and 'win', when he's not supposed to.

Just mentioning Kobayashi-Maru should be enough to make avowed trekkies expire into puddles of goo. Either that or they'll be screaming "Worst Episode Ever!" at the top of their lungs.

The effects look great, the reverence was there, the respect for the characters and the history (even as they refute it) everything pretty much felt right. Even the music, which I generally try to block out in most flicks, works by being old-school, bombastic and clever without drawing too much attention to itself.

I enjoyed it. I probably shouldn't have, but I really, really enjoyed it, far more so than most of the Trek films I've seen. Let's be honest, they're mostly crap. This is both a palate-cleanser and a game-changer. If it works then there might be some bold new adventures worth watching as they go where a few people have gone before. If it doesn't, well, it's not like J. J. Abrams or the estate of Gene Roddenberry need more money.

More please.

LORD ORCUS LISTENS

by Steve Saunders

Hello, stinky mortals! Time for another installment of LORD ORCUS LAUGH—er, LISTENS. It's summertime around these here slave mines, where I'm putting some pathetic fool to work typing this in the blood of pesky telephone salesmen. Are you ready for the Great Doling, friends? Well, here you go.

Let's begin.

SkimbleCat asks...

Lord Orcus I have a friend who can no longer eat dairy is there any hope for him & tacos or should he give up & end it all?

SkimbleCat, there may be hope for this friend of yours yet. As it so happens, most human flesh contains absolutely NO dairy! Or any eggs for that matter (unless you count those weird crawdad people who live over in Jersey). Just have him replace the dairy with people and he'll be a-ok. The tacos will have never tasted so damned good! Remember, dear readers: When in doubt, resort to cannibalism.

Lord Orcus! What is best in life?

Love,

Tormented Artificier

TA, bathing in the precious bodily fluids of my enemies is what's best in life. Oh, and the wind in on my horns, too.

Lord Orcus,

Why is gas so expensive? Can't we just burn other stuff?

-Mindless Follower

Gas is expensive because the Zangurat peoples require so much money for their giant Zeppibrahmin which can get pricy themselves because of their defensive tentacle arrays. But never fear! I hear that solar panels bonded with the souls of cute baby bunnies are an excellent alternative energy source. I've also heard that FEMA has plans to power 6,000 American homes by burning Glenn Beck. Who says that the FEMA Death Camps are worthless? Who, I ask??

iD software was bought out by the same company that owns Bethesda. Will DoomOut 4 have keycards to access the Vault full of RadRoaches?

-Andrew

I sure hope so, Andrew. I sure hope so. And I also hope they let the Fallout team remake Doom 3. Perhaps THEN they'll be able to figure out the magic of having a light on a gun. I for one welcome our new videogame overlords.

Dear Dread Lord Orcus,

Any new RPGs you're looking forward to?

Best Wishes,

D-Two-Oh

Heya, D! Oh, yes, most certainly. The new games I'm picking up this summer/early Fall are: *Hackmaster Basic*, the new *Judge Dredd* from Mongoose, *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader* and I can't wait to pick up a copy of *Curse of the Yellow Sign – Act I: Digging for a Dead God* and unleash it on my *Call of Cthulhu* group! Another game I'll be

breaking back out is *Unhallowed Metropolis*, which is a seasonal fave around here. Not to mention *Cannibal Contagion*!!

Johnny asks...

Lord Orcus, I can't seem to get my lady to stick around for my FATAL games. No matter how much fun I try to make it, she always has other things to do and makes herself scarce... help?

Johnny, you may notice that the other kids at school or at the office don't seem to like you. That's because you're not playing World of Synnibarr. Trust me: offer your lady more flying unicorns with eye-lasers and less "girth charting" and she won't only game with you, but she might stop visiting that guy at the copy shop so much.

Alt Shift Skool asks...

Hey Orcus, are you into old CPRGs at all?

Yes, Alt, I am!! I love old school computer RPGs. Some of my choice picks include *Darklands*, *Wasteland*, the gold box AD&D games, *Ultima III & VII* and *Planescape: Torment*. There are many, many more, but those come to mind. I'm also a big fan of Roguelikes and such. *NetHack*, *Dwarf Fortress* and *ADOM* are all perennial faves.

What's your favourite die?

--Charlie

Easy, it's the d12. I like to roll it to show my victims 1) what time it is and 2) in which random direction I'm going to send their freshly severed head 2d6 meters. And no, my d12 does NOT cry itself to sleep. Those are the kittens crying... soft hearted fools.

Dear Lord Orcus,

We have this guy in our 4e group who is always playing secret evil characters. Like, this one time he played a paladin who was really an anti-paladin and then he used his vorpal sword to behead all of us in our sleep and take our stuff! The group has all talked about him and we decided that maybe we should just kick him to the curb. But he's also our friend... What do you think?

Regards,

Frustrated in Aachen

You know, it sounds like YOU and your GROUP are the problem and NOT this guy. He's playing the game just as he should. I mean, how else can *D&D 4th edition* be any fun? My suggestion: Play *Tunnels & Trolls* or *Hackmaster*. Go crazy with all the killing and have fun with meeting new people and burning down their villages. This guy? He's your group leader. Don't kick him out. I'm also going to email you my phone number so I can give him a chance to play with my group. I'd love to teach that Nergal a lesson or two!

Greetings Lord Most Foul!

Have you heard about this Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay 3rd edition thing?

Cheers,

AxeHammerstein

Indeed I have, AxeHammerstein... indeed I have. I have my kobold and fimir spies working on some information, but it might just be better than Second ed. Of course, the last edition did have its issues. I still can't find the rules on shields for instance, and it could have been ratcheted down better. That said, it was still quite wonderful. I hear this new edition will have dice pools... so we'll see. We'll see. But it better be good. Pappy Orcus doesn't favor those who muss up his Warhammery goodness.

Okay, folks, that's all the time I have right now to whip this Steve guy into typing out this feature. If you have any questions or would like to submit to me... something... then please drop him a line: steve@studio-407.com

I haven't updated my website for a little while, but we do plan to bring the Orcusville comic back. See it here: www.orcusville.com

For everything else, please take a peek at www.baconlord.com to see what Steve and I are up to.

Until next time—STAY HUNGRY.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

***GURPS Krononauts: Time Travel and
Cyberpunk ... New World of Darkness
Terror Australis ... Holidays and Travel in
Paranoia ... Interview with RPG Illustrator
Dan Smith ... Insectes & Compagnie :
Review, Translation and Empire of the
Ants Campaign! ... Smell of a Rat: A
Mouse Guard Chronicle ... Retrospective:
Heroes of Olympus/Swordbearer
Odyssey ... D&D3.5/Pathfinder Ralis:
Ancient Dragons of the Bilybara ... Let
The Right One In & other horror Films***