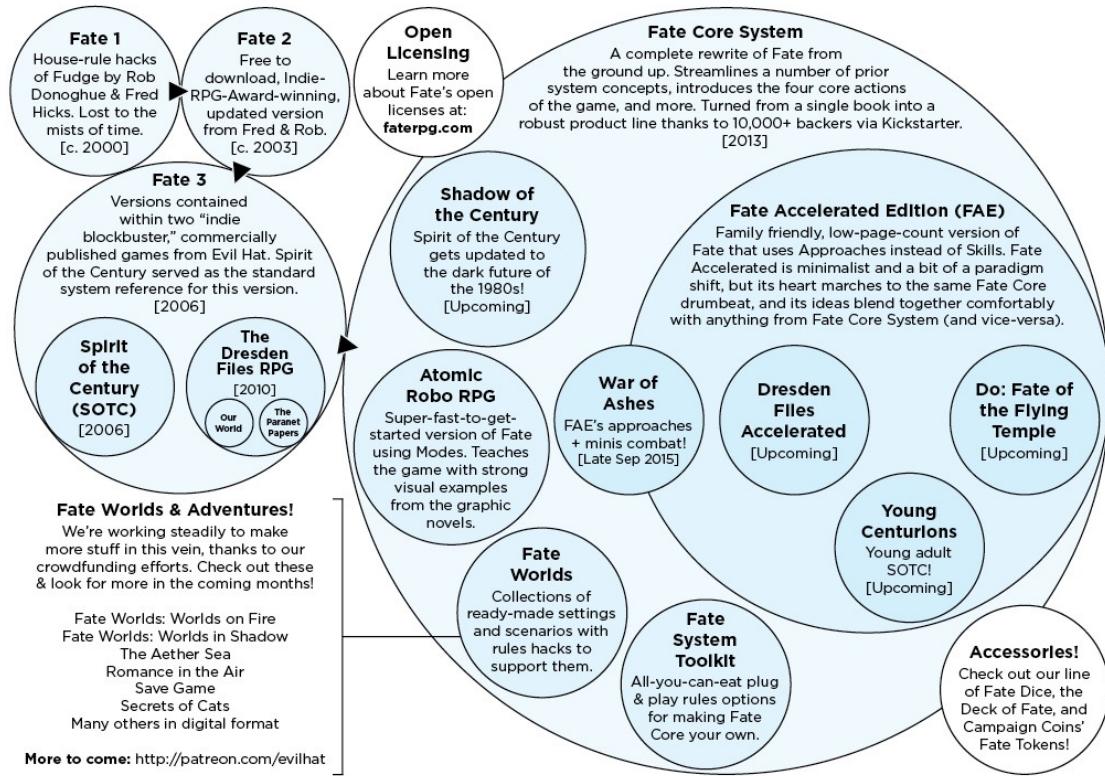


RPG REVIEW

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Versions of Fate from Evil Hat Productions



FUDGE, FATE, & FRIENDS

FUDGE, Fate, and Spirit of the Century Reviews ...
Fate Core Hacks .. Robots of Diaspora ...
Collaborative Legends of Anglerre ... Undying Empire ... Gulliver's Trading Company .. and more!

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ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL AND COOPERATIVE NEWS

Editorial

Welcome to the (extremely late) 46th issue of RPG Review, and it's well about time that we had a special issue dedicated to FUDGE, FATE, and many derived settings and games based on this model. It certainly has been one of the most remarkable game system families of this century, an easy "pick up" game which adheres to simple principles and complex elaborations, more than a bit of narrative input from the player's perspective, a little bit of GM/player competition, and it is certainly remiss of us to wait *over ten years* before having a special issue dedicated to this game system family. To be fair, we have published numerous FATE-related articles in the past. In recent issues there has been Simon Stainsby's FATE Red Planet play notes and scenarios (issue 38), and of course several articles on the FATE-based Gulliver's Trading Company, starting from Designer's Notes in issue 3 to The Far East in issue 39)

It is appropriate, however, that we begin with reviews of some of the big name FUDGE/FATE games, specially the FUDGE 10th Anniversary edition, FATE's Spirit of the Century, and the FATE core rules (4th edition, 2013), all by yours truly. This is followed by *four* articles by Karl Brown who apart from being a bit of a FATE aficionado is a goddamn machine when it comes to putting this material together. In particular, Karl has provided articles on "Technology and Robots" for Diaspora, a hard-SF game, "The Black Bull", a scenario for his own game, Gulliver's Trading Company, and two articles for that big-hitter of FATE-based RPGs, "Legends of Anglerre", specifically one on developing collaborative campaigns, and a 19th British Empire occult-horror version with Undying Empires.

What is missing? Plenty! Members of the Cooperative, for example, played for several months in a FATE Cats and Call of Cthulhu mash-up called "Cats Against Cthulhu" based in a fictionalised version of Wonthaggi. We were also hoping to have an interview with someone from Evil Hat, the purveyors of FATE, but alas that did not eventuate either. There was high hopes for a FATE/GURPS comparison and crossover, a review of the Eclipse Phase derived, Humanity's Fate, and another of Dresden Files. All of which should tell us something - FATE is *huge* and especially popular among the

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narrativist-orientated independent game designers and players who want to run an epic adventure without getting too bogged down into minutia.

What does that mean? It means that before too long we will certainly have to publish a second issue of RPG Review dedicated to FUDGE/FATE games. Certainly there are many other big games systems that are deserving of attention, one certainly does not deny that. But we've given some of the big players their own special issues, and some of them multiple times. FATE too, deserves this sort of attention.

Be all that as it may, the next issue of RPG Review is dedicated to "Health & Healing". Karl wanted it to be "Plagues" but we needed something a bit broader than that. And my goodness we're really going to dive deeply into this very appropriate topic. Hit Points? I mean, what the hell are they anyway? Is Call of Cthulhu's SAN just hit points for the mind? Fortunately we have a number of gamers out there with more than a little bit of medical knowledge, so all will be revealed in RPG Review #47. Until then... Stay safe!

Co-operative News

Look there is no other way to put this; the RPG Review Cooperative has had an awful past few months, thanks to COVID-19. Some of our special social events, such as the Annual Fruit Bat Picnic, or our regular Astor Movie Nights, let alone our face-to-face gaming sessions, have been put on hold. Noble Knight games, who placed an order for Papers & Paychecks and copies of Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery, had their shipment delayed because of the virus, as have a number of our backers. Our apologies, and we plead patience for these unusual circumstances to come to an end.

This said, we have had some fairly significant successes; we did attend Melbourne's major gaming convention, Arcanacon, and once again our second-hand stall was a major feature and interest of the convention of which attendees specifically note as a highlight. The first supplement of Papers & Paychecks, Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery, was released in print and PDF versions, completing a long overdue promise to our Kickstarter backers (which is much better than some major companies, one must mention). And, our ever resilient gamers, are making their way through the COVID-19 pandemic with a variety of online technologies. It is almost as if gamers have been preparing for the Zombie Apocalypse for years.

You know leaves us completely uncertain? When this will end. Which causes a couple of problems, not the least being our planned conventions. You see, the Cooperative had the very bright idea of a Cyberpunk convention to be held on July 4. It seemed sort of appropriate, don't you think? Except there is no way that's going to happen, barring the worldwide discovery of a vaccine, distributed by crop-dusters across the globe (ha! that'll send the chem-trail anti-vaccers into a spin). It also makes the prospect of another RuneQuest Glorantha convention very slim indeed. And due warning is given, there is a possibility that we will *never* have a vaccine for COVID-19. After all, we've never developed a vaccine for any other coronavirus in the past, why do you think this one will be any different (and no, throwing money and researchers at a problem provides the *potential* for a vaccine, not a guarantee; necessary, but not sufficient).

What to be done? Well, in your editor's own small manner, I came to the conclusion that I can sell off the bulk of my rather vast collection of RPGs and donate the proceeds to *Medecins Sans Frontieres*, who are doing extraordinary work in countries with few resources to fight such a pandemic. So, if you're looking for games to buy and want the money to go to a good cause, contact me: lev@rpgreview.net; it's the least I can do.

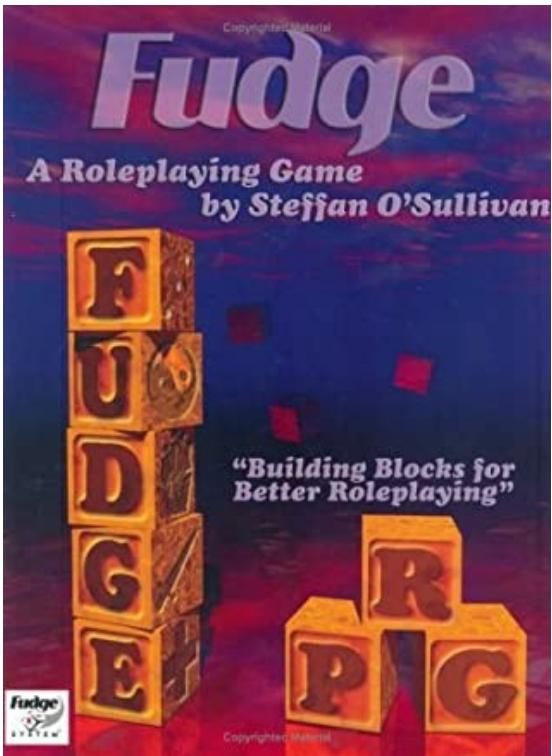
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FUDGE AND FATE REVIEWS

by Lev Lafayette

Fudge 10th Anniversary Edition (Steffan O'Sullivan et. al.,; Grey Ghost Press, 2005)

Introduction and Physical Product



Weighing in at some 320 pages of quality paper this hardback book is well-bound and certainly needs to be. Fudge (not FUDGE) 10th, as I will refer it to now on, is quite a mighty tome for something that isn't quite a complete roleplaying game in its own right. Rather, as fairly explicitly stated on the cover, it provides "building blocks for better roleplaying". In a nutshell, it consists a kernel of a system; a traits ladder by which attributes and skills are assigned values (superb, great, good, fair, mediocre, poor, terrible), and a system of 4DF, that is 4d6 with 2 +s, 2 -s, and 2 neutral results. Add that die roll to the values and one has a result, for opposed or unopposed actions, and with wound levels based on a track. Outside of that, much depends on the GMs intervention to work out exactly how their gameworld applies this general system.

The organisation of the text is well over twenty chapters, covering everything that one could hope for in a generic roleplaying system. There's a four-page table of contents, a two-page index, and character sheet. Page numbers are clearly marked and pages are provided chapter titles and subtitles. The writing style is friendly, charming even, and the text presented in two-column justified with a serif font with good level of whitespace. The artwork is primarily from public domain and accredited clip-art sources with a handful of exceptions. Most of it is quite good and contextually appropriate, although the cover is awfully bland.

CharGen and System

Fudge characters have traits, divided into attributes (relatively fixed), skills (relatively learned), gifts (bonuses that don't easily translate to the trait ladder), faults (negatives for the same), and supernormal powers. From the outset however, FATE makes it clear that it's up to the GM to determine what number of attributes are available, or to what number and what level of skill depth will be required for their own game setting, although sample settings are provided to give the GM a guide. Further the game differentiates between what it calls "subjective" and "objective" trait values; what is really meant is "qualitative" (superb, great, good etc) and "quantitative" (+3, +2, +1 etc). Skill cost levels can vary according to the relative difficulty of the skill (like in GURPS), or the broadness of the skill category, and traits can be

traded among each other (e.g., 1 attribute level equals three skill ranks). An option is also provided for random character generation. Supernormal powers consist of various magic, miracles, psionics, cybernetics etc. There is consideration of scale effects, especially differentiating between scale and speed, as to account for significant species variations; a Superb Intelligence (scale: Rabbit) still isn't going to do well at grade school!

With the core game system already explained, Fudge does give alternative methods of resolution which generate roughly the same result, with minor variations in success chances. So instead of 4DF, there is conversion options for a 4d6 (positive and negative groups), a 3d6 method, and percentile methods. Further description is provided for unopposed, opposed, and group tests. An option for critical results is provided, with the GM expected to flesh out the details of a critical chart, along with a contributing author providing for an alternative diceless resolution method, heavily based on thematic considerations and qualitative input. Later in the book a method of character development through petitioning form in-play use, or training, is provided. Further on, there is a simple alternative character generation method entitled "Five Point Fudge" which allocates points to various skill categories which are then used to apply levels of competence.

There is, of course, a combat system in Fudge, based on opposed rolls. Combat rounds are an indeterminate period of time and are potentially simultaneous at the GM's option. Offensive factors are based on weapon, scale, and deadliness of the weapon, and are contrasted with the defensive combat factor which includes scale, armour, and damage capacity (equivalent of hit points or constitution). Various situational modifiers are provided, along with generic offensive and defensive postures. The victor in the contested roll adds their success to the damage applied by the weapon. Wound levels are described as Undamaged, Scratch, Hurt, Very Hurt, Incapacitated, Near Death, and Dead, with increasing modifiers to capabilities on the wound level acquired. Again, numerous alternative implementations are offered, including a die roll for varying damage applied. Healing reduces wound levels, but with additional time required of one week per level for realistic implementations.

Somewhat out of place is a core list of skills, gifts and faults. Over one hundred and twenty base skills are provided, plus additional specialisations, as required by either the GM or desired from the player. Each skill is typically provided a couple of paragraphs of description, and often with direct in-game example effects. In addition there is around thirty gifts and some eighty flaws described from a couple of sentences to a paragraph. It would be fair to say that many of these seem to bear a striking resemblance to those listed in GURPS as advantages and disadvantages, which is unsurprising given the author's contributions to that system.

Setting Options

The overwhelming majority of the book is setting-specific examples, starting with a collection of sample NPCs in a "Tips and Examples" chapter, which does a great deal of justice to the design principles, illustrating a variety of colourful characters from historical and fictional settings. A personal favourite is the karma-trapped ghost with some impressive trivia skills. The chapter also includes a collection of normal creatures, with statistics, including some humour (a cat, for example, has the gift of Nine Lives).

The Five-Point Fudge system is applied for character creation examples for the chapter on Fantasy Fudge, which includes a small set of specialist setting skills (e.g., Alchemy, Spell-Casting) along with Gifts (Magical Talent) and Faults. Importantly of course there are the magical powers (necromancy, transmutation etc) with their magical feats, in-game requirements, and restrictions. These may be used in a skill-like fashion as a couple of examples suggest. It is, as with all things in Fudge, very much up the individual GM and their setting on how it is applied. In addition there is

some fantasy NPCs, a short sample scenario, and some twenty fantasy creatures to make up a bestiary. An extensive sample magic chapter has a system which involves broad spell groups, and specific spells with described effects (e.g., a combat spell group with spells of "Beast Fury", "Damage Opponent", "Degrade Weapon/Armor" etc), degrees of power for specific spells, mana to power spells, spellcasting skills, enchantment rules, and stress for unfortunate side-effects.

Other example setting chapters include Fudge Psi, for psionic powers, Fudge Superheroes, Cybernetics, Netrunning, Vehicles, Dogfighting (no, not involving dogs), Weapons and Armor, and Fudge Fu for martial arts. The Psi chapter is quite short with powers categorised as "Very Broad" (e.g., ESP), "Mildly Broad" (e.g., Telesense), and "Narrow" (e.g., Clairvoyance). Psi powers are associated with skills which begin at no level, and with a "Psychic Reservoir" to power psychic actions, along with "desperate" options. This contrasts with the superhero chapter which uses Gifts to provide scaled-up attribute-like effects for strength and speed, and with gadgets providing a means to introduce the scaled power. Sample characters have superpowers such as "Scale 12 to resist all forms of bodily damage" or a rocket-gadget which provides "Scale 8 for jumping" with a +8 jet flame for damage.

Also following a GURPS-like approach is the suggested rules for cybernetics, costing both Gifts or money, or both. About twenty different cybernetic systems are offered typically providing a fixed benefit of some sort. There is an option for limiting cybernetic systems according to attribute levels, or nervous system damage, or even mental disorders. As usual, there is only minimal detail on how such systems should be implemented. There is also rules for the "full cyborg" with scale bonuses to strength and damage resistance. A couple of sample characters are provided. A related and subsequent chapter covers netrunning, where the quality of the 'deck' (Terrible to Legendary) determines the quantity of the programs it can run simultaneously. The general environment follows the comically unrealistic approach to computer systems which treats the network as some sort of virtual reality with "doors", "passageways" etc albeit with almost appropriate programs for monitoring and intrusion.

Two chapters cover vehicles. Recommended standard attributes for vehicles are Durability, Size, and Speed, with scaling factors applied. Weapons (because vehicles often come with weapons) are Damage, Range and Target Size (that is, what they're designed to hit). Scale size and mass are differentiated from the human norm due to materials used (humans are mostly water). Almost forty Gifts and Faults are available to vehicles and their weapons, along with the application of a dozen skills or so. A half-dozen example vehicles completes "VehGen" rules; this is followed by maneuvers and combat, which has suggestions on how to interpret damage. Of note is the "dogfight" chapter, with an additional attribute, Maneuverability. Several options are provided on how to combine pilot skills with maneuverability. A variety of ship specific aspects, as equipment, is provided before moving into the dogfighting proper, which involves rolls for distance, maneuvers, positional advantage, then missile locks, weapon firing, and damage resolution. A short weapon list provides for ODF (offensive damage factor), range, and rate-of-fire.

An equipment chapter starts with a four-page essay on the role of equipment, and especially weapons, in Fudge, before describing the addition of new values for weapons; speed, reach, lethality, along with their bonuses "to hit" and "damage", an option for weapon-specific criticals, ranged combat, scatter for projectiles, explosions, a spray table for automatic weapons, variant rounds, armor values versus attack type, armor penalties due to weight and restrictiveness, hard vs soft armor differences, the use of shields, and so forth. It is all quite crunchy with around a dozen pages of tables for the different weapons and armour. It is also an interesting juxtaposition with the final rules chapter on martial arts, entitled "Fudge Fu", which makes use of "styles and moves". A character uses particular moves (e.g., disarm, feint, grapple, kick, takedown) following the relative degree of success from their contested style (wrestling, karate, boxing, aikido, capoeira, savate) check. The actual moves available depends on the style and the skill level.

A final chapter makes a pitch on the benefits of Fudge, arguing that the "lack of specific detail" is a strength. This could

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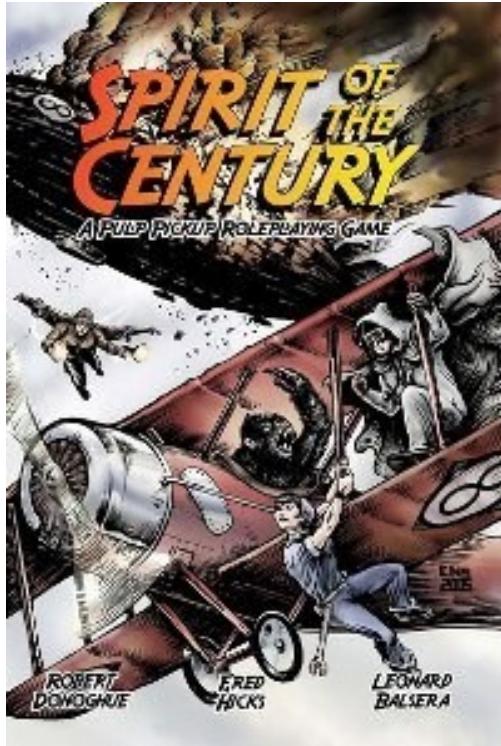
be the case, but as the rules are writ, it is not. It is far too vague, it doesn't checklist the options, and requires too much work for the GM. The essay sits the game somewhere between the simulation approach used by GURPS and on a trajectory towards the narrative-heavy approach commonly used in FATE. And where the rules do exist, more or less, in something vaguely like stone, this is evident. At times Fudge can be quite detailed, for example the very specific scale multiplier values for strength and speed. At other times the appeal to "mother may I?" or "handwavium" is quite frustrating. Despite the pretty good range of genres and material that Fudge provides in a physically rather impressive tome, a GM will find that they have plenty of additional system work to do with Fudge. In other words, it doesn't really provide enough "building blocks for better roleplaying", but rather some suggestions on how to build those blocks.

Style: 1 + .5 (layout) + .5 (art) + .5 (coolness) + .6 (readability) + .8 (product) = 3.9

Substance: 1 + .5 (content) + .3 (text) + .5 (fun) + .2 (workmanship) + .2 (system) = 2.7

Spirit of the Century Review (Robert Donoghue, Fred Hicks, Leonard Balser; Evil Hat Productions, 2006)

Introduction and Physical Product



Using the FATE 3 game system, Spirit of the Century is an unashamed high-pulp action adventure game, that was very well-received, winning the 2006 Indie RPG Award for Independent Game of the Year and the 2007 Silver ENnie for Best Rules. The evocative cover, featuring a gorilla in a bi-plane in conflict with an airship and character with personal winged jet-pack is indicative of the sort of gaming experience. The gorilla, for what it's worth, is a sample player character. So is the character with the jet pack.

The review here is for the softback edition of the book, weighing in at a substantial 411 pages (excluding advertisements) in a large paperback format, includes an impressive four-page table of contents and eight-page index. Each page is single-column justified with a serif font, and each page is marked with chapter and page number. The writing style is most formal, a perhaps a little wordy (and very wordy in places), but otherwise quite a pleasure to read with a multitude of examples of play and elucidations of the system. There isn't an enormous amount of artwork, but what is there is technically well-done, evocative, and usually contextual.

System and CharGen

Common to FUDGE/FATE games, Spirit of the Century ranks ability as a ladder with variation from a +0 norm which descriptives to a value, e.g., Academics, Good (+3), Pilot, Poor (-1). Resolution is 4dF, or Fudge dice, which are d6 with two +s, two -s, and two blank. The 4dF die result compares against a target number to determine success e.g., a Good academics result against a Fair difficulty would be a success. There is no separation between skills and attributes, but there are Aspects, which are relationships, beliefs etc. Where an Aspect is beneficial it can be Invoked, which costs

a Fate Point; where it is negative, the player can volunteer or the GM can Compel, which can gain Fate points. In addition there are Stunts, which are to FATE what Feats are to d20-derived games. Fate point themselves start equal to the number of Aspects a character has and can be used to invoke an Aspect (as mentioned), gain a bonus to a roll, reroll dice and the like. These are refreshed at the end of a session.

Appearing in a somewhat unexpected place in the text (between the Aspects and Skills) chapters there is a "How to Do Things" chapter which elaborates the game system. Each point of success above the target value is a Shift, which can be used to reduce required time or increase quality. Actions are defined as simple (fixed target), a contest, or a conflict which has more complex resolution with multiple exchanges that can inflict stresses on the loser of an exchange (to either Health, for physical or Composure, for mental and social damage), which can generate consequences, and even take the character out. Rather than taking a consequence, a character may choose a concession (e.g., surrender). Depending on the stress track, consequences are either mild, medium, or severe taking minutes, hours, or days for recovery. There are minion and companion options for those that are not fully-fledged characters with bonuses and reduced stress tracks.

Character generation in SotC starts with picking a broad character idea (academic, explorer, scientist etc), with an emphasis on what the character is doing. Each character (who should have a cool pulp-era name), chooses two aspects per phase of their Background (youth), War (the Great War), Novel (the title of their first adventure), and two Guest Star appearances (appear in other character's novels). After this characters have skill allocation, five at average (+1), four at fair (+2), three at good (+3), two at great (+4), and one at superb (+5), that is, 15 skills total. Finally, the character can pick 5 stunts for their character.

Aspects, Skills, and Stunts

Whilst the basic background, game system, and chargen is completed in under thirty pages, the glorious details elucidated in the Aspects, Skills, and Stunts chapters make up almost ten times that amount. Character Aspects are quite freeform, they're the sort of things that players should select. Descriptive aspects are encouraged for flavour and to drive the narrative; "Strong" is boring, "Strong as an Ox" is more interesting - and may create a situation where the PC has to test their strength against an Ox! It is pointed out that "Bad" Aspects are a sure path to more Fate points. Essentially, where a character has an Aspect, it is recommended that the GM use it as an opportunity to introduce in play, although with each PC having ten Aspects it certainly would be quite wild to have all of them in each session, and the Fate Points will be flying thick and fast - and this is not a bad thing! Locations and other characters can also have Aspects and these can be "tagged", and characters may use an Aspect to Declare a narrative input or make a Maneuver to apply Aspects to a scene. A short list of suggested Aspects is provided.

There's a fairly modest list of twenty-eight genre-appropriate skills, categorised as Combat, Craft, Knowledge, Mundane, Perception, Physical, Subterfuge, and Social. Each skill comes with a good level of description, usually a few paragraphs at least, but also with additional "trappings", that is, specific implementations of the skill. For example, the Athletics skill is described in the general sense in a two paragraphs, but there is also a paragraph specifically for Jumping, one for Sprinting, one for Climbing, one for Dodging, one for Falling; and so to it goes throughout the skill list providing a pretty thorough range of activities.

Skills are also associated with Stunts, which provides situational abilities and even minor powers. Stunts often come with prerequisites, and often another Stunt, and offer increasingly powerful abilities within their narrow scope, which makes them a sort of difficult skill specialisation. So 'Fast as a Leopard' requires 'Marathon Training', but acts as

dependency for 'Faster Than a Leopard'. Other Stunts are so powerful that they require the expenditure of a Fate Point when used, for example Disguise of the Mind, which allows a character to inhabit the mind of another persona, including their skills; obviously this is a type of power.

Equipment, GMs Advice, Setting

A 'Gadgets & Gizmos' chapter provides an equipment overview that is appropriate to setting, in a mundane manner, but also genre, in a superfictional manner. There is a modest amount of personal equipment provided with costs associated with the Resources skill. This is also the place that one finds engineering rules, especially for adding particular aspects to a mundane piece of equipment as well as developing the extraordinary gadgets of the setting, which often have to be treated as Aspects themselves, if they are personal (think Wonder Woman's lasso). Take it a level higher, then one has Artifacts. Unfortunately this chapter is not nearly as well developed as it should be and, indeed, needs to be to really flesh out both the mundane world and the fictional gadgets of great power.

The 'Running The Game' chapter is wordy very firmly settled on providing adjudication on character actions, with detail providing on how to go about this for each skill. A lot of the information here could quite easily go in the Skills chapter as the information provided is hardly GM-specific; the Climbing modifiers for darkness, slipperiness, and height being a very obvious example of this. On the other hand, one does find an interest in maintaining the flow and spirit of the game in the description for the Investigation skill, concentrating on the worthwhile overall suggestion of envisaging success and failure and how it contributes to the story's development.

This is contrasted with the following 'Tips and Tricks' chapter which is about running the game more than adjudication within the game system. Here is the place for plot devices and narrative development (including a simple pulpy structure), the necessity of decision points and keeping the action flowing, acting as the eyes, ears, and sometimes even knowledge of the characters and providing that information to the players, and generally having the GM act as a cinematographer. Finally the chapter concludes with a few suggestions about character advancement and development.

The final chapters is 'The Nether Adventure', a sample scenario which is always a good thing to include in a core rulebook in my opinion, and 'Secrets of the Century', which elaborates the default setting and especially the special society that the PC heroes belong to, the Century Club. Having a scenario provides a complete game within the one publication and let's you run it now. It's pretty well structured, being based in the default setting of heroic PCs in the Century Club, being involved with some society events, some rather interesting "scientists", a bit of archeology, and some fantastic geography. Add it to some mystery, murder and otherwise, along with iconic locations and mighty gadgets and one has all the making of pulp goodness. At the very end, almost like an appendix, there is a selection of quick stunt packages and sample PCs and NPCs.

Conclusion

Spirit of the Century provides a very good introduction to the FATE game system and the style of game which it works particularly well for. The game mechanics are very flexible and do require an involved level of adjudication on the part of the GM. There is little in the way of falling back to a simulationist perspective, especially in this setting. In some ways the game can also be strangely and unnecessarily constrained; for example with all characters having the same distribution of skills in their pyramid and the same number of aspects. Fortunately the game system is relatively open enough that one can tweak such things without causing too much damage.

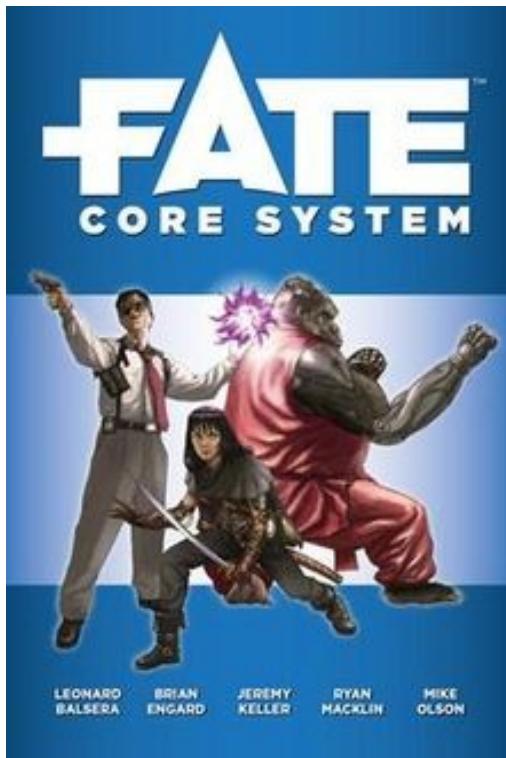
Stylistically this is a pretty good exposition of the pulp genre, covering the main bases quite adequately. The form factor of the book is just fine, although the layout and density of the text could be quite distracting and hard to follow, as the difference in font-size between headings and sub-headings is not exactly obvious. Of course, if the major complaint about a game is the aesthetics, then one can infer that the game itself is a pretty good product; and that is certainly the case of Spirit of the Century.

Style: $1 + .5 \text{ (layout)} + .5 \text{ (art)} + .9 \text{ (coolness)} + .6 \text{ (readability)} + .5 \text{ (product)} = 4.0$

Substance: $1 + .6 \text{ (content)} + .6 \text{ (text)} + .8 \text{ (fun)} + .6 \text{ (workmanship)} + .7 \text{ (system)} = 4.3$

FATE Core System (Leonard Balsara, Brian Engard, Jeremy Keller et al, Evil Hat Productions, 2013)

Introduction and Product



At around 2/3rds of an A4 size, the well-bound hardback of Fate Core (aka Fate third edition) and just over 300 gloss pages, the back cover blurb makes a lot of strong claims, about the ease of character and world generation, "rock-solid" storytelling advice, a clear game system, and all in effect of being a "new and improved" version of the award-winning Fate system. All of which is fair enough, and indeed you want a game to aspire to such things. A hat-tip is given to the copyright notice which provides "express permission" for copying for personal use. The type is serif, single-column justified with inverted black-and-white for sidebar information. Each page has clearly marked page numbers and chapter title along with sufficient space for references to elsewhere in the book. The two-page table of contents and one-page index is sufficient. The black-and-white artwork throughout is usually competent, somewhat evocative, usually contextual, and using images of sample characters is a nice touch. The writing style is mainly formal and is easy to read but is really on the verbose side. There are eleven major chapters (Basics., Game Creation., Character Creation, Aspects and Fate Points., Skills and Stunts., Actions and Outcomes., Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts., Running the Game., Scenes, Sessions, and Scenarios, The Long Game, Extras), plus various appendices.

GameGen and CharGen

The Basics chapter has an obligatory "what is roleplaying" and "what is needed for play" introduction, which does emphasise the collaborative and narrativist orientations of the game ("make everyone look awesome"). This includes an excellent overview of the character sheet, explaining the various subheadings and their relationship to the game, and a summary of the game system, which is roll 4dF (d6 with two pluses, two minus, two neutral), use the result to modify

base skill level, compared with target level or opposed roll, determine degree of success or failure. An important part of the Fate system is the use of Aspects, which are non-skill abilities or restrictions which can be invoked for a bonus or re-roll, or compelled. When invoked they cost a Fate point, a metagame resource, when compelled a point is provided, as a sort of compensation.

Further promoting the designer's creative agenda the chapter on Game Creation emphasises the elements of proactive characters (and players), competent characters, and dramatic situations. Apart from that there is the normal environmental considerations; setting, scale, main issues, major NPCs, what skills and stunts are common and available, and the process of creating the PCs. It's a handy basic GM and player advice chapter that is thorough in providing examples, albeit within the somewhat limited model. Some particularly nice features include the conversion of issues into Aspects and the emphasis on every player creating a protagonist.

Character generation starts with the "high concept" of the character (a one sentence description of who and what the character is) and their "trouble" (a major hindrance to their character's goals that isn't related to the high concept) as two central aspects. Following this the characters have a phase trio; firstly, the character's first true adventure, and two phases on how the other player characters became involved in the current adventure. The stories are then traded and the other players add their characters become involved. Thus there are relationships between the PCs from the outset. Each phase adds an Aspect to the character (somewhat less than previous editions of Fate games).

With the Aspects determined, characters are allocated a fixed number of skills in a pyramid structure; one at great (+4), two at good (+3), three at Fair (+2), and four at average (+1), although an option does exist for a varied column system. Characters also have a number of stunts, between three to five, with more than three costing Fate point refreshes ("the more cool tricks you can do, the more you'll need to accept compels to get fate points"). Every PC also has two stress tracks, which basically determines how much physical or mental damage they can take, modified by the character's physique and will "skills".

Action Resolutions

A primary manner to players to have some sort of narrative buy-in for Fate is through Fate Points. The primary mechanism to gain or spend Fate Points are through Aspects. Aspects may be part of the game setting or situation, or for the character. The latter includes personality traits, backgrounds, professions, relationships, goals, status, etc. In addition to Aspects, there are Consequences which describe a lasting injury from a conflict (e.g. Dislocated Shoulder, Social Pariah). The designers argue that Aspects should be double-edged, "Nerdy McNerdson" rather than "Computer Genius", providing for opportunities and complications, and should provide multiple plot devices, "The Legion Demands I Prove Myself" rather than "I Must Prove Myself". Invoking an Aspect costs a fate point and can provide a +2 bonus after a die roll, or a reroll. Some Aspects (e.g., setting backgrounds) provide a free invoke, which can lead to a +4 bonus. At other times the GM can compel an Aspect and the PC's situation is complicated; usually they received a Fate point as a result; or it can be awarded retroactively for a player who creates their own complications following an Aspect.

Skills are defined as broad competencies and are the basis of what the character does in the game (overcome challenges, create an advantage, attack and defend). There is no distinction between "stats" and "skills", so Agility, Empathy, Notice, Physique, and Will, are all skills. In contrast, a Stunt changes the way a skill works providing a special, additional benefit, with increasing levels of power and flexibility with a prerequisite system. In addition there's quite a lot of advice on creating Stunts. There are around 20 default Skills, often with several paragraphs devoted to each, explaining their relationship to actions and potential Stunts. As with other games with similar abilities, one must

wonder why Stunts aren't specialisations or high-level versions of a skill.

The chapter on "Actions and Outcomes" reiterates the core mechanic of the Fate system and the outcomes approach. The four main results are "Fail", "Tie", "Success" and "Success with Style", the latter is one succeeds by three or more. There is no equivalent "Fail with Ineptitude". "Fail" doesn't always mean "failure" either; it can be mean "succeed with serious cost". In combat situations a success translates either as stress or consequences, according to the defender's wishes, and if they can apply neither they are taken out of the conflict. Developing the ideas further, the "Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts" chapter differentiates between the three; a Challenge is a complicated action, a Contest is when two or more characters have the same goal, and Conflicts when they are directly attempting to harm another character. In Conflicts turn order is important; physical conflicts use Notice, mental conflicts use Empathy. A character may take damage as physical or mental Stress depending on the damage received; when Stress is exhausted they must take Consequences, which can be mild, moderate, or severe, with appropriate effects and recovery time. An extreme consequence exists which, in addition to the damage, replaces an existing Aspect. A player may concede in a conflict, and take the loss. Character death is recommended only for narrative purposes.

GM Advice and Setting Information

A chapter on "Running the Game" does what it says on the tin, starting from the perhaps unusual perspective of starting and ending scenes. This makes some sense when considering Fate's explicit design statement in this chapter that "Drama is better than realism" (it isn't innately so, but it is for *this* game), and which is reflected in action checks; all actions are meant to have a result, the worst die roll is one where nothing happens. Setting design is defined as a collaborative process as a player who really isn't into the game setting will seriously effect actual play. Difficulties are set in accordance to character skill, not what would be realistic, but rather what could be justified. Nameless NPCs tend to have an aspect or two, and maybe some stress boxes depending on their competency. But they are not fully-fledged characters are subject to this a narrative "mook" approach, or even worse still, "mob". More major NPCs are given names, skills, stunts, and more developed stress tracks. Some decent advice in particular is given to "right-sizing" the NPCs according to scene in terms of quantity and ability.

This is followed with a "Scenes, Sessions, and Scenarios" chapter. It starts with Scenarios, and specifically the building of said plots and narrative devices and, as is appropriate, draws heavily upon the Aspects of the characters, and indeed between characters to create a dramatic tension, along with obstacles and antagonist NPCs. The chapter then moves into Scenes, the foundational unit of the wider development into Scenarios, Story Arcs, and Campaigns, each representing a milestone of increasing significance. Notice something missing from the chapter? Sessions. There really isn't much here on describing the options or environment for actual play or, for that matter, managing player personalities and expectations.

"The Long Game" chapter explores story arcs and campaigns. This is also the point where game world changes and character changes are considered. At the end of each session, characters may switch ranks value of skills, switch stunts, purchase a new stunt with refresh, or rename an aspect. At the end of a scenario, characters can gain a skill point (still with column restrictions), recover and rename serious consequences, and with major milestones, rename extreme consequences, add refresh, advance a skill beyond the normal limits, or even rename the high concept. Again, the narrative orientation is evident here; there is no "realistic" reason why column restrictions should apply for skills, or that character development is based on narrative advancement.



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The final major chapter, Extras, is about elements that are a special, setting-specific, part of the rules. This includes magic and supernatural powers, specialist equipment, vehicles, and organisations. When these provide special abilities these basically follow the same rule as Aspects which, as a player, can take some initial getting used to; it may be a bit of a surprise to discover that the amazing gun that you took as an Aspect piece of equipment requires a Fate point to use. A basic weapon extras simply add to shifts on a successful attack, whereas armour will reduce it. There are a number of useful examples provided, but they are examples, and certainly not enough in quantity to run a genre-specific game straight from the book.

Conclusion and Evaluation

As an actual product Fate Core is really quite nice. The form factor is pleasant, the quality of the product is good, the layout is easy on the eyes. The artwork left a little to be desired in terms of context, and a little more to be desired in terms and the signal to noise ratio could seriously be improved (and which would have given opportunities for a bestiary, or a sample scenario and the like). The character generation system, whilst workable and with some excellent aspects (pun intended) does come with its constraints, both in terms of process (e.g., three and only three phases) and resolutions. As a game system Fate Core is orientation towards a particular narrative agenda, and it does quite a good job at it, but it is not the sort of agenda that will satisfy all players or even some players all of the time, especially when one counters the more "unrealistic" constraints that have been established to ensure that agenda. Further, it is quite incomplete and will certainly require a fair bit of work from a GM to create a particular setting for actual play. Certainly, it is a core system book, but most games have sufficient development in their core rules that one can pick it up and run with it. Overall however, Fate is an excellent contribution to the RPG world and one can certainly understand its popularity as a result; simple to learn, dramatic in style, and with plenty of opportunities for free-form elaboration.

Style: $1 + .7 \text{ (layout)} + .5 \text{ (art)} + .7 \text{ (coolness)} + .7 \text{ (readability)} + .7 \text{ (product)} = 4.3$

Substance: $1 + .4 \text{ (content)} + .3 \text{ (text)} + .9 \text{ (fun)} + .7 \text{ (workmanship)} + .7 \text{ (system)} = 4.0$

SOME HACKS FOR FATE CORE

by Lev Lafayette

1) Vary the randomness.

FATE's basic mechanic, derived from Fudge, is 4dF, using d6s with two +s, two -s, and two 0s. The result is added to the character's skill to give an effective result on the skill ladder. True to the narrative perspective of the game, there is an emphasis on when to roll the dice (FATE core, p187) with a strict emphasis on "something interesting" happening in failure and success. If nothing interesting is going to happen, the rules recommend that "just give the PCs what they want". This is unsatisfactory; giving PCs what they want leads to an in-game quasi-bullying situation between the GM and players, and (like an ridiculously over-the-top movie) it breaks a sense of verisimilitude. Instead, the PCs should get what they want according to their position on the skill ladder for those things which are unimportant to the narrative, and the number of dF applied should vary according to the degree of importance. From a simulation perspective - which can occur simultaneously with the narrative perspective - randomness represents all the fiddly bits that are difficult to include in a game table expression. For example, running through a crowded street versus running on track. Normally the athlete would be victorious over the novice in the latter, but in the former there's chaotic elements. Varying the d4 used in a narrative perspective gives a sense of importance and uncertainty to the event and have you noticed in great literature that there's all sorts of chaotic elements at the narrative's climax? Sometimes it will be 1dF, sometimes 4dF, and don't be scared to go up to 6dF or more!

2) Stacked Values.

Aspects are a helpful descriptive path for bonuses in Fate. From situations like "low gravity" to character experiences and beliefs like "trained by the Loremasters", Aspect values provide opportunities for GM and player alike to drive the story. As the game is title, a character's fate is very much tied to their Aspects. This is fine, but all Aspects are of the same value in the mechanics and they don't need be. Plus, it is difficult to represent the continuum of settings or beliefs with the flat value. "Low gravity" is not the same as "very low gravity of microgravity", and "overconfident" is not the same as "megalomania". As an alternative, consider allowing Aspects to "stack", with additional degrees adding an additional +2 to the result when invoked or allowing an additional reroll as desired. Likewise, when a Stacked Aspect is compelled, the character receives a like multiple of Fate point tokens. Like all the suggestions here, this proposal does add flexibility whilst opening up the possibility of unbalanced characters - but sometimes a GM or a player wants and needs unbalanced characters. Apart from the need to represent extreme environments, a classic trope is the character who has been brought up in an isolated monastic environment who knows only a few things about the outside world but has been trained with very particular skills and beliefs.

3) Separate Attributes from Skills.

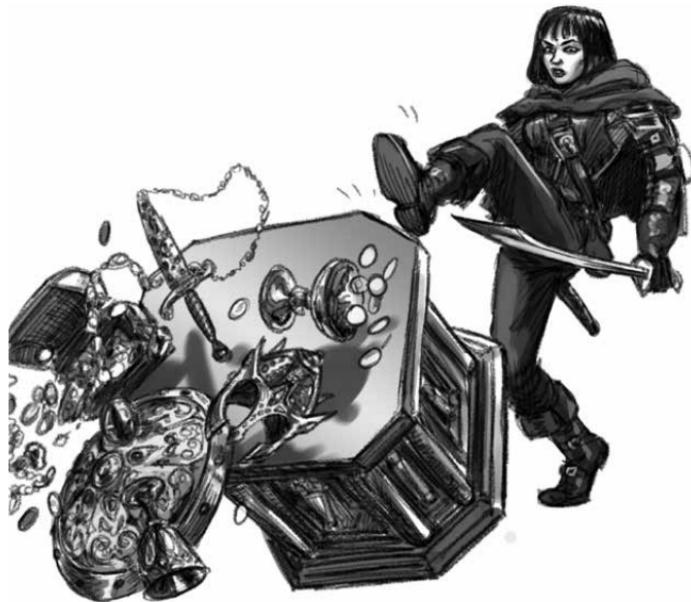
Fate Core doesn't separate attributes from skills. All represent "what can a character do", rather like how HeroQuest puts everything in "Abilities". Whilst there is a certain neatness in a design perspective that distinguishes between all those things a character does versus those things that influence a character's ability to do things, there are some skills which end up being "super skills" because they are so prominent in any character's activities. It is perhaps unsurprising that these are usually represented as "attributes" in other games; this would include, in part, skills like Athletics, Empathy, Notice, Physique, Rapport, Resources, and Will. Of course, Fate is already rather light on the skills used in the game, so rather than remove the quantity of skills what is workable is to create new Aspects (using the Stacked Aspects model) with positive and negative values for values like Agility, Perception, Physique, Reputation, Status, Will and the like and using these values as modifiers to the existing skills. Stress charts and initiative order should use the attribute-like Aspect as the default, rather than the skill which fits the model of "skills are things the character does" better.

4) Remove the Skill Pyramid and Columns.

Another element of Fate Core's approach of "balanced" and "narrative-driven" characters is the skill pyramid and column equality method. Again, it is artifact of the creative agenda that wants to make characters are that are equal but different and focussed. But this artifact creates problems, not the least being it is difficult to create characters who are specialists or generalists. There is a hint in Fate Core that a point-buy method could be used instead (p46) but the skill columns would still apply, that is, a character has to have fewer high level skills compared to lower-level skills. Simply applying 20 points at character generation and allowing allocation as one sees fit can lead to unbalanced characters (e.g., 20 +1 skills!) but does allow, from more mature and advanced players, do remove an artificial restriction and allow the creation of generalist and specialist characters.

5) Unbalanced Starting Levels.

A tradition in RPGs since day dot, but not replicated in other literary forms, is the idea that PCs start off with a degree of equality, whether it's 1st level characters in D&D or 100 points for GURPS. Fate Core does this as well, working on the basis that characters have a three-part prior story which establishes their background and interaction with other PCs. Again, this is an artifact of Fate's design which to an extent shoe-horns player choice to ensure a depth of narrative connection. But advanced players don't need that; they are perfectly capable (even if they need reminding) that their PCs should have connections to avoid the "you meet in a bar", although sometimes from unknown and divergent backgrounds can be exciting in its own way. An alternative chargen process which also allows PCs to have diverse backgrounds and ensures some connectivity is to (a) allow PCs to have prior experience equal to the equivalent of story arcs (but at a cost of refresh) and to have just one prior connection story. If one likes, the equivalent of childhood, adolescence, and then apprenticeship, and with extra years added on. This allows for a "Fellowship of the Ring" type group - Boromir was a lot more powerful than Frodo, but Frodo had a much higher Fate point refresh (Gandalf was probably an NPC).



TECHNOLOGY AND ROBOTS OF THE DIASPORA

by Karl Brown

Diaspora is a FATE driven hard science fiction RPG by B. Murray, C.W. Marshall, T Dyke, and B. Kerr. This article is the second in a series. The first appeared in issues 16-17.

With input and playtesting by: Elizabeth Bowman, Jay Patterson, Rick Barker, Lev Lafayette, Mark Llewellyn, and Michael Cole.

In Diaspora we have travelled the stars for millennia, worlds have been terraformed, and civilisations rise and fall in great cycles. Diaspora is hard science-fiction role-playing with FATE. Harder than Traveller; no quasi-magical anti-gravity, inertia-less drives, convergent evolution, etc. The exception is FTL. Very high transhuman technology is almost impossible to achieve, obeys real-world physics, and extinguishes the society that holds it. The result is most worlds have technology no much more advanced than real world 2020 but with a greater emphasis on space travel. Human live and work in space in a sub-genre some have called ‘blue collar space’.

Diaspora is a highly collaborative game where players and referee work together to create their own region of space. The players design ‘thumbnails’ of plausible local solar systems in the first session. Problem is, for those not versed in the hard science fiction genre little to no guidance is given. This is a real problem when almost all science fiction in the popular media is space opera. For advice on terraformed worlds see Lev’s excellent article in Rpg Review 11. For plausible alien life see Rpg Review 12. To make matters worse the authors of Diaspora themselves are not really versed in what is scientifically plausible. I have already addressed this issue in RPG Review issue 16 (page 54 http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_16.pdf but there was an editorial mistake and the explanatory notes did not appear until issue 17 page 4 http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_17.pdf).

This article is something of a review and something of a technology rules supplement using material generated during our year-long Diaspora campaign. We provide further notes to help players keep feel of the technology in their Diaspora games in line with current scientific understanding. In addition, Diaspora does not include rules for robots. This article includes new rules for robot design and player character robots.

Errata

P42-43 culture/tech skill: for ‘worlds’ read ‘systems’.

Ships

Extended range ships gain the Aspect *Huge* representing the extra reaction mass required.

Suggested space combat times

The goal here is to suggest some time scales that represent the times and distances of space combat in hard science fiction. Feel free to ignore and change these to suit the narrative. A ‘round’ is one complete cycle of positioning, electronic warfare, beams, torpedoes, and damage control phases.

Distance between

combatants (Bands)

Time for a round

9	A few days
8	A day
7	six hours
6	a few hours
5	an hour
4	half-hour
3	15 minutes
2	a few minutes

1	a minute
0	half a minute

Weapons and Armour

Personal Beam Weapons

As noted in issue 17, our progression of beam weapon technology was a little slower than the Diaspora authors imagined with laser rifles and laser pistols not appearing until T3. The energy density required to power personal laser weapons, even with a backpack power source, is so high as to likely be impossible with foreseeable technology.

There are electrolasers at T2. These use a low-power laser to ionise the air then fire an electrical charge along that path. To the uninitiated they are ‘lightning guns’.

New Stunt: Electrolaser

Adds the aspect electrolaser. The weapon cannot function in vacuum and thin or exotic atmospheres may also invoke compels to misfire. Bp-1.

Modified Beam Weapons Table

This table has been altered slightly from the core book.

Weapon (Type)	Harm	Range	Pen.	Tech	Cost	Stunts/notes
Flame Thrower	0	2-5	0	0	4	low recoil, dispersed fire, rechargeable
Electro laser rifle	2	1-4	2	2	4	low recoil, electrolaser
Laser Rifle	3	1-4	2	3	4	low recoil
Sniper laser	2	2-6	4	3	4	low recoil
Hand flamer	3	0-3	0	3	4	dispersed fire, low recoil
‘Disintegrator’	4	1-3	2	4	4	dispersed fire, slaved to the owner’s eyes

Vac Suits

New Armour features:

Limited duration: the pressure suit only sustains life for 3 hours (-1bp)

Extended Duration: this comes in several grades each extending life support for a longer duration but requiring a higher T and bp cost

- I: 1bp T1 A day
- II: 2bp T2 A few days
- III: 3bp T3 A Week
- IV: 4bp T4 A lifetime

Example space suit capabilities. (varies by design at any T)

T	kg	+kg/pt protection	Typical Life support	Time track
-2	60	33 (industrial equipment)	3 hours (limited duration)	A few hours
-1	40	33 (industrial)	7.5 hours	An afternoon

		equipment)		
0	30	10	7.5 hours	An afternoon
1	20	7 (flexible)	24 hours (extended duration I)	A day
2	15	5 (lightweight)	3 days (Extended duration II)	A few days
3	10	3 (lightweight and flexible)	7 days (Extended Duration III)	A week
4	6	2 (lightweight and flexible at T4)	Indefinite (extended duration IV)	A lifetime

Robot Design

A feature of the ‘blue collar space’ outlook of Diaspora is that robots are not as broadly capable as humans. At the society level this ensures humans are working in cultures we can easily relate to. At the play level starships require a crew. Certainly, the development of artificial intelligence is occurring rapidly in 2020 but the development of general artificial intelligence still seems a very long way off. Artificial consciousness is an even more difficult problem since we really do not have an understanding of the mechanism of consciousness, the best we have are ‘neural correlates’; correlation is not mechanism. For a detailed discussion of artificial consciousness see the article “Transhumanism is Total Nonsense” (page 11 issue 33 http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_33.pdf).

Robot design uses the same principles as design of any other equipment in Diaspora. This process can produce a range of automated machines from realistic T-2 clockwork automata to T4 genius warbots. The robots will be machines capable of navigating human environments such as buildings and spaceships. It does not produce large robotic vehicles or spaceships.

Note that robots have no default senses they must be purchased. Also note that by default a robot only functions in normal air (water shorts circuits, vacuum fusing, air breathing power plants etc offer in game explanations for this limitation).

Build points	Base cost* civilian/military
Build points 14T+20 for human sized robots (25-200L volume)	4/5
7T+10 for dog sized robots (3-24L)	4/5
3T+5 for rat sized robots (0.4-2.9L)	3/4
1T+2 for mouse sized (0.05-0.39L)	3/4
1T+1 for insect sized robots (0.006-0.049L)	2/3

*-1 if cheap. +1 if incorporating power armour.

Robot PCs

You could play a robot as a PC. However, it is not until T2 that robots are capable of almost convincing personalities and have skills that begin to match those of an average human (peak skill 3, 16bp of skills). Even at T2-3 robot intelligence remains narrowly focussed, unable to adapt to tasks outside of their skillset and making mistakes that are obvious to humans. Before T4 the best robots fall short of skilled humans. Most PC robots will have less skills to draw on than other PCs.

Players should select or design robot models with fewer than 10 aspects. No PC, including robots, has more than 10 aspects. PC robots begin with the aspects of their model but may choose to add aspects during the phases of character generation. Like other PCs they should begin with 10 aspects in total.

Statistics

Robots may purchase electronic warfare (EW) at the same cost as a spaceship. However, when using EW ranges are personal combat ranges not space combat ones. A robot can conduct EW against a spaceship but only if it is close enough to the ship's computer.

Movement maximum for humans is 3, for robots this is zero by default and costs 1bp per point. This maximum movement is the same for all movement modes unless VTOL is chosen. VTOL movement is purchased separately. There is no limit but if movement exceeds Agility+3 the design gains the aspect "poor cornering".

All robots have Data and Frame stress tracks. Frame is used as Health is for humans. Stress tracks are affected by skills as usual. Skill at 0 no bonus, skill 1-2 +1, skill 3-4 +2, skill 5 +3 Those designed to socially interact with humans also have a Composure stress track. Robots without a Composure track cannot meaningfully interact socially any more than a T-1 car can.

Composure: Base zero 1pt per circle maximum allowed T+1. Affected by Resolve

Data: Base 1, adding a circle costs 1bp. Affected by Computer

Frame: Base 4, adding a circle costs 1bp, removing a circle returns 1bp. Affected by Stamina

Skills

Unlike humans, robots without a skill cannot even attempt a task requiring it. Skill levels have a point cost and a minimum Technology. A robot is assumed to incorporate into its design all the tools required to use its skills at the skill level it possesses.

Note: A robot without a composure stress track cannot take charm, intimidation, oratory or resolve.

Note: A robot incorporating 'powersuit' in its design effectively gains an extra +2 in stamina. For robots these extra levels of stamina do improve the frame stress track.

Note: A robot with: Alertness skill receives one free sense. This should be a 3D sense such as vision, IR, or sonar.

Close Combat receives a bp discount equal to the skill level+1 on one integral close combat weapon.

Computer skill can connect to most computers

Communications has wireless radio communication built in

Energy weapons receives a bp discount equal to the skill level+1 on one integral beam weapon.

EVA is sealed and designed to operate in one hostile environment, often the vacuum of space.

Science skill provides a variety of sample analysers and instruments none of which are particularly useful because they are either linear (eg. pH, temperature, pressure, Geiger counter etc), operate on an inconvenient scale (microscopes), or do not report in real time (eg. stills cameras, DNA sequencers, etc.). If desired the designer may list a number of such sensors equal to skill+T+5.

Slug throwers receives a bp discount equal to the skill level+1 on one integral slug thrower.

Skill Level	BP	min. T
0	1	-2
1	2	-1
2	3	1
3	4	2
4	5	3
5	7	4

Intellect Skills

Though complex programming can 'fake it' for most apparently intuitive tasks, there are some skills that require advanced abstract thinking, intuition, and abstract pattern matching that are beyond computers in the blue-collar space setting of Diaspora, at least until T4. These skills are called intellect skills here. A robot of T4 can use these normally. At T3 or less (unless the robot is rolling to assist a human who is actually doing the task) ignore the robots skill level the outcome is *always* -4, aspects etc. cannot alter the result. Intellect skills are: Navigation and Brokerage, Science and Professions like physicist are Intellect skills when advanced abstract thinking, intuition, and abstract pattern matching are involved.

Stunts

True Artificial Intelligence	1 One Task only	-6 One Place only	-6			
One Context only	-4 Articulated hands	2 requires T-1 or better				
Human size and shape	2 requires T-1 or better	Transfer Aspect	1 Disguise	1 Civilian	2	
Cheap	2 Smooth floors only	-2 Micro G only	-2 All terrain	1		
Aquatic	0 Amphibious	1 Submersible	2 Climber	2		
VTOL	3 Power cells low	-1 cannot be used if design incorporates a power suit				
Three Laws	1 Limited Three Laws	2				
Senses	1 each. Minimum Technology: Touch T-2, Sight T-1, Audio T-2, Olfactory T-1					
Fixed in place	-2					

True Artificial Intelligence

Requires T4. Removes “Artificial intelligence is an oxymoron” and enables the robot to attempt tasks without a skill just like a human. 1bp. Soon after this technology is developed the machines design ever smarter designs the consequences of which lead to collapse of that civilisation.

One task only

Indicates the machine is highly limited and can only use its skills to perform one very specific task. T-1 Robot welders in car factories are a good example. The robot simply cannot perform any other task -6bp

One place only

The robots programming or bodily flexibility is so limited that it can only function within one specific location usually one specific room. Outside of this place the robot always acts as if it had a -4 result and cannot apply its skills, aspects can still be applied. Most factory robots have this restriction -6bp

One Context only

As ‘one place only’ except the robot is a little more capable and functions correctly within one context. Examples include Mars rovers or T1 valets that only function correctly within a single chain of standardised passenger liners -4bp

Articulated Hands

The robot has hands that are able to use human equipment. 2bp

Human size and shape

Not just humanoid, the robot’s body shape and size is within the human norms and it is able to use human clothing, worn equipment, drive vehicles built for humans etc provided it has appropriate skills. Includes all terrain movement and articulated hands. Climber is not included, and the robot must still choose Disguise to pass for human. 4bp

Transfer Aspect

This robot has some special feature not covered here that is modelled by applying an Aspect. 1bp.

Disguise

A common use is to make the machine look convincingly like a natural animal or human. Adds an appropriate aspect. Requires T0 to look completely convincing close up. The difficulty of the manoeuvre to tag this aspect in good light by a typical human close up looking at the machine for a second is Tx2. 1bp.

Civilian

The robot has protocols and programming and safety features suitable for civilian control. All armour and weapons built into the design must also be civilian. 2bp

Cheap

Poorly made. All armour and weapons built into the design must also be cheap. Reduces base cost by 1. 2bp

Smooth floors only

The robot is on small casters, has an ultra-low chassis, or is otherwise unable to negotiate any obstacle. It can only move over smooth flooring even shag carpet will prevent it moving -2bp

Micro G

The robots motive system does not function in gravity. This could represent low pressure gas jets or spindly limbs. -2bp

All terrain

The robot has tracks or legs that enable it to traverse rough terrain 1bp

Aquatic

The robot has liquid-surface movement only and is waterproof. 0bp

Amphibious

The robot is waterproof and can move over the surface of liquid and over land. Note All Terrain must be purchased separately if desired. 1bp

Submersible

The robot can swim and is waterproof. Only the effects of pressure and armour limit the depth it can dive to. Unless Amphibious is also taken the machine cannot move over the land. 2bp

Climber

The machine is as versatile as a human in movement. It can run over rough ground, swim, and climb. The robot is waterproof but still cannot operate in vacuum. 3bp

VTOL

The robot uses helicopter blades or ducted fans to fly and hover. It must purchase VTOL maximum movement separately to maximum movement by land or other modes. 3bp

Power cells low!

The machine gains the aspect “power cells low!” which one might compel to restrict actions in order to conserve energy. Robots without this are assumed to have an endurance of at least 8 hours. This stunt cannot be taken if cannot be used if design incorporates a power suit.

Three Laws

Some say these safety protocols originated on the lost homeworld of humanity. These encoded rules of behaviour reduce the frequency of dangerous mistakes made by a robot because of the “Artificial Intelligence is an oxymoron” aspect. The robot gains the aspect “three laws safe”. This aspect should be compelled often. You can compel this action to have the machine stop before endangering a human because of the “Artificial Intelligence is an oxymoron” aspect. As the three laws require judgement on the part of the machine they require at least T2. Cost 1bp

1 A robot may not injure a human being or through inaction allow a human being to come to harm

2 A robot must obey orders given to it by (all) human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law

3 A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Limited Three Laws

The robot has a variation of the three laws that only applies to one group such as “all citizens of Mrod” or “the crew of the Sleeping Beauty”. By default such a machine assumes a human is *not* a member of the protected group until some sort of identifier is detected by it’s senses. The identifier could be an ID card, national costume, distinctive accent or anything else that makes sense within the story. Requires T2. 2bp

Fixed in place

The robot is fixed to the floor wall or ceiling and likely draws power from the building or ship. -2bp

Senses

A machine has no senses by default. A robot with alertness skill receives one free sense. Each sense purchased costs 1bp each. All senses have a minimum level of technology: Touch T-2, Sight T-1, Audio T-2 (includes a voice free at T-1 or better), Olfactory (smell & taste) T-1, IR -1, Sonar -1, kinaesthetic sense (T-1).

All T0 or better robots are assumed to have short/personnel range/’wireless’ communicators

Armour and Weapons

Use the usual design rules for these items except you do not need to spend all the build points. If the robot is Cheap incorporated items must also be Cheap. If the robot is Civilian incorporated items must also be Civilian. When the design is completed -1bp (minimum 1) then apply this bp cost to the robot.

Aspects

1. All robots get one free descriptive aspect like "Mars Rover". If the robot is disguised then this descriptive aspect should reflect that.
2. All robots gain the Aspect "Artificial Intelligence is an oxymoron" unless they are T4 with True Artificial Intelligence. "Artificial Intelligence is an oxymoron" should be compelled to have the machine make stupid and sometimes dangerous mistakes. A common use is to compel to have the machine ignore something important if it is outside of its skills.
3. All robots receive the aspect "Limited Sensor Package" to represent that the machines have senses different to humans.
4. If movement exceeds agility+3 gain the aspect "poor cornering".
5. If the robot has a composure track it gains the aspect "simulated personality". The difficulty to tag this aspect is Tx2 for a short conversation taking about a minute.
6. All the movement type stunts are aspects.
7. The Stunt Human Size and Shape is an aspect.
8. The Stunts Three Laws and Limited Three Laws add the "Three Laws Safe" aspect.

Other aspects are gained through Transfer Aspect stunts or integral equipment.

Fate Points

Robots have no fate points of their own. Exception: if the robot is a player character it receives 5 fate points.

Sample Robots

T-1 Planetary Rover

An early exploration robot designed and programmed to explore one particular terrain on one specific uninhabited world. The Mars rovers launched in 2004 are much like this robot.

Movement 1

Data O

Frame OOOO

Skills

Stamina 1, Science 1, Communications 1

Stunts

Vision, Four scientific sensors, One Context only

Aspects

[World Name Terrain Type] Rover

Power Cells Low

Artificial Intelligence in an oxymoron

All terrain

If in doubt call home

Limited Sensor Package

Integrated Equipment

Pressure suit

Base Cost 4 MG

T2 Valet

Movement 3 Data O Frame OOOO Composure OOOO

Skills

Stamina 3, Agility 3, Alertness 3, Brawling 3, Communications 0, Medicine 1, Charm 3, Profession Valet 3, Culture/Tech 1

Stunts

Vision, Audio, Olfactory, Touch, Kinaesthetic Sense, Civilian

Aspects

Valet Robot

Three Laws Safe

Human Size and Shape

Artificial Intelligence is an oxymoron

Simulated personality

Climber

Limited Sensor Package

Base Cost 4

T2 Bodyguard

The Bodyguard is a large humanoid robot with a plain exterior. This civilian robot is intended as protection for VIP's.

Move 4

Composure OO Data OO Frame OOOOOOO

Skills

Agility 0, Alertness 1, Brawling 1, Slug Thrower 3, Intimidation 1, Stamina 3, Medical 0, Resolve 2, Profession: Bodyguard 0

Stunts

Vision, Human size and shape, Civilian, Limited three laws, Audio

Integrated Equipment

Power Armour: Def 2, civilian, pressure suit, powered, servos, crushing fists level 1

Heavy Gauss Pistol: Harm 2, Pen. 0, Range 0-2, civilian

Aspects

Bodyguard bot. Artificial Intelligence is an oxymoron. Limited Sensor Package. Human size and shape. Limited three laws safe. Out of juice. Out of ammo. Concealed weapon

Base Cost 5

T2 Spy Roach

The roach is a sophisticated robot insect. When programmed with the layout of a room it can scurry about recording

voice, vision, and computer files and wirelessly sending them to a nearby spy.

EW 1 Movement 1

Data O Frame O

Skills

Alertness 0, Stealth 1, Comms 0, Computer 0

Stunts

Vision, Hearing, One place only

Aspects

Spy roach. Climber. Disguise: Cockroach . Artificial Intelligence is an oxymoron. Limited Sensor Package

Base cost 3 MG

T4 Artificial Human

More human than human, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between this machine and the real thing without breaking the skin. If you cannot detect a difference is the difference really there?

Move 3

Composure OOOOO Data OO Frame OOOO

Skills

Charm 5, Alertness 4, Oratory 4, Intimidation 3, Culture/Tech 3, Resolve 3, Computer 2, Profession: Spokes model 2, Medical 2, Stamina 2, Arts 1, Repair 1, Bureaucracy 1, Stealth 1, Vehicle 1

Stunts

Human size and shape, Civilian, Climber, Touch, Audio, Olfactory, Kinaesthetic sense, Temperature, Sense of Direction, True AI, Disguise: More human than human

Aspects

Artificial Human. Limited sensor package. Climber. Human size and shape. More human than human. Simulated personality. (False?) memories providing 4 more aspects

Base Cost 4

THE BLACK BULL, A GULLIVER'S TRADING COMPANY JOURNEY

by Karl Brown

This article requires a copy of Gulliver's Trading Company (GTC) to be fully used. A beta version of GTC, the Grub Street Edition, is available here: <http://rpgreview.net/node/40>. This article copyright Karl David Brown 2020. Copies of the map of the world of Gulliver's Travels can be purchased at: <http://browse.deviantart.com/art/Gulliver-s-Travels-World-Map-294804331>.

Previous articles and previews of GTC have appeared in past issues of RPG Review. Issues: 3, 9, 12, 23-24, 26-27, 35-36, and 39.

Play testing by Elizabeth Bowman, Michael Cole, Lev Lafayette, Jay Patterson, Rick Barker, and Gawain McLachlan.

In memory of Rick Barker (1946-2019).

It is July 1730 and the newly formed private concern “Gulliver’s Trading Company” is preparing its first profit seeking venture. A risky but potentially lucrative expedition probably to Brobdingrag, though the referee might choose another destination. This article provides enough material for a solid first session playing GTC. Future articles may present later chapters of our adventure used in playtesting.

Campaign Type and Model

Several types of campaign could be conducted in the 18th century of Lemuel Gulliver. This adventure is written as an introduction to GTC and as such is aimed at entertaining a wide audience. For this reason, it is of the Traveller’s Tales campaign style. The adventure is written for the Ship’s Crew model. Since this is the very beginning of Johnathan Gulliver’s re-exploration of the nations discovered by his father characters from those unusual nations would probably not be allowed by the referee. There certainly isn’t any Brobdingragians! However, after decades, even centuries, of trade through much of the world there will be travellers from beyond Europe near the Pool of London. Sailors in particular are a very cosmopolitan occupation.

See the GTC core rules for discussions of campaign styles and models.

Chapters

The adventure is split into a number of scenes. This article describes the opening chapter within Lemuel Gulliver’s Black Bull Tavern. The chapters for an entire first part voyage might look like this:

- The Black Bull Tavern: Players are recruited to the crew and a provocateur starts a brawl
- London Bridge and The Pool: A brief chance for the PCs to aid Lemuel Gulliver. An argument between Jonathan and Lemuel Gulliver.
- Leg One: Canary Isles then Cape Town: An interlude to trade, take on fresh water and drink rum.
- Leg Two: Through the straits of Madagascar to Molucca Islands, the home of pirates.

- Leg Three: East across the Pacific Ocean 500 leagues to Brobdingrag.
- Brobdingrag: A longboat and a rocky coast then up a ‘creek’ through the fields to raid a farmhouse.
- Leg One: The Pacific Ocean with a possible deviation to Lilliput/Blefuscu or Van Diemen’s Land.
- Leg Two: The Southern Ocean with a possible deviation to Houyhnhnm Land.
- Leg Three: Cape Town and Canary Isles
- Home to London. Denouement.

During the voyage player characters’ skills are used to avoid hazardous encounters (GTC70). A selection of incidents is provided in the core book (GTC241). GTC contains extensive Maritime rules (GTC65).

Chapter 1: The Black Bull

Pass out copies of Handout 1 (end of article). The PCs arrive at the Black Bull tavern and must convince a panel of three vested interests to hire them, allow them aboard as paying passengers, or welcome them aboard as private investors.

Dramatis Personae

A complete list of NPCs followed by statistics for them all.

- Agent Provocateurs
- Captain William Robinson (GTC231)
- Edmond Smith the publican (GTC235)
- Eddy the Pickpocket
- Future crew members and passengers, i.e. the PCs
- Hurgo the Bull (GTC231)
- Johnathan Gulliver (GTC230)
- London bloods (GTC238)
- Out-of-work sailors (GTC240,235)
- Richard Sympson (GTC232)
- Scruff, a dog (GTC235)

Agent Provocateurs

Experienced NPC

If asked, the gentlemen give the names Alan and Gordon Gilson but are something else entirely.

The ‘brothers’ Albert and Govert Dirkszoon are agents of a new Dutch company with similar goals to GTC, the “Vereenigde Verre Gebieden Compagnie” (VVGC, Dutch Remote Regions Company). Both appear to be tall blonde gentlemen dressed in the English style. However, Govert is in fact Albert’s sister Griet dressed as a man. They speak near-perfect unaccented English. Both served as mercenaries fighting for the English and learning English customs before peace came. They then turned to Thief Taking in Bristol where they were recruited to be agents of VVGC. In the Black Bull ‘Gordon’ will observe the GTC while Albert stirs up the Local Bloods starting a fight.

The VVGC could be used as a reoccurring rival organisation in a GTC campaign.

Dutch -1, Thief Taker -1 -1, English Gentleman Impersonator -1, Bully -1, Soldier -1 -1

Skill	Rank	Rank-X Ladder
Appraise	1	-1 Mediocre
Torture	1	-1 Mediocre
Drill	1	-1 Mediocre
Intrigue	1	-2 Poor
Insult	1	0 Average
Law	1	-2 Terrible
Resist	1	0 Average
Stealth	1	0 Average
Alertness	2	1 Fair
Athletics	2	1 Fair
Deception	2	1 Fair
Encryption	2	-2 Poor
Intimidation	2	1 Fair
Observation	2	0 Average
Brawling	3	2 Good
Disguise	3	1 Fair
Pistol	3	by weapon
Single hand melee	3	by weapon
Language English	4	2 Good

Native Language is Low Dutch.

Each has smallsword Fair 1 WR2, and if threatened by firearms draws a pistol 0 Average WR 1.

Extras: literate, pocket pistol, smallsword (with Balanced -1) and purse of coins.

Eddy the Pickpocket

Typical NPC

Old Eddy drinks alone, the locals don't come near him, not because he's a foul mouthed, mean old drunk (which he is) but because he's a pickpocket. He'll pretend to fall over drunk on a PC who offers to top up the beer he's nursing. He's too poor to afford enough drink to affect his skill.

Eddy is known by a number of alias' to different people. He is known as Edward (the magistrate, his mother), Teddy (his current moll), Ted (his long suffering kind brother), or Eddy (sailors, criminals, and beggars).

English -1, Cruel -1, Pickpocket -1, Avarice -1, Roaring -1

Skill	Rank	Rank-X Ladder
Appraise	1	-1 Mediocre
Brawling	1	0 Average
Low Dutch		1 -1 Mediocre
Gaming	1	-1 Mediocre
Intimidation	1	0 Average
Observation	1	-1 Mediocre
Persuasion	1	-1 Mediocre
Resist	1	0 Average
Alertness	2	1 Fair
Begging	2	1 Fair
Deception	2	1 Fair
Single hand melee	2	by weapon
Stealth	2	1 Fair
Pick pockets	3	1 Fair
Insult	3	2 Good

Native Language is English.

Bludgeon 1 Fair WR 1.

Extras: Bludgeon (with balanced →), Bubber's liver, Iron Stomach.

New Aspects

Most of the Aspects held by these NPCs are described in GTC. New Aspects are described below.

Impersonator

You appear to be something you are not, for example English Gentleman Impersonator, Male Impersonator, &c. Spies might pretend to be subjects of a foreign power, swindler's might pass themselves off as aristocracy, and women often live as men among pirates and soldiers.

Spend an aspect card to: avoid your disguise being detected, have someone believe your fabricated backstory, or pass unnoticed in a particular kind of crowd.

Get paid an aspect card or conscience to: have someone suspect you are an imposter, have someone from your old life recognise you, or not know something someone in your role should know.

Pickpocket

You use distraction, dexterity, and speed to steal valuable from people passing by.

Spend an aspect card to: pick a pocket, sneak up behind someone, befriend street urchins, or outrun a victim.

Get paid an aspect card or conscience to: have a previous victim recognise you, be hunted by a thief-taker, or have a magistrate be biased against you.

Thief Taker

Victims of crime pay you to find criminals and drag them before a magistrate. You rely on investigation, cunning, underworld contacts, and ruthless violence to get the job done. Thief takers spend so much time among criminals and the poor that they look, dress and speak just like their targets.

Spend an aspect card to: spot a clue, find rumours circulating among the underworld, know a criminal, or bludgeon a criminal.

Get paid an aspect card or conscience to: have a criminal be a previous target who is angry at you, have someone in the underworld send a thug to kill you, or make a faux-par in polite society.

The Black Bull

The Black Bull is a typical London Public House. Owned by a Brewery, leased out as a business (in this case to Lemuel Gulliver) and managed by a publican. As an outlet for a brewery it serves beer and little else. The Black Bull is located on Fetter Lane. Lemuel Gulliver lived on this street over thirty years ago. Fetter Lane is a street in the ward of Farringdon Without. It runs from Fleet Street to south north to Holborn. Text in italics can be read out to the players or paraphrased.

It is a fine bright evening at about 9pm. The Black bull is a typical two-story mortared stone structure on Fetter lane. Over the door hangs a carved muscular bull in dark wood with off-white bits of shell for eyes and horns. The heavy wooden door is open and the smell of hops and rich tobacco wafts out. There is a neat white sign with red lettering nailed to the door.

(It reads “NO Gin Served Here”. Lemuel the Leaseholder will not stand for it and the manager is happy to comply). If anyone asks there is a narrow laneway large enough for a horse but not a coach on one side. This leads to a small yard.

Inside, Front room:

Inside is a good size public room strewn with solid tables and chairs. An oak bar is tended by a portly middle-aged man. In one corner a cold fireplace provides no warmth or light in another corner is a door. The room is lit by the smoked windows, giving a cosy private feel. The patrons form four groups. There are about 20 sailors drinking quietly and watching a corner table where three gentlemen are interviewing one of their number and a few more wait their turn. There is also a group of about ten young ‘gentlemen’ who openly wear smallswords in ostentatious scabbards and laugh at crude jokes. Finally, two other young gentleman dressed much like the others nurse tankards in a dark corner watched attentively by a black mongrel.

This is the room where most of the action takes place.

If the players want to buy drinks let them. Each finished drink requires two Average rolls one to avoid gaining a Box on the physical track and one to avoid getting a box on the social track. This is pretty much a simultaneous physical and social conflict and the booze can take you out if you persist. Most beer is WR0, a pint of stout is WR1.

Anyone who buys a drink will attract scruff who will beg for some. The publican even has a tin bowl for Scruff’s beer. So far this evening Scruff has had no luck. Keep track of Scruffs ‘wounds’ as well.

- The ales and beers are good and fairly priced.

- Wines are poor selection and quality and a little over-priced.
- No imported spirits, too costly with current taxes.
- No Gin: Lemuel the leaser does not approve, and the owners are a brewery who are direct competition with the gin houses.
- The food available consists of a selection of pies and sausages.
- No room for rent “we’re a Pub not an Inn”.

Other rooms and areas.

Cellar: Where barrels of beer and some foods are stored.

Alley: A cobblestone alley leads to a yard of forgotten grass and a run-down stable.

Yard: Those searching will find the wild descendants of carrots evidence that the yard was productive once. There is a noisome smell emanating from the outhouse.

Kitchen: Little used with the wife gone. The publican heats pies and fries sausages here and little else.

Stable: With the current fashions in transport few riders come this way now.

Outhouse: The outhouse is a small structure containing a bucket, rags, and barrel.

Guestroom: this is not for hire but for friends of the Publican. The publican’s wife and children live elsewhere in London and he does not like to talk about it.

Publican’s Residence. A comfortable bedroom.

The Interview

The three members of the panel interview each PC separately. To keep the other players involved check what they are doing in the pub every time a PC or NPC is injured. PCs can interact with other PCs and might be hassled by Scruff the dog. If things begin to lag have Old Eddy show up at between interviews or even start the brawl early.

Run the interview as a social conflict. Each NPC is convinced they should hire the PC, or at least no longer willing to argue, when they become injured and stop contributing to the social conflict at that point. The PC needs to injure two of the three interviewers to be hired: “Go to the third starling of the London bridge from the North bank tomorrow morning from 6am. Longboats will be collecting crew and passengers there.”

If the PC becomes injured they are not hired and told “You will not be coming with us I’m afraid. Thank you that will be all”. Previous injured boxes from social conflict prior to the interview do not count toward termination.

As a clarification of the Social Conflict rules, initiative is determined by base alertness with ties broken by base persuasion, and then an unmodified 4dF and as with physical combat each character gets one proactive action on their turn which can do damage and defences against the attacks of others do no damage.

Mr Johnathan Gulliver is chiefly interested in what experience the PC has in ‘High Seas Voyages’ as he puts it. He thinks he wants to know how the PC will cope with the stresses of the wild ocean and dangerous lands. In reality he can be easily swayed by a good story of high adventure in far-away places. An Oratory roll is a good choice for telling a ripping yarn.

Mr Richard Sympson wants to assess if the character is a liability in ways related to finance. He is looking to find out if the character has bad habits that lead them into debt and therefore, in his mind, inevitably to treachery. Rich, hard-

working, or stable personalities (such as married family men) will meet with his approval. Letters of recommendation from previous employers are also well regarded.

Cpt. William Robinson. The captain is primarily interested in the skills of the character and will generally pit his knowledge against that of the characters (skill vs skill).

The interview will also inform the PC of the expedition details. An example as follows but the referee may have another journey in mind. Show the players the map of Gulliver's world.

The proposed expedition is to take 19 months. A nine-month outward journey, one month for misadventure and exploration of Brobdingrag, and nine months to return home. The outward trip consists of three legs: London past the Canary Islands to the Cape of Good Hope, from there through the straits of Madagascar across the Indian Ocean to Molucca Islands then across the ocean to Brobdingrag.

The return trip will begin by sailing into the ocean to then turning south to the south coast of Van Deimans Land then to the Cape of Good Hope before passing the Canaries again and returning to London. Show them the map of the route across the world.

Old Eddy

Old Eddy will stumble in at some point before the brawl (see below). He can if desired beg a PC to buy him a drink whilst simultaneously picking the PCs pocket. If the PCs refuse to buy him a drink, he insults them briefly but with very foul language before going to the bar. If caught picking a pocket, he'll insult the PC as he runs for the door.

The Agents

During the interviews make an Alertness roll in secret for each of the PCs to spot two locals talking close one pointing at the table where the interviews are taking place. Difficulty Good.

MoS Detail

- 1 two locals talking close one pointing at the table where the interviews are taking place.
- 2 as above but also the glint of a few silver coins changing hands
- 3 Something about the body language indicates the payer is an outsider. He looks like one of the locals, but they don't know him that well.
- 4 Also: The payer is one of a pair who were sitting apart when you arrived. The other man is sitting alone in a day corner.

The agents are Dutch thief takers hired for their ability to blend in and remember faces. The man in the corner is memorising the faces of everyone hired. One of the agents has unknowingly left a scrap of paper in his pocket

Vereenigde Verre Gebieden Compagnie £40

Translation from Dutch: United Remote Regions Company £40

The Brawl

The brawl starts shortly after the PCs are interviewed. The agents do not intend to kill only disadvantage the GTC. The

purpose of the brawl is two-fold to injure as many employees of GTC as possible and to kidnap Richard Sympson (an easy target). Both could delay the departure of the Hopewell or otherwise tie up time and resources of the underfunded GTC.

Each player has a blood to contend with and the agents also act as described below. At the end of each round roll a mass combat conflict between the sailors and the bloods. Remember for mass combat each team rolls once, the team that wins achieves their objective for scene.

If either team is taken out before scene 5 they flee from the pub run away down the street. If the brawl ends the agents also leave even if they have not completed their mission. Remember this is a brawl no-one has drawn weapons YET.

Scenes for the Mass Combat

Scene 1: ‘Gordon’ slips out the back way while ‘his’ team distracts everyone with a brawl. Roll Gordon’s Stealth against the Sailor’s Brawl. He will head for a carriage parked nearby and rouse the driver to bring it to the Bull. If he fails he can’t make his way through the melee and must repeat this scene.

Scene 2: Four men are heading for Sympson (three bought local bloods and Alan). The sailors try to stop them. Roll brawl for both sailors and bloods. Keep repeating this scene until the bloods win an exchange. When this happens, the bloods have reached Sympson.

Scene 3: The bloods and Alan attempt to disarm Sympson of his smallsword. Sympson struggle to hold onto his weapon and sailors try to pull the bloods away from their new employer. Roll Brawl for both bloods and sailors.

Scene 4: Whether Sympson is disarmed or not the bloods and Alan try to seize Sympson and drag him across the pub towards the door. If Sympson was not disarmed roll he draws his sword roll Sympson’s smallsword against the blood’s brawl. If Sympson was disarmed roll brawl for sailors and bloods.

Scene 5a: If Sympson has drawn his sword. The bloods draw their swords and the sailors draw knives. The brawl becomes a bloodbath and the bloods no longer care about the job they were hired to do. Alan flees.

Scene 5b if Sympson was disarmed: The agents and two bloods try to bustle Sympson out of the door and into a waiting carriage. Brawl for both Sailors and Bloods again. Repeat this struggle until the sailors are taken out. If this happens the carriage takes off and Sympson is lost. The Bloods then flee.

Wrapping up the chapter

PC who failed at interview but are heroic during the brawl will be hired as well. Any PC’s who are not hired will have to be smuggled aboard. During playtesting our female French pirate PC who was recently released from gaol did not get employed. The ensuing scenes smuggling her aboard and the months of intrigue to keep her hidden in a PC noble’s cabin were most entertaining.

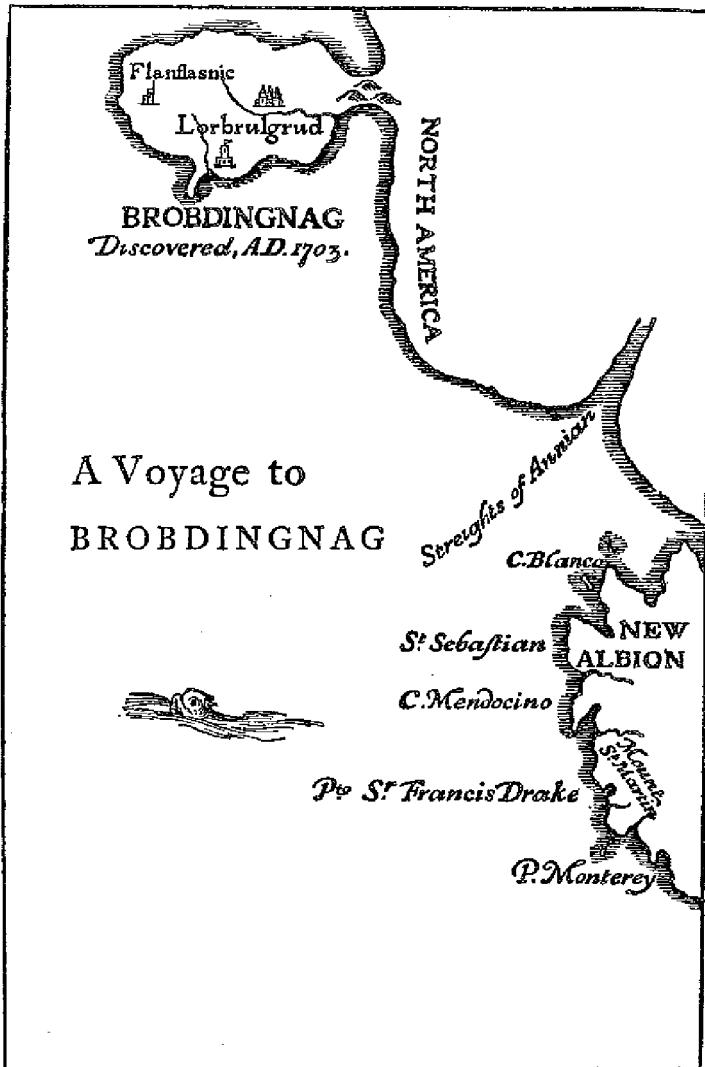
Players will be keen to heal the after the brawl and the social conflict of the interview. Damage from fists is non-lethal and will all be healed by the next morning. Other kinds of wounds could extend into the next Chapter. Sword Injuries if they occurred heal at 2-3 weeks, three if the player has a physical job aboard ship. The social wounds from the interview heal at the regular rate: Hurts are healed by morning, but Injured boxes will take 3 weeks each aboard the ship assuming player lay low and stay out of intrigues. See the note in Travel (p)

Next deal with advancement. If player’s have not yet picked a goal encourage them to do so. Each surviving PC should be awarded one rank at the end of this chapter, the first of 6 for the Part.

Erase any temporary items the players are not willing to spend a Conscience point or Aspect on.

Debrief and bring out the details of the Hopewell’s skills (GTC235) and rules for determining a ship’s skills so players can choose logical positions on the crew for their characters to improve the ship’s skills.

Seeking sailors, surgeon, tradesmen, &c



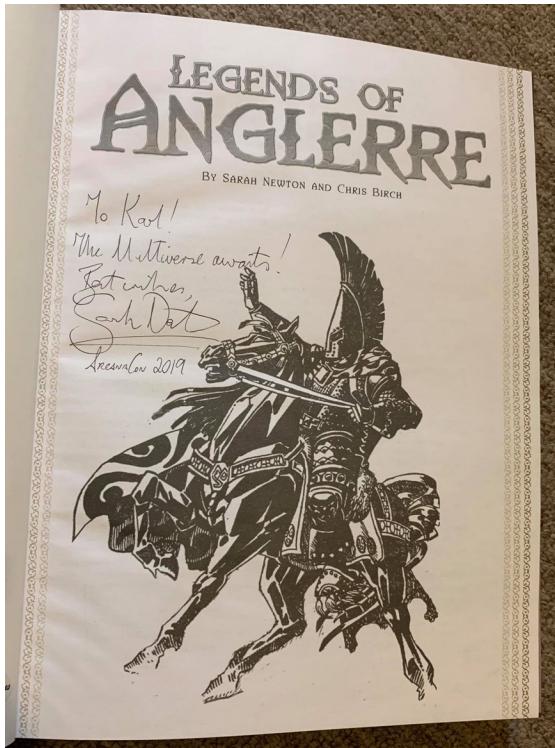
Gulliver's Trading Company (GTC) is a new venture to make use of the opportunities for trade and learning presented by the new lands discovered by my father Lemuel Gulliver. We seek sailors, surgeon, tradesmen, &c to crew our first ship. Enquiries from those wishing to join the investors of this private company or natural philosophers &c interested in remote regions of the world will also be entertained. Interested parties should be at the Black Bull on Fetter Lane on 30th June from 8pm.

LEGENDS OF ANGLERRE : COLLABORATIVE CAMPAIGNS

by Karl Brown

The most obscure and amazing campaign setting ever... YOURS!

An article for Cubicle 7's Legends of Anglerre by Sarah Newton and Chris Birch. This article requires that you have a copy of Legends of Anglerre. The Legends of Anglerre Companion is also used but adds little to the process and references to that volume can be ignored if it is not available.



What is Legends of Anglerre?

This article describes a process to play a collaborative campaign using all the systems in Legends of Anglerre. Given that it tells you what the book can do it is also something of a review.

Despite its title Legends of Anglerre (LOA) is not a game tightly tied to one particular setting. It is in fact a build-a-world kit using a modified version of FATE. Sure, two settings are included in the core book, but the bulk of the pages are filled with a unified system to generate and describe everything from PCs to nations for any fantasy setting in game terms. The game system operates at many different scales so you can play out everything from gangs vying for control of the docks to empires fighting for world dominance.

The title of the book is likely to be the worst marketing decision in the industry during the 2010's. Worse still as of March 2014 LOA's publisher Cubicle 7 did not renew the licensing agreement with the publisher of the out-of-print comic book that the game isn't really about anyway and the game line is now out of print. However, the anticipated *Chronicles of Future Earth* by Sarah Newton uses essentially the same game system. A stretch goal for that

Kickstarter campaign was *Chronicles of High Fantasy* which looked to be essentially a new edition of Legends of Anglere with the property filed off. Sadly, the stretch goal was not reached.

The strengths of Legends of Anglerre are: a quick unified system to create everything, cooperative approaches to world and story building, and the ability to deal with truly epic scope be it the clash of empires or mountain-sized monsters. This is one of my favourite games and I strongly recommend gamers who are looking for a system to run an unusual fantasy setting or who want a flexible system to build their own setting in take a close look at this game. These strengths also allow for a very collaborative style of play.

What are pick-up Games?

"Legends of Anglerre has its roots in "pick-up play", where you sit down with a bunch of friends and no preparation and just play. You can have great sessions built around character creation and collaborative campaign generation, and then, when you're ready, just let adventures arise from your character's aspects. The future aspects rules can also provide plot, and the improvisation guidelines in "Top Tips for Story Tellers"

(LOA)

Many storytellers are finding that the pressures of real-life are making it increasingly difficult to find the time to prepare exciting settings and adventures for their players. At the same time there is an increasing awareness in the hobby that a more collaborative approach where the players are encouraged to contribute more than just their characters' actions can produce richer more satisfying play.

In this article I describe a systematic plan for running a Legends of Anglerre campaign where you begin in the first session without any preparation beyond one participant, the storyteller, being somewhat familiar with the rules. As the campaign continues all participants build up a world to suit their own tastes and an epic story arc unfolds. The storyteller need only combine the material produced by the group into adventures.

Play test

Due to my limited free time to play games this article's plan has not been played through. Though carefully thought through over tens of hours and several complete read-throughs of the LOA rules some errors will remain. I'd love to hear how it worked at your table and how it can be improved at karl@rpgreview.net

This article is also a plan for play-testing LOA. Working through the plan you will encounter and thoroughly play every single system available for LOA. I'm sure our editor here at RPG Review would love to receive a review of your experience as well.

Small Groups

These instructions assume at least one storyteller (the LOA term for referee or games master) and three players at session zero and odd numbered sessions to ensure sufficient diversity and number of generated material. More participants than this is no problem. Where there are less than this number of players proceed as if there were four players dividing the work of four among those present. When there is a storyteller and one player each does double the work. Where there are two players and a storyteller the latter must input two shares of the work.

Gradually building a world of our own

A session zero will sketch out the world and cosmology. After that sessions are of two types on an 'odds and evens' basis. Odd sessions will be taken up with world building and unrolling history. Where possible odd sessions will include large-scale game play to advance the epic story arc. Even sessions will be a series of character-scale connected adventures featuring the items created during the odd sessions.

Ideally, all players will help build the world and play in it however maintaining a strict odds and evens schedule enables those who do not wish to generate new material to skip those sessions.

Players: before each odd session read the instructions for the upcoming session ahead of time and think of a rough idea for what you want to make.

Adventures

At various points the storyteller is instructed to prepare an adventure before even sessions. The core book has some good advice for preparing ripping yarns for play (LOA277) and improvising (LOA280). Adventures can be created using the adventure generator in the Legends of Anglerre Companion (LOAC131, note: each scene is a location in the generator). Inject items generated in the odd sessions into the adventure by overriding the random rolls as necessary. In fact override the random rolls whenever you like; the generator is just there to overcome writer's block and spur on your creativity.

The instructions assume that you will play through more scenes per session as everyone becomes more familiar with the rules. However, you may find that the players don't necessarily complete an adventure every session. If so simply pick up next session where you left off. You might also consider cutting future adventures down to fewer scenes to get back in sync. The players will want to see their creations from the odd sessions in action so do try to keep to the session schedule as best you can.

Advancement

Player characters will gain a skill point every even session after session 2 to reflect the previous even session. Aspects are awarded every session divisible by 6.

The sessions

Session ‘0’: The Creation of the World!

If you want to use an established setting most of session zero can be omitted.

Print out these instructions for session zero and give the players time to read them through before beginning. Do not begin until everyone has read these instructions and has been warned what the rules of the mini-game are.

Print LOA270-272 as a handout for use at the end of this process.

Setting expectations

Begin by discussing what the players can expect: how common will PC death be, how new PCs joining an existing party will be handled, that the players are expected to contribute to building the world as ‘mini-games’, that sessions will be ‘odd’ design sessions and ‘even’ play sessions.

World design as a short mini-game.

This is a mechanism not designed for full consensus but one that produces a compromise fast. Ideally, this and character generation will be done in one session.

Use tables 1-8 in chapter 22 to build a skeleton of the world and a small glimpse of the cosmology of the inhabitants. Proceed as follows:

- Get all players and the storyteller to skim the 8 tables and read this section.
- Give each player/storyteller 8 tokens you may spend a token to move a die roll result up or down.
‘Bidding’ wars can occur with players spending tokens to move the result up then down in opposite directions. To resolve these sum all the moves. Be aware you have in general enough for an average of one change per roll. Tokens spent during the bidding process stay spent.
- Each table is rolled then bid on. When bids are over we move onto the next table.
- There is no going back.
- Any unspent tokens at the end are lost.
- Play nice. Keep discussion to a minimum. Stick to the system

This is a mechanism not designed to give everyone what they are happy with. However, everyone should feel they had equal opportunity to influence the end result. Even after this zero session there is plenty of room for everyone’s ideas. You will also get to create an isolated place that differs from these ‘ground rules’ somewhat in session 11 and a completely different plane of existence in session 21.

Next each player and the storyteller assigns one aspect to the world (examples are bold). This could be a way of spotlighting one of the results from above (e.g. eternal winter), to select a genre (LOA270, e.g. high fantasy), add a new global detail (e.g. world at war!), or add campaign themes (LOA271, e.g. Lost Glory). Alternatively, players could use aspects to highlight features like ‘Tunnels of the Dwarven Empire’ or ‘Cities built on the backs of skywhales’. The only restriction being no aspect should contradict the die rolls. Mixes are possible (e.g. if the genres high fantasy and sword & planet are chosen then the world will be a mash-up of both). Genre aspects are also sometimes a statement about how magic and other powers work. For example in a Sword & Planet setting the only powers are mind control, telepathy, super science items, and the natural abilities of animals like flight. An accurate historical setting would be even more restricted. However, further aspects create exceptions, for example if one player chooses 10th century England another player could choose Ruled by Sorcerers thus creating an alternate history where an otherwise historical England is

under the thumb of powerful magic wielders.

Aspects can also be used to ‘pay’ for tweaks to the rules. LOA has default assumptions but also includes many options to allow you to bring the rules in line with your vision. Rules changing aspects are also used just like other aspects during play.

- The default assumptions of the LOA game system is that there are a multitude of learned and natural powers and that magic is mostly without built in Weaknesses and Limitations (see LOA171 and LOA173 for more on this). If you want to change these default assumptions you need to choose a Genre aspect or another aspect like ‘Exhausting Spellcasting’ or ‘The Necromancy Guild Controls Magical Learning’. A more general ‘All powers have a price’ aspect indicates that every power should have a weakness associated with it but leaves what the ‘price’ is in the hands of the player creating each character. Looking at the table (LOA173) there are lots of flavourful weaknesses enabling a lot of character backgrounds, for example a Wizard might have memorisation while a dragon might have no fine manipulation and scary. Don’t forget you can re-skin the rules; perhaps ‘memorisation’ represents rituals to gather and manipulate magic which is release by a brief gesture to complete the ritual at casting.
- Similarly, Legends of Anglere allows technology up to the level of muskets and petards. You may want to have an aspect that restricts technology to a lower level such as ‘Bronze Age’ or one that allows ancient high tech items (these would be items with Powers). Alternately, you may use an aspect to eliminate one type of technology such as explosives (see LOA51).
- The base assumption is that some items of equipment are restricted by law and availability, just as there was legal restrictions on weapon ownership and sumptuary laws in the real historical past. For a more ‘D&D’ approach add an aspect like ‘lax ownership laws’.
- You may also propose to limit a single skill or propose a new one to reflect the campaign aspect (LOA114). If you propose a new skill this is a bit of work and you will need to bring a written description of the skill and its stunts to the next session for storyteller approval.
- Finally, the standard LOA rules use 1d6-1d6 which gives a very heroic/pulp spread of probabilities. By taking the Aspect ‘Gritty’ change to using 4dF which makes your skills and aspects more important for influencing rolls and makes fights last longer.

Less than four participants? Share the 32 tokens as evenly as you can with the storyteller taking up the slack. For example, if a group consists of one storyteller and two players, a total of three participants. At session zero each player gets 10 tokens and the storyteller 12 for a total of 32. Next the players assign 1 world aspect each but the storyteller chooses 2 for a total of 4, the number that would be created by 4 participants. In session 1 the players each create one character but the storyteller must create two for a total of 4.

Session 1: Adventurers

9. Print LOA55 (example aspects), 62 (skills list), 121(core power skills list) as handouts.
10. Using chapters 2-9, create 4 phase Great characters, this gives enough room to build an experienced adventurer or a more unusual species. This is about equal to 5th level D&D characters (3 phase characters are kinda like 1st level D&D PCs; Mythic characters ('20th') are 7 phases). The species used will be the common intelligent species within your world’s civilisation. If you really want dwarves or purple blobs or whatever to be common make one as a character. LOA can handle non-humans pretty well, so cut loose if you want. You want to be a dragon, talking sparrow, or levitating octopus, no problem. The storyteller will create a character for use as a NPC, this will also be a common species. Be sure to follow the instructions labelled ‘Players Rules’ for each phase. This will provide background material to draw on later.
11. Some advice for character creation follows:
 - a. Organisations (everything from nations or guilds to families) and locations (especially settlements) will

play a big part in this campaign. You might want to consider linking your character to these by one or more aspects. What are the organisations and places? Just name them now, we will detail them in later sessions.

- b. Thinking about being a warrior-type? You may want the ‘shield training’ stunt (LOA98).
 - c. Look at the Races (LOA31) and Occupations (LOA37) for ideas, stunts and aspects. There are even sample builds nearly ready to go.
 - d. LOA covers all the fantasy standards but those playing very odd species or professions might want to create new stunts (LOA114).
 - e. Aspects are explained on LOA53-54. There is a big list of ideas on LOA55.
 - f. Aspects that describe relationships between PCs are a good idea.
 - g. Aspects that link a character to a family or organisation are also good.
 - h. Some equipment is restricted and requires an aspect or stunt before you are allowed to obtain it.
 - i. Strongly consider taking an Aspect reflecting an ambition or fate for the character. See Future Aspects (LOA21) for how to do this and how your choice will contribute to the plot of the campaign.
 - j. Skills are pretty broad and this makes for some unexpected skill uses. You may have to hunt around a little to find what you want. For example Art is used for painting, sculpture, public speaking, poetry, and music. So if you want your noble to make rousing speeches then you’ll want Art. If you want to be good at one particular use of a skill take the skill at a lower level and boost your desired use with stunts and maybe an Aspect.
 - k. Some stunts allow you to use a skill in some situations where another usually applies. For example wainwright (LOA84) allows you to use drive to fix vehicles instead of artificer. If there are four or more PCs, it’s a good idea to sink most skill points and stunts into a few skills.
 - l. Also note ‘adventurer’s pack’ (LOA36) and ‘mundane things’ (LOA46). Note also that if you buy grenades they come in pouches of three (LOA51).
12. Storyteller: Explain how variations on this quick and simple system are used to build just about everything in LOA.
 13. After the session the storyteller will distil features into templates as per Good or worse characters for the represented races (LOA34 for guidance).

Species

Storyteller: when distilling a species from a character pick out only the most core items. A good mix is 1 aspect, 3 skills and 3 stunts and never more material than a Good character (no more than 3 stunts, 6 aspects, and 15 skill points); so that individuals can vary. The species produced are shorter and more focused than the ‘races’ given in the LOA book. This is because these species note the essential features common to all members of a narrow species (eg. red fire dragon) rather than a broad range of traits covering a range of similar creatures (all dragons).

If everything you want does not fit, try to cut down your list. If that fails provide suggestions for advancement. Skills should only be those required for the stunts of the species. Be sure to describe how big the species is, LOA’s scales are very broad (dwarves and plough horses are in the same scale).

Prepared Setting Campaign

Instead of generating a setting in session zero you can use one of the published settings for LOA. To do this in session zero ensure the players read the chapter on the Hither Kingdoms or Anglerre before proceeding to character generation. Sessions one onwards proceed as described above except that the storyteller can draw on published adventures and materials to reduce her workload.

Session 2: Our story begins...

Before the session the storyteller builds a one scene adventure (do not roll on table 2 of the generator in LOAC) featuring the NPC created in the first session. The PC's are on the road to an as yet un-described place of interest, probably a settlement. Incorporate the treasure rules as an example of FATE game-play/approach.

Pass around the species templates generated by the storyteller for approval and discussion.

The players can describe their intended mode of transport and make any retrospective resources rolls. Note that luxury transport is at +3 resources (LOA51).

Session 3: A world on the brink!

Mud-map: This will produce a continental region that will be the focus of the campaign. Get every player and the Storyteller to draw a nation shape (not a circle) as per LOA256. Draw one small circle within your nation to represent a key trade centre. Then join the trade centres by trade routes and add preliminary details as per LOA256.

After this vote to pick one nation, change the scale, and repeat the process. This time draw little circles. A single zoom should be sufficient. In following sessions the advice on LOA257 will be followed.

Each player can then tag one feature of each map with an aspect. See LOA272 for some ideas that will work as society aspects and LOA274+ for more ideas.

Players then decide on one destination.

Session 4: Wicked cities and haunted ruins

Before the session the storyteller builds an adventure of two scenes (do not roll on table 2 of the generator in LOAC) using ideas and locations on the map.

The PCs are travelling to their destination and reach one of the landmarks on the mud map. A short adventure ensues.

Session 5: Hordes amass and dragons wake

Time to decide on the iconic monsters of your world. Everyone creates a monster that will be common or influential in the campaign world. The system allows for really big landscape size monsters if you want them.

Alternatively, players who have generated a character not covered by the broad races presented in the core rules (LOA29) might want to write up a full race description (LOA34).

Session 6: Bring them on!

Before the session the storyteller should build a three-scene adventure (do not roll on table 2 of the generator in LOAC) featuring a single tough encounter featuring one or more iconic monsters in the location the players are at (which should have at least one aspect of its own).

Award 1st PC Aspect. Draw attention to Future Aspects as an option.

Session 7: A fragile alliance

As per LOA257 and the organisation rules each player creates an organisation 'character' sheet for their nation from session three. Characters with appropriate aspects can be linked to the nations the players create. Also, players whose characters have a family related aspect could use the rules in the LOAC to also create their family as an organisation.

The legends and guest appearances are then ordered into a timeline of history.

Session 8: Ill met

Before the session the storyteller should build a four-scene adventure (do not roll on table 2 of the generator in LOAC) featuring traders or travellers from one or more of the nations described and using Aspects for the PC's current location and nation. Use plot stress to instigate timing of events punctuating the encounter.

Session 9: Ships and ports

Each player builds a construct as per LOA chapter 15. This could be a ship, a siege engine, a castle, or even a city (session 15 will deal with a more detailed way of generating cities). As with the nations, treat as per character creation with guest stars etc. This will build up even more history for the timeline.

Session 10: The adventure continues...

Before the session the storyteller builds an adventure featuring one or more constructs from the last session as well as monsters, locations etc. Incorporate character plot stress.

Session 11: Far off Isles

Read the Islands chapter of LOAC. If you don't have the LOAC, no problem this chapter simply provides some adventure ideas and no extra rules. An 'island' could be any very isolated place such as a valley amidst impassable mountains, a flying mountain, a system of caverns deep below the surface, or whatever. This isolated place can deviate from the usual 'ground rules' of the campaign world without upsetting the rest of setting. For example on a human only world an island of lizardfolk might occur, if a lich king has the whole world under his crushing rule then perhaps the hidden cavern system contains a long lost democracy. Your island is a chance to loosen up and get creative again.

Each player to create an isolated location by writing one or two sentences in answer to the following questions:

- How is the location isolated?
- Is the location well known, known only to a few, known only by legend, or completely unknown to outsiders?
- Who and what lives there (animals, plants and people).
- If there are people what are they like, how many in the population, and who is in charge.
- Why go there?

Session 12: Preparations

Before the session the storyteller should build an adventure wherein a series of encounters alerts the party to the need to travel to one of the isolated locations. Preparations are made for the hazardous journey. Award second aspect and draw attention to Empire Building as an option.

Session 13: All for one

Create a group character for the party for use in future adventures. Get feedback and answer questions. This will probably not take the whole session. Players can use the rest of the time to create constructs, NPCs, monsters, or organisations for their islands from session 11.

Session 14: Travels and travails

In this session the party must undertake a journey to the next adventure site, one of the isolated places detailed in the last session. Use the group character rules.

After this the players have a few encounters at the site before returning to civilization or reaching the gates of a city on the 'island'.

The adventure should end with the players just outside a town or city.

Session 15 Guilds, Temples and Palaces

Players use the City rules in the LOAC to create a town or city of interconnected organisations. If you don't have LOAC simply create urban organisations using the rules in LOA. Each player contributes one organisation to the mix. Perhaps one or more of these organisations is the family of a PC? If so see LOAC16 for more on family generation.

Session 16 The city lights

Before the session the storyteller should build an adventure to play out the party arriving in the city and becoming involved with one of the organisations of the city.

Session 17: The plot thickens

Use the Conspiracy section to get the group to create a web of organisation conflicts. This should involve the PC's current location but not necessarily be limited to it. This clash of conspiracies will unfold further in session 19.

Session 18: Cloak and dagger

Before the session the storyteller should build an adventure using some of the conspiracy background and referencing events from previous adventures. Incorporate organisation plot stress. Players are awarded another aspect; draw attention to the organisation and construct improvement uses of advancement but don't insist the group to invest in them. They now have 11 Aspects each.

Session 19: Clouds gather

Using the organisation actions rules to play out a portion of the unfolding conspiracy.

Session 20: Let slip the dogs of war!

As a result of the political situation described in session 15 an adventure built around a battle should be prepared. Ideally, this would bring together organisations, iconic monsters, and the construct from earlier sessions.

Session 21: The multiverse awaits!

Create a plane of existence (LOA268-269) each player gets 6 tokens the mini-game proceeds as per session zero.

Session 22: Terrible vengeance

Before the session prepare an adventure wherein in the wake of the battle a desperate someone quests to open a portal to the plane and receive aid from extra-planar forces.

Session 23: Details, details...

A free creative session wherein players can use one of the generation systems already introduced to add or detail whatever piece of the world, its organisations, peoples, fauna, and objects as they wish.

Session 24: Finale

Before the session the storyteller should build an adventure that wraps up the loose ends of the campaign and brings back some of the classic foes, allies and locales. A new aspect is granted at the end of this session. PCs now have 12 Aspects.

And on...

The plan above outlines an arc where events build up to a war in session 20, the unleashing of unearthly powers changing the world forever in session 22 and a wrapping up of loose ends in session 24. Think of it as being like a season of a TV series.

If you decide to continue you are about to embark on season 2 of your show. As with TV series a new season has all the old background but puts a new twist on things and ups the ante.

In your campaign maintain the odd/even structure so lots of raw materials are generated in odd sessions for incorporation into even session adventures. Let your players create whatever they want in most odd sessions but be sure to use what they make in a session or two as a reward for helping you out. Season 2 will see the PCs engage in epic struggles and eventually reach mythic levels of power.

1. Get everyone to read the Epic and Mythic Gaming chapter (LOA250).
2. In sessions 25-26 design adventures that showcase the PCs increasing influence in the world ready for their

Epic Occupation aspect at the end of session 26. Your world is already full of governments, organisations, cities, and giant monsters so this should be easy. You can use odd sessions to add detail to your world in response to the actions of powerful PCs. For example if a character founds a new religion use an odd session to generate the details of this organisation.

3. Sessions 27 to 30 are filled with epic adventure but as the characters rise in power they begin to be noticed by powerful denizens of the other planes of existence or perhaps the PCs begin to travel regularly to these places. You have already detailed one of these planes in session 21. Use sessions 27 and 29 to prepare a few other details for that plane. At the end of Session 30 players can use their Aspect to enter a Mythic occupation.
4. In sessions 31 and above detail the other planes of existence and play adventures that shake the worlds of gods and mortals alike!

Appendix 1 Examples

This appendix provides examples of outputs from the various systems and ready-made material for storytellers and players.

Example campaign world

While it is preferable for a group to create a bespoke setting the below is one output from this system.

1. The world is flat, floating on an infinite ocean
2. The sun is old, swollen, and red: there are probably lots of decadent civilizations and ancient ruins – maybe even technology! – on your world. The sun's unstable; sometimes it's much hotter or colder.
3. Despite this seasons are regular. There are hot years and cold years but summer and winter are on time.
4. The moon above is a lifeless world
5. The gods are superhuman beings, not divine principles.
6. Magic is uncommon, the fruit of hard study. This is the default for Legends of Anglerre.
7. Normal entropy: entropy has little effect.
8. There is this world, and then “Heaven Above” and “Hell Below” and a “Realm of Dream”.

World Aspects:

Leviathans of the sky and ocean.

Lost technology in ruined crystal spires of ages past.

Radium Wastelands.

The gods walk among us.

Faeries and horrors from the realm of dream.

Example species

Three examples of the abbreviated species are provided below. For designing a complete ‘Race’ see LOA34:

Leprechaun

Leprechauns are a kind of little people (LOA31). They are small faeries that traditionally fill the role of cobblers, milliners, and tailors to the faerie nobility. Leprechauns look a little like spry gnomes. Leprechauns are naturally magical and can develop the Dimensions power skill.

Aspect 1: Leprechaun (unlocks Dimensions, as well as power stunts for Artificer and Stealth)

Skills 2: Dimensions, Stealth.

Stunts 2: Small, Deceptive

Zelit

Alien scavengers that now inhabit the radium wastes. Zelits are black wrinkled levitating ovoids with yellow markings trailing two tentacles that bifurcate twice near the end into four 'fingers'. Zelits have no true face; three small black compound eyes at one end are almost invisible against their skin, the mouth is dorsal gash, and they breathe air through paired gills mid-way along their length. Other species find dealing with zelits unsettling.

Aspect 1: Inscrutable Zelit of the Wastes (unlocks Glide and Flight. Can be invoked to resist the effects of radiation).

Skills 3: Artificer, Athletics, Survival

Stunts 2: Glide, Flight

Fire dragon

Starting characters are typically young horse-sized dragons. They are clumsy fliers and their claws are blunt from walking at this age. To give the fire dragon flight and an armoured hide the options of suggesting advancements had to be used.

Small scale or medium scale if peak skill is Great.

Aspect 1: Red Fire Dragon

Skills 3: Fists, Element Fire, Athletics

Stunts 3: Glide, Jaws, Create Fire

Minor Weakness: Cold.

Advancement:

Stunts: Flight, Claws (minor weakness water), thick hide etc.

A dragon's size and its peak skill are linked. This is an extension of the rule for the dragon PC race (LOA32) based on the rules for monster dragons (LOA325).

Peak Skill Size of Dragon

Good (+3) Small (scale 2)

Great (+4) to Fantastic (+6) Medium (scale 3)

Epic (+7) Large (scale 4)

Legendary (+8) Huge (scale 5)

LEGENDS OF ANGLERRE : UNDYING EMPIRES

by Karl Brown

Supernatural adventure in service to the British Empire

Main inspiration is the Victorian era occult and folklore fads. This is NOT a steampunk setting but one where the Victorian view of the supernatural is super-imposed onto the real social mores and events of the 19th Century.

The meddling of occultists and paranormal investigators has weakened the walls between the worlds in Britain while the rest of the world is much less affected.

Use Imperial Age Faerie and Magick as a guide to creating the setting as you want it.

Ruleset

Legends of Anglerre? Yeh, this seems like a pretty off the wall choice for this setting. Well there are several reasons for this choice.

Despite the title Legends of Anglerre (LOA) is not tightly ties to an obscure setting. It is written as a toolkit to create fantasy settings and adventures in Fate. LOA is written with numerous examples from Tolkiensque fantasy and Sword and Sorcery genres but look beyond that fluff and you will see a highly adaptable game with systems to cover any kind of power, vehicle, fortress, creature etc. You could easily adapt LOA to any genre for Western to Superheroes. The one caveat would be what is true of any Fate game, all the players must have a shared idea of what is possible in the setting. For the Undying Empire this baseline is established by referencing real history and mixing in some Victorian era folklore. For those unfamiliar with these sources this document and a quick internet search for the item queried should soon resolve most disputes. For mose esoteric disputes on the nature of faeries and magic defer to your referee or consult the source material by Briggs and others if you can find it. Additionally, LOA's magic system will help to define what magic can do.

Secondly, LOA is a ruleset that covers a broad scope, everything from picking a pocket to the clash of imperial armies (or diplomats) but it does so with a simple consistent and rapidly applied unified mechanic. In preparation this lightens the load on the referee and in play actions are rapidly resolved in a narrative sensitive way, just the thing for a setting were the stiff upper lip of the British Empire must deal with the chaos and whimsy of the Fair Realms.

Previously considered Fantasy Craft base: campaign qualities carefully chosen for juxtaposition of real grit with dreamy dangerous supernatural. Need to also pick Campaign Quals to emulate Victorian occult and fey magick.

Use Gaslight RPG Background Occupations instead of FC Specialties. To maintain balance do not mix and match. The Gaslight occupations have a more Victorian feel. The occupation Wealth bonus becomes a bonus to FC lifestyle.

Use FC alignments for allegiance to particular groups. FC handles scale issues better than d20 and has good crafting rules

BUT Converting the magic system, equipment, species, classes, occupations etc f is just too much work! I was leaning towards d20 Modern SRD with selected Imperial Age supplements. The D20 Imperial age series is a huge toolbox that is based on careful research into the historical era. Imperial Age Faeries had an approach to handling the diversity of Victorian appropriate Faeries simply with a few races and feats. However, I'm not a fan of D20 modern. The True 20 version never did produce a Faerie supplement and other things I need. Conversion to FC would be nice but too much work

This brings us to my last point. This setting is as much about personalities as anything else. We are aiming to get within the mindset of people raised in cultures very different to the Western 21st century. A lot of the entertainment of play will be derived from getting into the shoes of these people and reacting as they would when adventure occurs. The mortal nations of humanity are rigid classed societies, where women are second-class citizens and bigotry along the lines of race, nationality, class, and faith are commonly accepted. Perhaps your characters are more enlightened than

most, perhaps their adventures make them realise the folly of accepted prejudices, or are they typical of the time and culture of their upbringing. Again toss aside the paper-thin veneer espoused by 'steam-punk' and come to grips with the real culture of the Victorians.

The faerie are possibly even more alien than the historical Victorians. These are not D&D elves who often are little more than thin Californians with pointy ears stuck on. The Faeries documented by Victorian folklorists were emotional and fickle creatures given to extremes, inconsistent behaviour and apparently nonsensical motivations. Faerie behaviour seemed strange even to those Victorians whom we find so fascinatingly odd. When playing a Faerie the oddity of the personality should shine through.

Whether you are playing a British Sergeant Major or a tricksy pooka Fate encourages roleplaying. Almost every roll you toss and every twist in the plot you are going to want to spend Fate points. You are going to want to spend fate points often so you need to earn them often too. The best way to earn these Fate points is to have some feature of your personality or place in society represented by a game feature we call an aspect. When the aspect disadvantages your PC or you act against your own best interests because of an aspect you are rewarded with a precious fate point. This is a major reason for using FATE, a system that puts game mechanical value on cultural and psychological traits.

Background

The Great and Open Door

When the politicians praise The Great and Open Door as one of England's many advantages they don't mean an actual door or even an immigration policy, definitely not! They are referring to the thinning of the barriers separating the supernatural lands and the 'real world'

Technology

Technology alone has exactly the same capabilities as the real world in 1880. In England however the wealth of the country exceeds that of the real world and numerous tiny enchantments make otherwise mundane manufacturing or mundane goods much more efficient. The upshot is that within England where mana is rich and there is Faerie gold to be had technology is twice as common. For example there are twice the number of train lines in the nation running a proportionally larger number of trains. Non-magical inventions beyond real devices can be created with the LOA rules but such devices may not have the miniaturisation improvement and unless entirely within the technology of 1880 must have the Technology improvement. Even with the Technology improvement the limit is items no more than 50 years more advanced. The ideas Additional Capability improvement will very often be outside of the technological capability of the day and thereby have the Technological improvement as well if the idea is allowed at all.

Magical technology

Closer ties exist between the Empire and the Fey Lands than elsewhere and each influences the other. Inevitably magic and technology are blended.

The Churches

Christians generally attempt to reconcile the existence of the fae with the cosmology of the bible. There is a wide range of apocryphal tales to account for the presence of the fae. Some say that Eve hid unwashed children from the Lord and he banished them to live in the wilds, others hold that they are from the line of Lilith Adam's first unruly wife, and other Christians are even less accepting labeling Faeries as nothing more than a kind of devil.

An International View

The British Isles are at once the seat of the great Empire but also an archipelago with many doors to the world of the fae. Bolstered by alliances with the fae and ready access to magic the British Empire is even more powerful than it was in the real 1900's. The American colonies are still under the Empire but with some concessions (use real Australia as a model).

Ireland and to a lesser extent Scotland have been overrun with Fey and away from the besieged Catholic cities and towns the wilds are owned by the Fey. (use IAF and Briggs for England and Scotland but Irish Myths for Ireland)

Germany and other Germanic lands are finding more and more ‘Grim’ creatures inhabiting the wilder forests and inhospitable mountains. (Use IAF and Grims Faerie tales)

The Sentients

The intention is that all sentient peoples be available as PCs.

Characters

For fey groups see Biggs & For Faerie Queen & County. Read Imperial Age Magick.

Create 4 phase Great characters, this gives enough room to build an experienced adventurer or a more unusual species. This is about equal to 5th level D&D characters (3 phase characters are kinda like 1st level D&D PCs; Mythic characters ('20th') are 7 phases).

—Skills are pretty broad and this makes for some unexpected skill uses. You may have to hunt around a little to find what you want. For example Art is used for painting, sculpture, public speaking, poetry, and music. So if you want your noble to make rousing speeches then you'll want Art. If you want to be good at one particular use of a skill take the skill at a lower level and boost your desired use with stunts and maybe an Aspect.

1. Some stunts allow you to use a skill in some situations where another usually applies. For example wainwright (LOA84) allows you to use drive to fix vehicles instead of artificer. If there are four or more PCs, it's a good idea to sink most skill points and stunts into a few skills.
14. Also note ‘adventurer’s pack’ (LOA36) and ‘mundane things’ (LOA46). Note also that if you buy grenades they come in pouches of three (LOA51).

‘Race’ and Species

LOA uses the term Race to mean a species of fantasy person like ‘Human’ or ‘Giant’ The ‘Races’ available as player characters include humans and various kinds of Faerie. Usually to be a member of a species you need only have a Species Aspect like ‘Sidhe’. Exceptions are humans who being the default need not have a species aspect and some more complex species who are treated as Occupation.

Vampires and Ghosts are humans who return from death. These are made available as exotic ‘occupations’ for starting characters or as an option that might become available later as the narrative of play unfolds.

Bloodline

A bloodline is a particular kind within a species. All members of a bloodline have a core set of Aspects, Skills, and/or stunts. When creating a bloodline pick out only the most core items. A good mix is 1 aspect, 3 skills and 3 stunts and never more material than a Good character (no more than 3 stunts, 6 aspects, and 15 skill points); so that individuals can vary. The species produced are shorter and more focused than the ‘races’ given in the LOA book. This is because these species note the essential features common to all members of a narrow species (eg. red fire dragon) rather than a broad range of traits covering a range of similar creatures (all dragons).

If everything you want does not fit, try to cut down your list. If that fails provide suggestions for advancement. Skills should only be those required for the stunts of the species. Be sure to describe how big the species is, LOA’s scales are very broad (dwarves and plough horses are in the same scale).

Humans

Humans are much as found in the real world of 1880’s.

Human Aspects

As distasteful as it may be to some in later centuries the politics and individual behavior of humans in the 19th century was for the most part an expression of beliefs about gender, social class, faith, race, and nationalism.

Gender

Most are constrained by the narrow gender roles of the day, but you believe in them and actively promote them for better or worse.

Religion

While many are raised in the faith of their parents and very few are publically atheists you are actually a devout believer in the doctrines of your faith and consider it the one true path to god(s) or salvation.

Social Class

Those without a social class aspect are assumed to be members of the growing middle classes with little interest in politics and who take the classes society around them for granted. The social classes are poor, worker, trade, middle, gentry, aristocrat, royal. In some human nations there are also slaves or untouchables.

Nationality

While everyone has a nationality an increasing minority are no longer patriots. You are disgusted by them. You are a proud citizen of your country and will put its interests first. You revel in the culture of your native land and why wouldn't you it has the best food, clothing, songs, traditions and the most admirable people. Everything foreign is inferior, suspect or down right sinister.

As a variation there are some who feel devotion not to one nation but to an Empire of nations and who seek to promote the interests of the Empire and emulate the customs and habits of the ruling nation. Colonials, such as the Anglo-Canadians and Anglo-Australians, in particular are often of this mindset but others as diverse as Indians and Siouxie sometimes become enamoured with the idea of serving something greater than a single nation.

Human Stunts

Religious

You must have a Religion aspect. Your faith gives you strength in the face of agents of evil and malicious spirits. +1 resolve verses supernatural effects or creatures.

Fractionist

You must have a Faith, Social Class, Nationality or Race aspect, choose one. When dealing with those who are in your 'in group' you receive a +2 to your rapport roll.

Inventor

Humanity is the only species to embrace technology and Industry with a capital 'I'. Those with this stunt can use the Technology improvement when crafting items to imcorporate features not seen in the real world until 50 years hence.

Faerie

The Fey are terribly diverse. Do not record 'Faerie' as an aspect instead use a more specific 'Species' aspect (see below). Whether tiny gentlemen or monstrous hags all faeries have some traits in common. All faeries are highly magical creatures and as such are affected by forces and conditions that disrupt magic. Faerie psychology and behavior is by human standards extreme and mercurial. They might reward the smallest favor with riche or magical blessings and punish name-calling with a beating to the edge of death.

Faerie Aspects

Faerie ‘Species’

Each faerie has one species aspect consisting of a Kind and Habit. For example the Aspect ‘Brownie’ has ‘Domestic Hob’. Details of appearance and powers vary greatly creating further variety. Each Kind and Habit has some examples of invocations and compels. In addition all Faeries regardless of their particular Species can use the following:

Invoke: to mentally recover or resist the effects of grief, to ...

Compel: to have a sudden and unacceptable mood swing, to over-react to a minor slight, to suddenly have no regard to someone who a moment ago were friendly to or even infatuated with. When the mercurial reputation of the fey means a human is cautious in her dealings with you. Faeries have a poor grasp of ownership t least as far as it applies to humans a fey might feel compelled to steal something a human friend wants, just steal something because it is shiny, or even kidnap a cute human baby because they take a liking to her. Faeries are also adversely affected by human religions in Europe Christian sanctified ground, ordained priests, crucifixes etc. would hinder them.

The following aspects are available to Faeries of all kinds and habits.

Additionally, most of the fey of England and Scotland are polarized into the Seelie and Unseelie. Scandinavian and Germanic fey also seem to be as polarised as English ones. Elsewhere faeries are not so polarized in their dealings with humans Welsh, Irish and French faeries have no such divisions. The Seelie and the Unseelie are often characterized by humans as ‘good and ‘evil’ but this a gross simplification. Seelie and Unseelie faeries generally are not opposed to each other and sometimes even live side by side. A better analogy is to say that the two are political attitudes regarding humanity. However even that does not quite capture it for both also differ in appearance and personality.

Seelie

The Seelie are generally tolerant of humanity and often beneficial to humans in their dealings with them. Seelie Faeries are often aloof, fickle, mischievous, and have no respect for human laws and customs they do consider human to be people whose lives have value. Seelie fey tend toward generosity, politeness, but still display the extremes of all faeries. Humans that cross them will be punished excessively by human standards. Those who do them favors might be rewarded with riches, magic or nothing. Seelie faeries still consider using Domination Power to charmingly control a human completely acceptable. Seelie faeries vary greatly in appearance, by humans standards they can be ugly, homely, cute, handsome or beautiful. They are never average, forgettable, hideous, or terrifying in appearance.

Invoke: in attempts to undo an Unseelie curse,

Unseelie

The Unseelie place no value on the dull brief lives of humanity and in fact see humans as a blight to be actively driven off or even killed outright. At best an Unseelie is merely callous in its dealings with humans valuing them less than inconvenient objects. The true appearance of the Unseelie is always ugly, hideous, or even terrifying by human standards.

Fixation

Faeries often have motivations that seem nonsensical to mundane humans. Darwinists claim these motivations are part and parcel of their magical nature the faerie are adapted to the relationships between magic, drama and narrative. The clergy eager to rationalize the Fae into Christian cosmology often cite that these creatures they are descendants of angels who spurned gods plan but where not wicked enough for Hell, without the moral light of or purpose of god to guide them. Whatever the case you have a fixation with a particular activity that you feel a need to pursue as much as a mortal man thirsts for water. Example fixations include: wooing attractive mortals, eating human flesh, leading travelers of paths to get lost, kidnapping children,

Taboo

Just as some faeries have odd motivation so too do some have prohibitions that make little sense to humans. Unlike

human taboos faerie taboos work both ways, for instance a fairy who must remain unseen will punish those who espy her. Examples include: will not cross running water, prevent anyone from speaking your name, must not enter sanctified ground, must not enter cities or towns, must not be seen, bad housekeeping, drunkenness, miserlyness,

Kinds

Faeries combine a Kind and a Habit into a single Species aspect. Each kind has:

Example bloodlines: at least three often more

Typical Occupations: 3

Typical Skills: 3

Typical Power skills: 3 most common or archetypal for the kind.

Typical Stunts: 3 stunts from LOA

Invoke: example invocations for using your kind as part of your Species aspect

Compel: example compels for using your kind as part of your Species aspect

Aspect

A single new aspect that optionally be taken by those of the Kind.

Stunts

3 new stunts unlocked by the kind.

Example Bloodline:

A single bloodline detailed

Diminutives

These are small faeries four feet tall or less, often much less. They are a recent product of the changeable nature of the Fey apparently some Sidhe transformed into diminutives in the 12th and early 13th century, The earliest written record of them is in the works of Gervase of Tilbury in 1211AD though their population was small until the 16th century. Diminutives are strongly Seelie in attitude and physically resemble miniature versions of the elegant Sidhe. They are noted for their extraordinary grace, speed, and agility. For the most part diminutives are Trooping but exceptions occur. Diminutives are found in the south of England and the Midlands.

Player character diminutives are between 4ft and 6' tall. Non player character diminutives can be 1/4"-5" tall but these creatures are infinitesimals in the LOA rules and not suitable as player characters. A faeries actual height is determined by his stunts (see below).

Example breeds: English elves, Ferrishyn of Manx, Ellylldan of Wales

Typical Occupations: Noble, Faerie Worker, Trickster

Typical Skills: Alertness, Art, Stealth

Typical Power skills: Glamour, Nature, Weather,

Typical Stunts: Glide, Flight, Lightening Fast

Invoke: Whenever you small size might be an advantage such as crossing a narrow beam, when agility is required, when your good looks are a factor.

Compel: to have a human child-bully pick on you, when something is up out of reach, or whenever your small size is a problem.

Aspect: Friend of Adam

You are more than Seelie, you are genuinely interested in befriending humans and helping humans; a most un-faerie-like attitude! Worse yet you do so out of a deep drive to promote ‘goodness’. This infection with human morality leaves a taint on you, an aura readily detected by all fey that look upon you.

Invoke: to earn the trust of a human, to defend any innocent.

Compel: when your infection with human morality causes you to be shunned by other fey, when you must put yourself in harm’s way to do good, to be encumbered with a lost human child for a time.

Diminutive Stunts

Some diminutives have gauzy wings and can take the Glide and Flight stunts. Others like the ferrishyn are wingless.

A Diminutive with no size related stunts is around 3’-4’ tall. Diminutives may take the Small stunt. Taking the Small stunt reduces height to around 3’.

Sleep: This works like the power of Domination hypnotize except that you may use the Glamour skill and only cause the subject to become drowsy and sleep. This only works when the target is not in combat or otherwise aware of physical danger.

Burning Ears: Your magical ears have an effect like the divination stunt scrying enabling you to use Alertness for Investigate at a distance but only for information on what others are saying about you. If those subject to the scrying do not use your proper name and do not mention your ‘bloodline’ a -2 applies to the roll.

Tiny: Requires Small.

A creature with this stunt is reduced to Scale 1, Tiny, and is around 2’6” tall. Due to his low mass the character also receives a +2 to Athletics rolls when falling. The character qualifies for Tiny creature stunts. Each Tiny creature stunt reduces height by about 6” to a minimum of 6” for player characters. NPC’s reduced below 6” are Infinitesimals.

Example Bloodline: Ferrish

The Ferrishyn are rather rustic wingless diminutives from the Isle of Man. They average around 2’ tall and typically dress in green with red hats or hoods. They are rather vagabond in habits often creeping into human dwellings for shelter after the owners have retired to bed. The Ferrishyn are excellent hunters who have their own tiny white hounds and horses.

Aspect: Ferrish (Diminutive Trooping Faerie)

Skill: Survival

Power Skill: Nil

Stunts: Burning Ears, Small, Tiny, Difficult to Spot.

Hobs

Hobs are homely humanoids 2-4 feet in height (exact size is determined by stunts) who are found in the northern midlands and further north. They are generally homely or even ugly, hairy, and males naturally outnumber females more than 10 to 1. Largely hobs are boon to humanity doing menial work around homes and rural settings much as they do for the sidhe in the Faerie lands. At worst they may be a little mischievous but never malicious. Rooted by some deep need to serve Hobs are never Unseelie.

Example Breeds: Brownie, Abbey Lubber, Bauchan, Leprechaun*

*This last is a Solitary Hob of Ireland who acts as a cobbler for other Faeries.

Typical Hob occupations: Faerie Healer, Faerie Worker, Trickster

Typical Skills: Artificer, Endurance, Stealth

Typical Power Skills: Glamour, Life, Nature

Typical Stunts: Small, To the Mallet Born, Good as New

Invoke: to complete domestic or rural chores faster or to a greater level of perfection, to sneak and hide, to repair items, to be overlooked as ‘merely a servant’, when smaller size is an advantage.

Compel: for your shyness to impede a social interaction, when your homely looks are a disadvantage, when your small size is a disadvantage.

Aspect: Lob's Wages

You work for a specific ‘wage’ usually something minor such as a linen shirt every year or a nightly bowl of milk.

Invoke: to gain access to a home as a servant, to be well treated by an employer

Compel: to have an employer break the taboo by paying too much (cake rather than bread), too little (hashan shirt rather than linen) or giving you a gift. Whatever the transgression you must at least quit employment and might gain further fate points by performing annoying tricks or vandalism against the offender utterly ruining any chance of a reference or reconciliation.

Hob Stunts

Nocturnal labours: When performing a repetitive or relatively unskilled labouring such as sweeping, threshing, digging etc. using the Endurance skill task at night you can reduce the time taken by two increments (LOA178) or complete a volume of work that would normally take two increments longer. For example three days worth of trench digging is completed in a single night.

Unseen by common folk: Use Stealth to give yourself an ‘invisible’ aspect as per the Glamour power Invisibility except you are invisible only to mundane humans. You are perfectly visible to animals, magicians, Faeries, ghosts, vampires, etc.

Barnyard bard: Your quiet, non-threatening and rural-magical nature makes livestock trust you and follow you. You gain +2 on survival rolls for animal handling when dealing with domestic animals.

Tiny see Diminutive except that a Hob never has more than one tiny creature stunt.

Example Bloodline: Brownie

Found from the Midlands to the Highlands and the northern islands the brownie is the best known sort of hob. Brownies are around three foot tall and dress in old clothes made brown from age and grime from rural and domestic chores. Their skin and shaggy hair is also brown. They work around farms or homes for little pay. As well as the home they serve they also protect a nearby poor or stream (and may have an aspect to reflect this).

Aspects: Brownie (Domestic Hob Faerie), Lob's Wages

Skill: Survival, Stealth, Endurance

Power Skill: Nil

Stunts: Nocturnal labours,

Guardians

Guardians usually appear to be bearded and wizened old men, female and young guardians seem to be very rare. Despite this appearance guardians are typically hardy and strong. Guardians range from 2' to 4' tall with height determined by stunts. Guardian faeries are dedicated to protecting a site. Unseelie guardians protect the site itself preventing humanity from entering or defiling. Seelie guardians protect those who do honest work at the site and try to reward those whom they judge virtuous workers. Most often they are associated with the underground or woods and have come to be called gnomes or dwarves by the uneducated or rude but these are merely foreign bloodlines from Northern and Southern Europe respectively.

Example bloodlines: knocker, spriggan, brown man

Typical Occupations: Faerie worker, Ranger, Elementalist (Earth)

Typical Skills: Might, Stealth, Resolve

Typical Power skills: Elements (Earth), Nature, Glamour

Typical Stunts: Earth Walk (LOA129), Champion of the Wild, Invisibility

Invoke: Whenever great strength or endurance are required, to represent your intimate knowledge of the protected site, when fighting to defend your site. To have humans underestimate how dangerous you are because of your aged appearance.

Compel: when your looks hinder attempts to seduce a young human, when your height causes problems, example compels for using your kind as part of your Species aspect

Aspect

A single new aspect that optionally be taken by those of the Kind.

Stunts

3 new stunts unlocked by the kind.

Tiny see Diminutive except that a Hob never has more than one tiny creature stunt.

Example Bloodline:

A single bloodline detailed

Bogies

Bogies are ugly humanoids 3-5 feet tall but many are shapeshifters or glamour weavers. They are among the most magical of faeries, virtually all of them have at least some magical power and the most feared. Most bogies are Unseelie who inflict a plague of kidnapping, murder, robbery and vandalism against humanity across the whole of the British Isles and Ireland. There are a few Seelie boggies who are merely mischievous and must bare the brunt of ill-feeling from humanity towards their kin. Some are called ‘goblins’ by uneducated city folk but that is from a French term, gobelin, and does little justice to these the most chaotic and terrifying of the Faeries.

Sidhe

Example Species: Swan Maiden

Typical Power Skills: Glamour, Transformation

Sidhe Aspects

God-Parent

You are a devoted helper and guardian for a human, perhaps even another player character. Your attachment to this particular individual may be because you sense greatness in them, that they are secretly of royal blood, or even arbitrary. Despite a connection that humans consider flimsy you are utterly devoted to protecting this person and ensuring they get ahead in life. The title ‘god-parent’ is a folk politeness, there is nothing Christian about the relationship.

Changling

Sidhe Stunts

Mer

You breathe water either fresh or salt but not both but cannot breath air without resorting to magic if you have it.

Nixie, asrai,

Giants

Like all the kinds human scholars try to shoehorn the Faerie into giants are a varied clade with little in common beyond a humanoid body, large size and enormous strength. Giant are most common in Ireland, Northern England and Scotland. Unseelie giants are terrible ogres or supernatural hags while Seelie giants are protectors and monument builders. In the Scottish Highland the giants are often Unseelie and powerful magicians. A giant without any size related stunts a giant is 7-10 feet tall, with Oversized (LOA120) he can be as big as a large horse or a rhinoceros. Further scale stunts will make him larger still.

Typical Giant Occupations: Large Weapon Warrior, Crone, Magician

Typical Power Skills: Glamour, Intimidation, Endurance

Giant Aspects

Kind Hearted

Common among the dimmer Seelie giants these buck usual faerie behavior and have a caring attitude towards humans going out of their way to help.

Brutish and lumbering

You are massively strong but slow moving and slow thinking. This aspect is often held by the lesser descendants of this once great race.

Invoke: for any application of Might or where brute strength is a factor.

Compel: Whenever agility, speed, or subtlety are required. Whenever anything more than a stone age understanding of technology is called for.

Hag

A hideous female giant descended from ancient goddesses of nature and battle. Most hags are terrible Unseelie monsters of the worst kind but a few are misunderstood Seelie giant-women. Unlocks the powers of Divination, Domination, and Nature

Invoke: to terrify or intimidate with your horrible countenance.

Compel: when your terrifying looks cause unwanted fear, attacks, or misunderstandings

Many Heads

Many Unseelie giants have two or three heads.

Invoke: To overcome stunning blows to the head, attacks to blind an eye etc.

Compel: To have the heads disagree losing initiative or become distracted

Giant Stunts

Designer's note

As with the dragons described in LOA, only Great or better characters can qualify for increased scale. Great, Superb and Epic characters can qualify for the Massive, No House will Hold, and God Blood stunts respectively. Dragons get their scale up for free (scale itself is neutral) so these stunts have some additional benefits.

Massive

Requires: Oversized (LOA120) and any 3 other stunts*.

The character is as big as a large elephant or cottage giant (medium scale). He also receives a further +2 bonus to intimidation if the target is of a smaller scale. The giant gains an additional physical stress box.

No house will hold

A giant of this size has not been seen for hundreds of years

Requires: Oversized, Massive, one Gigantic Creature stunt (LOA182) and any 6 other stunts.

The character is a powerful giant of large scale. As well as the increased scale you treat all weight-based difficulties as two lower (this stacks with Herculanean Strength if you have it). Furthermore your huge stride gives you +2 to athletics for running and jumping.

God Blood

Millennia ago before even the coming of the Celts one of your ancestors was a titanic god of bronze age peoples now all but forgotten in the British Isles. Exposure to fragments of old tales and treading among the standing stones has reawakened this hoary heritage resulting in your growth to truly epic proportions.

Requires: Oversized, Massive, Colossus, one Gigantic Creature stunt (LOA182), one Special Endurance stunt (LOA 119) and 7 other stunts

The character is a towering giant of the kind that strode across the world like gods at the dawn of the mythic age. You are of Huge scale but are able to target Small scale creatures and constructs, such as humans. When attacking constructs you gain +1 Fists.

Example giant species Firbolg (Fear-vulag)

A tribe of giants native to Ireland and the remotest regions of Scotland. Firbolg are ugly, apathetic in their attitude towards humanity, and ancient enemies of the Sidhe. Long ago the Firbolg ruled over the Faerie lands of Ireland but were conquered and killed or driven off by the Tuath de Danan Sidhe. The scattered few survivors and their descendants hold a terrible bitter grudge against the Sidhe who took their lands and killed their kin.

Aspects: Firbolg (Solitary Giant), Bitter hatred of the Sidhe

Skill: Might

Power: Glamour

Stunts: Oversized, Massive, Modify Landscape, Strike with Fear/Wonder, Camouflage.

Habit Trooping

Typically wear green.

Solitary Often wearing red or at least a red cap.

Domestic Often wear brown or go about naked.

Ghosts See the ghost exotic occupation.

Occupations The following are setting appropriate build within the occupations given in LOA.

Crone Faerie Healer

Casual magical Healing even at a distance

Magician

Separable soul

Faerie Worker Mundane tasks well or fast typical of Hobs

Trickster

Warden

Be you a protective giant, A brown man of the woods or... Unseelie wardens tend to protect places often with terrible violence while Seelie wardens tend to place a community under their protection.

Blessings

Exotic Occupations

Ghost

New Stunt: Will not go gentle into that good night

This stunt unlocks the Ghost profession (see below). If killed the character can remain in play rising as a Ghost at the cost of a fate point, if you have none you rise at a fate point cost at the next refresh. The player may choose to delay the return. When this occurs this stunt is switched for Ectoplasmic and the character must switch out an average skill for the Death power skill if she does not already possess it. Ghost equipment is an intangible echo of the real thing. Ghostly reflections of the character's gear and any grave goods appear with him but obtaining new ghostly gear will be difficult. Ghost gear affects other intangible characters as normal items affect solid ones. Magic items might have powers affecting the solid world or intangible things but not both.

Ghost

Held back from your final reward by some great yearning for the world of the living. Ghosts are insubstantial ethereal spirits of those who should have passed on. Whether it is to avenge yourself on your killer, protect a still living spouse, or complete your opus, some emotional some tie binds you to the living world. Ghosts must take the ectoplasmic stunt.

Ghost Aspects

Tasks undone: You left one or more tasks unfinished behind, perhaps you could create a specific aspect naming them?

Invoke: to drive forward towards your goal, to finish some task unfinished in life.

Compel: to falter from the grief of confronting unfinished business.

I will protect him from beyond the grave: there is a character who has your utter devotion, it could be a companion, an NPC or even a PC. Whether from love or duty you will protect him from all harm.

Invoke: to defend your loved one from harm in any form.

Compel: when your need to defend them will put you more danger than usual even for an adventurer.

Denied the pleasures of the living: You long for the simple pleasures: the sun on your skin, the taste of food, the touch of a lover, all these and more are lost to you.

Invoke: to possess one of the living, to help the living enjoy themselves, to seduce.

Compel: represent despair when you witness others enjoy what is denied to you.

Key Skills: Resolve, Athletics, Death, Dimensions. Use Glamour to be seen or create spooky effects. Use Domination to subtly influence or possess the living.

Stunts

Basic Stunts: ectoplasmic, astral sight (LOA117), glide.

Advanced Stunts: flight, inner strength (LOA104), possess (LOA128), Door to Limbo, Doors to Faerie, and Persistent Spirit.

Weaknesses: Ectoplasmic comes with the weakness stuck intangible. If the default assumptions of LOA hold then further weaknesses will be required for some power stunts. The weaknesses Burnout and Backlash are recommended.

Ghost Stunts

Ectoplasmic

This stunt is much like the Discorporate stunt (LOA125) except that the character is trapped in ethereal form (you gain the major weakness stuck intangible). Characters with this stunt must choose some anchor to the corporeal world such as their desiccated corpse, a haunted house, or even another PC. If this anchor is destroyed the character is killed. Since the anchor is a major lever in the hands of the referee you should consider taking it as an aspect; that way you can earn fate points when it is endangered. The character can also be harmed, even permanently destroyed, by other ethereal creatures or mental attacks.

Door to Limbo

Requires: Dimensions and Death skill.

This stunt works like Create Portal (LOA126) except that it only opens portals to Limbo a place much like a Faerie Realm but inhabited by the restless dead. Depending on the campaign setting this may require story related sub-quests, ingredients, events etc.

Doors to Faerie

Requires: Dimensions, Door to Limbo, Death skill and at least one aspect tieing you to a Faerie of a Faerie Realm.

There is a long history of ghosts visiting and even dwelling among Faeries. This stunt works like Create Portal (LOA126) except that it only opens portals to Faerie Realms. Depending on the campaign setting this may require story related sub-quests, ingredients, events etc.

Persistent Spirit

Requires: Death skill, Door to Limbo and an anchor to the living world.

Unless your anchor is destroyed you come back from being ‘killed’ at the cost of a fate point. If your anchor is destroyed you cannot return. The character should take a minor weakness.

Magic

A self-bored stone can see the invisible.

Elfshot

Ash Staff: Protection against Faeries when Rowan is not available.

Bestiary

Afanc

Apple-tree-man,

Arkan Sonney

Worm: a serpent-like dragon often a human transformed by a curse or greed.

"This article was originally included due to a miscommunication. It is an incomplete draft written in 2014. The author has now given permission for its inclusion warts and all."

CRPG REVIEW : LINKS AWAKENING REMAKE

by Dorchadas

I was pretty excited to play the game. I preordered it months in advance, and the weekend it came out, I sat down and played it for hours, getting quickly through the opening and the first two dungeons. And then I didn't play it at all until this month, a casualty of my attempt to play Suikoden in Japanese to follow along with the Square Roots Podcast--a task I do intend to get back to eventually--and then my increasingly-prominent social life. When I was out doing something with people five or six nights a week, I didn't have time to play games at all! Well, thank you for coronavirus for getting me back into gaming.

You might ask why I'm reviewing this if I already reviewed Link's Awakening, and what's more, if my review there was of the DX version and I never played the original. I've never made a distinction between the Zelda games before--I played the GameCube Zelda Collection version of Majora's Mask that allows saving at owl statues, I played the Master Quest version of Ocarina of Time, and I haven't played the HD versions of Wind Waker or Twilight Princess at all. And the simple answer is that I'm the one writing these posts and I can do what I want, but taking more seriously, the Link's Awakening Remake makes greater gameplay changes than any of the previous enhanced versions. Master Quest changes the dungeons around a bit, Twilight Princess HD has prettier graphics and the map on the WiiU GamePad, but Link's Awakening Remake changes the presentation of the entire game. That's worth some words.

The plot and dialogue in Link's Awakening Remake are all the same as the original game, and most of my original review was about them, so I encourage you to read that because the otherworldly mono no aware air of Link's Awakening is a major reason it's a masterpiece. And in the remake, the new graphics help with that air.

When I first saw screenshots, I wasn't sure what to think. Link's beady black eyes reminded me of the horrific soulless gaze of a Funko Pop, without pity or remorse or fear, and as I look at the amiibo on my Zelda amiibo collection I get the same feeling. But in the game, with everything in motion and a soft focus on the edges of the screen, it looks much better. The artstyle makes Link's Awakening Remake feel like a child's diorama or a puppet show, but the character's expressions bring life to what otherwise could be a very static presentation. Toon Link was one of the best Link designs because of his expressiveness, and while there aren't as many camera zooms onto Link's huge eyes here, there are plenty of situations where Link displays emotion. My favorite was definitely catching a fish during the fishing minigame, when Link turns to the camera and beams like a child given candy on their birthday, but I also liked the determined expression when he climbed to the top of Eagle's Tower to fight the albatross and the way he looked around in confusion when "Owl's Theme" kicked in and the owl messenger arrived. The other characters have less screentime, but Marin's joy at singing the Song of the Wind Fish or Tarin's panic when chased by bees were far stronger in the toyetic Remake style than they were in 8-bit graphics.

All the monsters have a similar toy-like aesthetic, as does much of the terrain. My favorite were definitely the "rocks" that require the Pegasus Boots to dash through, which now jiggle like balloons when Link touches them and pop into fragments of fabric when he dashes into them.

And the music! I'm normally a huge enthusiast for chiptunes and early VGM and after Breath of the Wild, I was worried that the Remake would be less music-forward in the way so many modern games are, and while the Remake did replace the original Game Boy tones with soft strings, it grew on me very quickly. Compare the Game Boy

Overworld Theme with the Remake version, or the original Tal Tal Heights and the Remake version. They're soft, sure, and "Tal Tal Heights" has less of that driving energy that the Game Boy versions has, but they're more, if I may say it, dreamlike. They fit the odd mood that's so important to Link's Awakening.

The one loser in the Remake is the Owl's Theme, which has soft strings and horns in an attempt to recreate the discordant weirdness of the Game Boy Owl's Theme. The latter's single sound channel did a much better job of conveying the strangeness of the owl and encouraging the player to recognize that those moments were set apart; a liminal experience of contact with divinity.

The major problems with the gameplay of Link's Awakening all related to the limitations of the Game Boy. With only two buttons, every tool and item had to be bound to one of those two, and with the inclusion of active blocking, the shield was no longer a passive defense like in the original Legend of Zelda. That meant that the sword, the shield, and every single item were all competing for space, and some battles involved more time in menus than out, swapping between sword, shield, and two or three other items while fighting.

No more. In the Remake, B is assigned to the sword, R is assigned to the shield, L is assigned to the Pegasus Boots, and X and Y are freely assignable to any other item. The Power Bracelet is now a passive boost like in A Link to the Past, so running into a heavy rock doesn't result in an informative pop-up about how it's heavy for the Power Bracelet could lift it every single time like it used to. Fighting bosses no longer requires a jump into the menu screen whenever their weak spot is revealed to swap to the sword to damage them. It's an enormous quality-of-life improvement that makes the game so much better, and even if I basically permanently assigned the Roc-Bird's Freather to X because jumping was an amazing way to get around the game and avoid enemies, I appreciated that I could do that and still have the sword, shield, Pegasus Boots, and Power Bracelet all available too.

The other major gameplay-affecting change is that the Remake isn't bound to the strict screen-by-screen grid layout of the Game Boy, so the world is expanded. Most of the outdoors is a single continuous area, and it's possible to walk from one end of the island to the other without going through a screen transition. This is true even in dungeons, and while dungeons generally maintain the one-screen-one-room rule due to the common use of "kill all monsters to get a key" or "solve this puzzle to get a key" layouts, there are occasional large rooms scattered throughout. Also, it's possible to move and attack diagonally now, which makes a couple fights less annoying. The original Link's Awakening designers did a great job with the hardware limitations, but the Switch's ability to have more buttons is simply better. It's more convenient, it requires less time messing around in the menu, it's less disruptive to gameplay, it's just an improvement in every way. If I never see another message about something being too heavy when I lightly brush into it, I'll be a happy man.

There are a few totally new additions in the Remake. The Color Dungeon makes its return from Link's Awakening DX, with the same simple layout and same color fairy at the end who rewards Link with his choice of the Red Tunic, to double damage done by him, or the Blue Tunic, to halve damage done to him. Unlike last time I played, I opted to do the Color Dungeon this time because I had decided to play the game on Hero Mode (about which more later), and I wanted something to even the score. That meant by the end of the game I was doing quadruple damage thanks to the Koholint Sword from collecting secret shells and the Red Tunic, but most of the hardest enemies in the game aren't vulnerable to the sword anyway, so this is less of a game-breaking advantage than it seems. It's no Quake III powerup.

There's also display stands in various houses around Mābe Village that hold figurines of Mario enemies, all available at the 今はやりゲーム (imahayari gēmu, "Popular-Now Game," Eng: "Trendy Game"). There's no reward for doing it, it just looks neat. So of course, I did it.



provide fine-grained control over the placement of platforms, tiles, monsters, coins, and every aspect of the levels. Danpei only allows the placement of pre-set rooms, which form a dungeon when combined. If a particular room has a chest or a stairway, then every time that room is used it will have a chest or a stairway. If a room has a set of enemies, or a miniboss, or a puzzle, that's an innate part of the room and it's unchangeable. The final chest Link opens will always have the nightmare key, so there's no option to allow the player a clever solution to the dungeon's puzzles. The only customization is plopping down a bunch of different rooms and calling it a dungeon, which is honestly pretty unsatisfying. There isn't even an option to reuse room tiles, and because there aren't enough rooms to build more than a smallish dungeon from a single theme, every dungeon becomes constantly-changing patchwork of styles. If you want to make a mostly-lava dungeon like Turtle Rock but include ジャッキー (jakkī, Eng: "Rover") from the Southern Face Shrine as a miniboss and ツボ魔王 (tsubo maō, "Jar Demon King," Eng: "Genie"), then there will be two bizarrely out-of-place rooms in the dungeon, and that's assuming there are enough lava tiles to use. And of course, the only bosses, tools, and items are those contained in the Remake--there's no Twilight Princess grinding on rails here.

I wonder how much of these limitations come out of tying Dungeon Maker to game progression. It's possible to beat the game without ever talking to Danpei, but he has one bottle and several heart containers as rewards for building dungeons to his specifications, and if it were possible to freely place everything in those dungeons, then it'd be easy to build minimalist dungeons and burn through them in minutes just to get those items. That's basically what I did anyway, at least for the first challenge before I realized that it was more effort than I wanted to go through.

Dungeon Maker is definitely not anything like a Zelda version of Mario Maker, and all I really saw in my brief interactions with it were the limitations. I suppose it's possible that someone could make an amazing dungeon that

By far the most expansive addition is Danpei's Dungeon Maker. Danpei lives in the northern part of the island near Crazy Tracy, and when Link first talks to him, he says that he has something to show Link in his hut. This is not a bash on the head with a shovel, but a whole minigame of dungeon-building. Using various tiles from completing Link's Awakening Remake's dungeons, from amiibo, or from completing Danpei's challenges, you can build your own dungeons, store them on amiibo, and then give them to your friends to try! That's the Zelda Maker we've all wanted for some many years, right?

Well, no. Emoji Link side-eye Danpei's Dungeon Maker is nowhere near as versatile as Mario Maker or its sequel are. Despite their limitations, those games

would blow me away, but I doubt it. The limitations simply don't allow for better dungeons than the game's designers already made. Another major change is the addition of Hero Mode difficulty, first introduced in Wind Waker HD and basically unchanged since its first presentation there. In Hero Mode, all enemies do double damage and no hearts or fairies drop. That's it, call it a day.

My opinion of this is best summed up by Hero Mode's Japanese name: 辛いモード tsurai mōdo, "Painful Mode." The video game difficulty discussion is long and mostly a tedious waste of time, but I think there's some value in talking about what exactly difficulty means and how it's expressed. There are several different axes under the difficulty umbrella, but the major determinant I think of is whether something requires player skill or whether it's independent of it. For example, a danmaku boss with specific attack pattern requires player skill--the player has to memorize the boss pattern or have fast enough reflexes to adapt to new waves of bullets, and if they do that, they can win. The fight is difficult. A danmaku boss that has a 10% chance to nuke the whole screen and kill the player every five seconds is also a difficult fight in that beating it is unlikely, but these are not meaningfully the same kind of difficulty.

For a real-game example, look at Patchwerk and Thaddeus in Naxxramas in World of Warcraft (yes, I'm old). Patchwerk just sits and slams the tank repeatedly while Hateful Striking the offtanks, so winning is based almost entirely on the gear the raid has--if they can put out big enough healing and DPS numbers, they win. If not, they lose. On the other hand, Thaddeus has two sub-bosses in Phase 1 that keep knocking the tanks over to each other's platforms and must be re-taunted, and Thaddeus applies a positive or negative charge to everyone in the raid, causing all players to damage anyone nearby with the opposite charge. Players need to be aware of their charge and switch sides if it changes, while avoiding everyone else who has the switching to their side. There's a lot more individual effort required and it doesn't just come down to Patchwerk's "Does your raid output 10,000 DPS? If so, you win."

A completely different example of good difficulty is Thief or Goldeneye, which add objectives as the difficulty level increases. On Lord Balford's Manor in Thief, Normal difficulty just requires entering and finding the sceptre. Hard also requires stealing 350 gold worth of valuables and not killing any servants, and Expert requires stealing 700 gold worth of valuables, not killing anyone, and making it back out after the job is done. A higher difficulty requires more complex actions and more long-range planning from the player.

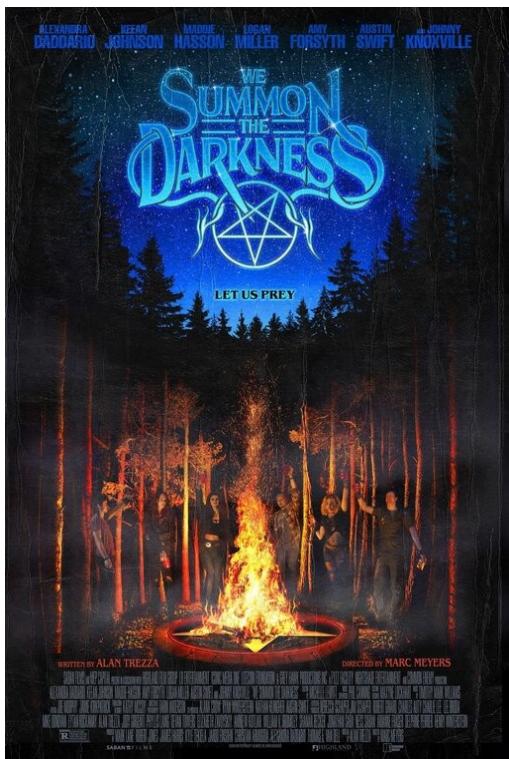
Hero Mode doesn't do any of that, and the end result was mostly just annoyance. If I took too much damage anywhere, I'd have to leave and go get hearts, and I still never died in any boss battle. I could have beaten Link's Awakening Remake in maybe 2/3rds the time if I played on Normal Mode and I would have still had just as much fun. It's not even like a better difficulty mode couldn't be done in a Legend of Zelda game, because Breath of the Wild had Master Mode where the enemies all start at a higher tier and regenerate health, but Breath of the Wild provides enough tactical depth that the player can adapt their tactics--sneak attacks, luring enemies away, using more food buffs, and otherwise intelligently tackling the increased challenge. Link's Awakening Remake doesn't provide any of those options, and "Painful Mode" really is the best name for it. But I beat it, so I guess I have bragging rights.

That said, all of my problems with Link's Awakening Remake are with the optional systems, and as the name implies, it's entirely possible to play the game and completely ignore both of them. Outside of those, the Remake is a masterpiece, a perfect update of a game to a modern format, that revamps all of the technical limitations of the original without changing any of what made it great. Nintendo created another Metroid: Zero Mission, where there's really no reason for the average person to play the original because the remake does everything it did and more. I'm really happy that Nintendo successfully brought an old classic forward and made it accessible to a new era, and so now I have just one question: *Oracle of Seasons* when?

MOVIE REVIEWS: WE SUMMON THE DARKNESS

by Andrew Moshos

dir: Marc Meyers (2020)



Set in Indiana in the 1980s, you would be forgiven for thinking that they're jumping onto some kind of Stranger Things bandwagon with this satanic panic horror flick *We Summon the Darkness*, what with the promotional poster and all.

It sounds so nasty and metal-y, doesn't it? Like some bad people are going to do bad things at a metal gig in order to, um, summon the, uh, darkness?

It's not as convoluted as it might seem. No actual darkness was summoned, harmed or pursued by the makers or participants of this movie. Some bad stuff happens, as in, people are killed (not really, I mean they pretend to kill people, this being a 'horror' movie and not reality television after all), but it has less to do with His Satanic Majesty, who thought it would be better to rule in hell than serve in heaven or at a fancy ice cream place, and more to do with three crazy kids who think it would be cool to kill a bunch of other kids and make it look like people are doing Satan's bidding all over the place.

We watch as three girls get ready for and drive to a gig somewhere in Indiana. It could be some bar, or a barn, or a haystack for all I know.

It reminded me of travelling out to suburbs like Croydon to watch gigs at The Hull, which was kind of like travelling back through time to Indiana. The rural sectors of Indiana are not ones I profess to know anything about. To be sure it just looks like a bunch of kids having fun. On the way to the gig, which is of a metal band called Soldiers of Satan or Satanic Pride or Merciful Pancakes or something suitably metal sounding, someone throws a milkshake at their car, which Isn't Very Insurance-y. Alexis has to clean the windshield. It's very inconsiderate. It could almost make you want to kill the people that did it, but not quite. And Val, who I'll get to, has to pee all the time.

The gig is...funny. But to these kids it's the real deal, I guess, and they're super into it, kinda. Alexis (Alexandra Daddario) doesn't know much about these bands of the day that the other 'kids' are talking about, like the minutiae of Sabbath and Metallica and Megadeth, and fakes her way through these conversations. If you were ever in a group of friends who were way into music, there was always someone like that in the group. Of course, you could have been that person in the group, that pretended to know all the connections, and to have gone to gigs you couldn't possibly have gone to, and gotten back stage with whoever.

Val (Maddie Hasson) is super into the music, and knows all the stuff with all the bands, and is very comfortable with her flirtatious and carefree ways, mostly because she's so busy auditioning not for this flick, but for some potential part where she gets to play Harley Quinn. Beverly (Amy Forsyth), right from the start, seems uncomfortable with

everything, whether it's the hard party lifestyle, or whatever is going to happen next. And she always has to pee.

The other three guys are mostly generic metalhead guys of the 1980s, or at least what the makers imagine they were like. Mullets. Bad peach fuzz facial hair. Sleeves-torn denim vests with patches. Little else.

Since we've rolled up on this thing expecting death and destruction, we have to pretend that we don't yet know who's going to try to kill whom, even though we've spent 30 minutes with one set of people, who seem to be gearing up to do something unspeakable, and another group of people who just want to party and maybe get laid.

Back in the actual 1980s, back when films like this were even cheesier and even more poorly made, wanting sex, drugs and or alcohol was enough to get your character killed. I'm not pretending I'm the first jerk to mention that the slasher genre that gave us the *Nightmares on Elm Street*, *Fridays the 13th* and the unending stream of *Halloweens* has this particular focus on sex and drugs and the sins of one's parents as the justification (somewhat) of supernatural murder fuckery.

But this flick isn't moralising at all, even if a couple of the characters moralise in order to justify their bullshit actions and the bullshit thinking behind those actions. It turns out, get this, that the people wanting to murder people aren't doing it because they're Satanists who want to kill people in order to please their Dark Lord; they're actually a bunch of Christian fundamentalists who think if they commit enough of these massacres, people will run to the Church for spiritual safety.

No-one, at least before the murderings begin, has done anything that "justifies" their future status as a corpse yet, because, surely, almost no-one deserves murdering, especially if they have enjoyed drugs and consensual sex with consenting, adulterous drug taking legal adults? So instead of killing for Satan, they're killing for Jesus! Sure, that both makes a lot of sense and a lot of difference.

No-one's going to accuse this flick of making a lot of sense, or of being in any way scary. Of all the characters, the only one that really commits and seems like she's having fun is the lunatic Val, who clearly isn't killing because of some far fetched and implausible scheme to boost the church's coffers; she wants to kill because it seems like fun. She just wants to kill people and then pee, like any responsible person wanting to prevent urinary tract infection after, you know, killing people. And, oh, of course, killing people seems like loads of fun for the whole family, that is until the potential victims start fighting back because they've got nothing better to do.

Sure, there have been a stack of flicks where people get tricked into or sneak their way into a house, only to find themselves at the mercy of the degenerates within, starting with *Hansel and Gretel* and not really improving since then. This isn't filmed in any particular novel or ironic way to make the flick anything more special than what it is – a mildly diverting way to spend 90 minutes.

I can't say any part of it was remotely surprising, or really that enjoyable, but there is an escalation at work, because a) a bunch of random stuff means more people keep coming to the house where everything is happening, and b) the plan is such a terrible plan, and the murderers aren't being led by a genius with a plan.

It made not a lick of sense that these people would make a murder scene in their own house that looks like a Satanic ritual, with sub-Halloween decorations, kill the trio and make it look like a murder-murder-suicide, which someone actually says is the plan, and then call the cops and say "Um, hi, there's been a murder? Some people broke into my house, bound themselves to some chairs, then killed themselves? I think they were devil worshippers? Okay thanks bye."

Problem solved. I guess no-one in this is really that smart, though at least two of the people involved here, being Bev and one of the nicer jerks, both go out of their way to save or help people rather than kill them openly. If anyone deserves to be murdered by their friends, I mean, saved, it's these two.

But to get to there, there's a lot of clumsiness, a lot of amateurishness on display, a lot of times where people just wander away for long stretches, and then wander back. I don't mean in terms of the filmmaking, which is perfectly adequate to the task at hand, I mean stuff like, two people trapped in a pantry, so their opponents try to gas them out, cackhandedly, so that they get gassed. Or using a can of hair spray, to shoot flames under a door, to what effect, now that you mention it?

Not funny enough to be a comedy, not scary enough to be horror, played entirely straight, with characters that don't make a lot of sense, with nil cleverness, no self-awareness or irony, I can say without a doubt that this was the best horror film I watched yesterday. Of course it was the only movie I watched yesterday, so it wasn't running against any competition whatsoever.

We Summon The Darkness probably thinks it deserves a sequel. There was no engagement with the music, the hysteria of the times, or anything that really grounded it in the era. If anything, they should have had people trying to kill members of Motley Crue, thus sparing the world from their awfulness. Maybe the producers will go there, with Sorry, We Summoned the Darkness Again? Or, We Still Keep Summoning the Darkness, or I Swear, This Time We'll Summon the Darkness (this has never happened before, just bear with me).

Maybe, set it in Seattle in the very early 90s, and have a group of angry mothers go after the creators of "grunge" music. They could be slaughtering SubPop employees and early signings, and young versions of Bruce Pavitt and Jonathan Poneman could be the Final Bosses the Concerned Mothers of America, led by Tipper Gore of course, have to take on in the climactic scene! Now that imagined film I would see, a bunch of times, maybe even risking The Virus to see it in a cinema. This here actual movie that I reviewed? I will probably never think of it again.

6 times most of these people could be doing better films or better things in general with their lives out of 10

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"You girls be careful. There's a lot of evil out there."

- "You don't think we can take care of ourselves?" – well, no-one told me this is what female empowerment was going to look like – We Summon the Darkness

Rating:6 stars

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(Read: Sickness, Death, and Plagues)

MERP Hands of the Healer

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