Solo Play Special Issue

Tunnels & Trolls ... Fighting Fantasy ... Papers & Paychecks ... HeartQuest ... D&D 5e Solo Game Interview ... Avengers Movie Review and more!
ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL AND COOPERATIVE NEWS

LETTERS

A Successful HeroQuest

At the close of RQ Con Down Under III this weekend, we were delighted to present Lev Lafayette with the inaugural Greg Stafford Memorial Award for Gloranthan Fandom.

This is a new award, established in memory of Greg Stafford and with the blessing of his family, that Chaosium will occasionally and irregularly give out to recognise a *significant* and *exceptional* contribution to Gloranthan Fandom in a current year.

Why did Lev receive this award? As our Australia - Asia/Pacific convention coordinator Andrew said when we presented it to Lev: “You went on a heroquest and brought RQ Con Down Under back from the otherworld. Greg would be proud.” The previous RQ Con DUs were in the last century (1996 and 1998). Lev was the driving force successfully
bringing RQ Con Down Under back.

The event was a great success, and sufficient funds and interest were raised to want to stage it again next year. #WeAreAllUs

From: Chaosium, Inc.
November, 11, 2018

Eclipse Phase Man Pages

In the most recent newsletter Lev intimated that I've been working on converting the Eclipse Phase 4th edition rules into Linux "manpage" (i.e. manual page) format.

I'm happy to announce that the first round of tidying up is now complete, after starting with a mess of loosely formatted plain text several months ago.

This was a process of going through about one chapter per week or so, doing a mix of manual and semi-automated clean-up, and some superficial editing (in Vim! ?)

I've only tested the appearance of the pages in Arch Linux. I expect they should look okay to anyone using any Linux and any BSD (including Macs). It might also be possible to view them using the Linux Subsystem For Windows available in Windows 10, or Cygwin.

I don't think they are complete. I have no doubt there are still typos, formatting errors and incongruent/inconsistent stylistic choices. If you spot any areas for improvement, please go to the issues tab at the Eclipse Phase repository on GitHub and start a discussion about it:

https://github.com/rpgreview/eclipse-phase-manpages

Tim Rice

In Praise of Ducks

Hi Lev,

I was just reading through issue 40 of your RPG magazine, I noticed on p.51 you used my cartoon!

I made this a few years ago in a rpg.net forum thread about Glorantha, it was a reflexive commentary on complaints
from posters who didn't like the idea of Ducks, all these gripes were from people posting in the thread itself, which I put into the mouths of the most ridiculous D&D creatures I could find at the time, being watched silently by Dan Barker's Duck.

Unfortunately I've noticed this being used elsewhere online with entirely the opposite meaning that I intended, I thought it spoke for itself but clearly I should have framed it better.

Bilharzia Aeetes

Hi Bilharzia,

Thank you for the letter. Having encountered in a few places online, it is truly a great pleasure to find the original author and you will be credited in Issue 41 as such.

I'm confused on how people could give the opposite meaning however. I felt that it spoke very clearly for itself as well. I guess some people really hate Ducks!

Best wishes,

Lev

Editorial and Cooperative News

Whilst the roleplaying game hobby is largely a social activity, indeed perhaps one of the most social forms of entertainment available, there is an interesting tangent of solo play. The reasons may be varied; perhaps a game simply isn't available, or a player lives remotely, or they're travelling, or maybe they just want to read something that is a bit more than a novel.

Solo gamebooks has been with us since the the earliest days, dating from the transition from wargames to RPGs, with Tunnels & Trolls being the first system to publish solo fantasy gamebooks - preceding Fighting Fantasy by several years. There is around thirty Tunnels & Trolls solo gamebooks available, with Buffalo Castle from 1976 being the first, and it is thoroughly appropriate that Karl Brown has contributed a "Tunnels & Trolls Bestiary Solo Play PC Special" for this issue.

There was a bit of a hey-day for solo gamebooks from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, when the hobby had more younger people playing and when computers weren't cheap and portable enough for using on mass transit (single-person computer games really did take the role in many cases). For a while there was a mass of such games, and most major RPG systems were producing at least some semblance of solo play for at least an introduction to the game
system. Even *Paranoia* had one - and who can forget the opening scenario in Mentzer's Basic *Dungeons & Dragons* with the poorly-fated Aleena at the hands of the bandit-wizard Bargle? As a special item there is also a solo adventure from the recent *Papers & Paychecks* supplement, Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery, entitled 'Camp 22'.

There has to be reviews of course, and myself and Karl are pretty productive in that sense. There's a review of the classic *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain* by yours truly, along with *Death Trap Dungeon* also from the Fighting Fantasy Range by Karl Brown. I've also contributed with TSR's attempt to get teenaged girls playing with *Ring of the Ruby Dragon*. Karl has also provided a review of a more contemporary publication, *Elminster's Guide to Solo Adventuring*.

Solo adventures aren't all over yet. Chaosium has made a few solo publications in recent times, and we have an interview with Paul Bilmer who has made a bit of a splash with D&D 5th edition solo games. There is also another version of play, with a solo PC and GM. I've written a few notes on running such games and the differences they have compared to larger group play.

It is rare to find an issue of RPG Review that is dedicated only to the major topic for each issue and this one is no exception. In addition to all this solo fun, we have a wonderful contribution to Australian gaming with designer's notes for *Magellinica*, a roleplaying game set in Fantasy Australia for Pathfinder, by Craig McKenzie. There is also the annual RPGaDay commentary by myself, Karl, and Michael Cole. Finally, regular contributor Andrew Moshos gives the movie industry a regular stabbing with his review of *Avengers: Infinity War*.

Finally, as this is our end of year issue, we have a large amount of Cooperative News, including the financial statement which will give our readers some indication of how small this voluntary venture is. Still, there is one bigger item among all this, and that's the RuneQuest Glorantha Con Down Under which the Cooperative organised. True, the entire last issue issue dedicated to the matter, but there's some updates, plus a wonderful short story from Darius West explaining a journey of subterfuge by Delecti within the Satarite homeland.

See you all in the new year!

Lev Lafayette, still editor, lev@rpgreview.net

Cooperative News
The biggest event of since RPG Review 40 has been, of course, the RuneQuest Glorantha Down Under III Convention where that 10th anniversary issue was distributed, in print form no less. Much of that event is discussed in the annual committee report, but the opportunity is taken here for a big “thank you” to the staff of Kryall Castle and the GMs for the day, Pete Tracy, Mark Morrison, Justin Akkerman, Martin Dick, Hugh McVicker, Garry Fay, panelists Dave Cake, Darius West, and of course Michael O’Brien and the Chaosium team for all their help.

One of the big outcomes of the convention was that we raised sufficient funds to hold more conventions in the future. Cooperative president, Lev Lafayette, donated a first edition, first print, of White Bear and Red Moon. Only 800 copies of this publication which founded Chaosium, and each was hand-stapled by Greg Stafford. A very generous bid was received by Phil Hibbs in the UK and that book is now on the way to him. He has rejected any suggestion that the Trust Fund be named after him, but he’ll have to put up with being recognised in this publication. Thank you Phil!

Mark Baldwin also contributed to the Trust Fund by donating the original Tales of the Reaching Moon cover art for Issue 8 in 1992 which had some controversy attached and wasn’t used in the US issue of the publication. What was wrong with it? Well, if you look carefully apparently there is just the hint of a … penis! I mean by all means have images of fire, sword, and bloody massacres, but no seriously no dicks. Children might see it.

Apart from the Con and our usual events and activities, the next big item has been the Diversity Survey, put together by Karl, our Diversity Officer. It’s basically designed to compare and contrast our membership and readership with the figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It takes only a few minutes to complete and is available at the following URL.

http://rpgreview.net/diversitysurvey

Finally, we have just started putting items up on our new online store. The same rules apply; members of the Cooperative can sell games to unsuspecting members of the public.

http://rpgreview.net/shop

Finally, the joys of being an incorporated association mean that we are required to provide a committee report for our January 2019 AGM. Here it goes.

Committee Report 2018

6 RPG REVIEW ISSUE 41 December 2018
The RPG Review Cooperative held its founding meeting in December, 2015, and was subsequently incorporated by the State of Victoria on January 7th, 2016. The following is a review of our second year of activities. All activities have been in strict accordance to our objectives. The committee members for 2018 were Lev Lafayette (President), Michael Cole (Vice-President), Andrew Daborn (Secretary), Liz Bowman (Treasurer), and Andrei Nikulinsky, Andrew McPherson and Karl Brown (ordinary members), with Karl taking up the role of Diversity Officer.

In the past year we have published four copies of the RPG Review journal (Issues 37-40, inclusive - the December edition is invariably late), constituting some 256 pages of material. Guest interviews included Terry K. Amthor, Lee Gold, and Paul Bilmer, plus we had a special print edition of RPG Review 40 for the 10th anniversary of the 'zine, which coincided with RuneQuest Glorantha Con Down Under III, which we hosted. Copies of this print edition are available to all members of the Cooperative, gratis. All copies of the ISSN-registered RPG Review journal have been submitted to the National Library of Australia. The RPG Review website received 50,284 unique visitors in 2018, an decrease of 7%, with RPG Review issues 6 once again receiving over 1000 downloads, with RPG Reviews 17 and 35 receiving 874 and 696, respectively.

The Cooperative has also published a monthly newsletter for members and potential members, 'Crux Australi'. This newsletter has outlined the various RPG campaigns being run by members, which increased to 27 this year, including 6 life members. There is 173 subscribers to Crux Australi. Continuing with our existing services, the Cooperative has also organised about visits to the Astor Cinema as a regular non-gaming social event. In addition, the Cooperative offers an online store for members to sell their second-hand or new games to the public. This was operated through Quicksales, but that service closed down this year and we have just started a new system hosted by ourselves. We also provide various IT support mechanisms (github, mailman mailing lists etc) with hosting donated from one of our members. Without a doubt the most important contributions in this area has been Tim Rice's 'Eclipse Phase manpages'.

Following the establishment of an RPG library for members in April 2016 we reached some 350 items by the end of that year. Now, with the library entirely stored in Coburg, Victoria. A substantial donation was made via Paul Smith this year of some 35 items, bringing us to a total of 723 items, up from a final count of 679 last year. For would-be game publishers, we also offer discount ISBNs which we gain an advantage from bulk purchasing. This year the Cooperative also published "The Tinker's Toolkit Race Design", with the first supplement for "Papers & Paychecks", "Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery" nearing completion.

Our Diversity Officer has produced two items very worthy of note this year, the first being the Code of Conduct. For any organisation if you don't have one of these sooner you will have problems later, so it is good that even our small group can manage one of these. In addition, following metrics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is a "diversity survey" which compares various social metrics of those associated with RPG Review and our readers.

The single most important event for the Cooperative in 2018 however, had to be our organisation of RuneQuest Glorantha Con Down Under III, held at Kryall Castle near Ballarat. The first such event in some twenty years, with some fantastic badges produced by Daniel Tosello, the long day saw over fifty people in attendance. With sponsorship...
of prizes and donations by Chaosium, there was game sessions of RuneQuest, Pendragon, and Glorantha 13th Age, Khan of Khans, a two-round auction (with extraordinarily generous bids from Phil Hibbs and Brett Easterbrook), panels, a free-form ("All The King's Ale") in which Andrew Bean and Brian P., provided outstanding assistance, Trollball, the usual events that the Castle itself runs, and glorious quality and quantity of food. One very sad aspect of the event was that in the midst of organising, the man who was first discovered by Glorantha, Greg Stafford, passed away. The committee is most insistent however that it is recorded that the Cooperative's president, Lev Lafayette, received the inaugural Greg Stafford Memorial Award for Gloranthan Fandom, from Chaosium and the Stafford family.

Reviewing the aims for 2018 in our last Committee Report, the Cooperative has completed most of the tasks that we set before us. Our membership has improved slightly, we brought out a new publication and are very close to the next, plus we have substantial cash and stock balance. Overall we have achieved a great deal for a small volunteer organisation that is only three years in existence. Looking forward to the 2019 year, the Committee will be looking at the following:

* Involvement in Arcanacon and other Conventions
* Completing our second Kickstarter publication, selling and promoting 'Papers & Paychecks'.
* Organising another RuneQuest Con DownUnder in association with Chaosium (c.f., https://www.facebook.com/groups/158376971443228/)
* Releasing between four and five issues of the RPG Review journal.
* Acting on the results of our Diversity Survey
* Maintaining our existing membership services, including library, discount ISBNs, store, and IT services.
* Investigating on whether the library can become a Deductible Gift Beneficiary and increasing its size.
* Improving our financial management and categorisation.

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

### 2018 Profit and Loss Statement

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2018 Balance Sheet

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2019 Budget
Forgive that the Delecti is no good with the names, hundreds of years has made the names hard to remember, perhaps the Delecti is a little deaf now. At the time I had words and memory of zombie boy, and spoke as any Satyrite local, but it all fades now into hundreds of years. Here is what the Delecti recalls of those events. Everything went by so fast for the old Delecti…

The Delecti is in the zombified body of the Cashed-in Longbroo, nephew and heir to the Pornos Longbroo who is Chief of the Greyfrogs Clan of Is-mouldy Tribe. The Delecti’s aim? To collapse the clan of course, as it produces the Intro-dummies Cult, who are flea bitten Humonkey death worshipers who think that dismembering the Delecti’s zombies is a fun sport. Well, be fair, dismembering can be fun, but the Delecti digress. Bah, these Satyrites with their bad roads and their crummy cities, Bald-dome, Swinestown, All-the-Chairs, they think they are so great, when Delecti could train even baboon to make better ones. Lamentably parochial. The Delecti remembers back in the day when Delecti’s mansion stood in the EWF capital, and Delecti’s Zoo was the popular tourist attraction. Now the poor Delecti has to put up with rude bumpkins raiding Marsh and their ancestor “heroes” like the Intro-par Greyfrog being reborn in the bodies of his kin to cut at the poor Delecti with their dirty knives. Intro-par has cheek to spirit possess own sentient and corporeal descendants like some Doggy Foul Shaman and somehow that is A-okay. When the Delecti does something like that and the fools call the Delecti an evil necromancer, even though the Delecti is using this dead body with no spirit dwelling within. Hypocrisy! All the Delecti want is to liberate the people from the cycle of life and death, and make them immortal; to provide them with limitless pleasure more profound than any mere bonking like animal can produce, but they disdain the Delecti’s gifts and attack the Delecti’s supporters at every turn. Never mind. The Delecti has all eternity to play, while they are finite little things who worship the death that will take everything away from them. If the Delecti manages to remove Greyfrog Clan, the Delecti can extend Marsh quite a bit. If the Delecti learned anything from the EWF it is that real estate is where the money is.

All that trouble to set up the Dragonkill, and what redevelopment plans the Delecti had for Dragon Pass! Then all the Poo Horse and their Filthy whore’s Queen and Hen-drinking squatters show up. Bah!

This recent misadventure began in chambers with the Delecti’s “dear Uncle” (remember, the cunning Delecti is pretending to be Cashed-in Longbroo). Now the Delecti has been studying the clan for some time, and the Delecti’s sabotage attempt had gone well. The chief is diseased, and looking forwards to handing off the responsibilities of rule to Cashed-in who is the Delecti. Wonderful. All is well. On the other hand, the Mallia priestess who diseased the chief only had partial success in diseasing the crops, as they up and vanished. Vanished is not destroyed, and that meant that starvation wasn’t inevitable. Then there was the whole issue that if the Delecti’s lesser vehicle didn’t look as if it was eating food, that it might compromise the Delecti’s cover, but The Delecti will get to that. Who is this Cashed-in? Some idiot boy. So the Delecti must play the part, and consider, the more Greyfrog the Delecti is, the better the foolish living ones will like the Delecti.

Consider poor old Pornos. He knows he is dying. He knows his clan is in mortal danger. What he doesn’t know is that his wife has cuckolded him with his own bastard son. The Delecti found out later. Very humorous. Of course Pornos must live for the Delecti’s plan to work, and we discussed strategy. We agreed that the food was very important, and the Delecti told the old Pornos that for the food to vanish, and the Pus Clan to raid, then the Lunar slop kitchen shows up with the Tax Collecter, just when the clan needs its hops to make Beer was all too convenient. The Cashed-in Delecti then says very practical advice, that when there are too many mouths and not enough food, but many swords, it
is time for war. The Delecti loves war, more bodies, so of course the Delecti counsels for war. Pornos cannot refute the argument but will not agree, for he is old now, and sick (but not as old as the Delecti). So the Delecti spoke next to Carnard Deathduck (strange name for a human), and he loved the council of war. The Delecti spoke to other weapon thanes, and rattled the sword in its sheath, so to speak, but I could see they were suspicious. And so they should be, for they were my competitors, and all of us carrion birds around the golden torc of old Chief Pornos, pecking for the meat of Greydog. That one, bah, what was his name? Boredom Greatsnore. What an arrogant blustering imbecile! And then there was the sleazy one, Youngbum Baby, whose mummy is called Hit Ignoring, a witch, the poor Youngbum, for he suckled on the cold titty. Then there is the Corvid the Black person (not Agimori, very misleading). This Corvid is worst night watchman ever. The Delecti found out he is called “the Black” because he lost his wits and has the blackouts. Very humorous, so The Delecti tells everyone and they laugh.

It is good to be the funny man, and they laugh and laugh, and they love their funny Delecti. So we of the weaponthanes all agree that to war we must go. The Delecti goes raiding with the Weaponthanes a couple of times to help win their hearts, but all it does is litter the land with dead bodies, and the weapon thanes all hate the Cashed-in Longbroo Delecti still; dirty bumpkins, back in the Jrustelan Empire we would think nothing of flash frying their whole village in burning ice, but those days are behind the Delecti; no ice-fire for him. How I reminisce with dear young Pavis about those days.

So the Delecti is having trouble, as there are not many sheep and old Pornos Chief keeps asking for more food. So Delecti remembers that his beautiful Daughters of Darkness have been getting sheep for him from Starfire Ridge. So the Delecti gets some more sheep, and tells Pornos that he needs the sheep to catch the thing that kills them, and Pornos accepts that. All the same, with everyone eating all the sheep, the poor Delecti is struggle to find enough to make the Greydogs into zombies with ritual of “If Delecti kill this sheep and take blood, then Greydog become Zombie”. The Delecti put the whammy on the Ovumstore the Trodden, and on Boredom Greatsnore but try a couple more. Hard to find time to do the rituals in the Delecti’s busy schedule, and lazy Daughters of Darkness must be micromanaged or they just sit around comparing nails all night and talk about the boys they want to drink.

Then the Delecti remembers his Duck. Finkfiend it is called. The Delecti saw through the silly disguise of the Duck, for it had beak, and it walked like Duck, but tried hard not to quack like duck. The Delecti would not be fooled. So, the Delecti could blackmail the Duck, but you catch more flies with corpses than by swatting, so instead the Delecti is all sympathy for the poor poor Duck who is victim of racist Lunar’s Duck Hunt. So very cruel, so the Cashed-in Longbroo must help the Duck, and others who “cannot pay their bill”. Duck took to that like worms in a bog. It is good magic trick to make Duck sing like the little bird, no?

After that I meet trollop (not being rude, that is what girl troll is called) the Ugly Has-Cash, who says the Cashed-in Longbroo is stinky. The Delecti is ever polite and say that perhaps she smell the Mostali iron sword of Cashed-in, but she say we should separate the sword and me, so she could smell better. The Delecti say no, as don’t give sword to troll is just smart. The Delecti smiles and stays polite to Ugly Has-Cash, while he looks for big stick. Is diplomacy, no?

Soon the Delecti is talk to the Lunar foreign aid worker called “Gnat-in-a-mucus-pool”, very Dragonewt name, reminds the Delecti of EWF, so the Delecti like her. She talks to the Delecti about how the Lunars have schools to mind control.
the young, and aqua-dogs that carry water, and how she is here to make people into good Lunar stool pigeons like her. But the Delecti is a good spy and so the Delecti make wise arguments about how Greyfrogs don’t need these things. Then the Delecti tell her that the clan is onto her, and that first the crop is stolen, then the Chief is sick, then the Pus raid, then the Lunar shows up with food. Is no coincidence. She did not like that. So as noble Cashed-In, the Delecti swear to protect when the clan comes for her. Good Jrusteli chivalry, no?

Finkfiend is good agent for the Delecti, and knows it not, the poor poor Finkfiend. Yes, the Finkfiend makes the Delecti to meet with the Lonny the Beer-head, who is boss of Orlanthi rebels and is head of the Hobo-son Bloodline. And oh what a great fool that one was. The Delecti tell him that the Cashed-in is “unofficial liaison” with Chief who has great sympathy with rebels, and there is much talking about how war will be waged. Yes, thinks the Delecti, we can call down the Lunars onto Greyfrog. Very good. The Delecti plans to wipe out whole clan, but maybe not just yet…

Then up comes Foreigngelding the Hopeless, and Corvid Blackout, and they ask the Delecti if he is vampire. Of course the Delecti is no vampire! The Delecti is spirit of a necromancer in the body of zombie if you must know, but cunning Delecti says nothing, but is all shocked. But you see the Foreigngelding has the Humakt magic for seeing lies, and he thinks Delecti is a vampire, poor foolish Foreigngelding. Of course his magics fail, for the Delecti is not vampire, only the Daughters of Darkness are vampire, the Delecti is so much more! Then the Blackout says he has been dreaming of Cashed-in, and the Cashed-in says “Have you been attracted to me this whole time?” All very embarrassing for the Blackout, and inside the Delecti is laugh and laugh. The Cashed-in Delecti promise to investigate what is all about and to speak with the Trickster Pigprice who is also in dreams.

The Delecti is just talk to the Pigprice, and find out that it is he who stole the grain, for he knows where it is, but cannot get it. This is good thinks the Delecti, for trickster can be killed and blamed as thief of the food, and the clan gets no more. But no!

Then the election for Chief is starting. This is not good, for the Delecti still has too much work to do. Still not good when the Boredom Greatsnore is ahead in vote, then the Delecti has the zombies change their vote, and it is the Delecti who has won! Oh the poor Delecti, is like the girl chosen for Bride of Spring, and is all smiles and sparkles in sunlight like Edward Cullen, and waves at the crowd. The Delecti is think “Yesss! YESSS! The Delecti will boil this clan Greyfrog slowly! They will not notice their decline.” Then cruel GM wrecks everything, for the Delecti is proclaimed, after all the work of hiding in the Cashed-in Longbroo, and so the Delecti has to fight the Blackout. At first everything is neck on neck, then the Delecti realize that if the Delecti is revealed, there is no point, and so he lose the fight, and wake up on favorite bier in home in Marsh again and the Delecti’s Cashed-in zombie and plan are ruined. Ah well, such is unlife. Try again next Sacred Time, no?
This is yet another article in a series of materials for the classic T&T 5th edition. Previous articles appeared in issues: 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, and 31. Though written for edition 5.5, this series of articles is largely compatible with the 7th edition. This selection of monsters are ones I might consider as PCs and would be suitable for use with the solo adventures published for T&T. The solo adventure City of Terrors by Michael Stackpole in particular takes place in a city where orcs and worse freely roam the streets and contained rules for troll PCs. As a guideline add up all the attribute modifiers (yes negative CHR subtracts) and if under 8 the kin may be suitable for use as a player character. An average IQ of at least 5 is also recommended unless you want to play a beast. Guidelines for role-playing monsters appeared in issue 15.

**Firbolg**

MR 14 Dice 2 Adds 7  
Natural Weapons: two attacks in a round these can be punches, kicks or head butts all doing 1d each  
Natural Armour 0  
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil  
ST 22 (x2) IQ 10 (x1) LK 7 (x0.5) CON 14 (x1.5) DEX 8 (x1) CHR 7 (x0.5) SP 12 (x1)  
Height x1.5 Weight x3.5 Starting Age: 3d+40 Old at: 180

Large, rough-looking people who dress much like the ancient Celts. Firbolgs (pronounced Fear-Bolg) ruled much of the land before the coming of the dwarves and the elves, and they are still bitter about the lands stolen from them centuries ago. Firbolgs now generally live in wild areas near the edges of civilization. They are not evil, but uncooth and a little wild. Firbolg often help humans, especially if doing so aids their long standing grudges. Firbolg culture also has a long magical tradition like leprechauns (using the same rules), but unlike leprechauns not all are wizards. Firbolg wizards are not members of the WizardsÕ Guild (which was established by elves and dwarves), but may use spells like a wizard, begin with all first level spells, but must purchase more spells as if a rogue, and are prohibited from using large weapons by Firbolg tradition. Unlike true wizards, Firbolg wizards pay for spells with STR not CON. Some referees may allow firbolg player characters, especially since they are an option for larger-than-human characters that donÕt have a negative charisma.

**Gnome**

MR 9 Dice 1 Adds 4  
Natural Weapons: unarmed attacks 1d Natural Armour 0  
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil  
ST 7 (x0.5) IQ 17 (x1.5) LK 12 (x1.25) CON 10 (x1) DEX 16 (x1.5) CHR 7 (x0.5) SP 12 (x1)  
Height x1/3 Weight x1/4 Starting Age: 3d+50 Old at: 200

Short, stocky, but not as portly as hobbits, these people of the earth and soil are sometimes mistaken for under-grown dwarfs. However where dwarves are sturdy, stolid and stern, gnomes are nimble, bright and cheerful.
While similar to dwarfs, gnome aptitudes tend to be on a smaller scale. Dwarves built huge stone halls and excavate cities within mountains, gnomes dig cozy warrens. Dwarves construct trebuchet and aqueducts, gnomes design intricate locks and telescopes. Dwarves forge steel into armour and axes, gnomes produce excellent jewellers. Gnomes are more amicable than dwarfs, and with their mathematical aptitude this combination can produce shrewd merchants. Gnomes enjoy practical jokes, preferring to outwit their enemies and generally get along with each other and other good kin. Gnome culture produces few warriors. Most gnomes have an aptitude for magic, there are many gnome rogues and some wizards.

Gnomes maintain that they were once genomus, a type of elemental that petitioned the gods to become mortal after becoming intrigued by beasts and plants. Whatever the truth of this, gnomes still have affinities for both the Earth and living things. Gnomes share the dwarf abilities of doubled digging rate, the ability to determine the value of jewels and gems, and to sniff out large concentrations of gold if they get close enough. Although earth dwellers, gnomes are concerned not just with rock but also with soil; they delight both in wild forests and gardens where the earth produces life but abhor the dull monotony of fields of wheat and other crops. Gnome gardeners are sought after by those who can afford servants. Many gnomes choose to learn one or more of the low tongues of animals; the rodent tongue is particularly popular.

**Goblin**

MR 10 Dice 2 Adds 5  
Natural Weapons: two claws 1d Natural Armour 0  
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil  
ST 7 (x0.5) IQ 12 (x1) LK 15 (x1.5) CON 10 (x1) DEX 14 (x1.5) CHR -3 (x-0.5) SP 15 (x1.5)  
Height x0.5 Weight x0.125 Starting Age: 3d+5 Old at: 30

Goblins are cruel faeries who are short and ugly but otherwise are so varied as to defy accurate description. Pointed ears, dog ears, pointed noses, ape-life snouts, skin of green, grey or purple, warts, cat eyes, black soulless orbs or eyes like red sparks; their magical and wicked nature makes no two alike. As faeries they have aptitudes for trickery and magic, some become rogues or even wizards. Some referees may allow goblin player characters.

**Knockers**

MR 10 Dice 2 Adds 5  
Natural Weapons: two claws 1d Natural Armour 0  
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil  
ST 6 (x0.5) IQ 12 (x1) LK 15 (x1.5) CON 10 (x1) DEX 15 (x1.5) CHR 3 (x0.5) SP 15 (x1.5)  
Height x0.5 Weight x0.125 Starting Age: 3d+5 Old at: 30

Knockers are faeries related to goblins but unlike goblins these secretive folk often aid human miners in exchange for privacy, food and a little ore. They can be distinguished from goblins by their habits and their homely rather than ugly appearance. Knockers avoid being seen by other kin and value privacy. The surest way to drive these helpers out of a mine is to try to observe them as they work at night or seek out the concealed entrances to their dwellings within the
Some knockers become rogues or, more rarely, even wizards. Some refereeÔs may allow knocker player characters. Such knockers will probably be less private than usual and will have to put up with occasionally being mistaken for a goblin.

**Nymph**

MR 8 Dice 1 Adds 4
Natural Weapons: Normal unarmed combat  Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil
ST 9 (x1) IQ 12 (x1) LK 16 (x1.5) CON 8 (x1) DEX 12 (x1) CHR 12 or 30 (x1 or x3) use second number when dealing those attracted to females. SP 12 (x1)
Height x9/10 Weight x2/3 but never overweight or skinny Starting Age: 3d+50 Old at: 200

Also known as korrigan and lamignac, nymphs are the yin to the satyr yang. All nymphs are female their natural mates are satyrs. Male offspring are born satyrs and female offspring are nymphs. Just as satyrs seem to be over-masculine, nymphs are brimming over with female essence. As young maids they are more adventurous and are most often seen by outsiders in their youth. As mature women they are caring and charismatic, as elders they offer wisdom and leadership. They look exactly like well proportioned and beautiful human females. It may not be apparent to others that they are dealing with a nymph and not an attractive human female. Nymphs often take lovers from the other good kin any offspring of such unions are full nymphs if female and attractive but sterile half breeds if male. Nymphs are fairy kindred and have a high aptitude for magic. Some refereeÔs may allow nymph player characters. Nymph culture distains violence and warfare and so produces no warriors. All nymphs are wizards or rogues.

**Orc**

MR 25 Dice 3 Adds 12
Natural Weapons: bite 1d, two claws 1d each.  Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil
ST 20 (x2) IQ 9 (x1) LK 16 (x1.5) CON 25 (x2.5) DEX 10 (x1) CHR -10 (x-1) SP 10 (x1)
Height x1 Weight x1.25 Starting Age: 3d+5 Old at: 35

Orcs are brutish and ape-like so therefore are stronger and more agile than humans but not greatly so. Some referees may allow orc player characters

**Pixie**

MR 9 Dice 1 Adds 5
Natural Weapons: unarmed 1d Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil
ST 4 (x0.5) IQ 13 (x1.5) LK 17 (x1.5) CON 9 (x1) DEX 17 (x1.5) CHR 12 (x1) SP 12 (x1)
Size x1/3 Weight x3.5% Starting Age: 3d+40 Old at: 180

By virtue of a bitter civil war centuries ago the rebellious pixies had their own country before the coming of the
dwarves. They still expect the old treaties to be respected and no elves or winged fairies to enter the land the pixies once owned outright. (see Briggs). Pixies are often rogues but rarely wizards since the Guild is viewed as an elf institution. Pixie wizards are outcasts among their own kind. Traditionally pixies wear green as camouflage in woods and verdant country but if out socially they consider it polite to wear a bright red hat. They are red headed with pointy ears and noses. Pixies are nocturnal and can see twice as far as humans from any source of light. They squint in sunlight but are otherwise unaffected. Pixies are experts at magical guerrilla warfare and typical pixie rogue tactics is to employ mirage and conceal to way-lay enemies and ambush them. Since these spells are so common in pixie society a pixie rogue in her homeland can buy these as if a wizard.

Satyr
MR 12 Dice 2 Adds 6
Natural Weapons: normal unarmed attack 1d and a butt for 1d Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil
ST 15 (x1.5) IQ 9 (x1) LK 15 (x1.5) CON 12 (x1) DEX 10 (x1) CHR 8 (x1) SP 12 (x1)
Height x2/3 Weight x1/3 Starting Age: 3d+8 Old at: 40

Also known as korreds and fawns, satyrs are the natural mates of nymphs. The offspring of such unions are nymphs if female and satyrs if male. All satyrs are male. Satyrs often take lovers from the other good kin any offspring of such unions are full satyrs if male and sterile half breeds if female. Satyrs may be used as player characters in some campaigns. Satyrs lack the necessary discipline for serious magical studies in the crucial years of youth and so may not be wizards. Satyrs may be rogues or warriors.

Therianthrope
MR 10 Dice 2 Adds 5
Natural Weapons: bite/peck/etc. 2d. In an action a therianthrope can make regular unarmed attacks as a human (1d) or use a weapon instead of a bite. Natural Armour: Nil
Special Attacks: Nil Special Defences: Nil
ST 10* (x1) IQ 10 (x1) LK 10* (x1) CON 10 (x1) DEX 8 (x 8/10) CHR 10 (x1) SP 10 (x1)
Height x1 Weight x1 Starting Age: 3d+5 Old at: 50
* Either ST or LK is 18 (x2) pick one based on the physical characteristics of the animal whose head the therianthrope has. Alternatively, both ST and LK could be 15 (x1.5). Therianthropes are as diverse as humans major NPCs should be detailed with attributes reminiscent of the animal whose head they have.

Therianthropes are presented in some detail because they would make an excellent player character kin in most non-European settings. A therianthrope is a human with the head and neck of an animal. Such beings have been depicted the world over since humans painted the earliest rock art, though they seemed to have vanished from Europe in ancient times. In my campaign world therianthropes are rare in most parts of the world, extinct in the ÖWestÖ and fairly common in the South (Africa). The animal head and neck is always as large as a human head and neck combined, so an ibis therianthrope has a larger head than an actual ibis i.e. a child sized head and a proportional ibis neck. An elephant therianthrope has a smaller head than an elephant and hardly any neck. The head of a therianthrope provides a
compromise between animal and human senses including colour vision and perhaps a single acute sense. The body of the therianthrope while totally human has a build and appearance reminiscent of the animal, an elephant therianthrope will be large and heavy set while a cat therianthrope will be smaller, lithe and graceful. However, the capabilities of their bodies and limbs are always within the human range, non-human abilities are limited to those few provided by the head. Therianthropic diets contain a mix of human and animal foods. Despite bestial heads flexible tongues and larynxes allow them to speak human languages but with a accent. In personality such creatures are basically human but tend to have personality traits reminiscent of the animal whose head they have. So human are they in personality that they fit in well in human societies accustomed to their odd looks and they are attracted to humans (when a human and therianthrope, or two therianthropes of different heads, or a therianthrope and a were, breed the offspring has an even chance of being either kin). Therianthropes generally get on well with weres of the same animal, sometimes forming mixed communities. As magical creatures therianthropes are often rogues or wizards and have their fair share of warrior-wizards also. However, there partially animal nature has less aptitude for tools and weapons so few are pure warriors or artisan civilians (though no character type is actually banned). The standard rules to prevent a therianthrope from making a bite and a weapon attack together in one action it is noted here again for clarity.

Each breed of therianthrope also has one minor special ability determined by the head. Typical abilities include:
* Smell/taste saves at one level lower.
* Vision saves at one level lower.
* Hearing saves at one level lower.
* Night vision like a cat, able to see double usual distance in dim light but still blinded by total darkness.
* Poisonous bite, the venom adds 1d damage if the attack hits and gets past armour.
* Elephant’s trunk, treat as an arm of DX x1/2, ST x1/3.
* Echolocation like a bat. You use sound to “see” even in total darkness (treat as colour blind) but enough of the squeaks or clicks you need to make to “see” in this way are audible by humans and others to give your own location away, sneaking saves are impossible in quiet areas and two levels harder if there is background noise.
* Sense of direction like a migratory bird. An internal “compass” so you always know which way is north and never get “turned around”. This is useful in mazes but does not allow a character to automatically retrace their steps.

**Troll, Young**

MR 36 Dice 4 Adds 18  
Natural Weapons: Tough clawed hands 1d each, bite 2d Natural Armour 0  
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil  
ST 30 (x3) IQ 10 (x1) LK 10 (x1) CON 30 (x3) DEX 10 (x1) CHR -20 (x-2) SP 10 (x1)  
Height x2 Weight x4 Starting Age: 3d+50 Old at: 200  

Trolls are tall but long limbed so mass less than other creatures of the same height. Some referees may allow troll PCs. Trolls grow sporadically throughout their lives in response to stress. Larger trolls can have much higher MRÕs and most of the additional Adds are devoted to STR. Trolls are a highly variable kin and the extra dice from higher MRÕs can be added to any of the natural weapons, one may have enormous tusks and other massive fists etc. Height of older trolls will be at least inches equal to square root of STR times 25, and mass at least ST squared divided by two.
Paul Bimler is the author of solo adventures for D&D 5e. He publishes as a small label ‘5e Solo Gamebooks’ on the DMs’ Guild. His first adventure created a bit of splash and went on to become a ‘Mithral Best-seller’ on the DM’s Guild.

RPG Review: Let’s start with a variation on our standard first question for these interviews. When did you play your first game book and what about your first RPG?

Paul: The first gamebook I read was The Warlock of Firetop Mountain, as I'm sure it was for many others, and I came across that in 1984, which was also the first year I got into Dungeons & Dragons, at the age of 11 years old. From there I collected the whole series of Fighting Fantasy gamebooks, as well as Lone Wolf, Way of the Tiger, Demonspawn, Grail Quest and many others. They’ve been a huge influence on me in terms of gaming and adventure writing.

RPG Review: Can you briefly tell us about how you came to write your first solo adventure for D&D 5e?

Paul: I've always been a fan of solo adventures, even within D&D. The day I decided to write a solo adventure was the day I found Dungeon Master's Guild. I went on there and did a search for solo adventures, and quickly discovered that none had been written for Fifth Edition (that's since changed). So, I got straight to work writing! And in the process of doing that, I shared the creation of the book, developing the style as I went. It was actually a really fun and engaging process.

RPG Review: You only recently began publishing your writing. How did you learn to write and polish your craft?

Paul: I've been writing fiction for many years, unpublished. I have had plenty of time to practice writing, which I think is the best way to polish your craft, and I've always been engaged in writing of some sort, since I was very young. It's always been a major passion of mine. With the appearance of DM's Guild, the opportunity to self-publish came up, and I'm glad that I've done it. I've been making submissions of my work (fantasy fiction) to various agents and publishing companies for a long time, getting the occasional response but never able to secure a deal of any sort. But having self-published, and having seen some success as a result, I'm re-evaluating the merits of pursuing the 'traditional path' of
publishing. A lot of what publishing companies are looking for is based on fashions within book selling, and I'm not sure my work really conforms to any of that! In terms of learning to write, I read a lot within the fantasy genre, which I think is essential for any writer. Be familiar with your chosen genre and the big names who write within it. I also have a small circle of friends who are writers too, and we are always reviewing each others' work and giving each other pointers. It's been very valuable getting that feedback. Sometimes, you need it spelt out for you, where you're going wrong. If I was to recommend a book on writing, there's a series called "Write Great Fiction" which I've gotten a lot of good pointers from. Those books will point you in the right (write?) direction when it comes to honing your craft!

RPG Review: Your books are quite professional how did you go about recruiting artists, cartographers and others with the skills needed?

Paul: 95% of the maps are done by myself. I've been a Dungeon Master for many many years, and have always made maps, so cartography is something that comes with the terrain (pun intended) of being a dungeon master, in my opinion. Regarding the art, when you make material for DM's Guild, you get access to a whole lot of art packs that you are able to use within your product. I'm also always on the hunt for great public domain and Creative Commons art, and I keep note of where to find all that stuff. So as it turns out, I haven't actually had to recruit any artists so far - although that has changed with the most recent book (not yet published). I did get three different artists to help me out with some of the images in there. But largely it's either public domain stuff or made by me.

RPG Review: D&D 5e was not designed for solo play can you briefly tell us how your first book “The Death Knight’s Squire” allowed solo play with the D&D rules?

Paul: In the most basic terms, it operates like a gamebook. Think Fighting Fantasy or Lone Wolf gamebooks. If you're not familiar with either of those series, here's a brief description: narrative entries replace DM narration, and at the end of each entry, you are presented with choices So, for example, here's an example from the book I'm working on currently, entitled The Tortured Land.

A sound from ahead makes you freeze. You hear a low muttering, a guttural voice cursing and debating with itself. Quickly you duck down and begin to make your way stealthily forward, using rocks and tussock as cover. Not an easy job, as this highland terrain is fairly bare.

Make a stealth check, DC 14.
If successful, go to entry 392.
If unsuccessful, go to 47.

From this point you will make the skill check, click on the appropriate option (all of them are hyperlinked within the text), and be taken to the next entry where you will see the outcome! So it is a gamebook, but it uses 5e D&D mechanics.

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RPG Review: as an New Zealand designer you are far removed from the centres of the industry in the USA and UK. Do you think the reduced chances to meet big designers, to show your work at the big conventions, and other effects of distance are a significant obstacle for Australian designers?

Paul: I'll say that yes, the fact that there are not that many RPG conferences and the like down here in the Southern Hemisphere is something that bothers me sometimes. But the Internet has provided a lot of opportunities when it comes to meeting some of the "big names" in the industry. I can't speak for the larger gaming industry but I've met some big names within the D&D world online, and I'm always looking to network. I think it's more of a challenge for those of us in the Southern Hemisphere, but I don't think it needs to be viewed as a "significant obstacle" as you put it there. I suppose it depends what you're aiming to achieve. In terms of getting my products to people, I think I'm achieving that pretty well just through my online presence and I'm not sure how much being in the US or the UK would improve that.

RPG Review: Why did you decide to publish on the DM's Guild and what advice do you have for others considering publishing on the DM's Guild?

Paul: I'd say that if you're considering it, just do it. Your product might be received really well. However, having said that, I think that it would be unrealistic to release something, not do any marketing or other promotion, and expect it to do well. You need to build an audience organically online, either by starting a blog, creating engaging posts, or whatever other method you think best suits your product. The other piece of advice I would have is a pretty common one from a business perspective: look for gaps in the market. Go onto DM's Guild and start searching for things that you think would be great but aren't currently there. What are some needs that DMs or players might have that aren't currently being filled? That's a surefire way to identify a product you could create that others might find useful.

RPG Review: Among the thousands of PDFs for D&D 5e on the DM's Guild and on the internet generally your book managed to gain a lot of attention. What do you think was the big break that got your book noticed in the first place?

Paul: Do you know, I'm not entirely sure! One thing that may have helped was that I shared the whole process of creation, as I was writing the book, and I think that piqued people's interest. That way, when it went live, people had been waiting for it and it went straight to number 1 on the bestseller's list, where it stayed for quite a few months. Getting a spot on that list ensures that sales will continue. But yeah, I put a fair bit of effort into generating interest in it before I actually released it, and I think that helped quite a bit.

RPG Review: Your adventures are set in WOTC’s “Forgotten Realms” world. Why did you choose to use that property and not set your books in a generic fantasy world or a world of your own creation? What are the pros and cons of working with a property.

Paul: The thing is, when you release on Dungeon Master's Guild, you have to set your product within either the Forgotten Realms, Eberron, Ravnica… you get the idea. So to gain access to that audience, there are certain guidelines you have to abide by, and the setting is one of those. I actually initially wrote the book set in my own homebrew world.
of the Voldrelm, but when I was about 50% done I realized I needed to change it, so I did. The cons of working with a property are that you need to conform to the lore and rules of that world... but I kind of view this as a pro. I like working within constraints and seeing how far you can exercise your imagination within those boundaries. What new innovations you can bring to that existing world. I like the Forgotten Realms, too. Possibly my favourite ever setting for D&D.

**RPG Review:** After Death Knight’s Squire you wrote a couple of sequels. The second book “The Tyrant of Zhentil” keep is written to include a degree of sandbox style play rather than presenting a clear quest from the start. I’m a fan of sandbox play but it is a style that usually uses a lot of back and forth between the players and the DM often writing between sessions to accommodate the players choices. Can you talk about the challenges of bringing exploratory play to the solo format?

Paul: I didn't actually set out to write it as such. It was when I was part-way through the writing process that I looked at what I'd done and thought, wait a minute. I've created a little sandbox here. The main way I took it to being a solo sandbox was by the use of locations and sidequests. So, there is a map of Zhentil Keep in the book where entry numbers are attached to locations. You look at the map and say, "I want to go there", and you proceed to the entry number that is displayed, like clicking on a map in a video game. But you only get a limited time, so you can only visit a set number of locations, and only a set number of sites within that location. That's managed via the use of a mechanic I created called Progress Points. It ensures replayability also. The other thing that I think gives it a sandbox feel is the inclusion of sidequests, usually triggered by a codeword. There are a number of quests in the book that are auxiliary to the main quest, and this gives the player a feel of open exploration. You're right, a sandbox in a DM-led game is much freer. But I think that by including the above-mentioned features, I've given a little taste of that within a solo setting. I hope so, anyway.

**RPG Review:** Your next project was a very different method for solo play the “Tables of Doom”. In some ways random tables for solo play are a hoary old tradition in RPG going at least as far back as the AD&D 1e DNG. What are some of the features of Tables of Doom that differentiate from other random adventure generation tables?

Paul: I didn't really set out to make the random generation tables different to tables that had come before. I just wanted to make a solo adventure that included tables, to increase the amount of possible adventures that could be had. Also, I love tables. You mentioned AD&D 1e. That's the edition I started with, and the tables in the 1e DMG are still a huge source of inspiration for me, and definitely partly inspired the tables in that product. I think just the combination of solo adventure, random tables, and standard gamebook entries was something that hadn't really been done before. I expand hugely on that concept with *The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox*. The next Tables of Doom, which is out soon (Tables of Doom 2: Crypt of the Deceiver) also contains a card-drawing mechanic. You draw cards from a standard deck to trigger encounters, traps, monsters, items etc. That's something that hasn't been done before within the concept of a solo D&D adventure, and I'm really looking forward to sharing that one.

**RPG Review:** After this you produced notes for converting a couple of adventures for earlier editions to solo play with...
the D&D 5e rules. Here at RPG Review we cover RPG material old and new so these projects of yours piqued our interest. Why did you decide to convert old adventures and these two in particular.

Paul: The selection of those particular adventures was more or less random (one is an old 2e module and the other a 4e one from Dungeon magazine), but they both happened between gamebooks. I wanted to bash out a product fairly quickly that would give people some solo gaming time, but wouldn't take too much effort on my part. As it turns out, it doesn't take too long to convert an existing module for solo play. And after I'd just finished writing a solo adventure product of 50k words (about the same length as a short novel) I was keen to work on something that wasn't so labour intensive! They were a lot of fun and I will do more conversions in future.

RPG Review: What were some of the challenges of 'double conversion' to D&D 5e and to solo play and how did you overcome them?

Paul: I didn't really view it as double conversion... when I'm working on anything, I am 100% focused on the *story* of the adventure, above everything else, and that forms the centre of my work. So I just work on the core of the story, and keeping those elements true to form, and working from that point. Then I just replace the existing edition's elements with 5e elements. Conversion of an existing module for solo play is a pretty simple process really.

RPG Review: The “Death Knight’s Squire” was the first is a series of adventures, can you give us a teaser for what to expect next from you?

Paul: Yes, well I've got five gamebook style adventures out now, two solo conversions and The Solo Adventurer’s Toolbox which is a set of rules for freeform solo play within D&D (which has been doing really well). So, what's next? Well, I'm working on Tables of Doom 2: Crypt of the Deceiver at the moment, and that should be out soon. After that, I'm planning on completing three more gamebooks, back to back, without interruption. The next one is called The Tortured Land and will be released some time in January 2019. At some stage next year, I'm going to release The Solo Adventurer's Toolbox Part 2, and I also have a long-term project, a campaign guide (non-solo) in the works too. That's for the Beastlands region of Faerun. So I've got plenty to keep me busy! But I'm eager to keep the solo adventure series going, especially for those players who have completed the first three books and want to continue the series. I want to reward their loyalty by writing and releasing three more solo adventures in quick succession. Then I'll work on something else, then release some more gamebooks. Going to take this series all the way to Level 20. After that... well, maybe I'll do a 1-20 in a different setting!

RPG Review: Thanks for taking the time to talk with us and good luck with the next book.

Thanks for having me!
DESIGNER’S NOTES FOR MAGELLINICIA

By Craig McKenzie

Magellanica is an Australian-themed RPG campaign setting designed for D&D 5E and Pathfinder. I wrote it as a means to incorporate the fantastical elements of Australian history and mythology into fantasy roleplaying. There is a very distinct lack of Australiana in fantasy, something which I have increasingly felt is a shame. Interesting adventures and creatures pop up from time to time, but I struggled to find a fantasy RPG based solidly around Australian themes. With this in mind, I set out to write a fantasy RPG campaign setting that incorporated all the most amazing parts of this great continent: its unique landscapes, creatures, people and stories.

What’s in a name?

I named the campaign setting “Magellanica” after the real-world name for the Great Southern Land that was used on many 16th century maps. It references the great navigator Ferdinand Magellan who sailed through the Strait of (you guessed it) Magellan in what became Argentina. Cartographers believed that the tip of Argentina merged with the Great Southern Land and invented an entire continent that spanned the breadth of the southern hemisphere. This continent was called Magellanica on many beautiful globes of the 16th century. Some of these old maps were decorated with imagined creatures and peoples, adding to the sense of fantastical wonder of what eventually was discovered to be Australia and Antarctica.

The inspiration - Australian history and mythology

As the dear reader has probably guessed, I am Australian. I was born and raised in rural Victoria which went a long way in immersing me in the sheer uniqueness of Australian culture. I grew up with an obsession for all things fantasy (books, movies, Warhammer, tabletop and computer RPGs). Throw into the mix a love of history and it soon becomes apparent why I wanted to make Magellanica. Writing it gave me the opportunity to weave my love of history and fantasy together with my passion for roleplaying.

Only in the last few years have I grown to appreciate Australian history and mythology. I have always been an avid
reader into all things historical, with particular interest into European history. However, the more I learnt about the
history of other places the more I realised just how completely crazy and amazing our own history was. Not only was
colonial and indigenous history an excellent source of storytelling inspiration, the mythologies of indigenous
Australians stoked the fire of imagination too. I feel that the history and mythologies of Australia lend themselves
perfectly to fantasy storytelling. The landscapes, creatures and myriad people of this unique continent are an excellent
source of inspiration for any writer or games/dungeonmaster. With that in mind, I set out to make a fantasy RPG setting
for D&D 5E and Pathfinder that described the characters and creatures of a fledgling colony in a land inspired by
Australia.

Australian history is a curious thing. European colonists experienced such a unique sense of wonder at just how very
different Australian fauna, flora and geography was from the rest of the known world. When colonial explorers
discovered the rivers of the Murray-Darling basin, they were amazed that they flowed backwards – flowing inland
rather than toward the sea. When the first colonists saw marsupials, they discovered tiny bears (koalas), dog-cats
(Tassie tigers), rectangular boars (wombats) and incredibly tall and muscular rabbits (kangaroos). Think for a moment
of the simple gum. It can be burnt black and yet somehow return to life. Gum trees are truly phoenixes.

This sense of wonder is reflected in the Dreamtime stories of Australia’s first people. One cannot hear the term
“Dreamtime” and not have their imagination run riot with fantastical ideas. The dreaming stories of indigenous
Australians weave an incredibly rich mythology for the land, creatures, weather and stars that remain uniquely
Australian. Their stories lend themselves brilliantly to fantasies that few have ever known. Onerous yowies, blood-
sucking yara-ma-yha-who, terrifying bunyips and life-giving alienesque wandjina are but a smattering of interesting
spirits found in the collective dreaming of various indigenous tribes. The conception of the Dreamtime is in and of itself
an amazing thing. Rather than an explanation of what was found “everywhere,” the Dreamtime lends itself to the
concept of “everywhen.”

Of the numerous characters that grace Australia’s history we have tribal elders, sorcerous kurdaitcha, desperate
convicts, cunning bushrangers, ambitious explorers, greedy prospectors, ruthless politicians and all manner of hopefuls
arriving on these fair shores. All these and more fascinating characters cry out to grace the pages of books or to be
roleplayed at the tabletop.

**Making Magellanica**

The idea of writing my own Australian-themed fantasy setting had been rattling around in my mind for some time when
a friend of mine began to write his own RPG. He was making his own fantasy ruleset but had only made some rough
mechanics. He had no setting. I figured it would be cool if I started fleshing out ideas about a setting whilst he made the
rules. Although his ruleset never got off the ground, I continued on writing the setting which eventually became
Magellanica.

I had excellent brainstorming sessions with friends and family as we trawled through every bit of Australian history and
culture that we thought was interesting. All of it got incorporated into the setting. Even the antics of Tony Abbott got in
there somewhere.

However, initially Magellanica was only a setting without rules. This prompted me to start writing rules for
Magellanica’s characters, creatures, magic and environment that were compatible with current RPGs. As an avid player of Pathfinder and D&D, I could look no further than writing rules for those two systems. The flexibility of open gaming licenses for both systems provided excellent flexibility to weave historical and mythological inspiration into either game.

As a complete novice when it came to publishing, it was a steep learning curve. I set about making appropriate layouts, matching fonts, making chapter headings, buying stock art and commissioning some concept art from local artists. As I was doing it solo and this was my first attempt at publishing I thought it best to stick to digital copies of Magellanica rather than printing hard copies. Due to a personal obsession with the adventures of Hernan Cortes, I thought it appropriate to publish Magellanica from Fortunately Bold Games given Cortes’ frequent use of the saying “Lady Fortune favours the bold.” Though daunting, publishing Magellanica was an incredibly rewarding experience which gave me an exciting glimpse into the publishing world.

**Donation to charity**

I am a scientist lucky enough to earn a decent wage and figured I could donate all the profits from Magellanica to charity. I chose the Worldbuilder’s charity because I love what they do and it seems appropriate given their association with RPGs and nerdom at large. Thankfully, the Worldbuilders charity let me use their logo on the cover of Magellanica after I could prove to them that all profits were sent directly by cheque to their headquarters.

**Conclusions**

Magellanica was a labour of love. It took a long time to research and write. As an added and entirely unexpected bonus, I managed to get somewhat proficient with cartography software so that I could draw a map for the setting. As a whole, Magellanica was an exciting first foray into publishing RPG content. I look forward to delving further into expansions to Magellanica or generating new content for various fantasy adventures on the tabletop.
SOLO PLAY REVIEWS

By Karl Brown and Lev Lafayette

Ring of the Ruby Dragon (Jeannie Black, 1983)

Review by Lev Lafayette

Designed as a spin-off from the Endless Quest gamebooks, and an attempt to appeal to a younger female teenage audience, TSR published a half-dozen interactive branching-plot stories in the early to mid 1980s. They were not a huge success by any stretch of the imagination, perhaps not helped by the fact that distribution seemed limited to RPG hobby stores with its predominately male audience, or at least it was back then. Not also that these were not "gamebooks" in the sense there was no game system included in the story (but then again, nor did the Endless Quest books).

At a mere 153 pages, single column, serif font, this is the size of a short adolescent novel. The cover by Elmore art is a bit cheesy, but the internal art is competent and contextual. The writing style is pretty simple, but one must also consider the audience that it is pitching at. Nevertheless, the tale itself ends up with

The basic plot is that the young Chandelle is travelling with her father, a jeweller, when they are attacked by a centaur and winged lions. Chandelle is knocked out, and her father is missing, but the wagon still contains the precious magical ioun stones which certainly raises an eyebrow of D&D players that such a relatively powerful magic item is available.

An inexperienced knight, Sir Coren, on his first quest, turns up and notices centaur tracks. At this point Chandelle has the option of following the knight's tracks or go to town to find someone more experienced. Another character that Chandelle may end up working with is Sir Toreck, the older, more experienced knight. Thus the plot is set where we have a mixture of a fantasy setting with a young woman trying to rescue her father, and with potential romantic interests.

On the positive side, there is a romantic plot element, which was a welcome formal addition to the RPG world (keep in mind that even Pendragon, which took romance very seriously, would not be released until 1985). Secondly, it is good see such an adventure, indeed a series of adventures, with a positive female lead role where she has the initiative and can determines the outcomes, even if these are within a somewhat contrived framework and often with elaboration of her internal dialogue.

Part of that contrived framework does mean that it is possible to finish the story in literally just a handful of moves, which means missing out on most of the content of the tale. Assuming one either chooses "incorrectly" or plays again, the rest of the story can be revealed which does involve some more complex tales, and some which are quite odd - in one possibility a *dragon* slips in the mud.

Most of the romantic plots involving the older knight will have worse endings, whereas those with the younger knight will have a more positive result, but he requires a fair bit of ego-stroking. One can decide for themselves what thematic content implies. This said, the various paths don't have a great deal of overlap so a positive of the book is that they can
be played over for different results.

'Ring of the Ruby Dragon' is not a great tale of romance and adventure. It clearly need additional work on the construction and with relatively flat characters with inconsistent personalities it is hard to feel any great sympathy or association, even with the lead character. Then again, all of this can also be said of the *Sweet Valley High* series as well, and they were enormously successful. However the inclusion of romance was both innovative and enticing for both book and the entire series. As a result it has a certain charm, and it would be nice to see something similar attempted again. But like romance, once bitten, twice shy; it would take a brave publisher to give this another chance.

**Review of The Warlock of Firetop Mountain (1984)**

Review by Lev Lafayette

This rather famous book started the "Fighting Fantasy" choose-your-own-adventure which eventually blossomed into over fifty solo gamebooks, and its own setting of Titan. Originally published by Puffin Books in 1982 (the version reviewed here), it was republished through Wizard Books in 2002, several RPG supplements, novels, computer games, a board game and more. For something that started with a print run of just 5000 it has certainly ended up being one of the more successful and well-known publications related to the fantasy RPG hobby (some, quite accurately, describe it as a "gateway drug").

The physical things itself is the size of a short novel, in a single column serif font. Thankfully there is no page numbers as that would have just confused things - rather it just uses the 400 key indexes of the adventure. Mention must be made of the excellent interior artwork, with its complex line-drawings, always evocative, skilled, contextual. The are arguably the highlight of the book.

Before the adventure proper the book introduces the game system, such as it is. There are three statistics, Skill, Stamina, and Luck. Skill and Luck are determined by 1d6+6, and Stamina by 2d6+12. Skill is your fighting ability, Stamina is your hit points (each hit causes 2 Stamina damage), and Luck is used for "Tests of Luck" (2d6, roll user), or it can be used in combat to modify both damage inflicted or received; using Luck however reduces it.
The background of the story is pretty simple; there's a sorcerer that lives in a mountain with plenty of monsters, and he has lots of treasure, and the treasure chests require keys. Basically, you're a murder-hobo. Some bloke and his mates live in a place down the road and it's time you went out and killed him and took his stuff. Whilst many simplistic RPG adventures are not much better than this, they are hardly justified there and they're not justified here.

The adventure itself involves basically following and choosing among the path options and fighting the occasional monster. Even given the various limitations of such offerings in a choose-your-own-adventure style there is some rookie dungeon-design mistakes which will generate some amusement or annoyance depending on one's disposition to such things (or both). There is, for example, a group of Dwarves playing cards lost inside a maze. Where do they get their provisions? There's even a guy who sells candles, yes, in the middle of a dungeon crawling with monsters. On the other hand there is a dragon in one room, but with a route far above to the outside world, which is better than a lot of keyed adventures one finds.

There is also some vague sense of structure to the place. Around the entrance there is goblins, orcs, and the like. Further in you will encounter plenty of undead. Then there's the Maze of Zagor, and finally the Warlock himself. Gameplay is really a munchkin-like exercise, kick down the down (turn the page), kill the monster, take itself, rinse-and-repeat. The biggest challenge in terms of playing the thing is the maze, which absolutely requires mapping, which is fine it itself, but given the scale it's more of a massive annoyance than anything else.

Eventually you get past the dragon, tough if you've found some prior items, difficult otherwise (which suggests that you should loot the place thoroughly), and then you have to fight the Warlock himself, where the same applied. Once you acquire the Warlock's treasure, you can go back to the village, although the book does give you the option of replacing the Warlock, which is a nice twist.

Overall however it's not exactly a great story from beginning to end, nor even a particularly interesting implementation. The game mechanics, whilst extremely simplistic and limited, do have at least one vaguely interesting component with the operations of the Luck statistic. But really, there isn't too much that can be said in its support with the notable exception that it filled what was evidently a massive gap in the market, and one which Puffin almost missed out on.


Review by Karl Brown

I would have been 13 when I got hold of Deathtrap Dungeon, my first solo game book. Unlike many people, Fighting Fantasy (FF) was not my introduction to RPGs. We had been muddling around with full RPGs for a year or so already, but getting friends together to play was challenging so the idea of a solo adventure was enticing. That book was the same edition as the one in front of me now, with the blue spine and back that goes nicely with the blue dungeon walls behind the blood beast on the cover. I really loved that cover. Despite being a corpulent legless thing the bloodbeast is twisting to look at you, with his serpentine stinger rising out of the ooze. You are transported into the world as if you had just opened the door and seen the thing reacting to your intrusion. I never managed to play through to the end and
collect the reward for surviving the dungeon. Perhaps its time for another crack at it.

I’m actually writing this review as I read this book for the first time in over 30 years. I note that rather than character sheets, the cover proclaims the book is complete with combat system and score sheet. An odd deviation from established terminology of the hobby. The book is a perfect bound novel sized paperback. I paid $1 for this one a few years ago, it is a second printing, and was in as-new condition. So I guess unlike other RPG books these haven’t held their value or become expensive collectibles. The first page and back cover give a pretty good summary of the book with YOU capitalized to emphasize to young readers that this is no ordinary novel and that you have some agency. The illustrations by Ian McCaig provide a consistently stark and fairly realistic style throughout well suited to the grim (for a young teenage audience) subject matter. There is a short and rather unnecessary table of contents.

I am now directed to make my character. Throughout the book the idea that you are making a fictional character who has a different name and background is entirely absent. You are determining your scores. It seems your character is a fantasy version of yourself. I had forgotten about that. Not having the opportunity to at least give my character a name and describe his appearance is somehow disappointing. The system only uses two six sided dice (2d6). I roll a 5, producing a Skill of 11, pretty good. Then a one and a six, adding 12 produces a Stamina of 19. Finally, I roll a one adding six gives a Luck of 7. This I remember. Fighting Fantasy only has three ability scores, it’s almost as paired down as a game can get. Skill is fighting skill, Stamina and Luck are self explanatory. I personally would prefer a little more to the system. Combat is also simple roll 2D6+skill and beat the opposition. The winner of a round usually does a flat two damage. However, I had forgotten that you can use Luck to modify damage done by or to you. I actually like this idea of flat damage that can be modified with risk by desperate players.

Rules to determine starting equipment are equally minimalist. You begin with a sword, armour, pack, ten meals of provisions, and can choose one magic potion. I choose potion of Strength, which will restore my Stamina to full once. Provisions also restore Stamina at four points per meal.

The book then provides “Hints on Play” that is a rather wordy warning that there is only one way through the maze and death is likely. You are also advised to draw a map. I remember drawing a map as a child and realizing that half of the dungeon does not take you past something you need, dooming you to failure. I don’t remember what that something is.

The background section tells us that I am one of six champions attempting to run the gauntlet of a dungeon filled with traps and monsters; a pretty standard dungeon crawl adventure. Reading the background I notice something I hadn’t detected as a child: the adventure takes place in a town called Fang on the river Kok in the province of Chiang Mai. Today, despite being of English and Scots extraction I now have family in the northern Thailand city of Chiang Mai. Is Deathtrap Dungeon set in the Fighting Fantasy world’s equivalent of Thailand? On a hunch, I Google the name of the baron, one Sukumvit. Google finds that Sukhumvit, with an “h”, is both a major highway in Thailand and a trendy neighborhood in Bangkok. So I Google “Fang Thailand” and sure enough there is a town called “Fang” in northern Thailand. I wonder if it has a dungeon filled with traps and wild beasts? Did Mr Livingstone visit Thailand in the 1980’s or did he just pull the names out of an atlas? The background is four pages long. There is an illustration showing
the baron and the other contestants. If you look closely the image supports the idea that we are in a fantasy Asia.

After the Background the book is filled with 400 numbered paragraphs. At the end of each you are directed to another numbered paragraph or given a choice of two or more actions each leading to a different numbered paragraph.

The inside of the dungeon is atmospherically described. I get the impression that, unlike 'Choose your own adventure books, Mr Livingstone is trying to reward actions with appropriate consequences. This is a key feature of the RPG hobby that FF books are often considered a gateway to. Next, I come to a corner and according to the text decide to draw my sword and rush towards the sounds of battle ahead. Personally, I'd rather wait for the sounds of battle to end then sneak up on the maimed victor. This kind of lack of agency is the thing that irks me about solo game books. Anyway, I'm rushing forward like it or not. Ahead are two hobgoblins fighting over a sack. I am given the option to sneak by but not to hide and wait. Not fancying a two-on-one fight I slip by, and continue north hoping that one of the items I need was not in the sack. I come across a row of poles sticking out of the wall. This looks like a trap. I decide to hop across the top of the poles. One of the poles explodes into splinters when I step on it. I lose two Luck and 10 Stamina. Argh! After that I rest and eat two provisions restoring my Stamina to 17. Coming to a junction the author decides I turn north. Again the lack of agency is grating to someone used to playing fully fledged RPGs. The next junction is the same; I have no choice but to continue north. I enter a cavern with an idol with gems for eyes. I am reminded of the classic Advanced Dungeons and Dragons first edition cover from the 1970s. The illustration in Deathtrap Dungeon shows a three-eyed Buddha-ish statue flanked by two giant stuffed birds, fantasy Thailand again. I just know something is going to come to life and try to kill me but those gems have got to be worth collecting. Without rope the idol is hard to climb. I need to test luck, remember the system has no skills and the Skill score represents fighting skill. I roll three! Under my current luck of seven and I scramble up to the jeweled eyes. Although the illustration had three eyes the text gives me a choice of left or right. I choose left. Unsurprisingly, as soon as I touch the eye the huge stuffed birds come to life and attack. My skill is reduced as I am clinging to the idol. Despite this I win through with only a couple of wounds. The combat system is pleasantly fast playing. Ten rounds of combat took less than a couple of minutes. I prise out the emerald eye. Being a greedy sod I get to work on the right eye. The false gem shatters releasing knock out gas and I fall to my death. My perfect fail record stands.

Despite my demise and being much older now I enjoyed my journey into the dungeon. The text had just enough descriptive prose to immerse the reader without too much reading between choices. The cover and illustrations throughout well executed with a good sense of drama. The game system is very minimal. This makes combat pleasingly fast but character generation has no depth whatsoever.

In my game the competition and the other competitors did not feature much so it felt like just a dungeon crawl. I assume that if you survive longer you might meet some of the other contestants. It seems like choices have logically appropriate consequences, which is good. There are some nasty surprises but nothing so improbable that it made me feel cheated. In places the author makes choices for you, this lack of agency is frustrating especially when you are forced to ignore a side corridor and keep going. How hard would it be to provide one extra choice to join up with the paragraph number at the end of that side corridor?

I recommend this book as a gift for teenage readers and even gaming adults will find playing through until killed once a
pleasant way of passing a couple of hours.

**Elminster’s Guide to Solo Adventuring (2018)**

Review By Karl Brown

Elminster’s Guide to Solo Adventuring (EGSA) is available through The DM’s Guild community content site owned by Wizard’s of the Coast. The author is not given in the PDF but looking on the DM’s Guild website I can see the author is Oliver Gibson. I think the publication date is May 2018 because this is when it was added to the DM’s Guild. The last update to the file was August 3 2018.

Elminster’s Guide to Solo Adventuring promises to allow you to play any adventure designed for regular play with a GM and several players by yourself. I have read this little booklet and used the instructions within to play through the first adventure site in the WOTC campaign book Storm King’s Thunder. I have enjoyed the experience very much and intend to complete Storm King’s Thunder as a solo campaign, so no spoiler’s please!

Before we get to the review proper consider the uses of ESGA and you’ll see its value. I have several D&D adventures and PDFs of even more. With ESGA I’m going to get more use out of adventures I buy. Furthermore playing solo through an adventure first seems like it would be a good way to prepare to run the adventure as a DM. A solo session can fill a rainy afternoon giving you another D&D fix or your only one if you don’t have a regular group. It allows DMs to play for a change. Finally, it provides another tool for playtesting home brews. It’s not a great tool for discovering if your new race of class is overpowered but it will spot glitches, mistakes, and unseen holes in your rules before you take them to your players.

The booklet is only $1.39AUD. For your money you get 10-page colour PDF with bookmarks. There is no print version. The illustrations seem to be taken from the packs of recycled WOTC art made available to those who publish on the DM’s Guild. The pieces chosen appropriately reflect the subject matter and are somewhat coherent in style. However some are awkwardly cropped and or have some of the text over them. The pages are on the standard D&D 5e parchment look background. If you did want to print, it would use a fair bit of ink but at only 10 pages maybe that’s ok. The PDF does not display properly on some PDF readers but reads fine on Acrobat Reader. What your really paying for though is the ideas within. For this reason it is hard for me to go into too much detail without giving away the essential content of EGSA for free. I’ll therefore focus on what it does and how well it does it rather than how it works.

Sales and fan ratings support my positive impression of ESGA. The GM’s Guild site rates EGSA an Electrum Best Seller. This high rate of sales could have been aided by the lack of solo adventures for D&D 5e until this year as noted by Bimler in the interview in this issue. At the time of writing this five buyers rated EGSA an average of four stars though some probably rated the booklet lower because of the display issue on some PDF readers.

The booklet opens with an excerpt from a Forgotten Realms novel. Mr Gibson makes good use of the property the DM’s Guild licensing agreement gives him to set the tone of the book and promote the book through the name recognition of Elminster. Really though this is not a Forgotten Realms book, it will work with any D&D 5e adventure on any world. Mr Gibson’s writing is informal yet to the point. The introduction sets expectations; this is not a perfect replacement for gathering friends around a table nor is it an A.I. that acts as a DM for you. It then outlines that EGSA
tackles the standard framework for D&D 5e: the DM and player roles and the ‘three pillars’ of adventure: Exploration, social interaction and combat. After the introduction the booklet then outlines some tricks to help manage information flow as you fill both the player and DM roles. As well as the tricks Mr Gibson gives you I found writing an account of my adventure in first person present tense keeping pace with the action *as I played* a great help. Next pick your adventure, any published adventure you have not read; this booklet is in no way a stand-alone product. ESGA then has sections for each of the three pillars. The social and exploration pillars are handled in much the same way and I found the methods intuitive and easy to implement. Combat is easily adapted using the usual D&D 5e rules. Finally, the booklet gives you three different methods to ensure a single PC can survive encounters intended for a party of 4-6 PCs.

The following is a deliberately cryptic comment that hopefully will make sense once you have the booklet. I have noticed though is that while 3 is fast and easy to implement it effectively turns a -1 for an ability score modifier to a -6. After a couple of sessions I split the 2’s in two to replace 3 and that worked well. Unless your math obsessed though this probably will not matter to most players.

After more than 25 hours of play I found that solo gaming using a published adventure and ESGA works smoothly. In fact you can see write-ups of my adventure here: [http://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewforum.php?f=81](http://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewforum.php?f=81). Here’s a tip, if you pick one of the big hardback adventures from WOTC like Storm King’s Thunder or Out of the Abyss then the first chapter generally gives an overview of the adventure tells you who the real villains are and what they are up to. This takes away the fun of figuring it out for yourself so you might want to skip reading this chapter and start at the first adventure site.

At 10 pages and with its very informal tone ESGA is the kind of thing we are used to seeing for free in a fanzine like this or on someone’s website. However, the little systems in the booklet work well and enable you to play a published adventure by yourself as promised. The play experience is smooth and entertaining as you explore and develop the story much as you would playing with a group. With ESGA I will be playing a lot more D&D and getting more value out of the rest of my D&D collection. I certainly don’t begrudge Mr Gibson his $1.69, at that price ESGA is great value.
RPGaDAY

With Karl Brown, Lev Lafayette, and Michael Cole

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 1: What do you love about RPGs?

Karl: I love that RPGs give you the freedom to create whole worlds and then have your others walk around in them, that the creative capability of a group is always more than one individual, and that no-one knows how the story will evolve.

Lev: Where does one start? Oh, here, right. The social activity of participating in the generation of a narrative in a shared imagery universe, whether fantastic or otherwise. The development game systems that have a sense of realism, have efficient yet interesting mechanics, that allow for player contributions to story development.

Michael: The ability to escape from reality - to create in my head a complete vision of something that never was, and let it become real. If I had talent, I would write books or screenplays, but I neither have the time nor patience for that, so I placate myself with dreaming up worlds and characters and plots in my head, most of which will never see the light of day. But some do...

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 2: What is the first thing you look for in an RPG?

Karl: I favour generic rules sets such as GURPS or FATE, or ones with settings that allow a lot of creative freedom such as Ringworld. I also want an RPG if it does something different or better than the books already on my shelf.

Lev: Primarily material that supports the setting, everything from various organisations (religions, political parties), equipment, geography, culture etc, the material that provides for character immersion. After that I start looking at the game mechanics and how well they integrate with the setting content.

Michael: For setting, something that still has a connection to reality. Even if it is fantasy or sci fi, it still needs to be rooted in reality. Characters need to have some sort of humanity. It needs to allow the players to connect with the concepts and environment.

In terms of game mechanics, I don't care if the characters take a while to generate, but once generated, you should be able to do almost everything simply with the character sheet.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 3: What gives a game "Staying Power"?

Karl: Thinking about my longest running campaigns (over two years) using Cyberpunk, GURPS, and D&D 5e I can identify two related key traits. Firstly, referee buy in. Is the referee passionate enough about the games to do the work
month after month? For me this usually means a strong interest in the world I have created and the source material I reference. For example in The Green Isles (D&D 5e) I tapped into my long fascination with the folklore of the islands of my birth and also learned a lot about real everyday life in early medieval Britain. Second, player buy in. The players are as enthusiastic as the referee. This might be because the characters are really cool, the characters have in-world goals to achieve, or the players are involved in building the world or even share refereeing.

Articles about long running campaigns The Green Isles D&D 5e and the GURPS Krononauts have appeared in previous issues.

Lev: The players. It is absolutely essential that the social contract of behaviour between players and committment to the game exists before all else. Looking at it from the game as a product however, it is supporting material and adaptability. Looking at from the perspective of a campaign, it's the unfolding of the narrative. There's some ambiguity here in the term "game".

Michael: Something that is connected to reality, and allows people to customise as they see fit. Niche games may be cute, but at some point will become staid and get put back on the shelf.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 4: Most Memorable NPC?

Karl: There have been so many over the last 36 years it’s hard to remember them all let alone choose. A recent favourite is Païter Whitshoal the balding middle-aged ex-pirate servant to the impossibly honour-bound giant Weoxgyld Stormborn. The pair appeared in a play-by-post adventure here http://www.crafty-games.com/forum/index.php?topic=4129.0

Lev: In the early 1990s I played a few sessions of Harnmaster with a paladin-like character, a "shield maiden of Larani". Whilst chasing off some gargun (orcs) who were raiding a village, one of them surrendered to me. If I recall correctly, it was a Gargu-Arak, the small streaked-fur Orc, more naughty than malicious. But being an Orc it did come with its own troubles, not the least being their poor impulse control. It would thieve, it would bite people inappropriately, it was just plain trouble. But my character had sworn to themselves to reform it. It was like the relationship between a social workers and a incorrigible delinquent.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 5: Favourite Recurring NPC?

Karl: Firstly, let’s not discuss Micheal Cole’s time-kidnapped Montezuma who became a famous DJ in the Russian club scene. We must never speak of that again.

Travelling through the Elfland Kingdom of Spring the PCs happened upon a group of pilgrims, mostly elves, but also a old mortal woman wearing a silver ring. Magren the Lost ran away to elfland with her lover as a young woman but her elf husband went to fight in the war against Winter and did not come back. The players were taken with this sorrowful
tale. A little while later the pilgrims were attacked by big bad wolves. Despite the PCs efforts a huge wolf closed on Magren… who transformed into a Green Hag and rode away on the wolf’s back! Magren AKA Rot-tooth Meg became a recurring villain for a while. However, Players hate to be fooled so they hunted her down in her cave lair beneath the lightning-struck oak, killed her, and took the treasure she kept hidden in a slimey giant sack made of rotten elf skins at the bottom of a noisome cave pool.

Lev: Ed Hogg, The Pixie Were-Hedgehog from a GURPS Middle Earth game, an ally for my Dalish Ranger. The character was named after a English person who I chatted with online in the 1990s a couple of times on rec.games.rpg.advocacy, a Chivarly & Sorcery player, and of course, had the nickname "Hedgehog". True to the tradition of British Fantasy pixies could be were-hedgehogs. Yes, these did exist, hence the common term for children and hedgehogs as "urchins". Anyway, Ed was a cheeky trickster with compulsive carousing and who was fond of rabbits - but would often turn up with just the right information to push the party on a trajectory in a campaign that included all sorts of supernatural possessions.

Michael: Reoccurred only twice, but Motezuma in the Time Travel campaign - rescued from Mexico and brought forward in time, so I could reuse him as a record producer in the near future.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 6: How can players make the world seem real?

Karl: Please ‘play nice’ with the world presented. Ensure your character is someone who could exist in that world and is in keeping with the genre and tone. If your playing 1930’s Call of Cthulhu then Professor McFluffybum who insists on wearing a pink rabbit onesy is going to ruin it for everyone. If you’re playing Toon then the professor would be fine.

Lev: Player engagement with the setting is pretty fundamental. The main authors of a game-world or even the GM can't do everything in this regard - the players need to have some buy-in as well to generate an adequate level of immersion, and whilst on this topic this is why that game mechanics that encourage this are important.

Michael: By acting appropriately as if they were acting in real life. It’s easy when your characters can respawn to play as per a video game, but IMO, that takes you out of reality. Having a healthy respect for death and injury, whilst allowing players to be heroes is the most difficult task for a GM, and it doesn't help if the players are not willing or able to immerse in this.

For medieval-type fantasy, It is also difficult to play as an old-fashioned person with class structures and proper deference, but again, playing with modern standards can break the glass wall. The thing that always annoyed me the most about the TSR D&D adventures was when they gave combat stats for the adventure patrons, and stated what would happen if the PCs attacked the patron, and what defenses they had. I would have said that if the players decided to murder the adventure patron rather than proceed on the adventure, the proper course of action is to immediately pack up the game and do something else.
Karl: I think this question should be rephrased: How can everyone at the table make the stakes important? The referee should try to ‘hook’ both the characters and the players. Consider Rot-tooth Meg above. After she fooled the *players* so thoroughly when the local Moon Priestess asked them to rid the forest of the hag not only did the characters want to help out the *players* were itching for payback. However, the best stakes are the goals the *players* invent for their characters. A good referee can create material that responds to the actions and goals of the PCs and make them part of the story. Obviously this is harder if working from a published adventure rather than writing scenarios between sessions yourself. In the Green Isles I jump-started this process by getting the players to nominate the reason for their PCs’ travels during character generation.

Lev: Well, the GM can introduce important stakes at any time to the story. However, as a few hints it's particularly helpful to introduce stakes (and its doesn't have to be immediate) that are bigger than the immediate backstory. That doesn't mean that the PCs have to be the protagonists of the most important actions in the history of the world, nor even that even greater things are possible in the future of the game-world. What is important is that the instigators of a most critical situation in the environment which they have influence over. It could start as small as protecting a village, carrying an important message across the stars - whatever. But don't create a situation where their success or failure is not important.

Michael: To my mind, it is to introduce something, whether family or friends or even a favourite pub, to give the players something to care about, and then have that become part of the stakes. The players need to invest in the world, for its peril to mean something.

Karl: Easy, ask people you wouldn’t normally play with to play. Got a game on? Invite your parents. Playing with your school friends? Invite that weird ethnic kid with no mates. Running a game in a FLGS? Make the age requirement as low as practical and accept folks older than yourself. Someone watching during your FLGS game? Offer them a pregen so they can ‘jump in’.

Lev: Overall, being more inviting helps. Making use of social media and enabling technologies is essential, given how much interaction is carried out online and how geographically dispersed people can be. Clubs and organisations provide a useful formal structure. One thing that the hobby has been good at is improved game systems, built on good theoretical foundations.

Michael: By trading off computer games, and showing the shortcomings of computer-generated personalities for NPCs? By trading off the social aspect of playing in the same room as others, rather than over a computer network? By showing that tabletop games offer much more freedom and scope, because you create the world as you want it, rather than trusting that a software company won't ultimately disappoint you.
#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 9: How has a game surprised you?

Karl: Recently, I acquired a second hand copy of Chaosium’s discontinued Magic World at a good price hoping to perhaps get some material to use with the Basic Roleplaying ‘Big Gold Book’. Magic World is cobbled together from recycled text and images from old Chaosium games. There are places where the stitched together nature of the game shows and the art is an inconsistent mish-mash of styles. Despite this Magic World is a great game that sits right in my sweet-spot for complexity. It is a streamlined generic fantasy version of Chaosium’s BRP rules. Although discontinued Magic World is still available as a physical book and PDF from Chaosium.

Lev: I'll put two down here, separated by some thirty years or so. The first was RuneQuest, when I finally managed to get hold of an actual copy of the game, around 1982 or so. My eyes were opened to the idea of RPG characters without arbitrary classes, with a mostly consistent skill system, with what seemed to be a far more realistic combat system, where magic was everywhere, where creatures has full statistical values and so forth. The second was around 2005 or so, playing Dogs in the Vineyard. The setting was quite an interesting take on the Western genre of course, but it was the narrativist raise system that really caught my attention where players would introduce entirely new items into play related to their traits during conflict resolution.

Michael: A narrativist game, IMO, is a very difficult concept to do well. Unlike competitive games, with dice and other mechanisms for judgements, it is left to the players to invest in the game such that they want to cooperate solely for the story, rather than individual glory. There are some attempts at this which fail miserably, but when the backstory to a narrativist game is such that you get player investment, it works brilliantly. Some of the best at this are the small one-off style games - they may not have staying power, but you remember those sessions forever.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 10: How has gaming changed you?

Karl: Gaming didn’t change me, it had a large part in making me. I started playing young and RPG has had a massive impact on my development from a child to an adult. I was a world builder even as a very young child before RPG. What RPG gave me was a way to make the solitary pursuit of world building social, it gave me skills in public speaking and leadership, enough practice at mathematics and writing to enable my later university studies, a broadening of my education to include more history, mythology, folklore, biology, physics, astronomy, futurism, and a little functional linguistics. My current career and lifestyle would not have happened if I hadn’t discovered RPG at the age of 12.

Lev: Wryly, I could say if it wasn't for gaming I'd probably be a better sysadim or more active in politics. I'd also have more money in my bank account and more space of my bookshelves. But given that I have cut this path, and RPGs are an unending part of my life, I'd better mention what they've done for me. Firstly, they have really inspired my interests in mythology, history, and speculative futures. Secondly, and this becomes related to the first, it has sharpened my ability to engage in abstract systems design. Finally, it has provided structured and interactive group entertainment with a literary perspective.
Michael: It has made me much more empathetic, and more invested in creating enjoyment for others. See above about narrative games.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 11: Wildest Character Name

Karl: Moppotty Bogbogee was a first edition AD&D jester in a high school era comedic Blackmoor game.

Lev: Without a doubt it would have to be from the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons campaign from the mid-2000s. My Paladin was named "Sir Duc Sean of the Innocent". I think I picked that up form an early issue of Imagine magazine in the 1980s. This said, there is a lot of potential Pendragon characters with this approach, "Sir Kit Board", "Sir Cumference" etc.

Michael: I am so incredibly boring with names, but I did have a D&D dwarf named T'anc N'jineer, who was interested in wagons and explosives...

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 12: Wildest Character Concept

Karl: Wild funny: Moppotty the lemonade gnome jester. Wild unusual: my uplifted dolphin biotechnology professor and reluctant slower-than-light interstellar colonist. An honourable mention goes to my time travelling genetically engineered raven patent lawyer.

Lev: I didn't get to play it much, but I had a Aoemoran in Spacemaster which was a psionic. These aliens had the ability to physically merge and become part of other characters. The possibility of having other PCs and NPCs taken over by a psionic absorbant jelly was quite fun. I didn't get much of a chance to develop the character's background beyond the basic mechanics, but I think having psychically absorbed multiple personalities from various hosts would be entertaining.

Michael: Probably the female teenage psychic teleporter in the GURPS Time Travel Adventure. Experimented on by the evil corporation to allow them to travel through time, who then escaped, along with various mental issues.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 13: Describe how your play has evolved.

Karl: From shy fumbling as I taught myself and friends to play to skillful production of scenarios to reflect PC goals, greater involvement of players as collaborators, and good control of the social environment at the table.

Lev: Definitely more narrativist over time, and more interested in the narrative. I always enjoyed consistent game systems, so that much hasn't changed, and I'm into some pretty hard-nosed simulationist creative agenda. But these
days I'm very interested in the trajectory and development of a story, from beginning to end, and with player buy-in to the campaign world. Also a lot more interested in efficient and less complex game systems.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 14: Describe a failure that became amazing!

Karl: We were in a wizard’s tower on a blasted plain hiding from the Tarrasque, a terrifying Godzilla-like monster. After fighting our way to the top of the tower the party was desperate for healing and the cleric was out of spells. As an AD&D 1e jester Moppotty had a decent chance of controlling his special Wand of Wonder with 1000 random effects. My wand had a heal 1d6 hit points effect. So I rolled the die but failed to control the wand’s output. So we rolled three d10s produce a random effect. An iron cage appeared around the fighter. OK, no problem. I’ll use the wand to turn the iron to rubber. Another control roll fail and therefore another random effect. A blue whale began to squeeze out of the end of the wand. Everyone scrambled to grab onto a flyer as we leapt from the tower windows and past the snapping jaws of the Tarrasque. Soon the tower fell and the Tarrasque had a confused whale to feed upon.

Lev: A Cyberspace character from the early 90s, where I randomly rolled characteristics that were rather extreme. I ended up using the physical statistics as my dump stats, and put all the good results into the mental statistics and became the party’s Net Junkie and helped them out on all things remote. The character never actually went outside of their bedsit, but was still not just engaged in the team's efforts, but absolutely essential. Not so unexpected now of course, but rather amazing back in the day.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 15: Describe a tricky RPG experience you enjoyed.

Karl: My first and only game of Puppetland at a small convention. I’m refereeing a game I’ve never played before, my first diceless game, and one that expects players to speak in character for the entire hour time limit. Definitely out of my comfort zone. We had a hoot. The game was the basis of a review of Puppetland here: http://gamesvplay.com/gatecon-vi-part-1-review-of-puppetland-rpg/

Lev: Another GURPS Middle Earth moment was charging an opposing army and entrapping their big beast vanguard in a manner not too unlike the famous scene in The Empire Strikes Back where a Walker is brought down with cables. We were trapped inside a small fortification and the opposing army was numerically quite superior. There were some very confused and horrified NPCs when I told them to saddle up my horse, I'm going to charge ('Overconfidence' is a hell of a disadvantage). Actually from the same campaign fighting a flying demon on the roof of a three-storey building was pretty epic as well, even if I took the first opportunity to hide in the overhang.

Michael: Describe all of Karl Brown's GMing efforts in the Time Travel campaign, where he would create a situation, without even thinking about how it could be resolved...

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 16: Describe your plans for your next game.
Karl: Next year, 2019, I’d like to play a few sessions of the Green Isles but I’m not sure I have the time to write enough material to re-start the campaign. I also hope to start a campaign in the obscure TSR era setting of Council of Wyrms using the D&D 5e rules towards the end of 2019. It would be nice to get back to running a Gulliver’s Trading Company campaign but I wont have time in my schedule until 2021.

Lev: My Eclipse Phase campaign still has a bit to run, as does my Exalted China game. However I am toying with the idea of converting the Fortunate Isles-Brasil-Atlantis legendary story of a phantom island in the Atlantic. Very tempted to use Harnmaster for this, or at the very least Harn itself and perhaps bolted on to a different game system. Or is this the next game session?

Michael: Not running anything at the moment, and no plans to. Depends on whether others are willing to let me go again. See also Good Society at Day 25.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 17: Describe the best compliment you've had gaming.

Karl: Having 8-13 people show up regularly for my Green Isles game.

Lev: "I have to say, this game has some solid mechanics for a game based on a joke" - Dan Davenport on 'Papers & Paychecks', which was a pretty high compliment. Perhaps not exactly a compliment but at different times I’ve literally had players in tears (both sadness and joy) over a story moment; a shared imaginary space can have a lot of emotional attachment.

Michael: "Its a fucking gelatinous cube!" After having the players not know what they were fighting for over half an hour, and having them all run away in fear from this strange ghostly apparition, particularly as at the time we were also having a discussion about the worst D&D monsters and the gelatinous cube had been discussed at length whilst the encounter was happening. You probably had to be there...

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 18: Art that inspires your game.

Karl: Hmmm. This assumes art inspires me. Actually, mostly art is a useful reference. I use accurate representations of historical subjects to convey ideas to players. Art from Osprey military history books is often useful. Additionally, Charles Brock was an illustrator who was very careful about accurately representing the texts he was illustrating. His illustrations for Gulliver’s Travels were invaluable for my game “Gulliver’s Trading Company”. You can see Brock’s illustrations in the beta of my game here: http://rpgreview.net/node/40 and I’ve started a Facebook group about the game here https://www.facebook.com/groups/208222386790880/

Lev: Oh, there's all sorts of crazy art out there that's helped a great deal in various games. The art in Eclipse Phase alone has provided inspiration for a couple of scenarios and set-piece scenes. The artwork in the two-volume Guide to Glorantha really captures the admixture of numerous traditional real-world religions. For science fantasy there's
Druillet's Loane Sloane/Delirius. I have numerous art, religious, and space books which I flick through regularly to entertain The Muse.

Michael: So much art does this. Particularly character concepts (Alice the Musketeer (Alice by Rhineville.deviantart.com on @deviantART), which originally came from Lamentations of the Flame Princess, but which I used for a 7th Sea campaign. Also for storylines and NPCs - such as Lilith, by John Collier (1892), which was the base for a plot-line in the GURPS Middle Earth Campaign. Unfortunately the players decided that they sympathized with her and so never tracked her down...

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 19: What music enhances Your Game?

Karl: None, it's a distraction and makes it harder for people to hear each other, especially the hard of hearing. In 36 years in the hobby I have never seen it be effective. Furthermore if you want to grow the hobby this is exactly the kind of unnecessary barrier to play we should be eliminating.

Lev: Not much. I've played the soundtrack to Icewind Dale in the past for fantasy RPG sessions, and have used some ambient trance for background music for Eclipse Phase. That's about it really.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 20: Which game mechanic inspires your play the most?

Karl: Another unhelpful question. Game mechanics do not inspire, they enable. History, mythology, science, futurism, fiction. These are the things that inspire. The game mechanic that is most *useful* is the one that best suits the current project. The right tool for the job. This question is like asking a mechanic “what is the most inspiring kind of spanner?”.

Lev: Simple and adaptable game mechanics that provide opportunities satisfy my simulationist and narrativist creative agendas. Game mechanics which are realistic (e.g., GURPS) and have been "reality-checked" do well with me, but so do systems that have player buy-in. There are specific mechanics where reality is altered appropriately to suit the setting as part of the game mechanics; the relationship between Mythos knowledge and Sanity in Call of Cthulhu has been a long-favourite of mine. I'll give a nod in the direction of the Hero System for providing game mechanics which are adaptable; indeed the Hero System is probably the closest I get to a gamist creative agenda.

Michael: Mechanics which also take into account the simple abilities and skills of characters, not just combat skills. I like having modern day Australian characters know bicycling and cricket...

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 21: Which dice mechanic appeals to you?

Karl: Again, a pointless question. The best dice mechanic is the right one for the current project.
Lev: Simple dice mechanics, that have good elaborations. Dice mechanics that give plausible results. Dice mechanics that scale. Things like D20 or BRP satisfy the first component. FATE-like and numerous independent games for the third. Hero Wars/HeroQuest is particularly good for the third and fourth components. I like my own (Mimesis RPG) mechanic because it actually incorporated different degrees of randomness (an idea I picked up from David Cake), but I would say that.

Michael: I am so not into discussions on dice mechanics or resolution methods. So long as it doesn't involve massive calculations, I don't care. Just don't make it too complicated - I don't care how clever you are.

**#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 22: Which non-dice system appeals to you?**

Karl: I have only played one, Puppetland. I expect my comments about dice mechanics apply equally to non-dice mechanics.

Lev: Very few, to be honest. The lack of a developed system coupled with a lack of randomness in Amber was quite disappointing. I guess the best I have encountered was the vaguely poker-like card-based magic system for Deadlands.

Michael: If it is a narativist game, then trust the players to cooperate. If it is non-narativist, then just use something simple. Don't make the game about the mechanics.

**#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 23: Which game do you hope to play again?**

Karl: Gulliver’s Trading Company, my own game set in the world of Gulliver’s Travels. However, myself playing again is not what the beta needs to progress to a finished project so it will be a while.

Lev: Well, the new edition of Bunnies & Burrows is coming out this year so it will be a good to hop on that opportunity. Following the same author, I'd like to play Swordbearer again. Ran a session of Skyrealms of Jorune about eighteen months ago, and the players enjoyed that but voted to go for an Eclipse Phase campaign instead.

Michael: Still hanging out for another session of Polaris.

**#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 24: Which RPG do you think deserves more recognition?**

Karl: Legends of Anglerre, which despite the name is a generic fantasy toolkit based on FATE. Legends of Anglerre drew on illustrations from an obscure licensed property (a comic) and with the relinquishing of the license is not longer available. However, the designer Sarah Newton has flagged the possibility of a new similar game to be called “The Chronicles of High Fantasy.”
Lev: Did I just mention Swordbearer? Solid chargen with innovative background system, lethal and quick combat system, astoundingly evocative magic system, interesting bestiary, and superb GMs advice. I must also mention the Spanish-language "realistic gritty late-medieval" game, Aquelarre. It's worth learning Spanish just to play this game in my opinion.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 25: Game that had an impact on you in the last 12 months

Karl: Not really a game but a campaign setting: “Council of Wyrms”. I have discovered the nuanced setting hidden behind the attention-getting PC dragons. Over 2018 I have been converting this hidden gem to D&D 5e. You can follow my efforts on The Piazza forum. I recommend you start with this post about the essential themes of the setting http://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewtopic.php?f=103&t=18192

Lev: Well, running the RuneQuest Glorantha Con Down Under III would mean that game had a fair impact. In terms of actual play, reading, etc., Eclipse Phase and Megatraveller certainly rate the highest. Eclipse Phase requires a lot of hard thinking about the trajectory of technology and matters of consciousness, whereas Megatraveller has some great logistical puzzles.

Michael: Good Society (https://storybrewersroleplaying.com/good-society/). Found on Kickstarter - loved the concept - playtested - invested - have just received the game. Am still to run properly.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 26: Gaming ambition for the next 12 months

Karl: My main goal for 2019 is to finalise my long-stalled project Gulliver’s Trading Company. I need to write a couple of short playtest scenarios, recruit playtesters, and incorporate feedback into the final version. The final version will have an original colour cover and map of the world that the beta lacks. If you are interested in playtesting email me at karl@rpgreview.net. If you are curious about the map of the world of Gulliver’s Travels you can see it here https://www.deviantart.com/coronoides/art/Gulliver-s-Travels-World-Map-294804331

Lev: Finish my Eclipse Phase, Exalted, and HeroQuest games. Start a new campaign based on Harn. Tempted to give The One Ring or Skyrealms of Jorune a good run. Continue to run my occasional D&D Paladins of Charlemagne game. Continue playing Megatraveller and RuneQuest, or go down whatever path other GMs have planned for me. I should do more work on my long-unfinished Mimesis RPG.

Michael: Play a proper session of Good Society.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 27: Share a great stream/actual play

Karl: I have never seen one of these.
Lev: I don't do streams, but I do run mailing lists with write-ups of sessions. So here's the one for Eclipse Phase (http://mail.rpgreview.net/pipermail/eclipse-phase_rpgreview.net/), and here's the one for Exalted China (http://mail.mimesisrpg.com/pipermail/exalted-china_mimesisrpg.com/)

Michael: I have never streamed. Nor listened to other people's streams. (Nor podcasts, nor do I download music - play the entire album or not at all - but I am getting off track here...)

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 28: Share whose inspiring gaming excellence you're grateful for

Karl: Sarah Newton. A versatile designer who deserves more credit. Her work on Legends of Anglere and Monsters & Magic are great examples of her work. I am eagerly awaiting her Chronicles of Future Earth to be released later in 2019 which will use an updated version of the system used in Legends of Anglere. Also Fred Hicks and Rob Donoghue for FATE *2e* which shook up my thinking about RPG play and enabled my long incubating idea for a game about Gulliver’s Travels to be realised. Most FATE games are based around FATE 3e, which is less generic/ flexible because it was built with pulp in mind. FATE 2e is free and can be found here: http://faterpg.com/dl/FATE2fe.pdf. All of these are of course descended from FUDGE by Grey Ghost Press. You can get FUDGE free here http://fudgerpg.com/goodies/fudge-files.html

Lev: In a name, Greg Stafford. Firstly for Glorantha, being the first fantasy world created by mythologist and a practicing shaman, opened up for others to contribute to the legends and lore, and as a result arguably the greatest fantasy world ever created and the inspiration of two great RPGs, RuneQuest and Hero Wars/ HeroQuest. Secondly, for the the Pendragon RPG and in particular the supplement The Great Pendragon Campaign. The Pendragon RPG represents the first game where character personality traits become an integral part of the physical mechanics of the game and a moral outlook of the world. In the Great Pendragon Campaign Stafford took all the anachronistic works of Arthurian legend and constructed the most comprehensive single narrative that has ever been written. As I have said it before, The Great Pendragon Campaign will be recognised by future scholars as the most important book ever written on Arthurian legend.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 29: Share a friendship you have because of RPGs

Karl: Friendship is over-rated. Give me a bunch of strangers and newbies willing to play. I love to watch new people discover RPGs and see what unexpected actions and ideas they create.

Lev: Oh, that's easy. Michael Cole. All my other close gaming friends I have some other social connection with and there would be a strong possibility that I would have met many of them through those channels. I have no idea how I would have met Michael if it wasn't through gaming. The fact that he travels to and from the outer, outer suburbs to attend our gaming sessions is a pretty good indication that we must be doing something right over the past fifteen years or so.
Michael: All of the guys I game with, I only know through RPGs. I knew none of them beforehand, found the group on-line and contacted them, and we have now been gaming together for over 15 years.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 30: Share something you learned about playing your character

Karl: Don’t create too much detail right away. Start with a good concept and see what comes out during play. A concept inspired by real history, mythology, or other source material can help you get away from tired genre tropes. Be ready to have the character grow and change in response to events but don’t plan an arch for the character. Usually, the arc will be frustrated by the actions in the game. Let the character evolve organically. I’d offer similar advice about running a campaign.

Lev: I’m going to answer this in terms of something I (the player) has learnt through a character, and my answer is “Esperanto”. I had a character who spoke it, so I decided to learn it whilst playing the character. I've tried the same with Russian but that's proving a lot more challenging.

Michael: Its OK to be a bit-player in another person's triumph. Particularly if you planned and/or assisted in that triumph.

#RPGaDAY2018 - DAY 31: Share why you take part in #RPGaDAY?

Karl: I love to pontificate.

Lev: To fill up extra pages in RPG Review when I haven't got enough content? No, that can't be the only or main reason. Actually it's because I'm interested in reading about what other people think about their participation in RPGs in a structured manner.

Michael: For the lulz...
Solo play is often described in terms of single-person adventures, such as common with gamebooks. However there is plenty of examples of single-player, single-GM games as well. There are a number of good reasons why two players may wish to explore a one-on-one game, apart from just being in isolated circumstances or the demands of time.

From a player's perspective it can serve as an excellent introduction for a novice player to the game in an environment where they can feel more comfortable making mistakes. It can serve as a single-character's side-quest in a manner that doesn't interrupt the rest of the group; consider for example the Questing Beast from Arthurian legend, or similar examples in Pendragon, or even Dogs in the Vineyard. It may even be the type of play that is most appropriate for the genre, such as 'lone wolf' vigilante superhero characters, like Batman for DC Heroes. However, there are several considerations that the player and GM have to take into account before engaging in such a venture, and this article hopes to explore some of them.

Different Narrative Tension

The first thing to have in mind is that the narrative tension is different. Most stories will have narrative conflicts imposed from an external threat (e.g., the raider wish to attack a village), within a protagonist group (e.g., conflicts between heroes defending the village), or within a protagonist character (e.g., conflict within a hero).

It is an obvious observation that in a multi-player group that there is different character objectives and, because these are player-characters, a high degree of independence of orientation and action. In addition to external threats, there is also a number of in-group conflicts. This changes in one-to-one play. Whilst it is plausible for a GM to play these independent roles, but this will create a situation where the GM is dominating the game far in excess of what a one-to-one setting can justify. There is only one major protagonist in one-to-one play and that's the sole player-character.

The typical approach is to remove most of the in-group conflicts (one can still have conflict between a number of major NPCs and the PC, and usually one at a time e.g., between Batman and Robin, Batman and Alfred etc), and replace them with more emphasis on external conflicts. One especially good model of an external conflict plays on the PCs absolute requirement of the GM to be their "eyes and ears"; one-on-one play works very well when the character is subjective to hallucinations, dream experiences and so forth, as there are no other players to interrupt the immersive experience.

However there is a lot to be also said for exploring the internal conflicts that the character has. Thus, the GM should prepare in advance those things that challenge what the character has multiple emotional attachments to, and make them choose a conflict situation between those attachments, which will result in character development (not to mention a tricky narrative headache for the player). Call of Cthulhu is a particularly good game for building on this sort of
development and in some cases (e.g., Nephilim) there is an physical and mental internal transformation that drives the character. Such games are especially well suited for one-to-one play.

**Difficulty Classes and NPC Dependence**

Many RPGs assume that every PC can't do everything, and those with deliberately restrictive class professions virtually demand that players perform a role best suited for their abilities (e.g., "long range artillery" for wizards in Dungeons & Dragons). One one-to-one play this makes stock adventures extremely difficult as they are usually designed with a minimum ability scope for effective participation (e.g., for classic AD&D a Fighter, a Magic-User, a Cleric, and a Thief). The usual, and effective, solution to this in one-on-one games is to make use of supporting NPCs, such as henchmen and hirelings, or childe in Vampire The Masquerade. On a related manner, games where there is a large number of specialist classes which are requisite for a scenario are not particularly well-suited for one-on-one play.

However when played this way, the PC must be the leader of the party for purposes of the narrative (why would the henchmen following them otherwise), and as an interesting aside this usually means that the PC plays the role of the moral leader of the group (e.g., Cleric), although there are circumstances where martial leadership (Fighter), or even business leadership (Thief). Games like Ars Magica make a good case for Magic-User leadership with the option of single player troupe play. Note that in situations where the PC leader is knocked out, or comes to some other situation where they are unable to be a protagonist, it would inappropriate for the rest of the party to continue on the adventure. They will retreat to a safe spot and re-await the PCs leadership and initiative.

The NPCs can be allies, trusted friends even, and provide useful advice and support for the main character and despite their independence, will act in the best interest of the PC. However, one also wants to avoid a situation where the the GM is effectively playing (using the D&D example above), three GM-NPCs where there is one PC. In there interest of story and character development, there is a lot to be gained for both the player and the GM, if there is some sort of cooperative development on the NPCs henchman's actions e.g., "Right, so what do you think that the wizard would do at this point?"

**The Spotlight is Always On.. You!**

With single player games, the spotlight is always on the decisions of that single player. In multi-player groups it is possible and indeed encouraged to share the limelight a bit, and give another player who has just been through an tense narrative moment to relax a little bit. This is not an option in single-player games and as a result different strategies are required.

The first thing to do is to tone down the intensity a notch or two. Rather than have waves and waves of Orcs attacking the village (because that's what Orcs do), punctuate the events with some strategic maneuvering, some logistical issues that need attending to, and so forth. Reduce the need for immediate reaction and response and give the player an opportunity to focus their mind in a different way. One must also be aware that running a single PC through standard
adventures, even given attempts to slow down the pace, will result in completion rates far quicker than usual.

Another related aspect to this is that along with the greater narrative intensity there is a greater emotional intimacy between player and GM in one-to-one play. In the first-person narrative, which the one-on-one play strongly tends towards, the player will almost certainly express more of their inner dialogue to the GM so they can build on the narrative tension. An interesting variation on this would be where the player decides to be an unreliable narrator towards the GM.

Concluding Remarks

One-on-one play is perfectly legitimate form of roleplaying even for situations where it is not the result of circumstances. There are very sound creative reasons why one would engage in this form of play, and whilst attention is required to the specific player and character needs that this generates, it can be as rewarding as group play, albeit in a different manner.
ESCAPE FROM CAMP 22

By Lev Lafayette

"The Department of Immigration will deport a North Korean-born refugee despite recognising he would probably be executed or sent to a forced labour camp on arrival in his birth country... documents obtained by The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald show, even though the department accepted the man, Choe*, may be subject to the death penalty, or put into one of the secretive regime’s notorious forced labour camps on his return, these threats are not an “insurmountable” hardship sufficient to stop his deportation."

-- Execution not 'insurmountable' hardship, immigration department says, The Age, 28 December 2018

1 Introduction

Part story, part game, this is an article with a difference - one in which YOU become the hero!

Armed with two dice, a pencil and eraser, you can set off on a perilous quest to find the Camp Administrator's Records. YOU will will need to decide which route to follow, and which guards to fight in the elaborate *cough* combat system given in the article.

You may not survive your first journey. But with experience, skill and luck, each fresh attempt should bring you nearer to your goal.

System

If you don’t have a copy of Papers & Paychecks (and you should get one) the system is essentially 2d6 + skill versus target number. Sometimes that target number is an opposed roll.

When there is (physical, social, or mental) combat the difference between the two rolls is the damage taken by the losing party. Where there is an active presence they may adopt a particular attack stance as follows:

* Normal attack, normal defense.
* Damaging attack, +1x damage, x0.5 defense.
* Defensive stance, no attack, x1.5 defense.
* Beserk attack, x1.5 attack, x0.5 defense.
* Damage reduction, x0.5 attack, -1x damage.

Different weapons can cause different damage multipliers. For example physical attacks apply a multiplier depending on the weapon: Fists = 1/2x, clubs, knives = 1x, swords = 2x, handguns = 3x, rifles = 4x. Attack with surprise = +1x.

Damage can be wounds or bruises. For physical weapons, 'bashing' weapons cause bruises, whereas impaling, stabbing, 

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explosive, shredding, burning, eviscerating, and basically anything that gets under the skin, causes wounds. Bruises heal relatively quickly, wounds take a lot longer. A character with zero wounds is unconscious, has a breakdown, or is temporarily ostracised. A character with zero wounds is dead, permanently insane, or imprisoned (yes, your character starts with 0 social hit points).

2 Your Character, Rim Song-il
YOU are Rim Song-il, a North Korean prisoner in Hoeryong concentration camp, also known as Kwallyso (penal labour colony) No. 22, where you work as a farm worker. You're not to sure exactly why you're here, in fact you can't remember much of your past life. You recall you used to work in an office, and your skills in reading, writing, even using a computer, have not left you. But you do remember being taken away one morning and for an unknown period of time being afterwards being left in a dark room, except for periodic scraps of food, and regular beatings. You do, fortunately, remember your name.

Finally, one day, you were taken out to the farm, where you have worked for what must be a year, at least if the chalked calculations you make each sunset are accurate. By your estimations it is now spring, and the potatoes will be ready for harvesting.

Rim Song-il, I+2 S+2 T+2 P+2 (Crafter), Player Points 3

Profession Administrator (level 4), Labourer (level 1), Movement (running) 4
Strength 9 (-1) Intelligence 13 (+1) Wisdom 15 (+2) Dexterity 13 (+1) Perception 13 (+1) Charisma 11 (+0)
(Skill, Char bonus, Train bonus, Total Bonus)
Administration +2 +4 +6 Athletics (strength) -1 +2 +1 Athletics (stamina) -1 +1 +1 Carousing +0 +1 +1
Concentration +2 +4 +6 Craft (writing) +2 +3 +5 Craft (computing) +1 +3 +4 Craft (structural) +1 +1 +2
Knowledge (general) +1 +4 +5 Language (Korean) +1 +3 +4 Melee -1 +1 +0 Lie +0 +3 +3
Pilot (car) +1 +1 +2 Profession +2 +5 +7 Sense (hearing) +1 +1 +2 Sleight +1 +2 +3

3 The Box
For a few days you have been detained in the dark of a small solitary cell, where there is just enough room to sit, but not to stand or lie down. You start off the story having suffered the equivalent of 3 attacks from a STR 12 (+1) opponent, represent the various cramps from not being able to stretch, along with 6 mental attacks from a WIS 10 opponent, representing the assault om the mind that being constrained in such a manner causes.

Note that you can die or go insane from these physical and mental bruises. If this is so, it is game over. Whilst improbable when you are starting the adventure, you may find that the accumulated bruises have taken their toll. If you have been beaten unconscious on your return to The Box, you will start this section again barely conscious with an accumulated 8 bruises - one more and your unconscious again.

Finally, you have been let out. Squinting in the sunlight, you are motioned towards a Sungri-58 truck by a guard, where
you can see several other prisoners that have been bundled in. Do you ask the guard why you were in solitary confinement? Go to 7 The Box Guard Or join the other prisoners without saying anything? Go to 10 The Truck Journey

4 The Gun Fight
You have ended up in a gun fight with four trained guards. What were you thinking? They have Firearms +2, Gymnastics +2, STR 11, +0 and DEX 13, +1 ; you have default skills at -4 and DEX +1. Standard handguns from the core rules are used, causing 3x Wounds damage. The Guards will continue shooting at you until you are dead. Finally, you are at one with Kim Il-sung, the Eternal President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Game over.

If, by an extraordinary success of lucky dice rolls, "wonsung-idol namueseo tteoreojinda" ("even monkeys fall from trees"), or the judicious use of Player Points, you succeed in the gun fight, you may make your escape. Go to 16, The Great Escape.

5 The Farm
You're back at the farm, in barracks accommodation, with a hard bed and a thin blanket. Maybe you've managed to sneak some chicken meat in, maybe you've even managed a pistol. You try think back, before being put in the box, what work at the farm was like. Your memory is blurry. You remember meals, twice a day, mainly corn meal. You remember the work being very hard and the hours long, with constant exposure to the elements. Any meat you had was from animals - rats, insects, lizards - that you caught in the field. The lizards were the best; how wonderful it was for the Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-un, to provide such bounty!

A child cries out somewhere in the darkness. Entire families are often incarcerated here, "guilt by association". Why are you here? You still do not know, and when you asked the guard at the box beat you. But you have a choice, you always have a choice. If you decide to stay here at the farm go to 11 A Work Day. If you decide that you're going to escape go to 17 The Latrines.

6 Chinese Border Gate
It takes over an hour to get to the Chinese Border Gate. There are two guardhouses here, one inner guardhouse that is parallel to what you know is an electric fence, and one outer guardhouse, parallel to a barbed wire fence. In the daytime, each guardhouse will have eight guards with assault rifles stationed, and at night, there will be four. The guardhouses are sufficiently close that all guards will engage in a combat if you attempt to escape or, if you have a gun, engage in combat. Well, you could fight them your fists. But you know the saying: "Looks like you're brought your fists to a gun fight".

The Guards have STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), firearms +2. They will fire the assault rifles in semi-automatic mode (three shots, -1 to skill). An assault rifle requires a reloading action after 30 round, does 4x damage. The Guards will shot to kill and if they succeed in doing so, go to 8 Juche Mercy. If by some miracle, you succeed in defeating the Guards go to 12 The Chinese Border.
7 The Box Guard
With a bestial snarl the Box Guard calls you "kotjebi!" (vagrant child!, literally 'flowering swallow') raises his truncheon and hits you! The Guard has a STR of 12 (+1) and training in melee of +2. The Box Guard will be attacking with a Damaging Attack (+1x) with a truncheon (x1x), for double damage and half defense. If you adopt a defensive stance (no attack, x1.5 defense), the Guard will carry out 1d6/2 attacks before getting bored with hitting you. If you are unconscious after this, go to 3 The Box. If you are still conscious go to 10 The Truck Journey.

If you adopt any other stance apart from defensive, remember that you will be at (x0.5) damage because you are using fists. If you're very lucky and win the fight, go to 16 The Great Escape. Otherwise the Guard will beat you until you are unconscious; go to 3 The Box.

8 Juche Mercy
You are executed. Finally, you are at one with Kim Il-sung, the Eternal President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the world's only necrocracy. Game over.

9 Inside Knowledge
You have made it into an administration building. If it is daytime and there were any administrative staff, you have managed to avoid them as you make your way into a small room for document processing. There is a collection of desks, filing cabinets, and even a few desktop computers, all lined up in neat rows. You start to look over the paper work, the files describing the various crimes of the estimated fifty thousand people in the camp, and the records of the thousand guards and other staff.

You get an eerie feeling that you should look up one of the computers. It is almost as if it is calling you. Sitting down, and placing your finger to the keyboard, your brain recalls pathways that you have consciously forgotten. You start to type, searching for your own name. Make a Craft (computing) check, TN 9.

If you fail, you find records that you have been incarcerated here for a year and have been assigned to the farming sector. There is not much useful information. You have to leave quickly, as there will be Guards looking for you. Go to 14 Hoeryong City Gate. If you succeed, go to 24 Revelations.

10 The Truck Journey
Bundled into the back of the Sungri-58 truck the vehicle makes its way down the narrow and poorly maintained road on the way to the farm. Returning from the family a similar vehicle approaches. Make a Craft (structural) or Pilot (car) TN 9 check. If you succeed you have braced yourself by either recognising the effects of the narrowness of road and the pot-holes or you down a quick mental check on the trajectory of the two vehicles. If you fail, you take the full force of the trucks crashing into one another, and experience the equivalent of a STR 15 (+2), mellee attack (+2) with bludgeoning damage. The success of the Craft or Pilot roll adds a bonus to the DEX roll made in resistance to the "attack".
The truck that has collided with yours is full of cages of chickens. The two trucks are written off, both drivers are apparently unconscious. Your fellow travellers in the prison vehicle are making different choices. Some are staying behind to help the drivers. Others are taking the opportunity to steal the remains of a dead chicken (fresh meat!). Others are taking the opportunity to escape. Which one are you going to choose?

Make a great escape? Go 16 The Great Escape Help one of the drivers? Go to 21 Unconscious Drivers Collect some chicken? Go to 25 ChickenQuest

11 A Work Day
You are awakened before dawn by the Guards. They shove a small cup with a mix of watery weevil-infested half-cooked rice and potatoes with a little bit of some grassy substance. That will be your meal until sunset. The generosity of the Democratic People's Republic knows no bounds!

You make your way out to the potato fields, where you will spend the day digging for the harvest, placing the potatoes into sacks, and carrying them to the trucks. It is back-breaking manual work, with no respite, and always under the watch of the guards. Entire families, with various levels of malnutrition, work alongside you, gloriously making a contribution to a better tomorrow whilst also being rehabilitated from their erroneous thoughts (some in advance of even having them).

An Athletics (stamina) check is required with a TN of 7. If you fail, you are beaten by a Guard with a club. The Guard has a STR of 12 (+1) and training in melee of +2. The Guard will only hit you once to get you to your feet, but you will still take damage. As you are hit, make a Craft (writing) check with a TN of 9. If you succeed, go to 30 Subversive Thoughts and then return back to the farm lodgings, 5. If you succeed in your Athletics (stamina) check you work through the day, exhausted but relatively unharmed, and are taken back to your lodgings, 5.

12 The Chinese Border
It's three hours travel from Camp 22 to the Chinese border, through farmlands and around the township of Sechon, Hakpo, and then across the Tumen River which is shallow and narrow, however the border is patrolled on the Korean side. Whether daytime or nighttime you will have four Guards with assault rifles to avoid. You have no skill at sneaking, so you operate at a default level (-4) with a bonus (+1) due to your size. If you are attempting the action at night, you also receive an additional +4 bonus due to the lack of lighting, plus you have a environment modifier (+2).

Unfortunately, you are engaging in a contest against Guards who are, unsurprisingly, good at Guarding. You must succeed a contest against all the Guards' Sense (sight) checks; they have a PER of 12, (+1) and a Sense (sight) of +2. If they spot you they have STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), firearms +2. They will fire the assault rifles in semi-automatic mode (three shots, -1 to skill). An assault rifle requires a reloading action after 30 round, does 4x damage. The Guards will shot to kill and if they succeed in doing so, go to 8 Juche Mercy.

If you succeed in sneaking past the Guards you must also make a Swim check. You have no skill at this, so you operate
at the default level (-4), plus you are quite weak (-1). However it is a relatively easy crossing so the Target Number is only 5 (whilst strictly speaking this would require a large number of rolls, it is abstracted into a longer-term effect and greater movement). For each failure, take that amount of damage in physical bruises equal to the failure as you begin to drown. You require three successes to cross the river. If you cross the river go to 5.4.23 Illegal Economic Migrant.

13 Steal a Car!
You've managed to steal a car! Fortunately the keys are in the ignition. Make a Pilot (car) test, TN 7. If you succeed, you can drive very fast through the Hoeryong City Gate and only experience one round of gunfire per soldier. That's still a lot of bullets, but you have a chance. The car has 8 points of armour and a STR of 50. Return to 14 Hoeryong City Gate. Those behind the car will get exhausted, but those in front will have to run very fast.

14 Hoeryong City Gate
It takes over an hour to get to the Hoeryong City Gate. Just before the Gate however there is a collection of administration buildings. If you arrive here during the daytime there are eight guards here at each building, all with assault rifles. If you arrive at nighttime, there are four. In both cases there is a vehicle as well. The option exists to try investigating one of the buildings. If you do so, go to 42 Administration Buildings.

If not, you make the effort to skirt around the buildings and remain out of eyesight. Eventually you can approach the gate itself. There are two guardhouses, one inner guardhouse that is parallel to what you know is an electric fence, and one outer guardhouse, parallel to a barbed wire fence. In the daytime, each guardhouse will have eight guards with assault rifles stationed, and at night, there will be four. The guardhouses are sufficiently close that all guards will engage in a combat if you attempt to escape or, if you have a gun, engage in combat.

The Guards have STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), firearms +2. They will fire the assault rifles in semi-automatic mode (three shots, -1 to skill). An assault rifle requires a reloading action after 30 round, does 4x damage. The Guards will shot to kill and if they succeed in doing so, go to 8 Juche Mercy. If by some miracle, you succeed in defeating the Guards go to 18 Hoeryong City.

15 Subversive Thoughts
Is the first time here? If so, as the Guard's club slams into you, reminding you to get back on your feet and work, a thought comes unbidden to your memory:

> When the people are being beaten with a stick, they are not much happier if it is called "the People's Stick".
> -- Mikhail Bakunin, Statism and Anarchy, 1873

Where did you get such ideas from? What sort of monster are you? Return to 5 The Farm for another day's cycle.

If you've been here before, different sayings come to mind.
> A truncheon is a weapon with a worker at both ends.

That one doesn't quite seem right. After all, somebody is hitting someone else. Return to 5 The Farm for another day's cycle.

> Comrades, you must all analyse your own responsibility. If you have to shit, shit! If you have to fart, fart! You will feel much better for it.
> -- Mao Zedong, Speech At The Lushan Conference (23 July 1959)

You wonder if the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea analyse their own responsibility, or if they think that they everything they decide is fragrant. Return to 5 The Farm for another day's cycle.

> Citizens shall have freedom of speech, press, assembly, demonstration, and association. The state shall guarantee conditions for the free activities of democratic political parties and social organizations.
> -- Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (April 2009), Article 67, Chapter VII

You suffer an attack of cognitive dissonance, WIS 17 (+3), receiving mental bruises. Return to 5 The Farm for another day's cycle.

> The basis of the Juche Idea is that man is the master of all things and the decisive factor in everything.
> -- Kim Il-sung, On Juche in Our Revolution vol. 2 (1977)

After attempting the same process several times in a row, you reconsider your irrational optimism. Return to 5 The Farm for another day's cycle and make an escape attempt.

16 The Great Escape
Which way will you go? It depends on whether you make a Knowledge (general) check, TN 9. If you succeed, you may choose. Otherwise you have to select randomly, by rolling 1d6

1. If you fail your Knowledge (general) check, and roll a '1', you stand around confused and then attempt to run in one direction, then backtrack to another, then turn back again. Eventually you are caught again. Go to 3 The Box.
2. South. If you fail your Knowledge (general) check, and roll a '2', you head in this direction whether you want to or not! If you succeed your Knowledge (general) check, you know this leads to the gate that has a road which leads to Hoeryong city, and may choose to go in this direction. Go to 14 Hoeryong City Gate.
3. North. If you fail your Knowledge (general) check, and roll a '3', you head in this direction whether you want to or not! If you succeed your Knowledge (general) check, you know this leads to the gate that has a road which leads to the Chinese border, and may choose to go in this direction. Go to 6 Chinese Border Gate.
4. West. If you fail your Knowledge (general) check, and roll a '4', you head in this direction whether you want to or not! If you succeed your Knowledge (general) check, you know this leads to the Tumen River, which forms the border....
with China, and may choose to go in this direction. Go to 20 Tumen River Fence.

5. East. If you fail your Knowledge (general) check, and roll a '5', you head in this direction whether you want to or not! If you succeed your Knowledge (general) check, you know this leads to a train station and beyond that mountains, and may choose to go in this direction. 19 Camp 22 Train Station.

6. If you fail your Knowledge (general) check, and roll a '6', you may select one of the directions of your choosing.

17 The Latrines
Leaving the barracks you make your way to the nearby toilet block that has a barely flickering kerosene lamp. Nearby you can spot the cigarettes of two guards. You know that the guards will be on the lookout for attempted escapes and that they are armed with assault rifles and carry torches. Escape attempts are not uncommon, but success is unheard of.

Without any doubt these worst toilets in the People's Democratic Republic of Korea, but certainly better than any imperialist toilets that might include water, toilet paper, and a semblance of cleanliness. Make a Concentration check (TN 9) to avoid throwing up due to the stench. If you fail take that number of mental bruises. If you succeed, you may attempt to climb over the toilet block wall, as this is your best means and opportunity to escape. Make a Sense (hearing) check, TN 9. If you succeed, you make it over the wall and into the fields. Go to 16 The Great Escape. If you fail, a Guard has caught you unawares as you're climbing over the wall. Go to 8 Juche Mercy.

18 Hoeryong City
Several hours later, after climbing through farm, forest, mud, and hills, you have reached the outskirts of Hoeryong City. It is by no means a large city, but one supposes that they can make the right contacts and go into hiding. Make a Knowledge (general) with a TN of 17 as a streetwise check. If you fail, you have made the wrong contacts, and have been turned in by an *Inminban* (neighbourhood watch) informant, who will be rewarded for their service to the People's Democratic Republic. On the other hand, you will experience a different sort of reward. Go to 8 Juche Mercy.

If you succeed however you are hidden in a cellar for a few days. Your saviours demand 50,000 Chinese Yuan for you to taken to South Korea as a refugee. As an escapee, you have no money. Make a Concentration check, TN 15. If you fail, you are turned in by the people you trusted. Go to 8 Juche Mercy.

If you succeed however, you remember the address of your family home. A few days later you are told the surprising news that your family has somehow raised the money and paid the people smugglers. They have made arrangements to collect the money and smuggle you across the border, first into China, where you are bundled into a transport truck along with twenty others. After two day's journey in the back of the truck, will be emptied in Ulaanbaatar, where you make your way to the South Korean embassy and apply for refugee status.

Did you make it? Probably not, that is the fate of most refugees. But that's another story to tell. As for now, you have escaped from Camp 22.

19 Camp 22 Train Station
It takes about an hour to get to the Camp 22 Train Station. If you arrive during the day, there is four Guards here, and a truck transporting various goods (farm or mine produce) from the camp. If you arrive during the night, there are two Guards and no train.

You have no skill at hiding, so you operate at a default level (-4) with a bonus (+1) due to your size. If you are attempting the action at night, you also receive an additional +4 bonus due to the lack of lighting. Unfortunately, you are engaging in a contest against Guards who good at Guarding. You must succeed a contest against all the Guards' Sense (sight) checks; they have a PER of 12, (+1) and a Sense (sight) of +2.

If they spot you the Guards have STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), firearms +2. They will fire the assault rifles in semi-automatic mode (three shots, -1 to skill). An assault rifle requires a reloading action after 30 round, does 4x damage. The Guards will shot to kill and if they succeed in doing so, go to 8 Juche Mercy.

If you arrived during the night you will have to make two successful hide attempts - one for hiding during the night itself, and one for trying to sneak to the train when it arrives.

If you succeed boarding the train, you can escape to 33 Hoerying City without having to travel through the countryside. This plot runs on rails.

20 Tumen River Fence
It takes about an hour to reach the two-part fence. Facing you is an electric fence, then there's some open land and then there's a barbed wire fence. You have no means to get past the electric fence. What were you thinking?

Four Guards come looking for you. The Guards have STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), firearms +2. They will fire the assault rifles in semi-automatic mode (three shots, -1 to skill). An assault rifle requires a reloading action after 30 round, does 4x damage. The Guards will shot to kill and if they succeed in doing so, go to 8 Juche Mercy.

If you somehow survive and defeat the Guards you can follow the fence around to either 14 Hoeryong City Gate, 6 Chinese Border Gate, or 19 Camp 22 Train Station.

21 Unconscious Drivers
There are two unconscious driver-guards here following the accident between the prisoner truck and the guard truck. You can undertake one or two actions here; provide first aid and/or steal their pistols and ammunition. If you attempt first aid (an untrained Survival skill), roll with your WIS modifier with a TN of 7, but with a +4 penalty (i.e., 11 or more required). After a few minutes another truck will arrive with eight guards; four will round up escaped prisoners, three will attend to chicken thieves, and one will check on you.

If you are successful you have provided critical first aid, healing them of some of their wounds and preventing death through blood loss. The Guards are impressed with your level of rehabilitated social duty and provide you extra rations.

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Gain +1 STR and go to 85 The Farm.

If you are successful and have taken the pistols, roll your Sleight vs their Sense (sight) at 12. If you succeed, the Guards are impressed with your level of rehabilitated social duty, provide you extra rations, and you have two pistols with ammunition. Gain +1 STR and go to 85 The Farm.

If you are successful and have taken the pistols, but failed your Sleight vs their Sense (sight) contest, you may either fight your way out or surrender. If you choose to fight your way out go to 4 The Gun Fight, but gain +1x damage on your first shot and the opponent's DEX is effectively 0 (-5 to contest) as you have surprise. If you surrender go to 8 Juche Mercy.

If you fail the Survival check and did not take the pistols you are taken back to 3 The Box, unless to succeed at a Act check TN 9 where you give a bawling story of how you struggled to keep the drivers alive. The Guards are impressed with your efforts and provide you extra rations; gain +1 STR and go to 85 The Farm.

If you fail the Survival check and you took the pistols, roll your Sleight vs their Sense (sight) at 12. If you succeed, you are taken back to 3 The Box, but now you have two pistols and ammunition. If you fail your Sleight vs their Sense contest, go to 4 The Gun Fight.

22 Administration Buildings
You attempt to sneak up on one of the administration buildings without being seen. You have no skill at this, so you operate at a default level (-4). Fortunately, you are small (+1). If you are attempting the action at night, you also receive an additional +4 bonus due to the lack of lighting.

Unfortunately, you are engaging in a contest against Guards who are, unsurprisingly, good at Guarding. You must succeed a contest against all the Guards' Sense (sight) checks; they have a PER of 12, (+1) and a Sense (sight) of +2. If you are spotted the Guards, the following Guard statistics also become relevant: STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), firearms +2. They will fire the assault rifles in semi-automatic mode (three shots, -1 to skill). An assault rifle requires a reloading action after 30 round, does 4x damage.

The Guards will shot to kill and if they succeed in doing so, go to 8 Juche Mercy. If by some miracle, you succeed in defeating the Guards go to 9 Inside Knowledge, or 13 Steal a Car!

23 Illegal Economic Migrant
Congratulations, you have made it across the border into China. However China does not look kindly upon North Korean refugees, and will not grant you refugee status. You must make contact with friendly Koreans who live on the Chinese side of the border. Make a Knowledge (general) with a TN of 15 as a streetwise check. If you fail, you have made the wrong contacts, and have been turned in to the Chinese authorities. After a couple of days in a Chinese prison, you are returned to Korea where you will receive 8 Juche Mercy.

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If you succeed however you are now working as an illegal farmworker in China and you are provided food and lodging. It isn't much, but it's a lot better than where you were before. You live in constant fear that one day you will be sent back and in constant hope that one day you may even try to make it to South Korea as a real refugee. But that's another story.

24 Revelations
An old memory comes forth and you enter in a password for advanced privileges. Access is granted and once again you search for your name. This time, startling information is received. YOU were the administrator of Camp 22. Yes, it was only in acting role, whilst the usual administrator was on leave for "illness", but nevertheless you were in charge. In charge of those who did the beatings, in charge of those who provided the meagre rations. That was your responsibility.

Apparently, however, you had some moral sense. You had written to one of the many Vice-Presidents about the many "kotjebi" (vagrant children) that were at the camp, whose parents or other family members had died due to various reasons. As they had committed to crime against society themselves, you recommended that they be rehabilitated and integrated to society.

The problem wasn't the suggestion as such, but rather your use of the term "kotjebi", which is forbidden in official correspondence. The order to incarcerate notes that you had engaged in a "bourgeoisie-liberal sentimentalism", "anti-Party propaganda", "destabilising the State and society" and that a harsh regime of "re-education" was necessary. It was the result of this "re-education" that you had forgotten not just the memo, but also your prior position in the camp. If you experienced a beating by The Box Guard, it becomes clear that he wasn't insulting you - but rather telling you the truth. You suffer a mental attack with a WIS 18 (+4) as a result of this revelation. This is a mental wound, not a bruise, and it shakes you in realisation and will take a long time to heal.

If you are still compos mentis, you may make your way to 14 Hoeryong City Gate, but before you go there is one other thing that comes to mind; make an Administration check, TN 9. If you succeed, you write a short script that deletes the electronic records and recurses into the online backups. Gain 5 Mental health bruise points back, as you are buoyant with at least some success.

25 ChickenQuest
Fresh meat! Such a fortuitous opportunity cannot be passed up. Kim Il-sung must be looking down on the heavens for you. You take the opportunity, as do others, to hide some fresh chicken meat on your person. Soon, another truckload of guards will appear to take you away to the farm. Roll your Sleight vs their Sense (sight) at 12. If you succeed, you have succeeded and will have chicken tonight; gain a point of STR and go to 5 The Farm. If you fail, your precious chicken carcass is cruelly wrenched from you, and you're taken back to 3 The Box.

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Marvel is becoming that particular kind of arrogant boyfriend / girlfriend that takes you for granted so much that they feel like they can basically do anything to you and you’d put up with it forever. Infinitely. So confident are they that we’ll put up with anything, that you’ll eternally keep coming back for more they’re like a character from Jonathan Franzen’s The Corrections, who is so sure of herself and her hold over her partner that she often walks away from the bedroom in the middle of sex after bringing them close to the ‘edge’, so to speak, but deciding to torture them by walking away with the job unfinished.

It’s a strained analogy, I’m the first to admit, but I am not sure this flick exists as a flick that makes any sense on its own, unlike the other 18 Marvel flicks which all have discrete beginnings and ends while teasing what’s going to come next. This just exists as whatever it is, but will completely not make sense BECAUSE of what will come next.

Again that’s not going to make sense. In a lot of ways I wish Marvel was even more arrogant and disinterested in anything other than making a point, and decided that this was going to be the last Marvel movie. It’s an impossibility, really, because the amount of money these movies have made is staggering. Put real simply they’ve spent 3 billion dollars over 10 years to make 15 billion dollars. That’s a ROI (Return on Investment) of 400%. Drug cartels don’t make that kind of money. So obviously there are going to be an infinite amount of Marvel flicks, but eventually won’t we get sick of being brought to the edge and have it fade out to nothing every fucking time? Isn’t this becoming a masochistic exercise in frustrating futility?

I’m not sure there’s any way to talk about this film without mentioning spoilers, obviously, but also the more obvious point being that the villain wins and half of our heroes die, and we have to watch them either die violently or quietly fade out to nothingness. The villain wins. The villain achieves his objective, and then it ends. Several times it looks like our heroes are going to stop Thanos in his ambition to kill half of the beings in the universe, and every time bar one they fail. The one time they look like they’ve stopped him, with a wave of his hand, it’s undone, and he still succeeds.

So… It’s strange that we maybe are meant to revise our thinking, and think, well, maybe Thanos was right? Maybe he deserved to get his way because he just flat out wanted it more? I mean, he is massive, and purple, but he’s somehow
soulful. He's not a rage monster; he doesn't personally hate anyone or anything, he's not overtly sadistic or cruel (other than, you know, the cruelty of ending billions of lives). Is he the absent father figure - Conservative daddy we secretly want to be genocided by? Of course not, because that would be way too much of a head fuck, and Marvel aren’t in that business. David Lynch would end it there, and he’d be a hero for ever more for doing so. Imagine a Marvel franchise run into the ground by David Lynch, man, that would be so awesome.

The most depressing thing is that everything the villain achieves, or everything our heroes fail to achieve, has to, absolutely has to be undone by the next Avengers film. And since that’s the case, because half of the attractive and overpaid people who ‘die’ here will necessarily have to be resurrected in some way by the end of the 4th Avengers film because Mm-Mm-Mm-Mm-Money, then everything we endured by watching these adventures for two hours and forty fucking minutes not counting the goddamn extra ten minutes we wasted waiting for the post credits scene, will be for nought. It will have meant nothing; none of the characters who died will stay dead, none of the loss will be felt, and so nothing will have been achieved by the press of a reset button.

So, for the sake of clarity, the villain succeeds and half of the people in the universe are wiped out. A countless number, surely, but it’s a concept so huge that the mind doesn’t entirely grasp it, or really care for that matter. What I was wondering was, does this include dolphins? Puppies? Did Thanos kill half the puppies in the fucking universe? That’s… just, no, Thanos. Bad Thanos. That cannot stand. That cannot be allowed to continue to have happened.

And I say this as someone who has no idea what they’re going to do in the next Avengers flick. All I know is that no matter how they do it, no matter who they choose to bring back with space – time – glove magic, it’s going to be very hard to make it seem anything other than cheap and unearned.

Let’s face it, just like in Orwell’s Animal Farm, while all the heroes are equally loved, some heroes are more ‘equal’ than others. Kill all the former S.H.I.E.L.D agents and talking trees you want, but nothing gives you the right to kill Loki. I joked months ago, when my family and I were discussing who was going to bite the big one in this movie (I had no idea at the time, honestly I remained completely unspoiled going in and had no idea what was actually going to happen) that there was no way they were going to off Loki, because if they did that no women would continue going to these stupid movies. And then Thanos kills him in the opening minutes. Bad move, Marvel. It was hard enough to get women into cinemas for these flicks, audiences reeking of Twisties and sexless nerddom before, and it’ll be nigh on impossible now.

At least I should have said half the women came for Loki, maybe the other half came for Thor. Or should I say, half for Hiddleston, half for Hemsworth. Well, at least they’ll always have Hemsworth. In Thor: Ragnarok, just to completely spoil a different film, all of Asgard is destroyed, and some stragglers end up on a space ship. At the beginning of this film, Thanos (a giant purple dude voiced by Josh Brolin) comes onto the ship the survivors were on, and kills pretty much everybody.

Thanos swans about the universe for the next two and a half hours killing various people when he feels like it, but he
only has a nice conversation with his adopted Gamorah (Zoey Saldana) because she’s about the only person or thing in
the whole universe that’s not very gaudy jewellery that he actually cares about. Of course he kills her too, because
getting what he wants is way more important than cheap sentiment, and he needs to kill the one person he cares about
because that’s the only way to get one of the Infinity gems.

I wonder if he’s going to have buyer’s remorse because of getting his way so completely. The rest of us go through life
with our petty wants and desires, and, generally, when they’re petty or modest enough, we achieve them. A job that
gives enough booze money; raising kids that don’t hate us and that survive to adulthood; a car with four wheels and
working windows: we can get these things without sacrificing too much. Bigger picture things, like getting celebrities
to notice us or achieving political power, winning the Tour de France with only one testicle, or paying off a mortgage,
require us to give up a lot. Sometimes it comes at the cost of our families, or giving up other dreams, or often it costs us
what we call a soul.

If you had to kill the one person you cared about in order to get enough power to be more powerful than God,
whichever idea of God you can think of, then surely the price would be steep? And deep within your purple soul,
wouldn’t there a pain so sharp that even your complete omnipotence couldn’t salve it? I dunno. This metaphysical stuff
is way too bigheaded for me to wrap my head around. This is a movie in which an angry purple guy dropped a moon on
Iron Man, and that was before he even had all the Infinity stones. A moon. He dropped a moon on the guy. All twenty
two Marvel heroes, excluding Ant-Man and Hawkeye, working together, from across all the franchises within the
franchise, all working in teams, can’t beat him.

In the words of the Great Prophet Kenny Rogers, "you gotta know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know
when to punch a purple guy, know when to just shut up and disintegrate." Nothing good will come from trying to save
the universe, not for anyone. I mean, and this is the weirdest set of sentences I’ll write this year, this is the kind of flick
where Thor convinces a giant dwarf (the always great Peter Dinklage) to forge a weapon with which to kill Thanos for
which he has to restart the heart of a dead star. And then when this new mighty weapon is finished and needs a handle,
Groot generously supplies some of his woody goodness? Not 'how is any of this remotely possible', but, 'what bunch of
stoners thought of all this in the first place?"

And speaking of the aforementioned Groot, did you know that Groot, as in the language Groot, was taught at Asgard
University, where Thor presumably studied it as an elective? When I heard that absurd line, I laughed so goddamn loud,
but alas I was the only one in the entirety of the theatre laughing. Mostly because I thought the idea of Thor studying
anything other than Advanced Abs was too ludicrous for words.

There are a specific number of laughs in this flick deployed in an almost mathematical fashion, a surprising amount
since really, from a genocidal perspective, there’s never been a bigger mass slaughter in anything you’ve ever seen
before, but without those attempts at humour, like the continued belief of most of the Guardians of the Galaxy that
Kevin Bacon is still somehow one of Earth’s Mightiest Heroes because of his actions in the movie Footloose, or that
Peter Quill (Chris Pratt) feels intimidated by Thor’s masculine beauty such that he even has to deepen his voice to
compensate, it would be a ludicrous slog.

Let’s all be honest, the stakes are so high that it’s hard to care, and a guy who turns other people’s weapons into bubbles or who can beat up the Hulk without even needing the gauntlet is so powerful that it’s hard to conceive of anything meaningful coming out of whatever they come up with as an either inevitable or a very evitable solution. Alternatively, we maybe could accept that Thanos, happily sitting on the veranda of a hut overlooking a natural paradise, content in his labours done, is all the happy ending we deserve.

Almost every Marvel Cinematic Universe hero that we’ve seen so far gets screen time or a token line of dialogue, but most of them don’t do or saying anything that matters. Black Panther and the Wakandans don’t really supply much beyond a venue for a battle to occur, in a way that could have been lifted straight from one of the Lord of the Rings films, except instead of orcs and such, it was thousands of some kinds of things with four arms that I could not even describe to you who or what they were or why they were there. There is no reason really given for why Thanos would even need anyone else to do anything when he can go anywhere and do anything at will by that stage of the film.

And then… half of the cast start fading away. It was really quite mesmerising to watch. Almost soothing, yet gently sad. I really didn’t know what I was feeling when this was happening. After watching this I felt exhausted, like I’d watched four movies simultaneously, and none of them had a satisfying ending, but loyally, like all the other cinema-going morons, I’ll be there in a year’s time to see how they finish it all up. Mostly, at the end, while I was sitting through the endless credits for a truly unsatisfying post credits scene that is nothing other than a teaser for the Captain Marvel movie coming next year, I sat there feeling perplexed, and a little bit hungry, but mostly perplexed. And there are worse ways to feel after a movie has had its way with you.

Still, it's impossible to score, which is a similar problem I faced with the first part of the last installment of the Hunger Games saga, or Part 1 of Deathly Hallows, and any other flick utterly dependent on its second part. Infinity War could be the first half of a great two-part story, or it could be shown up as the remarkable waste of our time that I secretly suspect it could be with a second installment that renders the first moot, mute or Groot. Time will tell, but it certainly doesn't improve my mood to have paid a ticket to only see half of a film. That'd be like reading all the A Song of Ice and Fire books and never get the last two books because... reasons. So for now let's admit all scores are irrelevant and it doesn't matter anyway. After all, Thanos can now edit the universe at will, so maybe he'll revise my review to be more to his liking.

7 times this movie is like if a pirate had a baby with an angel out of 10

"In time, you will know what it's like to lose. To feel so desperately that you're right. Yet to fail all the same. Dread it. Run from it. Destiny still arrives." - it's like he's saying we've already lost just by walking into the cinema - Avengers: Infinity War

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