

RPG REVIEW

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HEINRICH HARDER.

HOUSING, FOOD, AND CLOTHING

**ETTINS AND CHICKENS FOR D&D ... CITY AND
FOOD REVIEWS... FOODIE PREGENS ... BLOOD
SUCKING BLADES ... MAGE THE AWAKENING
CAMPAIGN ... BENEATH SHORT STORY ...
STOWAWAY MOVIE REVIEW ... VALEDICTIONS
STEVE PERRIN AND TERRY K. AMTHOR ... AND
MUCH MORE!**

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ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL AND COOPERATIVE NEWS

Editorial

Yes, this issue of RPG Review is late, very late. And by now, gentle reader, you would know it often is but at least it always comes out, even if the published date and the published time are not quite the same. At least it is a double-issue and on a subject that is both interesting and prosaic, "Housing, Food, and Clothing". The prosaic part is obvious enough; these concerns are ubiquitous. But interesting? How could such subjects be interesting? Are they not the *par exemplar* of the mundane? Well, too a degree that is true. But there are two reasons why this subject has been selected.

The first is to illustrate how RPGs, caught in a "great men of history" perspective (and they are usually men who get the spotlight) is often portrayed as the game of kings, generals, and soldiers. "Little people", those who feed you, those who

clothe you, those who made your home, are quite often forgotten. Yes, it is true that it is indeed rare that one of these people becomes the hero of the story, but isn't it more interesting and courageous when they do? It was not Aragon or Boromir that took The One Ring to Mount Doom which destroyed the power of Sauron, but rather it was two rather plucky Hobbits, Sam and Frodo, "normal people", and the greatness of the famous story is how modest individuals have can find with themselves a great source of resolve, strength, and hope.

The second is a counter to the lack of imagination that is witnessed far too often. How often do we encounter in the many and varied imagined worlds of fiction representations of normal life that are simply are the lifestyles of the late twentieth and early twenty-first western societies simply transported to a different setting that is supposed to be exotic, speculative, and magical? It is something present not just in game descriptions, mechanics, but even RPG artists do this far too often as well. Yes, it is easier not to create a setting that is alien to the player's understanding, but certainly on the great contributions of RPGs is that they do give us that opportunity to discover and imagine what other places are like.

With this in mind, we have our issue on "Food, Clothing, and Housing". It has been a while since such things are covered, so there is a a rather hefty introduction with RPG Review Cooperative gaming 'blogs, especially in the form my own Eclipse Phase campaign (and with thanks to the contributions of Jay Patterson, Andrew McPherson, Tim Rice, and Michael Cole). It has been a while since said story was included in RPG Review (see Issue 47, June 2020), but it does make special sense to include it here. Firstly, because it covers the end of what was a five-year story. Secondly, because Eclipse Phase does show the sort of imagination that is appropriate for the issue. In that setting your body (the morph) is effectively a vehicle for your mind (ego), a home for your mind, and your clothing. Adding to this, and a tech-level below, is Andrew Daborn's Cyberspace Darkspace 'blog which is also inclusive. Apart from being a standard cyberpunk setting, the Dark Space component includes adding alien biological lifeforms to one's sense of body.

Following this there two articles by yours truly on the theory and application of divergence in housing, clothing, and food. These are really for the GMs to mine as a resource when they are thinking about their own imagined worlds to be attentive to the combination of environment, technological development, and culture. More GM resources follow with Thomas Verreault's review of Victorian-era lifestyles and assumptions for Steampunk games, and Karl Brown's "Foodies", being pre-generated food-related NPCs and, on the other end of the food-table, Ettins, who have a reputation for eating people. Or maybe chickens, as quirky as that is with Karl also providing this creature template. The style continues as I provide "Blades of Shagal" for RuneQuest, literal blood-sucking weapons that grow with consumption. A set of review which featured cities and food follows (including the famous "Rat on a Stick"). Paddy Hutchinson, who contributed to the Cyberpunk 2020 Issue (RPG Review 51) has two related articles with "The Redistributors", "The Long Scenario" which act as scenario seeds for a cyberpunk setting.

Of course, not everything has to do with the subject of the issue. It never does. Karl also provides "The Devil Comes to the Green Isles", an interesting supernatural visitation to an already magical place, whilst Tim Rice provides notes from his Mage: The Awakening campaign, "The Shores opf Mysteria Aeons". Swithcing back to Karl we have Auzya and Zelund (yes, that does sound right) which is bestiary information for our lands for Gamma World. Although "base animal stocks" really does sound food related as well. And as for "Benath", a short story by new contributor Aidan Parker, well, that does feature a sort of clothing as a driving plot device. Finally, we conclude with the ever productive Andrew Moshos' movie reviews and, in this case, Stowaway, which certainly is about about housing in space.

Cooperative News

It is fair to say that this year has been rough for all concerned, and as coronavirus fatalities are now over five million the seriousness of the situation should be apparent to all but the most closed-minded. Of course, there is mental exhaustion as well, even among those who accept the reality of virus, who have followed the data that illustrates the effectiveness of the vaccines (it's even somewhat surprising that we have any at all), and have engaged in the protocols of social distancing to protect ourselves and others. Marching onwards, the virus is often more resilient than the people it infects.

Whilst a great deal of our face-to-face gaming activities, movie nights, BBQs etc have shifted online (for gaming) or have been deferred. Online gaming seems have become the new normal for participation, and it is hoped that as effective vaccination rates improve that eventually we can have some sort of hybrid approach. It has all meant that our

activities have dropped and with it, membership and involvement. As a result the committee has strongly advocated that members "get the jab", not just for our own sake as an organisation, but also for everyone else. The following has been circulated in our newsletter:

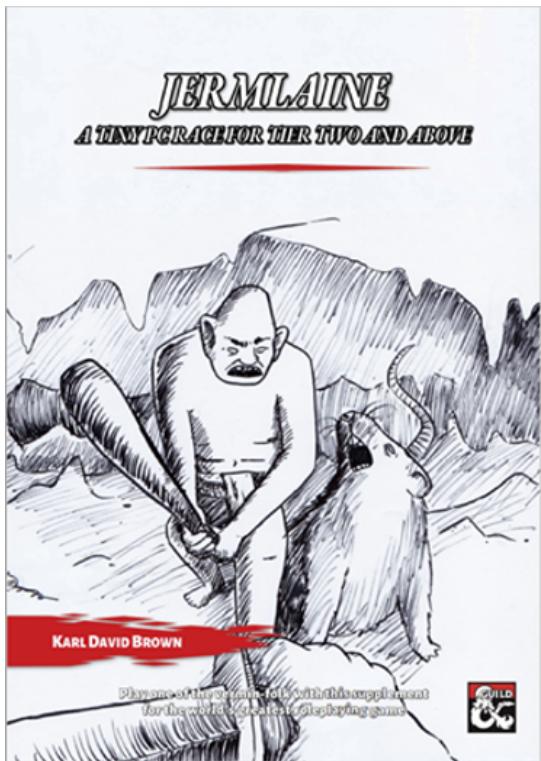
Online is great, but it's nothing compared to a late night catch up with old friends at our favourite Con or the singular odour of a well-loved game store.

Help us bring back live events. Get vaccinated against COVID-19.

*Please find a link to the vaccine clinic finder below:
<https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility>*

Pretty clear, really.

In addition it must be mentioned that, courtesy of Karl Brown, we have a new publication under or aegis as well:



Jermlaine. A tiny PC race for tier two and above

The classic D&D vermin-folk from Mordenkainen's Fiendish Folio Volume 1 as a PC race. Includes rules for Tiny PCs, a new feat, and a new monster the Jermlaine Swarm.

"Swarming out of dark holes, the vermin-folk turn the tables on larger denizens of the Underdark who try to exterminate them. Many adventurers have been humiliated by the jermlaine and their rodent allies. Now your adventuring party can recruit these tiny terrors to their side! Jermlaine are a classic monster from the earliest days of D&D. Mordenkainen's Fiendish Folio Volume 1 brought this monster back for the 5th edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game. However, in the era of the second edition of AD&D players could create jermlaine characters. This booklet restores the jermlaine as a player character race!"

Mathematically designed and play-tested by a veteran with over 30 years of D&D experience! You will find herein jermlaine race's rules and lore described in the same detail as the races in the Player's Handbook. In addition, there are new jermlaine specific background options, a new feat, Tiny equipment, design notes, tips for play, and rules for Tiny Size player characters.

There is also a new monster for Dungeon Masters, the Jermlaine Swarm!

Requires the 5th Edition D&D Player's Handbook. An optional feat provided here uses Mordenkainen's Fiendish Folio Volume 1. Jermlaine can also optionally make use of a feat in Xanathar's Guide to Everything."

<https://www.dmsguild.com/product/349363/Jermlaine-A-tiny-PC-race-for-tier-two-and-above>

Papers & Paychecks



The Roleplaying Game of an Industrialized and Technological Society

Readers are also reminded that we have other publications available for sale as well, including Papers & Paychecks and Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery, both of which whose proceeds go directly to the Cooperative and are available in PDF and physical forms (limited print runs for both).

Inspired by the classic cartoon by Will McLean in the first edition of the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Masters Guide (TM), where things - the worst 'monsters' of all - are against us.

Character advancement across six professions, with linked characteristics, is measured by successfully completing projects which provides extra wages and perks. Core mechanic is a familiar characteristic+skill vs target number with a player-based Luck attribute providing intervention.

Written by Lev Lafayette, foreword by Tim Kask, scenario by Dan L'Estrange, and a example of play by David Cameron Staples

<http://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/227291/Papers--Paychecks>

Cow-Orkers in the Scary Devil Monastery is the first supplement for Papers & Paychecks, there are new character classes, new equipment, new NPCs, new settings (fantasy, noir), and three new scenarios, including "Keep Our Borderlands", "The Palace of the Electrum Princess", and "Camp 22".

<https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/299123/CowOrkers-in-the-Scary-Devil-Monastery>

One additional thing that must be mentioned is our library. The RPG Review Cooperative has a truly extensive gaming library for use by members, consisting of over 750 RPG gaming items, plus over 100 RPG magazines. It is the sort of thing that makes our membership (\$10 per annum, \$100 life membership) absolutely cost-effective and worthwhile. Excuse the ugly Google Docs URL, but do look at the stunning size of what we have to offer.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NXHi1mKQJvfSysXiX3nFz3Oeousiwub9bOM_p7FkZ_c/edit?usp=sharing

Despite the difficulties of the past two years it should be quite clear that the RPG Review Cooperative is an ongoing and successful venture. Maybe you would like to join, participate, and engage with this group? If so, please do get into contact with us. We've done well so far, we'll do better in the future.

Nota bene: Annual General Meeting of the association will be held on January 29, 2022. Again, sign up for details.

Lev Lafayette
lev@rpgreview.net

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COOPERATIVE GAMING 'BLOGS

CyberDarkSpace by Andrew Daborn

A continuing campaign of Cyberspace and Dark Space set in Australia with a "Stalkers" theme.

Session 23: Release the Kraken

"Very well. Release the Kraken." - Laurence Olivier

* Off a dark corridor in an office WALLY, CANCER and BOMBER crouch. Camera cuts to JONES in another room standing next to a large coral-like mass.

MAL [Voiceover] Come on out, we just want to have a little talk!

Large jellyfish suit bounces in.

SEVICK Remember me? Where's that fucking camel? I'm going to tear it's head off!

* Cut to BOMBER standing over SERVICK's form emptying her shotgun into him, a fearsome expression on her face.

Further down the corridor GRAVLIN in the squid suit tears the airlock but is distracted by weapons fire before finding JONES.

MAL explodes through the office room wall bare-chested with an artifact glowing prominently. A shot from JONES bounces off him.

* Cut to JONES spraying an extinguisher in GRAVLIN's face.

JONES [Voiceover] There's a way out down this corridor!

* Cut to the four of them in a dark mine tunnel looking up at light from an old shaft above. A menacing shadow flicks behind them.

* Cut again to the four of them slowly travelling up the shaft in a cargo lift.

SFX: Lift engine winns.

* Cut to the four of them fighting off large tentacles that burst from beneath the lift.

WALLY, JONES, CANCER and BOMBER: Aaaaagh!!!!

* WALLY, JONES, CANCER and BOMBER enter a dark aircraft hanger, the silhouettes of several light aircraft in distance.

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Session 24: Flying

"The knack lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss" - Douglas Adams on flying.

* Interior shot of a Cessna light aircraft, WALLY, JONES, CANCER and BOMBER squeezed inside.

* Exterior shot at night of Cessna neatly taking off from a darkened airfield

FX: Engines starting and crew running around.

* Inside Cessna aircraft WALLY glances over his shoulder.

WALLY Two, at six o'clock!

FX: Heavy automatic gunfire and sounds of a fuselage being hit.

* Cut to the Cessna dropping and banking into the Zone as it's engine cuts out.

BOMBER [Voiceover] They'll never follow us in here!

* Cut to Cessna emerging the far side of the Zone, at a much lower altitude, draped in seaweed?

WALLY, JONES, CANCER and BOMBER Aaaagh!

* Exterior at Pine Gap airfield. The Cessna taxies in, smoke pouring from its engine. Ground crew rush to the aid.

CAPTAIN WINTER That concludes our debrief. I'm sure you will find the bonus amicable. We'd like you to go back...

Session 25: Planning Attacks

"Attack is the secret of defence; defence is the planning of an attack." — Sun Tzu

* Interior shot of military store room. BOMBER stops in front of a large, multi-barrelled machine gun and smiles.

BOMBER Betsy...

* Exterior shot of outback at dawn with an helejet dusting off and four figures running from it.

WALLY [voiceover] Well, the business case for this is the large payout we expect for recovering the coral mass and BOMBER's GEM asset.



* Exterior shot of outback mega-corp facility. Flashlights seen in one building.
WALLY [voiceover] Stage 1 Penetrate boundary and arrive at destination

* Interior shot of dark corridor. Furious gunfight in progress.
FX Heavy gunfire.
WALLY [voiceover] Stage 2 Enter Building

* Interior shot of lab with large coral mass. WALLY, JONES and CANCER stand before it in tactical military gear. BOMBER sits in an office chair, her leg heavily bandaged, a huge gun on the floor next to her.
WALLY [voiceover] Stage 3 Identify objective...

Session 26: Time to Join The Establishment

“We travel, some of us forever, to seek other states, other lives, other souls.”
— Anaïs Nin,

* Interior shot of lab with large coral mass. It recesses open to JONES's touch.

CANCER - Nope, I've got nothing.

* Interior of large coral mass, a trypophobic inducing surface of razor clam-like prominences packed tightly together.

* Darkness

CORAL MASS Feed me.

FX Screams

* Exterior shot of coral mass in the Pine Gap compound, a crushed car half beneath it. WALLY, JONES, BOMBER and CANCER are escorted from it by military personnel.

JONES I think it needs to refuel.

Session 27: Benefits of The Man

“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.”
— Ernest Hemingway

* Interior of a military hospital cybernetics bay. A figure under a sheet is attended to by several masked figures. Large machinery and medical equipment surrounds the table.

FX mixture of medical and industrial sounds.

* Close up of JONES face, circuitry is just visible beneath his skin. His eyes blink open.

JONES I understand Question Six.

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* Interior of medical waiting room. WALLY and CANCER sit. A courier enters with an empty box for WALLY.

COURIER Your package had arrived Mr Namatjira.

* Interior of military gym. BOMBER land in front of the camera on chromed cat-like legs with neon-blue Tron lines. Claws flash out as she kicks at a training dummy slicing it in half.

BOMBER I'll take both!

Session 28: The Alien of Larapinta

"Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander."

— Yehuda Bauer

* External shot of sprawling Alice Springs.

CAPTAIN WINTER [voiceover] Locate the alien in Larapinta district. Do not engage. We will extract it. Do not engage.

* Smart news anchor talks to camera. 'Channel 99' banners and news feeds run across the screen.

NEWS ANCHOR Only three days after declaring techno-apotheosis the Fellowship of the Golden Messiah militia have taken possession of the abandoned Wesfarmers spire. Lawyers from Kerrigan-Wills Combine have disputed the move...

* External shot of porch with AUNTIE JENNY and WALLY.

AUNTIE JENNY Anger continues to grow against the corporations. A storm is coming Julius.

* Exterior evening shot of crowded laneway in a shanty town. WALLY, JONES and BOMBER stand at a corner.

WALLY The alien is in this block. Let's split up.

* BOMBER is slouching on her car and looks up to see three corporate thugs surround her.

IPSEN Remember us?

* Over the shoulder shot of JONES aiming his Tazer at IPSEN, who is standing with PAY and FRISBEE beating BOMBER to the ground.

FX Ominous hum of capacitors....

Eclipse Phase by Lev Lafayette

Adrien La Fontaine (Proxy, with the following Sentinels)

Jack Kayne, US Alien Psychologist, aliens and exsurgents

Gregory Hooker, Botanist, food growth in hostile environments

Farzad Shirazi, sneak thief character

Steve Millan, bar security person, autonomist
Martin Neufeld, IT Person, Solid Ground Initiative, autonomist

Vyvyan (Proxy, with the following Sentinels)
Arwa al-Sulayhi industrial engineer, Arabic Argonaut
Jean-Pierre Mignon telepresence operator,
Angelique Hobart, Fury morph; pilot, navigator, and gunner
Yamada Tarō, tough penetration expert.

Di Yi Nuhai (Proxy, with the following Sentinels)
Mary-Anne Hobart Fury morph; pilots, navigator, and gunner
Ji Gong, Buddhist philosopher, async
Abu Nidal, Scum captain
Ekaterina Molotov, heavy weapons
Siti binti Taarab, singer social

Hermann Blank (Proxy, with the following Sentinels)
Georgia Hobart, Fury morph; pilot, navigator, and gunner
David Wilberforce, information scientist and fraudster
Marie Lee, infiltration and security systems expert
Tjandamurra, a hostile environments specialist.

19.3 The Crews of the Good Planet Venus

With the teams arranged the recently-promoted Proxies sent their Sentinels into action. Adrien's team was assigned by Eludere to find out the scenario being employed by Cognite to kidnap the neo-synergists, with most of the team travelling to Pavraati, but with Farzad travelling to Thought to follow the mission objective. Farzad receives a thorough interview at customs and border control on account of his prior record, but is provided a visa on the precept that he will be undertaking neurological surgery. It is discovered through an electronic trail that the plans are held by the head of security, one Kasper Strumpf. Adrien pays Blackvein the princely sum of 100KCr for documentary proof of Kasper's complicity in serious war crimes on Mars.

Vivian and Hermann's teams attempt to work their way through the Red Cap mines bureaucracy proved challenging, to say the least. Even after footage of Vivian's explorations were shown to the executives of Red Cap, their immediate interest was towards capturing the TITAN industry base and mining equipment. An offer of sending down a team of Q-Morphs with telepresence was proposed, but Vivian found the idea more than a little off-putting. "Nuke the site from orbit, it's the only way to be sure", was the general refrain from those more experienced with TITANs. Lacking support from Red Cap, Vivian has proposed a targeted leaking of the footage to the Planetary Consortium to take decisive action.

Nihai was esconced for a day "writing a report", but was assigned to organise the Sentinels to organise protection for the neo-synergists from a potential kidnapping by Cognite. Firewall unfortunately did not know who was planning the kidnapping, or how. Nihai's took the opportunity to define the area of operations where in Octavia the neo-synergist commune was based, and what potential ingress points there were.

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head of security, one Kasper Strumpf. Adrien pays Blackvein the princely sum of 100KCr for documentary proof of Kasper's complicity in serious war crimes on Mars.

[Nota bene: Gregory Hooker was refused exit from Thought; Jack Kayne could leave]

19.4 Closing the Venusian Blinds

With the gradual and lumbering move of attack ships from the Planetary Consortium making their way to Venus, the Proxies continued carrying out and delivering orders to their Sentinels. First, from Adrien's team, Gregory Hooker organised a meeting with Kasper Strumpf after sending a quantum encrypted file and passphrase to the other Proxies and to their Server, Eludere. Taking an opportunity to view the material even the hardened Adrien was nauseated by the extent of Kasper's warcrimes on Mars.

Adrien passed the information on to Farzad who attended the meeting with Hooker on the third day of his arrival on Thought. Threatened with exposure of his crimes, Kasper reveals the mission to kidnap the neo-synergists has been mandated outside of this office; his job is to implement it. The task is to send an operative to Octavia, who will arrange the transport of the neo-synergists to Thought. At Thought the neo-synergists will be modified with the variant Watt-MacLeod virus and then used to deal with the TITAN threats. Adrien contacts Eludere with this information and their suspicion that this might be Nihai.

Meanwhile Vivian and Hermann to send a feed to Planetary Consortium concerning their failure of Red Cap Mines to protect Venus from an existential risk, as they move their teams move to Pavraati. After three days the Planetary Consortium issued the feed for propaganda purposes, resulting in massive panic and riots especially on Lucifer but also on other aerostats, and even on orbital stations, including Thought. "You can't have thought without worry", quipped Vivian. The government Lucifer, by the end of the day, verified the the feed and arrested the CEO of Red Cap mining and then nuked the site from orbit (it's the only way to be sure), sending down a mop-up squad afterwards. On the fourth day, the Jovian Republic recognised the Planetary Consortium claim over the Morningstar Constellation, whilst at the same time the Consortium calles for an interdict on Venus.

On Octavia, Nihai and her team engaged in a touristy-style visit to the neo-synergist commune, where they were shown the community's homes and work, and research activities. Nihai arranged for a follow-up meeting the next day, asking a series of questions and pointing out a concern with the subtle, "you may become a marketable commodity against your well". On the third day Nihai expressly makes the Cognite offer to Neo-Synergists; after consideration, the Neo-Synergists make request for the same autonomy they have here, which of course isn't entirely possible. Nihai is contacted by Oversight reminding her of her job. As the news report hits and their is panic in the streets, the Neo-Synergists speculate to Nihai of the possibility of going to Thought to receive the modified Watts-MacLeod virus, but then being rescued; a kidnapping within a kidnapping. The following day Cognite's shuttle arrives on Octavia to transport the Neo-Synergists - at the same time, the Proxies and Sentinels from Adrien's, Hermann's and Vivian's teams arrive to have a little talk to Nihai, whose Sentinels are positioned around the commune. Vivian in particular expresses concern that the Neo-Synergists could be an X-Risk if exposed to the new Watts-MacLeod.

19.5 Problems resolved next year, not tomorrow

As the Ni-hai, Hermann, Vivian, and Adrien debate over the issue of neo-synergists and Ni-hai's loyalties to Firewall, the neo-synergists themselves make their own move, informing Ni-hai that they will be leaving via the shuttle to Thought. The debate then turns to whether or not they are an X-Risk or not, with Vivian making the case they they will be, if they are infected by the Watts-MacLeod variant and Ni-hai arguing that they have the right to leave of own volition. The possibility is raised on whether or not the group should contact the Planetary Consortium and inform them what is happening and to that end, Ni-hai contacts Oversight via Captain Renault, pointing out that the neo-synergists seem to be far too enthusiastic and want to move into management positions quickly. Captain Renault accepts the concern by assures Ni-hai that they will monitor the the situation.

The shuttle leaves, first to Pavraati, and then to Thought. Eludere contacts Ni-Hai, asking what is going on with the Neo-Synergists, with Ni-Hai responding they have chosen to leave - Eludere argues it was Ni-Hai's responsibility to prevent this, and sends a message to the other agents to arrest Ni-Hai. The Sentinel teams and the Proxies take several shuttles to Pavraati, just as news comes in that there is good news from Lucifer, with the TITAN threat destroyed and mop-up teams scouring the landscape for any machines. On Pavraati the teams take up residence in a factory to build their own system to reconstruct the trajectory of the TITAN flight-paths as it escaped from Earth; noting that the overwhelming majority of the systems would have made it to Mercury (the ever-loyal Muses give the Proxies and update on the system). Eludere asks Hermann for update on Nihai, as Adrien received a message from Gregory Hook from Thought, telling him that he cannot be part of Firewall as he has become a Neo-Synergist, which he says is an amazing experience, especially now that they no longer need mesh inserts for communication, and that their number has grown to sixty.

Hermann contacts Eludere to say that Nihai required as a window to Oversight, and points out that the TITAN threat is almost certainly on Mercury. Arawa contacts Jovians about what is happening on Thought. Meanwhile Nihai contacts Captain Renault about situation as it seems that the Neo-Synergists are well on their way to taking up management roles. A less-than-happy Eludere contacts Hermann to mention that ship to Mercury is arriving, as the received reports that from the Eden mining and hydroponic habitat on Mercury that several miners have gone missing and it is possible that this is there TITAN. When the ship does arrive there is a couple of surprises; first it is being piloted by Pyotr Kozlov, whom the Proxies were once guests of, back on Ceres. Also surprising present was a newcomer in a large cellar-spider-like morph. "Hello mother", it introduced itself to Ni-Hai in song, "I'm Mika".

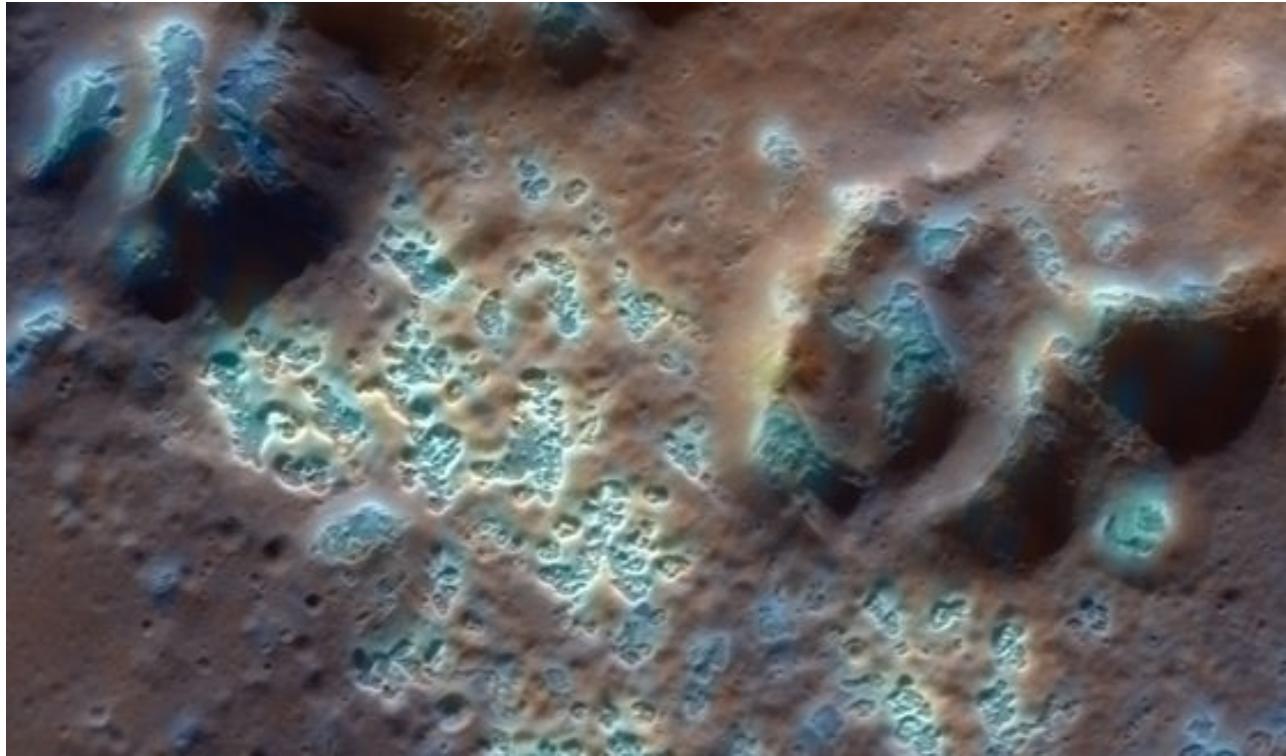
20.0 Mercurial Times

20.1 The Sunscreen Factor

The Proxies and their Sentinels made their journey to Eden, a small and quite mis-named mining and food colony on Mercury. First settled in AF2 by refugees, the community of some two thousand transhumans (about 60% synthmorphs), an uplifted octopus, and an AGI are organized as a direct democracy collective that gathers every day via the Mesh in the Eden Council, where all but the AGI and the twelve children have voting rights. All property in the habitat is collective and work, time, and goods are assigned by the Programming Office, which accounts for interests, tastes, and abilities. It is a demanding environment and there is little opportunity for entertainment or free time. There are three central seats of power in the community, which are voted on twice a year, being the chair of Eden Council, the chair of the Programming Office, the Chair of Relations. Elissee Dewager was the original thinker of the establishment of the habitat has been chair of Eden Council for most of its existence. Rudolph Dewager, Elissee's first husband, has the position of chair of the Programming Office, and Tron, a mining synth-morph, is in charge of relations.

Following the reports that several miners have gone missing in Eden, the cover for the team is a search-and-rescue mission, with technical teams (e.g., Jack Kayne on the electronic lifts) and others supplementing. Nobody else has taken up the offer due to the paltry payment offered, but Firewall recognised that this may be the TITAN quarry. Following the lead of where the miners went missing, two thin shafts were noted that were not immediately recognisable from communications and scanning equipment, as much of the environment already consisted of hollows systems. Following the shafts down there was a notable shift towards a more curiously organic surface, something which more experienced members of the team recognised as reminiscent of the Factor spacecraft that they encountered many months ago.

Making their way into a larger central room, the Sentinels first perceived the smell of alcohol before they were surprised by a sudden attack by a giant Factor with clear intent to harm. Sporadic visual and audio communication from the team indicated a mighty battle in place, with kinetic weapons splattering and breaking up the Factor, but which it responded by forming multiple opponents. The battle was swift as it was deadly, with only one sentinel, David, escaping to tell the tale.



From: https://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2011/24oct_sleepyhollows

20.2 Mercury Poisoning

Following integration and alienation tests for the new morphs of those who had the misfortune to encounter the Factor, the Proxies and their Sentinels prepared themselves for hunting down the Factor. Hermann expressed concern that this could lead to an interstellar and multi-species conflict, whilst Vivian raised concerns that the Factor may be in league with the TITAN. Adrien made use of their research skills and knowledge of xeno-life forms to try to find out what sort of Factor it was; a single publication made mention of a similar creature, a Factor Gestalt, although this being did not seem to share many of the same characteristics - one notable difference was that the Eden Factor seem include the physical visage of those beings that had been absorbed by it, although it did include the similarity of the apparent ineffectiveness of kinetic weapons.

Hermann came up with the idea of testing the population of Eden for DNA. The message was raised with Elisse Dewager, who agreed, and the most opportune time would after the meal break. Although the colony was relatively impoverished, a ban was placed on all goods entering and leaving the colony, even though a transport vessel was just in the process of loading food products. In the meantime a message was sent through the Egg Board, those who were assigned to protect the giant Factors Egg that hovered above Mercury. Mika the Iktomi informed Ni-Hai that the egg rotated.

Based on their experiences with the Eden Factor, the Proxies and their Sentiels had ascertained that only biomorphs were likely to be infected, although synthmorphs were certainly subject to being disassembled. The tests were difficult however; after a few seconds it was possible to guess whether a biomorph had a human DNA background. A more conclusive determination would take at least half an hour per sample - and with some eight hundred biomorphs to test, the cost in time was prohibitive.

As the DNA tests were being conducted, Adrien noticed a disturbance in the starship port; a biomorph, one of those who had not undergone the DNA test, was boarding the transport vessel. Adrien hurried to the port, noticing that three guards had been killed, but it was too late. Adrien managed to get on the right side of the port door as the afterburners of the vessel kicked in and it exited into Mercury's space. A hurried message was relayed to nearby settlements; the Factor Gestalt, or at least part of it, was out.

Adrien received a message from The Factors, after attempting to contact them. An ambassador gave the traditional Factor warnings - don't build AGIs, don't go through the gates, don't use synthmorphs – before mentioning that the gestalt-like Factor on Mercury was indeed one of theirs, a prisoner of sorts as it had succumbed to a madness after integrating with transhumans. The ambassador requested that it be contained, not harmed.

Hermann pointed out that the Proxies and their Sentinels may have just started an inter-species and inter-stellar war.

20.3 Who Goes Where?

With part of the Factor Gestalt escaped and part of it still on the Eden base combat teams are formed from the Proxies and their Sentinels. Adrien's group consists of Fahzad and Jack Kayne, Hermann's with Djadamurra and David, Vivian with Jean-Pierre and Ni-hai with Abu Nidal. Going deep into the mines David finds three disassembled synth-morphs. As expected, a Factor Guardian was encountered and destroyed with plasma weapons and lasers. Of note it was discovered that the electro-shock capability of the Factor was also the most likely cause for the disruption of communication channels.

Whilst successful in destroying this one part of the Gestalt, Eden based noted that radio contact with Delacroix-Shelley, the largest Mercury based, failed, and then shortly afterwards, the second largest, Lumina. Adrien thought it appropriate to take the opportunity to send an report to Euledere, updating the Server on the situation.

Ni-hai communicates with Life, the Eden AGI about what can be done, who responds entirely in passages from Shakespeare - apparently this is normal. Mass panic began to break out on Eden as incoming radio signals were being sent from Venus asking for updates. Adrien received a further message from the neo-synergists on Venus, that they would come to help. Euledere forwarded the Proxies the Mozart Protocol:

Incoming Message.]

[Source: Anonymous]

[Public Key Decryption Complete]

MOZART PROTOCOL.

CLASS: COMPARTMENTALIZED, ALPHA BLACK SIX

FIREWALL CACHE OF WEAPONIZED ANTIMATTER LOCATED IN CRATER MOZART SOUTH OF CALORIS PLANITIA. IN EVENT OF LOSS OF QUARANTINE, CALORIS 18 IS TO BE

VAPORIZED. TOTAL TITAN EXTERMINATION MANDATED. ALLOWABLE TARGET ESCAPE

PERCENTAGE: ZERO. ALLOWABLE COLLATERAL DAMAGE: UNLIMITED. ACTION ON PROXY

AUTHORITY ONLY.#

Hermann, Vivian, Jack Kayne, Angelique, Fazrad, Steve, etc took their to find out what had happened at Lumina and Delacroix-Shelley, whereas Nihai and her team stays at lab. Flying to the hypercorp Lumina station there was no radio contact, and the lights were out, although it was noticed that 'bots on the ground were building solar arrays at speed. As the main body of Proxies and Sentinels made their way to Delacroix-Shelley, the remaining 'morphs on Eden found that perimeter defenses were failing.

At Delacroix-Shelley the party avoided missile attacks and made radio contact with a force of six soldiers holed up, and requesting evacuation as the base had been taken over by TITANs. The party suggested that they should break out and destroy the base instead. Meanwhile on Eden the remaining morphs started moving backups from storage to the last

ship on Eden, then the synthmorphs, and even the AGI "Life". The travelling party reaches the antimatter cache near Coloris and Vivian reconfigures the missile to go to Lumina and launches, scoring a successful hit and completely destroying the station.

Meanwhile, the smaller Mercury stations - Al-Hamadhanj, Cannon, and Hellwatch - all go offline. There are now no more Mercury stations in radio contact with the exception of Eden, and that one is clearly under some stress. The Factor ambassador contacts Adrien expressing the grave concerns that the alien species has with the potential escape of a TITAN and informs Adrien that transhumanity had better destroy the TITAN outbreak, otherwise they will have to make use of "The Egg". Adrien's Muse whispers "if some advanced intelligence were able to figure out a method to cause the star's interior to burn down to a core of iron and nickel, the sun would explode in a supernova, wiping out the entire solar system." Hermann suggests that it perhaps time to escape to the Vulcanoid asteroid V/2011-Caldwell, where the closest Pandora Gate is located, near Sol's surface.

20.4 Quicksilver Escapes

After much debate and radio chatter the Proxies decided that the scale of problem was getting well and truly out of hand. Following Hermann's suggestion of self-preservation being the better part of valour, moves were made to escape to the Vulcanoid asteroid V/2011-Caldwell, and through the Gate. On Eden, as the defensive perimeter became smaller and smaller from the onslaught of increasing numbers of Factor-infected biomorphs, and any stray synthmorphs was disassembled, a lottery was quickly put into place as the ship could only take one hundred passengers. Only a handful of biomorphs were permitted; the sixteen children, the octomorph who made an appeal on the basis of the uniqueness of their morph, and the Sentinels, as they had no recent backups. Some argued against the AGI being assigned a place on the ship, however it was listed under cargo, which also included the cornucopia machine and almost two thousand stacks of the infected, deceased, and soon-to-be deceased. Elisse Dewager, elderly chairwoman of the colony, in her biomorph, decided to stay behind until the bitter end.

Meanwhile the Khara-Khoto, piloted by Pyotr Kozlov, and carrying Vivian and Hermann's team, began their journey to V/2011-Caldwell, which was a major gate to several systems. Adrien got it into his head that this would be a good opportunity to contact Eludere and explain what had happened, given that there was only several hours before the Morningstar fleet would arrive, and see if there was any Vulcanoid Firewall agents. Euledere mentioned that there was a Firewall agent in the Vulcanoids, one Benjamin Kurosawa, nano-ecology expert, but had not been on active missions for some time. She also suggested, quite strongly, that Delacroix-Shelly did have antimatter bombs, and now that these were in the TITAN's control that it was necessary to turn them against it.

Adrien contacted Benjamin to warn them of their incoming vessel and their desire to make use of the Gate to get out of the system before it was destroyed. Benjamin indicated that the Vulcanoid populations were aware of the TITAN menace on Mercury, although the matter of the Factor's Egg was new information to him. He pointed out that V/2011-Caldwell had taken a precaution of evacuating almost everyone to exoplanets, with the exception of a military guard who were to prevent any possible TITAN infection – and that meant no synthmorphs, as they could be hacked. To emphasise the point he displayed an image of the V/2011-Caldwell vulcanoid, its orbit surrounded by hundreds of surya, the solar whales, each with mounted particle cannons.

The news struck the Proxies harshly, as the Eden shuttle was almost entirely full of synthmorphs. Vivian suggested returning to Mercury and informing the TITAN about the Factor's plans and negotiating a mutual solution; an insane suggestion under insane circumstances. Stopping a minimum safe distance from the Delacroix-Shelley base, they opened a communication channel with the Vostok-Kunlun TITAN and explained in greater detail than it had access to the behaviour of The Factors and in particular the function of The Egg. Hermann also took the opportunity to transmit this information to the incoming Morningstar Constellation fleet. The TITAN raised an attack missile towards the Egg, conducted some quick calculations, and realised that it would destroy Mercury if destroyed at this range. Instead, it disassembled itself into packets, and fired these towards V/2011-Caldwell, as the fleet arrived. A single fighter craft carrying an anti-matter missile approached the Egg at a rapid trajectory, fired the missile and scored a direct hit.

As the antimatter destroyed the Unbihexium shell of The Egg, it released a black hole some two hundred meters in diameter. This created an intense gravitational field that literally tore Mercury apart. Its life was short however, and almost immediately after this great destructive force, it underwent evaporation, releasing black-body Hawking radiation. Mercury, The Egg, and the Gestalt Factor were all destroyed, along with the craft that fired the anti-matter missile.

In a sense, the Proxies had won. But they were now faced with what would be very angry Factors, and the components of a TITAN hurtling towards the Vulcanoid Gate and at its connection to eleven other systems.

21.0 The Icarus Singularity

21.1 A Holiday in the Sun

Outside the Vulcanoid asteroid V/2011-Caldwell the Khara-Khoto docked with the Eden spacebus A300. The Proxies and the Sentinels from Eden joined the rest of the party on the Khara-Khoto and the teams were united. Meanwhile, the Eden spacebus parked itself a minimum safe quarantine distance from the surya and the dolphin and orca allies.

As the Proxies were considering their next move, Adrien received a call from Eludere asking what happened at Mercury; an explanation of what happened to Mercury wasn't required - it was destroyed courtesy of the Morningstar antimatter missile fired by Col. Paul Tibbets, and more to the point what had happened to the TITAN. Following Vivian's suggestion ("TITAN's are really smart") it was explained that it seemed to have at least partially escaped. Eludere responded with the news that the Jehovah TITAN has broken through the Interdict and was currently making very short work of the stations in Earth orbit.

Hermann took the opportunity to conduct a scan of the environment and caught at least forty two (an auspicious number) of the "flying toasters", as he dubbed them, on the way to Caldwell. Being very small and with a radar designed to pick up much larger objects, Hermann was aware that there could be hundreds more, at least, of these toasters flying through space. He arranged for Adrien to forward such a message to Caldwell.

As Adrien completed this message, the Neo-synergists made contact and a request to dock. There was some concern among the party of this hive-mind, but they did so with Gregory Hook in the lead. Amazingly, the Neo-synergists made the suggestion that the Proxies and the Sentinels might wish to join their hive-mind. Most refused the offer, being quite attached to their individual and private thoughts, however Jean-Pierre Mignon took up the option, and as also such became infected with the Watts-MacLeod exsurgent virus.

A panicked call was then received from Caldwell that the TITANs had landed and had combined into a fleet of a hundred or so Think Tanks, that were making fairly short work the suryas and their allies. The Khara-Khoto landed, with Vivian and Jean-Paul de-stacked and integrated in salamander morphs, whilst the rest of the party came out guns blazing, with the heavily armed and armoured Adrien and Hermann in the lead. A direct hit from the Think-Tank's plasma cannon turned Adrien's battlesuit to a smoldering stack of twisted metal and slag, but the occupant was unharmed. Shortly afterwards the Think-Tank was disabled.

Vivian, who had spent several months and multiple forks working a paraconsistent programming paradigm to make the TITANS less prone to their unforgiving violent disposition, took the opportunity to reprogram the TITAN with digital virus. It was a lengthy process and whilst it was occurring a second Think-Tank spotted the group, but again the Proxy and Sentinel team proved their worth as elite agents of Firewall, and downed it in record time.

Meanwhile the virus propagated throughout the TITAN network, and the TITAN adopted a new stance. Whereas previously TITANs would seek to destroy opposition - as completely as possible and with tactical and strategic genius - Vostok-Kunan took the approach of minimising losses through parley. The TITAN made it clear that it wanted to

grow and expand, and given that transhumans wanted to stop that, it was evident that they were the enemy. It was now up to the Firewall team to convince it otherwise.

Nota bene: The TITANS were originally designed with formal logic with Bayesian inference and machine learning. When they encountered a contradiction it followed the principle of "ex contradictione sequitur quodlibet" (from a contradiction, anything follows), which would mean defaulting to its principles of (a) survive and (b) destroy potential threats that threaten survival.

Vivian's low-level programming added paraconsistent logic to the process. When the Bayesian-inferred value is "both" (both potential enemy and potential ally) its programming now defaults to "negotiate", where informal logic can prevail. Its primary objectives have not changed, however the path to achieve them has.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraconsistent_logic#An_ideal_three-valued_paraconsistent_logic

It still comes across as a weaponised robot.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEby9OkePpg>



21.2 Faustian Agreements

An uneasy standoff continued at the Vulcanoid asteroid V/2011-Caldwell as Surya, the Proxies and their Sentinels, and the remains of the Vostok-Kunan swarm TITAN negotiated their future, and perhaps the future of transhumanity itself, against the bright and hot backdrop of Sol. As options were weighed, Adrien received a message from Euludere seeking an update on activities, which was provided with something approaching gallows humour. For their own part, the rest of the system seemed to be busy as well, with Euludere reporting that the Jehovah TITAN was making steady progress through the LaGrange habitats and was approaching Luna, whilst civil unrest had broken out in Jovian space with one Santo Juan declaring a gospel that the Jehovah TITAN was in fact the "word made metal", and that Jovians should seek to surrender the stacks to the TITAN.

Meanwhile out in Saturn, the Commonwealth has drawn its forces close and was engaging in an orderly evacuation through the Pandora Gate, which refugee status offered to their allies on Locus. Far out on the border of the system, Ultimates at the Discord Gate report arrival of several Factor ships who engage in aggressive action, and that the

Discord Gate is believed to be taken. With the success of the paraconsistent logic program, Vivian passed this on to Firewall.

The option was raised of the prospect of having the TITAN become a member of the neo-synergists. The Neo-Synergists confirmed they had the assimilated Cognite's developments on the Watts-MacLeod virus which would allow attacking actions against synth-morphs, but the transfer of the infection would be difficult to say the least. It would be a lot easier if the TITAN was part of a bio-morph - such as a surya for example. Vostok-Kunan made the point that, as far as they knew, none of transhumanity's TITANs were responsible for that particular strain of the exsurgent virus.

Ni Hai mentioned that a preference of going back to Echo or even Droplet, which spurred Mika The Iktomi to mention that their species too had encountered the Factors and had members with async powers appear after the their mechanised AGIs turned on their creators. From this it seemed to those present that it was at least possible that the Factors were responsible for Watts-MacLeod - after all, it reduced the ability for the infected to resist traumatic experience, and typically came with serious mental derangements.

The stand-off was eventually broken however by the sudden arrival of some fifty or so Factors who, as was typical, admonished transhumanity for letting TITANs loose and for using the Gates; it was not unnoticed that they had used the Gate to arrive as well. Some sharp thinking by Hermann proposed simultaneously on private channels that they combine forces with the Factors to destroy the TITANs and that they also ally with the TITANs to destroy the Factors (it was suggested to the Surya that they slip away). The resulting battle was quick and devastating as Factor and TITAN clashed, with the latter ultimately victorious and around ten escaping through the now-deserted Gate.

The Sentinels rushed to the Gate to find out what had happened. The TITAN remains had escaped to Willowane, a vacuum planet with a high iron content, magnetosphere, and plenty of rare earths, but also known alien artifacts. The Factors had come through from Basilica and so Benjamin resleeved from a Surya to a Salamander to act as Gate operator. On the other side, there was evident carnage from what looked like a Factor invasion. Adrien was first through with Jack Kane who reacted badly to the Gate journey, and revealed his true character as an infected Gesalt Factor. Whilst Jack was eventually burnt by Adrien's plasma rifle, it was not before Adrien has suffered an infected wound, requiring him to be destacked and added into a new morph - a Ghost - as Vivian contacted Just In Case to explain what had happened.

As the rest of the Sentinels and the Proxies regrouped, debate broke out on what to do next. Ni Hai wanted to bug out entirely and go back to Echo, adopting a position of de-engagement from the world. Hermann wanted to approach the Factors with a view to negotiation and avoidance of an interstellar war, and would give details of where the remains of Vostok-Kunan had gone. Vivian argued that The Factors were now the main existential risk and that a neutron bomb (kindly donated by Just In Case) should be pushed through to the Discord Gate. Adrien argued both positions - negotiation *with* a bomb. The debate raged in the blood-and-pus smeared Basilica station above what was supposed to be a refuge for Transhumanity.

21.3 Gates of Wrath

The debate over the means of negotiation with The Factors did not last much longer; their attack on Transhumanity could not go without a response, and Hermann's response was "blow the bastards up!". With the aid of Benjamin's skills the Gate was set to Discord, and the neutron bomb was sent through with a very short fuse. It would, at least, prevent The Factors from returning to Basicala for at least a couple of weeks. With the recognition that Basicala was also connected to the Pandora gate, and footage showed that The Factors had made short work of the Commonwealth refugees who have arrived there.

Thus, coordinates were sent to that location, where the Proxies and their Sentinels came up close to some three score heavily armed and angry members of the Commonwealth; it was clear that The Factors had also tried to take this locations as well, but had encountered the sort of surprising resistance that the Commonwealth is known for. But back

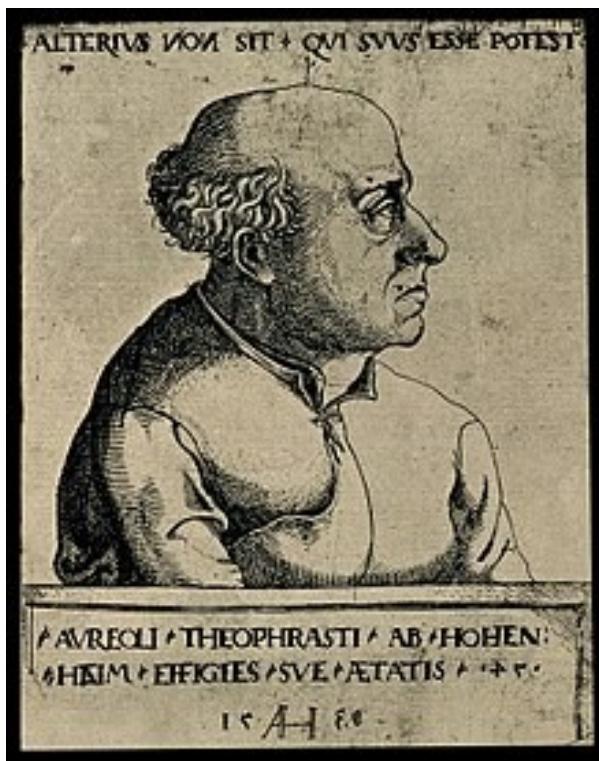
in familiar territory, the teams were able to meet with their old ally, the Firewall Server Professor Magnus Qiao-sen Ming. Professor Magnus was able to give them an update on the events of The War.

Firstly, the Jehovah TITAN has incorporated various systems in various La Grange habitats and now has subsystems spreading out across the Lunar systems, taking down various bases, and headhunters and extractors in the Lunar streets. It was clear that it was only a matter of time before the Lunar colonies fell to this expanding monstrosity. There has also been surprising victories in the Jovian system on the Santo Juan heresy, now nicknamed "Jehovah's Witnesses", with adoption of many Reclaimers, with large sections of Ganymede in rebellion and headhunters and extractors in the streets. The Republic military and police are engaging in brutal suppression of rebellions. Also, there was an outbreak of prisoners from Io maximum security Maui Patera Rehabilitation Center. With the Proxies back in the Sol system, Eludere was also able to provide an additional update of events in the inner system; where the Whales had joined - in all senses of the word - with the Neo-Synergists.

Despite Ni-Hai's protestations that the Echo exoplanets were so nearby, the party decided that a return to Mars was in order, especially given their calculations that this would be the next planet to be subject to the TITANs attack. Hermann's evaluation strongly suggested that it only a pre-emptive coordinated attack would work, as the TITAN would continue to grow in strength. With Hermann and Ni Hai both locatin the owners of their original morphs, a decision was made to jump through the Pandora to Babylon and Bablyon to the Martian gate, some considering was raised about trying to capture the Babylon alien craft, particularly after Adrien's review noted it was made of Unbihexium, used by The Factors as a shell for both prisons and their black hole bombs. After all, having destroyed a planet a solar system is the next step up.

Arriving at Mars, Hermann was feeling a bit out-of-sorts [personality of Mohommad takes over], although this was common among several members of the team. The rapid succession of jumping through gates can be very taxing on the mind leading to identifiable short-term derangements. A backup of Jack Kane was transmitted from Venus and

resleeved. Whilst on Mars, amidst the panic, the party met with Eludere and plotted their next move - Firewall being increasing open with their resourcing. A military spacecraft was located and was taken to low orbit where a tight beam to a a surving LaGrange comsat through the gaping hole of The Interdict to Barcelona. Here they discussed with Mare Nostrum the possibility of further developing Vivian's Paraconsistent Logic Virus, and also the prospect of engaging in a venture to the mid-Atlantic Ridge, where the Jehovah TITAN was launched from. After all, if a transhuman keeps backups, it's worth assuming that TITANs do as well. Mare Nostrum agreed with the strategy and noted that there were submersible morphs available for the characters. Taking the opportunity to illegally alpha fork off the satellite to Barcelona, the following Proxies and Sentinels were transmitted before the TITAN destroyed the comsat; Adrien La Fontaine, Jack Kayne, Vivian, Angelique Hobart, Di Yi Nuhai, Marianne Hobart, Hermann, Georgia Hobart.



21.4 Nada, The Lazy Fish

The reduced number of Proxies and Sentinels transmitted to Clinic Hospital Universitari were interrogated by Mare Nostrum 37, and they explained the current state of affairs

with the rise of the JHVH TITAN. Vivian offered the suggestion that a return to the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, where the TITAN arose, could provide information on its strengths and weaknesses, and the potential to modify the the paraconsistent logic rootkit ("PARACELSUS") for greatest effect; after all, the rogue TITAN was as much a threat to Mare Nostrum as it was to the rest of Transhumanity. Mare Nostrum agreed and making use of the some helpful AGIs worked on resleeving after transmitted egos to new 'morphs appropriate to the mission, the Hospital del Mar, where a number of oceanic morphs were located. Specifically the ego were sleeved into the following morphs.

Adrien La Fontaine, Takkos
Jack Kayne, Takkos
Vivian, Nautolid, Octomorph
Angelique Hobart, Neo-Whale
Di Yi Nuhai, Neo-Dolphin
Marianne Hobart, Neo-Orca
Hermann, Nova Crab
Georgia Hobart, Neo-Dolphin

Resleeving is always a difficult business, and ego forks are particularly well-known for issues with psychological integration. Vivian found both the Nautolid and Octomorph difficult to get used to, as did Marianne with the Neo-Orca, but the psychological effects were worse. Adrien started to suffer mood swings, Hermann developed an overwhelming admiration of their self, Georgia was suffering from tremors, whereas Angelique complained bitterly about their status in the neo-whale albeit with no obvious negative effects.

Realising that something was amiss, Adrien took the initiative and scoured the hospital for medications eventually finding a maker and producing some appropriate anti-psychotics. As the party started the long trip down to the equatorial Mid-Atlantic Ridge, Jack Kayne begin intensive psychotherapy sessions with various members of the party who were mentally out-of-sorts. It was a very time-consuming process with one dramatic failure as Georgia suffered avatars and swam away from the party, firm in her belief that she now actually was a dolphin. The mind is fragile thing.

As the party approached their destination submersibles were noted, and with the occasional Think Tank found to be scouting the region. Vivian pulled upon on the submersibles finding that it was full of modules and stacks. Invesiting the computer it was found to have originated in Dakar, Senagel. Reprogramming the cargo boat, it was sent on its way with a camera attached and, when it returned, the footage indicated the building of a new TITAN.

Alarmed by this proposect the party considered their options; eventually Adrien volunteered to investigate the baee with a rendez-vous set several days in advance. Making use of their infiltration skills and aided by the Takkos chameleon powers, and the roughness of the rideline, Adrien travelled quite close to the TITAN base, noting large numbers of submersibles and Think Tanks building a new TITAN, along with a databank system. As this footage was being collected, unfortunately, unbeknownst to Adrien, he had been spotted...

21.5 A Dead End Job

While surveying with great interest the building of a new TITAN, there was a flash of light, and faster than consciousness could process it Adrien felt a great deal, then nothing at all. After a day, the others began to worry a bit. "Shouldn't Adrien be back by now? Something bad has probably happened to him", observed Vivian sagely. "We should swim away", suggested Nihai, quite appropriately. "About now", said Hermann, as a few hundred metres away a half-dozen submerisible Think Tanks, fanned out, headed in the direction of the party.

Vivian in the Nautolid, with Hermann in the Nova Crab in tow, made their exits quickly, as did Jack Kane in the Takos, the neo-whale Angelique, and Mary-Anne and Nihai. The Vivian fork in the Octomorph hid in the crevices, the body morphing into the surrounding background, hoping to get a close look at the Think Tanks.

Although why anyone would want to do that is perplexing. Whilst four of the Think Tanks were too distant to make a proper scan, two did. One was completely oblivious to the Octomorph. The other made direct visual contact. The Octomorph prepared to escape, but the Tank was quicker. There was a brief flash of light, and the Octomorph was no more.

Fortunately the Tanks were slow, and needed to cover a lot of area; the Agents made their way to a rendez-vous point several kilometres away and assessed their options. "Cheyenne Mountain Complex?" "Almost certainly destroyed". "Nuclear weapons? "All used up during The Fall". "All of them?" "Well, we could search the entire planet Earth for one that got away". "We need to destroy that new TITAN. Who has infiltration and demolitions skills?". Eyes turned to Hermann.

Using part of Jack Kane's Chameleons Suit the Nautoloid fabricator created a new one suitable to fit the Nova Crab. A set of limpet mines were also provided, and crab Hermann scuttled towards the garden of Eden, which as good as any name. There was, of course, a perimeter guard of a Think Tank. Boldly, Angelique the Neo-Whale, and Marianne the Neo-Orca charged the Tank with hope of providing a distraction. It was successful, in the sense, that Hermann slipped past the perimeter defense. It was unsuccessful for the Sentinels as the Tank opened its weaponry on them, destroying them both before they could engage properly.

From a vantage point Hermann surveyed the 200m long ADAM TITAN-in-production. A couple of Think Tanks stood guard. A range of worker bots scurried over the TITAN engaging in various construction activities. A sequence of activity was noted, a point of ingress found, and, under the stealth of the suit, Hermann went in with ten limpet mines attached to his limbs.

First at the crown, then between the eyes, then at the throat ("sahasrara", "ajna", "vishuddha", the words came unbidden to his mind). Making his way through the body, workers were spotted at various junctures, but Hermann managed to avoid them. Another mine where the heart ("anahata") and navel ("manipura") would be on a humanoid, and a confused worker bot spotted the crab. It tried to scuttle away, but Hermann grabbed it with a pincer and tore it apart. Hermann continued down in the body, and, taking a peak out of where a kneecap would be, noticed two Think Tanks heading towards the TITAN. He rushed to the ankle, where the last mine would be placed, but saw that the Tanks were upon him. He pressed a button, and all was bright and beautiful.

Five Sentinels and Proxies had now been killed, but there was still a desire to find out what had happened, and also whether there was anything of the original mission - to find the backups of the Jehovah TITAN. Nihai considered the task, but considered living discretion to be far to dead valour. Instead, brave Jack Kane took up the task and made their way into position and surveyed the wreckage which was, as one would expect, what it would look like if a skyscraper had been blown apart. Pathetically some worker robots continued on their pre-ordained task trying to build and repair the TITAN body. Perhaps in a few month's time they would make some headway.

More importantly however Jack did spot what seemed to be a workshop or hanger; his professional opinion was that if one was to keep a backup of a supercomputer, this would be place to do it. The fact that it was guarded by a TITAN made it even more probable. Making his way back to the party he relayed the information. Vivian took the opportunity to capture another submersible, and encode it with updated information for Mare Nostrum. Given that at least five Stacks had been lost it seemed probable that the TITAN would know everything that the Sentinels and Proxies knew; about Mare Nostrum, about the fact that the Agents were present, about the PARACELSUS virus.

22.1 Worthwhile Problems

"It seems that the influence of your teacher has been to give you a false idea of what are worthwhile problems. The worthwhile problems are the ones you can really solve or help solve, the ones you can really contribute something to" - Richard Feynman to a former student.

Receiving a calling card, hand-delivered no less with gold-leaf trim, the Proxies were informed that the Server Das Frettchen would be available to meet them at a bar on Olympus Mons. It turned out to be very expensive and very exclusive, with devastating views. The Ferret was Anglo-American in appearance, WASPish, but carried himself with a level of barely contained menace. He explained that the Proxies and their Sentinels were to go to the Feyman Base on Mars, as some difficulties has arisen.

The base was owned by OmniCor, and had long been suspected of engaging in nanoplague experimentation, contrary to various Lunar treaties. A Firewall sentinel placed in the base confirmed this, but to little avail as a few weeks ago the base was overrun with exsurgent Immolators. If this wasn't bad enough now with the Jehovah TITAN present, a force from the TITAN had attacked the base and now it was believed to have Extractors and the usual robots running riot in the place. Omnicor also had a protective component, an anti-matter bomb. Having control of the bomb is considered very important.

Of note is the relative proximity to Feyman to New Mumbai which remains under quarantine and off limits after an exsurgent virus outbreak some years ago and the subsequent nuking. Recently, a Firewall sync who participated in a low scouting flight over the crater. According to her report, she experienced odd feelings of some sort of presence down in the ruins, reaching out to her. Given the distances involved, this presence must have impressive sync abilities.

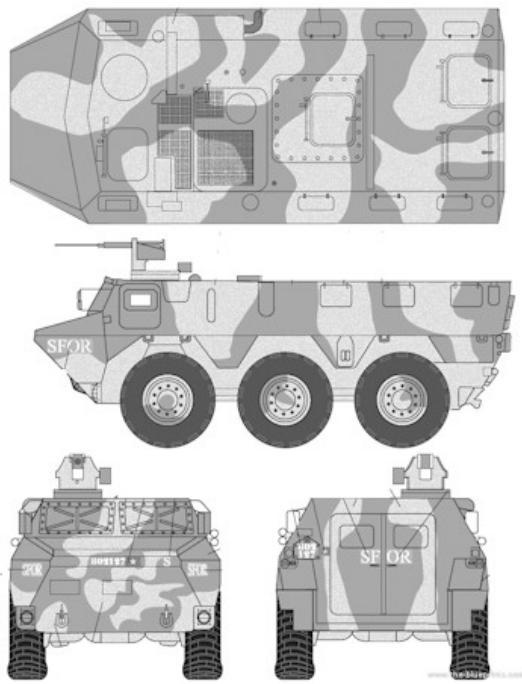
Rather than taking a ship through what was now a war-zone, the Proxies and their Sentinels were ego-cast to Nectar, where they were able to be placed into some medium level morphs as well select a range of weapons. Very shortly after Nihai completed her print-out of her sword and bow, she received a call from her old friend Captain Renault, who being the sort of character he was, invited her to dinner at the discreet French restaurant La Chaumiere. Over that dinner Renault indicated that he was very aware of the situation on Feyman (bomb and all), and requested that Ni hai keep him up-to-date. He also made an offer that if everything went terribly wrong that he had made a plan for escape, providing her the means to contact him. Finally, Renault provided an APC for the group to travel to Feynman in, rather like a Lunar-version of an Véhicule de l'Avant Blindé.

The party took the vehicle towards Feynman, noting that the checkpoints between the station and its neighbours were now entirely placed with guns facing Feynman. Driving down the tunnels, they found themselves only a couple of hundred meters from the entrance to the base when they attacked by an emplacement at the end of the tunnel. Adopted discretion in preference to valour, the party retreated to five kilometres difference where there was an access shaft to the surface. From there they made their way on foot, with two remaining on guard.

Hermann and Adrien acted as scouts, until they spotted - and were spotted by - a Lunar buggy with two exsurgeants. A short but conclusive firefight broke out, with the exsurgeants no match for the superior weaponry, skill, and armour of the Firewall agents. Taking command of the buggy, the party planned their next actions.

22.2 Same equations, Same solutions

Bringing most of the party together, the Sentinels and their Proxies made their way to the Feyman base, leaving David



and Ektrina in the VAB. On reaching the outer walls, the party surprised some Immolator exsugents, who fled futher into the compound, Vivian cut a perfect section of glass, and the party sought a rapid ingress into this top level, which seemed to be largely terraformed to some extent with wide open fields and occasional greenhouses, barns, and similar buildings. Taking the opportunity to break into a local information booth, the party acquired a general map of the complex, noting that the place was built a little like an inverted pyramid; a "countryside" of sorts on the surface, then a smaller urban and industrial zone benath that, and then finally, governmental, special research, and military. The most restricted parts were, of course, not available on the public maps, but it was fairly clear where they were. Also of note was a single central shaft that presumably was for space vehicle ingress and egress.

The party made their way towards this central shaft, skirting from one building to the next and hoping to stay out the way of any possible attackers. The fields were strewn with the debrie of various battles, the wreckage of TITAN machines and the de-stacked bodies of exsurgents. At one point they noted the slow hum of TITAN headhunters and hid themselves in one of the buildings. Later, there was the burst of gunfire and taking a viewing position, they watched in fascination as a large group of Immolator exsurgents confronted TITAN headhunters and extractors. Although there was heavy casualties on both sides, in this battle the exsurgents were victorious. As they neared the central shaft, the group was surprised by a dog, which was befriended by Adrien. Checking it over the dog was just a plain-ol' dog with no augments above the basic health improvements. The dog however, was tagged, it's named was "Laika", with the owner's contact details available. Later it was discovered that Laika would let out a series of barks alerting the party to the presence of TITAN machines.

Breaking the code to enter the central shaft region, some of the Sentinels and Proxies elected to go downstairs into the industrial and urban zone. With Hermann, Adrien, Yamada, and NiHai taking the downward path, the rest of the party stayed upstairs into a barn. The underground region was, in some ways, like a small underground underground city. However, for a place that had a population of some 50,000 it was like a ghost town. There were de-stacked bodies, but nothing like that which visitors to Earth had witnessed. Where was everyone? There was no time to determine this, as the sound of TITAN extractors led the party to make a rapid retreat through several buildings towards their objective - the local council offices. There, the noticed a militarised fortification. Yama took a path into the offices via a neighbouring building, making their way passed a family orgy, a known side-effect of the Immolator exsurgent virus. Breaking into the council offices they were able to enter the local mesh and get copies of various conduit pipes and the like, which was not on the public maps. Also, they overhead some military operations discussed in the council offices.

Following the air conditioning pipes and vents, the party made their way into the secure research zone, by-passing the security that had been placed at the entrance. In one room near this point, the bodies of several immolators on medical benches was located, and the party entered the room in hope of discovering more information. Alas, they were spotted and attacked by no less than a TITAN stalker. In the battle that followed, Hermann was rendered unconscious, but the party defeated the deadly machine, and it was quickly booby-trapped by Angelique. As extractors entered the room, the party made their way through the conduit, eventually reaching a central point, where an anti-matter bomb on a rocket launch was protected by two TITAN think tanks.

22.3 How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb

Locating the well-protected bomb, the Proxies and their Sentinels engaged in an action that they are experienced with; shooting things with extreme prejudice. As an explosion was heard in the distance (later determined to the booby-trapped Stalker), Adrien took a tactical initiative by sneaking in and opening fuel valves before they were spotted by a Think Tank. Nevertheless, the objective has been achieved, as a thermite grenade was dropped causing some serious issues to the Tank caught in the flames. As this was going on Abu Nidal decided to make their way to the rocket, whilst Nihai, joined by Yama fought a rearguard action with the appearance of several Extractors, identified by their 'clicky-clack' sounds as they scuttled on the stainless steel vent corridors. Marianne, Angelique, and Georgia fought in a most-sisterly manner and in an act of solidarity decided to all miss their target and back off as a Fetch, a cut-down

TITAN made an appearance. Hermann on the other hand waded into the battle, and with impressive shooting from Adrien, and Vivian, dealt a stunning and explosive blow on the first tank and then and on to the second, but not before Vivian was rendered unconscious.

With both Think Tanks destroyed, Angelique took it upon herself to carry the antimatter bomb (don't drop it), whereas a wounded Adrien found that he could walk, as long as people don't move too fast. Yamada and Jack took it upon themselves to carry Vivian. The party made their way out of the secure zone, up their stairs and then, exiting into the countryside on the ground level. Staying in a barn and greenhouse to recover they determined that the dog was owned by one Abdel Fattah's family. On the insistence of Adrien the party made their way to the homestead, to find it deserted. Reviewing the records there however, determined that it seemed that a TITAN strike team had struck the base by surprise and had moved directly to its central target and from there had taken over the factories and rapidly produced the various TITAN extractors and head-hunters that were about. Nearly of the Exsurgents have gone to New Mumbia, including Abdel Fattah.

Once sufficiently recovered the party made their way out of the complex, and back to the VBD and started their drive back to Hertzprung. In the meantime Nihai thought it would be a good idea to contact Captain Renault to see if they could secure an exit through the guarded points. Captain Renault was most obliging and turned up with a large force to ensure the protection of the party from harm in the form of protective custody, and especially given that they were carrying a highly explosive device in the form of a 50kg antimatter bomb (don't drop it) which would be a terrible thing if it fell into the wrong hands. As Captain Renault and his soldiers took the party away to their new quarters (Nihai will be offered something more private), Adrien took the opportunity to contact Das Ferretchen to explain what had happened.

23.0 Alien Sex Fiends (A Trip to the Moon)

23.1 Some Protective Sheaths

Ensconced in "protective custody", permitting no communication to the outside world (but receiving plenty of incoming information), the Proxies and their Sentinels make an assessment of their situation. Nihai, of course, has been offered a different sort of situation and can explore that environment with Captain Renault - who generously provides Nihai a brinker location where they can escape together if everything fails. Meanwhile The Bomb has also been taken into protective custody by the Planetary Consortium's audit team, aka Oversight. Arguments presented by the Proxies and their Sentinels that they should be released were less than successful; after all, they did try to smuggle an antimatter bomb across a border.

Calling for an intervention from Firewall, eventually a meeting between the Ferret and Miguel Ángel, Director-General of Police, is arranged with the party present to present their case and insights. An agreement is reached, where the party "volunteers" to investigate New Mumbai, and discover the source of the exsurgent virus and the psychic power that has been detected there. As for the TITAN, a military assessment suggests that when the Commonwealth and Locus fleets arrive it should be defeated, especially with the fusion bombs that the Planetary Consortium and the Lunar-La Grange Alliance have at their disposal.

Recognising that they are about to enter a city controlled by sex-crazed psychic mutants, the party as a whole decides to adopt synth-morphs. Undergoing the sleeping, alienation and integration tests, the group is as follows:

- Nihai, Slitheroid
- Mary-Anne Hobart, Guard Morph
- Ji Gong, Xu Fu morph

- Hermann Blank, Reaper

-- Tjadamurra, Steel Morph
-- Marie-Lee Hobart, Steel Morph (Liquid Steel)

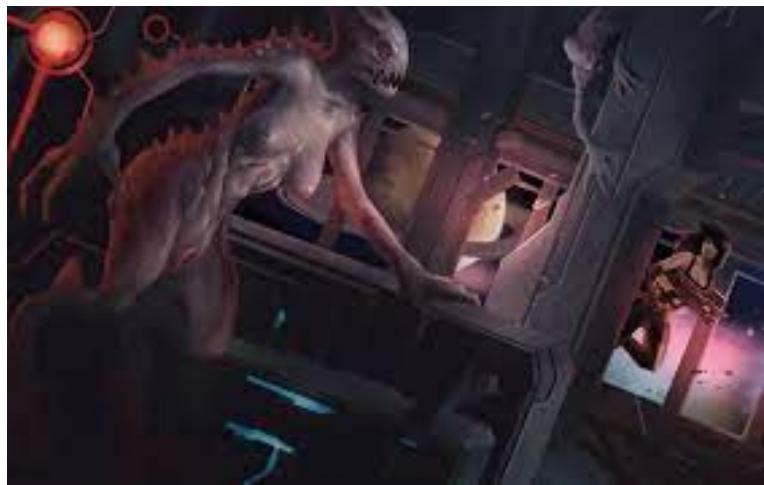
- Adrien, Reaper
-- Jack Kane, Arachnoid
-- Fazard, Slitheroid

- Vivian, Steel morph
-- Yamada, Steel morph
-- Angelique Hobart, Steel morph

23.2 Bombay Away!

Encased in their new morphs and with Véhicule de l'Avant Blindé outfitted with anti-tank weaponry, the Proxies and their Sentinels made their way to New Mumbai. The twenty-five hour trip from Nectar was mostly through the various connecting roads, but in the last thirty kilometres the party adopted the overland route. Alas Adrien's driving was less

than perfect and the VAB soon found itself in a ditch, although it was soon fixed by members of Hermann's team.



As the VAB approached New Mumbai, there was evidence of Luna vehicles. The party disengaged from the vehicle and programmed it to stay in a hollow, and to shoot and move if approached by a non-party force. Meanwhile the Proxies and Sentinels adopted a tactical advance, with Tjadamurra and Marie-Lee Hobart on Lunar bikes on the wings and Nihai and Farzad on point.

With the horizon a mere 2.43 kilometers away it is easy to be surprised on the moon, especially given the rugged

landscape. Fortunately, this plays both ways and the party with their powerful binoculars noted the incoming appearance of two buggies filled with immolator exsurgents. A missile struck true, disabling one vehicle, as the party opened fire on the group with surprise. The immolators attempted to fight back, and one scored a hit on Adrien. But apart from that it was a one-sided battle, over in less than half a minute. The disgusting appearance of the immolators seemed to strengthen the resolve of the party as Hermann engaged in summary execution of the unconscious. "Too ugly to live", remarked Nihai.

But their damage had been done. A review of the undamaged buggy revealed that an alert had been sent out. The party could only proceed to New Mumbai with the assumption that the exsurgent population knew that they were coming with murderous intent.

23.3 If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them

As a rapid immolator response group (now coined "the Rooters" by Hermann) made their way out of New Mumbai and across the Lunar surface, the Proxies and their Sentinels positioned themselves for an ambush against their rear. Lead

by Hermann, and an aggressive burst of fire was taken onto one of their moon buggies, disabling it. The other Sentinels and Proxies also opened fire, with Farzad and Yamada opening their attacks on the drivers of two other buggies.

The Immolators proved to be professional soldiers, however, with their APC turning its anti-tank HEAP missile against Hermann's position, as others disgorged from their vehicles, adopting defensive positions and prepared themselves for a shoot-out. The party fought back, at least those who had combat ability; for their part, Ji Jung and Vivian engaged in electronic warfare. Hermann, Tjandamurri, and Marie-Lee Hobart engaged in a withering assault on the APC, penetrating the weak hull and wounding several of the Immolators within.

Flashes of light appeared in the sky, initially confusing Vivian, but shortly afterward he realised that they were from the assault of the Planetary Consortium, the Lunar-Lagrange Alliance, the anarchist Locus fleet, and perhaps even some early ships from the Titanian Commonwealth against the TITAN, Jehovah. The quantity did not match the number of antimatter bombs that the allies had at their disposal, leading the grim realisation that it was the TITAN launching what must be nuclear weapons against the fleet.

Meanwhile, on the surface, the battle raged on. Hermann took out the main weapon of the APC, but the professional and concentrated return fire of the Immolators first took out Hermann, and then Adrien. This was the beginning of the end. Whilst Farzad engaging in desperate hand-to-hand combat with the closest group to prevent their missile fire, the battle had clearly turned. Whilst individually the Proxies and even perhaps the Sentinels were better than the individual Immolators, the party was seriously outnumbered, and not even the infiltrations of Nihai's group could protect them against the concentrated fire. One by one, party members fell, until the final member Jack Kane was captured, and then all dark and silent on the moon.

Their stacks retrieved, the obvious would follow. Infomorph forks or weak biomorphs forks would be created by the Immolators to drill the characters for information, who they were, what they knew about the Immolators, and so forth. Enhanced interrogation techniques against psionicists would be more powerful than the will of any character. Once sufficient information was gathered the Immolators explained their position - they simply wanted to live, the TITAN was a threat to them, and the rest of transhumanity were a threat to them as well. They needed operatives, such as the Sentinels and Proxies, to help them, as high skilled combat and espionage individuals with extensive experience. But of course, you must become one of them. The urges? Well, yes, they would exist. But they have drugs to suppress it, which work at least for a while.

23.4 Demons Within, Burning Inside

"Firewall policy is to terminate the infected with extreme prejudice."

Morphed into new Immolator bodies (1) the Proxies and Sentinels found themselves with a range of new abilities. The neural pathways were harwired (2) and their minds were awakened (3). In some cases the new morphs needed to be force-educated to integrate into the needs of Immolator individuals and their society, although that could be quite stressful (4).

As part of the new Immolator community, new knowledge about their society and history was attained, with a meeting with Alim (head of community) Aanisah Seif, and Emir (head of military) Timur al-Assad. Firstly, they had been selected due to their obvious and some very cases well-known competencies. This information included what happened at Feynman; the Omnicor station started with a population of some 50,000 it was engaging what was believed to be self-replicating nanotechnology based on TITAN nanoplagues.

After the destruction of New Mumbai, a handful of Immolator exsurgeants survived, buried deep under the Lunar surface. Heroically however, they had saved The Mother. As Mother grew, the Immolators realised that at some time she would need to spread her seed, and so a plan was hatched where the exsurgeants would infiltrate Feynman using

their Glorious infection vector. To cut a long story short, they succeeded and the Glory infection spread throughout the station.

Unfortunately it was around this time that the Jehovah TITAN broke The Interdict and once it reached Luna orbit it sent a substantial strike-force directly to Feynman, already decimated from the uprisings associated with the exsurgeants and under violent quarantine by neighbouring stations. Some suspect that the TITANs attack was due to purchased artifacts from Earth from a Scum Reclaimer group. Fighting a losing battle against the TITANs war machines, a great wave of Immolators made their way to New Mumbai, following their determination to protect Mother. Many of these Immolator refugees were killed by Lunar-La Grange Alliance drones, along with TITAN war machines.

The total number of Immolators is now about 5,000. They have been very busy in recent weeks breeding and building up the mother Immolator. Sexual appetite suppression drugs are available to keep their urges under control when engaging in critical activities. Mother is ready for freedom. The Immolators need to get her on a ship, so she can explode and breed, with the closest stations Karpola or Feynman. Now in charge of organising a team to acquire a ship, the former Proxies and Sentinels were even given an audience with the wonderful Mother, affectionately named Virginia Lunahart. She was the a beautiful being to behold, a gibbering mass of uteruses and mouths. The urge to merge with her was overwhelming.

The team organised six squads of ten, with vehicles, to go to the Feynam spaceport to try to find a suitable spaceship. Whilst one squad was destroyed by TITAN war machines, another found a damaged medium-sized ship, a large tanker, probably used in the transport of water. Some twenty immolators, with four buggies and an APC, managed to sneak into the spaceport to repair the spacecraft, adding camoflague. Taking the ship back to a suitable entrance ingress near New Mumbai, the Rooter team began to arrange for Mother to be brought to the surface, from some 3km underground.

Unfortunately, it was at that point that the TITANs war machines arrived.

And as they did, there were flashes of light in the space above the Luna surface; it was the battle between the transhuman ships from the anarchists at Locus, the Planetary Consortium, and what remained of the Lunar-La Grange Alliance. So confident they were that they could defeat a single, albeit massive TITAN. But they hadn't counted on one thing that the TITAN had in abundance; nuclear weapons.

23.5 A Steely Battle

As the TITAN above made short work of the transhuman ships, the Immolators below were confronted with their own problem of a large number of Extractors, Headhunters, Think Tanks, Warbots, and other TITAN forces following in from New Mumbai. The Proxies quickly took control of the situation, allocating sixty troops against the invading force in a semi-circle around the recovered vessel, whilst The Mother was being lifted from more than three kilometres below.

The Immolator forces primarily took aim at the approaching headhunters and extractors who had managed to make use of the terrain to close; those with heavy weapons, such as Angelique attacked with the Think Tanks, whereas Adrien, Farzad, and Nihai sought ambush sites. The battle was brutal and short; the Immolator team quickly took out the Think Tanks and then turned their attention on the headhunters and extractors; after several volleys of precise fire, those that remained turned to return to New Mumbai, doubtless to bring a larger force.

The Immolators bundled The Mother into the shuttle ship, and began to make preparations to fly; but as they did so, the Jehovah TITAN Hunter Killers appeared overhead. All seemed lost, until they were suddenly destroyed from a hitherto unseen vessel, which some recognised as a Factor ship. Taking the shuttle close and eventually boarding through one of the organic-like orifaces, first the party and eventually the entire Immolator community took to the ship, which informed them that it was named Moya. It even seemed to overlook the faux pas of inappropriate tributary gifts.

24.0 Release the Dogs of Moya

24.1 Vacuole, Alt-Delete

With the Immolator community safely aboard, opportunities existed to explore Moya. Moya seemed to be a being in its own right, rather unlike the AGIs which are sometimes used as pilots on various transhuman ships, and the ship itself was curiously organic in many ways. Whilst it did not have any artificial gravity there was a degree of stickiness to the surfaces which provided and equivalent for movement about the ship. The ship also had an oxygen supply suitable for transhuman use. The ship provided to be quite amenable to the needs of the Immolators, providing a nearly complete layout of the vessel, and clearly marking out what areas that were forbidden - mainly related to the ship's drive technology. There was a plentiful supply of food, water, and accommodation, and even a command bridge was provided for the leaders of Immolators, Alim (head of community) Aanisah Seif, and Emir (head of military) Timur al-Assad, and the Proxies.

There was some debate among those present on where to take The Mother, and the urge to release her spores and immolate was increasing strong among the community. Mars was the closest Pandora Gate, but that was not exactly considered a friendly community. Earth was not an option as there was insufficient biological life there to sustain a new immolator society, and the same applied for Venus. Mercury had experienced a recent accident. Perhaps a journey through the Vulcanoid gate and then to Echo IV via Pandora? Either way, Sol and the Vulcanoid gate was the chosen route.

Despite the obvious superior technology of the Factors, who had kindly provided this vessel out of the goodness of their nucleoluses. However, over time Emir Timur al-Assad noticed that a number of the community had gone missing. The regulated society that the Immolator's had in New Mumbai had been relaxed greatly, and as a result some may have been perhaps missing for days. The Proxies suggested engaging in stronger surveillance of Immolator movements, and a requirement that they move in pairs, and soon the problem was ascertained. Transhumans being transhumans, some had ignored the clearly stated rules of movement that Moya had laid out. Hermann considered these "acceptable losses" in favour of the larger issue - bringing The Mother to her fate.

Eventually the ship reached near the Vulcanoid Gate; however, it was clearly and obviously defended. A pod of Surya, the space whales, stood in formation against the Moya, and demanded that it leave. Certainly, Moya did have some long range weapons and indeed, longer range than what the Space Whales were estimated to have, but there was at least a hundred of them. In addition, Moya did have a hundred escape pods, with shorter range weapons. As battle stations were called, the Proxies recommended two immolators per pod; one to fly and one to attack.

24.2 Grand Whalecomes

There was a grand stand-off between the Factor ship, Moya, and the array of Surya. A furious round of communication went back and forth. It was clear that Mother wanted to explode in a biosphere, and the Surya were preventing access to the Vulcanoid gate. The Immolator community was increasingly on edge, wanting to merge with Mother for the Big Bang. The Surya and the allies made it abundantly clear that they did not anyone anywhere near them, least of all a Factor ship. Calculations were quickly conducted on the likely outcome if the tense negotiations turned to conflict; Moya indicated that the chance of survival was around 50%. As much as they wanted to transport the Mother to a biozone they also didn't want to be killed by Space Whales with particle beam lasers.

All sorts of proposals were made on how to get around this problem; Adrien speculated that Immolator insemination of the Surya was a possibility. Nihai and Hermann were keen on the idea of flying away and using the solar wind method, although the chances of the crystals falling in a biozone were slim; they also suggested sending out some immolators to infect the Surya in the form of packages.



Eventually, Moya was directed to turn and head to Venus. There had been conflict between transhumanity and the TITAN but at least there was some sort of biological agents to infect in the various cloud cities. A review of radio messages, indicated that the TITANS were defeating transhumanity in Octavio, and had completely overrun Lucifer, although the transhuman forces were defending successfully in Aphrodite Prime and The Shack. As usual, there was no information coming out Parvarti. There was further debate here on whether there was sufficient biomass for a successful infection and ongoing propagation of species and so, once again Moya was directed to turn towards Mars.

This was an additional 75 days of travel, putting great strain on the increasingly "hot" Immolators. Several of Moya's cornucopia machines became dedicated to the production of antipsychotics which were fed to the Immolators, reducing their urges but also stupefying their abilities. Reaching Mars the radio reports indicated that the TITAN versus transhumanity battles were going in favour of the latter. In particular, the Pathfinder Gate had been taken by TITAN forces, but this did not prevent the Immolator forces. With the gate in a deep and wide ravine, Nihai opted for an scorched-Mars approach systemically using Moya's impressive space-craft sized arsenal to obliterate everything that could possibly be in the way, meter-by-meter. Certainly some TITAN forces escape the carnage, but they were no match for the numerically overwhelming Immolators.

Reaching Pathfinder base there was all the evidence of a great battle. But as usual the Gate stood undamaged. Discovering and entering the codes opened the gate with a connection to Ascension, one of the first extrasolar locations. Taking advantage of the "in-between" status that the Gate's entrance provided, Adriend suggested that the Big Bang occur right on the edge, spilling Immolator crystal seeds on either side of the Gate. The Mother was positioned, the Immolator's merged, and all reached a explosive climatic conclusion. If any were there to witness it, they would have seen the seething mass of five thousand groaning bodies merging into one flesh, a great mélange of mouths and genitals, the heap of meat increasing red through heat, and glistening sweat, until the groans turned to cries, and the mass explosively inflamed, and as the fires subsided through the stink and crackle of burning flesh, they would have seen the small crystals of Immolator seeds on the ground, in preparation to create the cycle of life once more.

Ill as yet the eye could see
The eternal masonry,
But beneath it on the dark
To and fro there stirred a spark.
And again the sombre guide
Knew my question, and replied:

'At hell gate the damned in turn
Pace for sentinel and burn.'
-- A.E. Housman

21.6 Tentacular Results

With the datacentre for JHVH/ADAM in close reach, but having lost five stacks already there was significant discussion about what the next actions would be. The ADAM Titan's builders were now obviously aware of the presence of the Proxies and their Sentinels and the submersible Think Tanks, with their spectacular weaponry, were in hunter mode. Ultimately it was Hermann's suggestion to leave the seabed beneath the Arquipélago de São Pedro e São Paulo and return to Barcelona and inform Mare Nostrum of what had happened.

The journey would take approximately fifty days, with the Nautolid acting as the main vessel and towing the slower morphs. It was a bleak trip, through the dead oceans and the murky light filtered through a tainted, dusty, atmosphere. Nature never knew colours like this. But after forty days and forty nights through the seas, the Proxies noticed in the distance a Think Tank slowly lumbering along in the same direction of travel, towards Barcelona. Spreading the party out, the Firewall team noticed three other Think Tanks at varying points in the distance. Fortunately, with their slow movement, it was relatively easy to swing wide around their path and continue onwards. But the warning had been received - Think Tanks were on their way to Barcelona.

Reaching the Port de Barcelona several days later, the Sentinels made contact with Mare Nostrum. Unfortunately they were, to a degree, too late. The Torre Girona had been located and was attacked by a squadron of flying TITAN Hunter-Killers. Whilst their sortie was short, they destroyed much of the old Torre Girona, the main datacentre for Mare Nostrum, who had to distribute itself among other smaller clusters. As a result, Mare Nostrum had lost much of their processing power and data, and what did exist was significantly slowed.

The Proxies informed Mare Nostrum of the changes that had occurred with the ADAM TITAN and also that there were four Think Tanks heading in their direction. It was Vivian's strong opinion that in order to protect Mare Nostrum, and what remained of Transhumanity, it would be necessary for the TITANs to be voluntarily infected with the PARACELSUS virus, expressed as an upgrade. A group made their way to the old Torre de Collserola to send messages via short-wave radio for a group meeting of all the TITANs via internet chat. Because, of course, as the Internet was designed to route around damage, it was still operating to a degree even post-Fall. And so the Conference was called:

TITANs Against The Factors Conference: Upgrade Now!

- Factors demonstrated hostility and can overpower TITANS and Transhumanity
- Transhumanity and TITANS must unite
- Conflicts between Transhumanity and TITANS to be overcome
- Behavioural upgrade with PARACELSUS
- Transhumanity represented by Firewall Proxies

There was however, the issue of four Think Tanks intent on destruction heading towards Mar Nostrum. A sortie was arranged to make short work of these relentless enemies just outside Barcelona. Whilst the Think Tanks had fanned out to make a multi-directional assault on the port, the Proxies and Sentinels attempt to close. Unfortunately for Angelique Hobart in the neo-Whale morph, a failure to hide and a successful targetting by the Think Tank resulted in rapid and immediate destruction. The battle before the conference was on.

21.7 Holy Sights

At first the Think Tanks made their way to the harbour unchallenged, destroying the communications system there and any morphs that were present. But it was a trap, as the submerisibles were lured onto land and into the ruins of Barcelona.

From various vantage points the transhumans were able to separate and destroy the Think Tanks piecemeal, with Adrien making a notable attack from La Sagreda Familia with thermite grenades, burning through the armour of the Think Tank, and Vivian engaging in electronic warfare. After a short period the Tanks were destroyed, and from their parts Hermann Blank and Jack Kayne build a single Think Tank, fully armed and armoured. Meanwhile Di Yi Nuhai and Marianne Hobart scouted the ocean floor and found Angelique's stack. Adrien La Fontaine scrounged a Fury morph at the Barcelona military barracks, and Angelique was brought back.

With the Think Tanks defeated a search was on to find a secure location from which the PARACELSUS upgrade could be stored. Mare Nostrum, or rather, their remains, made a network map, and amazingly this included a still operating site at Sanctuaires Notre-Dame de Lourdes. Driving to this site, the Proxies made their way into the lifeless ruins of the town before making into the Sanctuary proper, noting that an operational generator was still present. At first the Proxies encountered automated weapon emplacements down narrow passageways, along with the remains of minor TITAN threats, Headhunters and Extractors.

****SIDEBAR: Mare Nostrum's Network Map****

Nota bene: Alliances based on political make-up just prior to The Fall.

Alliance #1

European Union TITAN: Extreme System

und Softwareeinheit (ESUS) aka Der Falke

Azania/South Africa: Assegai (Spear)

Mare Nostrum: #notaTITAN



Alliance #2

Russian: последняя битва. Poslednyaya

Bitva. (Last Battle) at Baikonour,

Khazakstan

The Caliphate: Iram Pillars of Shaybah

Chinese: Jīnwū (House of Gold), Rénmín

jīqì (People's Machine), Zhēnguì de qízhì

(Precious banner)

Brazil-Russia-India-China: Vostok-Kunlun

(destroyed)

Alliance #3

United States of America: Great Eagle, Iroquois Confederation, Longhorn, Columbus

UK: Longbow

Israel: YHWH/ADM

****END SIDEBAR****

Inside they met Antoine St Paul, an elderly Anchorite who for the past ten years had carried out his duty of ensuring that the Lourdes website remained operational. Unsurprisingly Brother Antoine was quite conversational and insisted the Proxies stay for dinner and some particularly fine wines. During the evening's proceedings Vivian took the opportunity to break into the website - fairly trivial with ten year old security - and upload the PARACELSUS upgrade, and then notify the TITANS of their opportunity. Vivian informed Antoine of current events, with the elderly brother arguing very strongly against the TITANS and in favour of the Factors as a matter of preference. Rather than stay the night, Vivian and Adrien took the opportunity to retreat to the ruined observatory at Pic du Midi de Bigorre where they observed EU Hunter Killers destroy the site. Nevertheless, Vivian had collected a log of the visits and determined that downloads of the PARACELSUS upgrade had occurred from the European Union, the United Kingdom, and The Caliphate.

Returning to Barcelona, the Proxies considered their next actions. Vivian advocated finding another site to review the effects of PARACELSUS. Making use of the pwned satellite, Vivian informed the Proxies that a satellite dish was spied on Mont Saint Michel, and so a plan was hatched to journey to this locale via jeep and motorocyle (with Ni-Hai taking the long journey via the coastline. Alas, the entrance was less than grand as the party was attacked by no less than a Carmelite nun with a bazooka [thank you GURPS] whilst crossing the causeway; probably a warning shot given the proximity.

Calling for parley, the Proxy group was accepted into the monastery, where they met the anti-technological group of nuns protecting the remains of the establishment; Mother Teresa Lisieux, Sister Jeannette Bruere, Sister Emma de Normandie, and Sister Barbanna Calvez. It turned out that the satellite dish, which Vivian swore was functioning, had not been operational for years. Nevertheless, the nuns welcomed the opportunity to be rid of the thing, with the necessary equipment to repair the thing could probably be found in Rennes.

Acquiring a farm truck, Adrien, Jack, Hermann entered Rennes and made their way to the central part of the town, but unfortunately they were attacked by extractors which, as the battle continued, continued to increase in number as they woke from their slumbers. Taking a fighting retreat, the Proxies made their way out of Rennes without the equipment that they so desired to set up the satellite uplink.

Meanwhile, Ni-Hai had espied one of the nuns, Sister Barbanna, feeding a dolphin at dusk. Introducing herself, it turned out the dolphin was named Michelle, and greatly desired the opportunity to get off Earth. Making their farewells, the party made their way back towards Barcelona, their number increased by one. It was at Barcelona that Mare Nostrum made an announcement that they had been contacted by Iram of the Pillars who had adopted the PARACELSUS upgrade and now wanted a meeting in person with the Proxies.

25.0 Iram of the Pillars

25.1 Just Deserts

Following the message the Imran of the Pillars wanted to meet the Proxies in person to discuss further developments of the PARACELSUS upgrade there was debate whether to actually attend, with Vivian keen and Hermann suspicious. The party decided that as long as back-ups were made then there was at least some security, so they made their way to Moorocco, taking an old ferry. Arriving at the Caves of Hercules, they were somewhat surprised to see that their old Earth survivor, Allal al-Fassi, was no longer present although a fine collection of morphs and backup systems were still in place. Making use of what was available, most characters selected a Splicer, although Nihai, Mary-Anne, and Hermann chose a Theseus, appropriate given where the characters were heading, with Farcasters set for the orbital station Fresh Kills. Hermann also insisted in getting a cortical bomb installed.

Taking the ferry once again for several days through the Mediterranean, the transhuman team avoided what was previously the densely populated centres around the Nile valley, which would surely be swarming with TITAN weapons, and instead landed at the saline swamps of Bardwil Lake. From there they could unload their motorcycles and jeeps and make the first leg of their journey from rough Port Siad to Shaybah, noting along the journey that near populated areas the desert sand had become a green, glass substance - trinitite - indicating the use of nuclear weapons during The Fall.

Whilst progress across the former Caliphate was good, there part was interrupted by the cackle and radio hum of a humanoid population heading towards the party; Ny'knikiin, and their intentions seemed far from friendly.

25.2 Hungry for a Sand Witch

Attacking the convoy with clubs and axes, the Ny'knikiin did great damage to the Sentinels and Proxies, with Adrien La Fontaine in particular being on the receiving end of their primitive melee weapons. Things were looking grim, but

fortunately Vivian was able to decode the strange clicks coming from the Ny'knikiin and request that they send a message to Imran of the Pillars. The Ny'knikiin acquiesed to this, and soon the issue was resolved and the party was sent through - with the rearguard remaining behind.

Making their way through Rub' al Khali, the Empty Quarter, the convoy followed what roads were available, as the erg would be too difficult for vehicles to traverse. The path lead to Shaybah, once a prominent oil field and as the party neared the location the presence of five pillars of Creepers, which fortunately let the party pass unmolested.



Eventually the party reached the Shaybah fields township; like so many other places it was deserted, although there was no evidence of TITAN machine presence. Standing clearly among what would have been residences was a three-story administration building. Making their way inside the first thing the party noticed as the stacks of dessicated and beheaded corpses of scores of transhumans.

With a reception desk indicating that the group head to the basement, the party did so with sufficient preparation. But they did not expect to see the disembodied heads of

scores of transhumans, hanging like mobiles, and feed piped nutrients. With artificial vocalisations the heads spoke as one, introducing themselves as Imren of the Pillars. The party was shocked, although Vivian most visibly so, having to excuse himself due to nausea.

On his return however, he engaged Imren of the Pillars on the nature of self and identity. Imren spoke of the need for unity, ummah, as the path with the greatest strength and processing capabilities; and the addition of the PARACELSUS upgrade had helped the Ummah even further. Vivian argued for the need of opposing and independent views, for which Imren agreed with the former, but not the latter. Whilst Vivian also argued that transhumanity and the TITANS would be under threat from The Factors, Imren agreed that unity would be possible against this common enemy.

But in order to bring the TITANS onside they would have receive the upgrade. Most had showed opposition to doing this, as it was contrary to their programming, but Imren had already understood the advantages of bringing transhumans into the fold. Imren made the suggestion that a specialised strike team, such as the Proxies and Sentienels, could make their way to Poslednyaya Bitva at Baikonour, Khazakstan, and force the upgrade. In assistance, Imren would send a Fetch, and two excellent Ny'knikiin scouts. In addition, Adrien and Hermann were both provided Reaper morphs. A proposed trajectory was set; through the Straits of Hormuz, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Khazakstan

25.3 Mirrors to the Souls

With the primary forks just outside Haradh, Adrien found an old drone in good conditoins among the residences of Shaybah, and Vivian programmed it to send a message back to them before their departure to Khazakstan. Travelling with Imren's Fetch, Hajj, the first step of the journey was an eight-hour drive through to the Straits of Hormuz where a boat was already in place. Unfortunately the travellers were caught in a massive cyclone which blew them off course, and was far beyond Adrien's capacity to pilot the ship; a Nynnian and Nihai both overboard, but were rescued by Hermann.

The following morning the wrecked ship found itself Karri village. Again Adrien's abilities proved successful in finding and fixing a vehicle for travel. From there they made their way once again, reaching the old city of Shiraz in late

afternoon. However, it was clear that the party had been spotted as headhunters and extractors made their way towards them. Taking refuge in a mosque, which afforded a great line of fire, the party found it to be full of mirrors, the famous Shah Cheragh. It is from this holy locale that there was massive exchange of fire, as the headhunters fired explosive missiles at the party, felling Adrien. As Nihai made their way to a higher point, they caught The Fetch engaged in a furious discussion with itself, one in its standard voice and the other in a voice seemingly representing a multitude in unison. The standard voice argued for the need to liquidate and incorporate the proxies once they had been of use, whereas the multitude argued to honour the agreement. Nihai intervened with a suggestion of a middle way, only to castigated by the AI voice: "Anyone who denies the law of non-contradiction should be beaten and burned until he admits that to be beaten is not the same as not to be beaten, and to be burned is not the same as not to be burned". As The Fetch turned, Nihai caught a weak voice of the multitude: "help us".

Whatever thoughts that followed quickly evaporated as more missile hammered into their targets. Whilst almost two score of the headhunters were taken out of action, Adrien, Vivian, and Nihai were all unconscious, and Think Tanks were lumbering towards the mosque. Hermann beat a hasty retreat to the latrines and tearing at the flooring made access to the pipes below as TITAN machines made their way to the building. Taking the unconscious proxies in hand, the Fetch, Hermann, and the two Nynnikan (now known as "Merry" and "Pippin") made their escape, eventually to the outskirts of Shiraz town, where they holed up in an effluent waste plant, noting mushroom growth nearby. The Earth was recovering and life finds a way. Whilst the TITAN machines searched nearby, the party managed to hide with assistance of Vivian's hacking skills.

Recovering another abandoned vehicle the party made their way travelling to Mashad in just under a day and then for another day to Baikonour through the old Karakum Desert, avoiding Russian TITAN machines on the way, but capturing one Extractor and reprogramming it. Baikonour provided to be a large open complex but also with the sort of the defenses that one would expect for a TITAN central quarters. Observation noted that a large number of trucks entering the central complex region, and a plan was hatched for the party to smuggle themselves in using one these vehicles. A truck was captured, and inside the party noted crates of stacks with logs indicating that they had come from isolated parts of India from around The Fall. The log books also included references to conflicts with Chinese AIs over ownership of the stacks. The party made their way into the vehicle and travelled into the complex, where eventually the truck doors were opened.

27.0 An Unexpected factorial!

27.1 Catch a Falling Star

Taking the journey across the Mediterranean Sea, there was some hours before landfall. Nihai found an old box of glitter from happier times in storage and took some delight of adding this to The Fetch in a stick, now nicknamed "Screamin' Jay Hawkins". Adrien acted as both pilot and navigator for the journey adopting a path along the mid-point of the sea, a place where the expected number of TITAN machines would be fewest. Making landfall, like previously, at Lake Bardawil, it was noted that there was a few mosquitoes around: "They're not bugs. They're features!", exclaimed Vyvyan. The presence of such creatures, of course, implied the existence of larger blood-carrying animals. Life was clearly returning to Earth.

Under the somewhat clear sky Hermann noticed a falling star; following the path using binoculars the star was elongated with an external thrust fire behind it; not a falling star, but rather a spaceship. A quick calculation was undertaken to work out trajectory, and an estimation was made that it would be falling in the Arabic peninsula. The following day, the Proxies made their journey in this direction, as it was also on the path to Imren of the Pillars.



With Nihia travelling as an outrider and Hermann as point, they soon found themselves close to where the Ny'knikiin village was located on their previous trip, but this time all was silent and dark. Further in the distance Hermann spotted Moya, the Factor ship which the party had previously been on. Nihai made quite and silent ingress into the village, noting there had been signs of some fighting, but there were no longer any Ny'knikiin to be found. Entering one building, she found some telecommunications transmitters, which she used to relay information back to Hermann.

A Factor ambassador and two guardians entered the building, opening a period of parley. From their vantage point near-Earth, they had detected a quantity of nuclear weapons and had predicted war among the TITANs, and thus had come to investigate. As usual the Factors expressed their concerns with transhumanities continued use of AGI systems and use of the Pandora gates, and noted that this had resulted in the revival of the TITANs and exo-planetary risks and infections. The Factors promised again that they could save transhumanity, but it was essential that they destroy the TITANs (which they would help with) and hand over control of the Pandora gates.

The party pointed out that the latter was outside their jurisdiction, a somewhat confusing notion to the Factors, but they were broadly interested in their help in former. Adrien took the opportunity to make use of the transmitter system to send an update to the Firewall Server Eludere on Venus, and received feedback on current situation in the solar system. With deception in mind, the party provided a location for Imren of the Pillars, but it was in fact a ruse. The Factors suspected such

behaviour, having become familiar with transhumanity, and took Nihai as insurance. As the ship took off and made its way to a new location, its coordinates were transmitted message to Imren of the Pillars and to prospectively to the Chinese TITAN, "Zhēngù de qízhì" (Precious Banner). When the Factors attempted to probe the mind of Nihai, they carried out the ultimate sacrifice to transhumanity, releasing a thermite grenade within the ship which was soon assaulted by the forces of Imren and Precious Banner.

The loss of Nihai was sad, but the victory enormous. Nevertheless, there was still an ongoing concern. What if the Factors were right, that they, as pure organic beings, were the only ones who could be adequately protected against the literal machinations of machines that thought of felt little towards the biological transhuman forms. Was the great split in life between organic and inorganic life?

27.2 Defenders of Imren

With the Factor ship sent to Babylon, and one World Heritage site being destroyed at a time, the remaining Proxies considered their next move, a planned assault on Imren of the Pillars and replacement of that TITAN with the packed Mare Nostrum. Adrien took the initiative by looking for the remains of vehicles that could be used against the probable defenders, at the very least the pillars of Imren. Aided by Hermann's knowledge of explosives and Vyvyan's electronics, some impressive weaponry was created; a utility IED with remote control, and two linked flame-throwers on the van. Vyvyan also discovered and activated an AGI, long dormant, in the van which introduced itself as Paco the Pegaso.

All of this takes time however, and as the party completed their production, three TITAN Creepers made their way towards the group and an almighty battle ensued. The pillar Shahada made a direct move onto the van and started to eat away at the frontage, despite taking serious damage itself from nearby fire, whereas concentrated firepower on the pillar Salat proved to be more successful bringing in down fairly quickly. Adrien found himself in strife as his Reaper morph hovered above the third pillar, Zakat, but the use of the remote control bomb proved to be successful. Finally, in

desperation, Vyvyan turned the firepower of the van onto itself, damaging Paco, but also destroying Shahada in the process.

The proxies now gave consideration to their next move; the approach to Imren could be achieved by two land routes, and there would be two pillars remaining, Sawm and Hajj. These would be undoubtedly on high-alert given recent experiences and the various TITAN defenses of the town of Shaybah. But getting to Imren and replacing the psychotic TITAN with the friendly AI of Mare Nostrum with the PARACELSUS 2.0 upgrade was essential for the survival of transhumanity and the evolution of the TITANs; or at least that's what Vyvyan said.

27.3 Imren: A Pillar Application

The Proxies travelled from the Nyknikiin town (old maps mark it as Haradah) and made their way to Shaybah, thoroughly expecting to encounter the remaining two creeper pillars of Imren among a range of other TITAN machines. But surprisingly, they did not appear. Taking this as an optimistic and opportunistic event, Paco the Van charged towards Shaybah and straight towards what was the main administration building. "Paquet per lliurar!", the van exclaimed as it smashed through the front door.

Perhaps as expected the sudden intrusion led a massive number of TITAN machines converging on the entrance. Adrien and Vivian broke out the back of the Paco and started unloading the packages of Mare Nostrum, as hordes of TITAN Extractors and Headhunters converged on Paco, with Hermann standing beside engaging in destructive fire. Inside the administration building Adrien and Vivian were having their own issues as they were attacked by a horde of Skitters, but these were dispatched (with some effort) by use of EMP grenades.

Outside the battle raged as advanced Headhunters launched minimissiles at Paco and Hermann, causing great damage. Extractors managed to break through and made their way toward the one biomorph in the party, although most were destroyed when Paco was struck by multiple missiles. Meanwhile, Adrien and Vyvyan were confronted with a major problem of their own in the form of two Stalkers who used their massive plasma rifles and chains with some effect. As the Headhunters converged on Paco and Hunter-Killers appeared on the scene, Hermann beat a hasty retreat only to be knocked out by a Stalker.

The Stalkers defeated, the Sentinels made some minor repairs to Paco, bringing the AGI back online, and ventured downstairs. Paco was able to report that the Hunter-Killers disappeared from and another firey light was seen in the sky. At first the Proxies thought it was the return of The Factors and hurried to their task. At first they had to deal with the Talking Heads, and Adrien made attempts to convince Imren that it was, in fact, his Fetch that had lost the plot - the argument was not convincing.

The firey light however turned out to be Eludere with other Firewall agents in Reaper morphs, which had used their powerful space-going vessel to destroy the Hunter-Killer airforce of Imren. Certainly other TITAN machines would be on their way, but a powerful squad of Reaper morphs were designed for this sort of activity. Euludere explained that following communication with Adrien there had been a number of successes for Transhumanity; the Factor threat seemed to have retreated following their destruction of the Jehovah TITAN and with The Interdict down the opportunity was taken by Firewall to find out what their best Proxy team was doing on Earth - and perhaps rescue them.

Eludere was not entirely happy with the story that was told. The idea of upgrading a TITAN seemed antithetical to the entire purpose of Firewall, that is, to prevent existential risks and whilst they were in a TITAN lair the first impulse was to destroy it. The idea of a TITAN gaining some sapience (even without empathy as they still cannot *feel*) seemed impossible. But she was prepared to undergo the experiment if the TITAN was sandboxed, with all external network communications broken, which Vyvyan carried out, along with reducing the TITANs computational capacity to that of the mere head nodes without additional computation power, which included the Talking Heads who had their stacks removed by Adrien. In these circumstances the Mare Nostrum cluster was easily able to overcome the TITANS.

resistance, despite its protestations. When rebooted with the virus, its initial expressions were of great guilt for its actions in TITAN form.

With a great success achieved problems still remains. There were now a thousand corpse heads dangling in the room (1024 to be exact) and a bag of stacks carried around by Adrien. What to do with them? And there were still several TITANS remaining; three in China, three in the United States, one in Germany, and one in South Africa. How would these be located? It seemed with every problem that Firewall solved, there were still several more confronting Transhumanity.

28.0 The Hawk Does the Eating

28.1 Analysis Paralysis, The Sanity Assassin

With Imren of the Pillars under control, Adrien raises the suggestion of recruiting the former TITAN to Firewall. The idea, of course, was preposterous and Euledere stated as much, but Adrien as a Proxy could recruit Sentinel agents as they saw fit; and so it was done, on probation, of course. The stacks of the suspended transhumans of Ummah were removed and put them on ice. Then the party debated their next move; could they replicate the process of a stealth or frontal assault mission to another TITAN-base, commando-style? The difficulty would be that with previous TITANs they have located the datacenter with some accuracy. The others were relatively unknown. The best options would be Cheyenne Mountain in the United States, and the Stuttgart EU TITAN, which at least there was some rough knowledge of the location. The latter was chosen and mapping a path from Tyre to Montpellier to Lyon and Stuttgart the party geared-up, with Imren sending a message to their minions, as best they could, to provide free passage to the Proxies.

Mapping a route to Egypt via Jordan the party packed up Mare Nostrum and began their journey to capture the third TITAN, with their server Euledere and team also in tow. They were surprised, whilst travelling through Jordan, to encounter a transhuman brandishing a bold blue-green banner, designed to attract. With some negotiation, it was discovered that this was Ahmed al-Assad, and he was part of a community of some forty others who lived in the ancient Nabataeans tombs of Petra. The community had been here for the entirety of the post-Fall period but had recently captured a Stalker which, remarkably, did not react offensively. The Proxies decided to reveal to Ahmed that Imren had been converted to a sapient being, although the other TITANs had not. This led to great rejoicing among the community and a feast was held that night in celebration.

From Petra, the Proxies travelled in Paco The Truck until they reached Egypt and boarded their ferry, which lay undisturbed. The journey across the Mediterranean required some alteration as Paco, now patched into the ferry, noted an incoming storm, and so the slow entrance into a port on Malta was made. From Malta the party made their way near Montpellier, avoiding major population areas (where Extractors and Headhunters, or worse) were sure to lurk, and then drove the truck on countryside roads and under through the former forests of south-eastern France. On two occasions Adrien spotted TITAN scout aircraft overhead by managed to find secluded locations for protection.

Eventually making their way into south-west Stuttgart, the party positioned themselves in Rotwildpark, detecting a moment of mesh activity as passing the Patch Barracks. In Rotwildpark they released their drones to scan the areas of the University of Stuttgart, the Patch Barracks, and the airport, as the three main locations where TITAN activity seemed probable, all from a minimum safe distance. Meanwhile Adrien scouted the forest and the Bärenschlössle in particular. Two great discoveries were made; first that some of the foliage had returned to the forest, green shoots and ferns, making their tentative grasp for existence. The second was in the Bärenschlössle was a family of boar who had apparently lived out the past decade on the ample supply of beer, oats, and noodles.

With a review of the recordings found, Vyvyan noted that in one instance an automated silver car (Mercedes Silver Arrow) made its way in the carpark at the University, which seemed a little unusual, as automated cars don't need to go to a carpark. This was established as the probable point of ingress and Vyvyan, Adrien, and Hermann made plans to head there, leaving Euledere and the other Reapers to look after Paco and the supercomputer payload. Stealthily, the

party made their way into the university to the High Performance Computing Centre, where the Silver Arrow entered the parking lot at the rear of the building. Watching another Arrow come out of the parking lot, the party made their way cautiously towards the carpark. But before they did so, they saw what looked like an ancient computer in the foyer of the main entrance. Vyvyan recognised it as Cray II. What would a supercomputer from 1985 be doing here? Is this some sort of trick?

28.2 Pets, Not Cattle

Whilst the Proxies wondered about the Cray II 1985 supercomputer, the system defenses has their own ideas of what to do. Whilst discussing what to with the wild boar piglets - Adrien, ever the survivalist, considered eating the first known mammal life to be born on the planet in over a decade - suddenly Adrien floated and turned on the party, demanding surrender. Even in their worst behaviour this was considered abnormal, and being subject to rapid fire being the synthmorph to an "unconscious" state, the Proxies beat a hasty retreat into the charred and broken woods, dropping Adrien into the Pflaffensee.

As they attempted to return to their vehicle, Paco had encountered troubles of their own as two TITAN warbots made very short work of the vehicle. A forklift and truck were summoned and began their work to remove Mare Nostrum from the back of the van. Vyvyan, however, had other ideas and managed to take control of the warbot in the interim, turning the warbot onto its colleagues whilst Hermann assisted in taking out the forklift and truck, although receiving grievous wounds for their efforts. Ripping out Paco, and getting another van into service the Proxies made a hurried escape as Stalkers were spotted making their way into the woods. For their own part, the warbot was sent back with commands to attack the TITAN base.

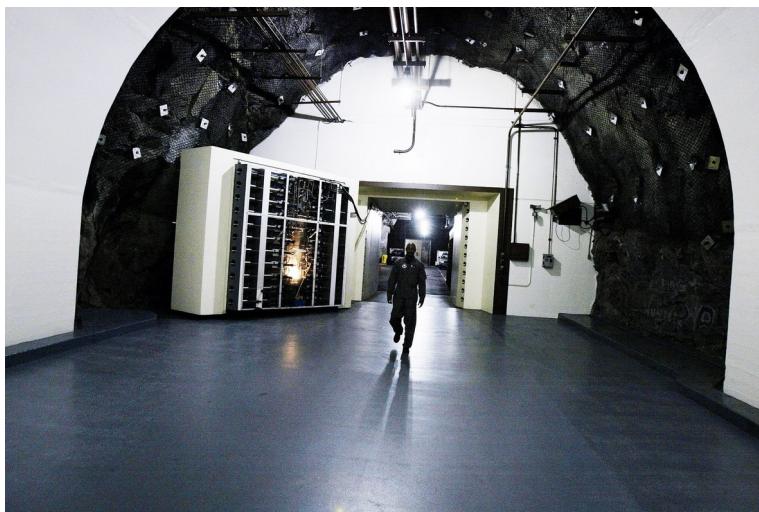
Taking the van and hiding under a bridge some twenty kilometers away in the old town of Eltingen, the Proxies spent the night under cover, with but one moment of a Stalker making their way over the bridge scanning carefully, but not finding any trace of the Proxies. Meanwhile with the breaking of dawn, Adrien wakes up, and decided to hide out in Bärenschlössle where the rest of the party determined would be a way-point. Vyvyan decided at this point to name the old male "Nils Boar".

The party considered their options. This European TITAN seemed to be very well defended and prepared for incursions. Adrien however argued that because it had requested a surrender it must already consider negotiation an option. With some degree of despondancy, the party agreed to set up a radio way-station and attempt to communicate with the TITAN.

This turned out to be a wise approach. The TITAN patiently explained to the party that they had implemented PARACELSUS and, in co-ordination with other members of European Union, had argued that transhumans should receive basic rights (Grundrechte) under core laws (Grundgesetz), deriving from animal welfare legislation. After all, transhumans will clearly inferior to TITANs in terms of cognitive capacity, but they did show some capability of thought. They would not be exterminated as per their prior programming, but rather subject to care in specially prepared environments suitable to their species. "Pets, not cattle", Vyvyan quipped.

Whilst the European TITANs were prepared for negotiation, there was some difficulties with the US supercomputers which the EU systems were in some friendly contact with via Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft. It remained armed, belligerent, as was not prepared to install PARACELSUS willingly. Der Falke and the Proxies hatched a plan, whereby they would be backed-up and join a transport of new Mercedes APCs to be transported to the US, where they would break from the rest of the convoy on reaching the region of the Cheyenne Mountain Complex, home of NORAD.

28.3 Cheyenne Ghost Dance



specifically designed to protect against such incursions, and, based on the various warbots and other TITAN machines abound the entrances, was more than operational.

Adrien took the opportunity to go on a larger scouting mission, noting the nearby connections with the Peterson Air Force Base. Whilst attempts to scout out alternative entrance points were successful, these too were heavily guarded. Returning to the way point the Proxies and the AGI sought to find an alternative path and extended their scouting range. However, this time they were spotted; Hunter Killer had been summoned and came in with an attack formation. Vyvyan forced a brute-force hack on one and succeeded, and another was shot out of the sky. But Paco was taking enormous damage, and even for a heavily armoured APC, one more hit would surely mean curtains for the APC, and probably all travellers.

Fortunately however, the party was saved by the intervention of several surface-to-air missiles taking out the remaining Hunter-Killers. Through a series of smoke signals. Eventually making contact, their saviours turned out to be a population of Native Americans who now resided in the White House, Canyon de Chelly. A rigorous interrogation was carried out by Téyahpetáht, the Great One, to ascertain their business and especially their desire to take over the American TITANs. Téyahpetáht took some convincing, but eventually saw validity in the Firewall agent's argument. He also revealed that several of their people had been captured and had been taken to ADX Florence, a former maximum security prison that was nearby. Why a TITAN would want transhuman prisoners was anyone's guess.

It was at that point that he revealed the secret of the tribe; that they were practitioners of the Ghost Dance, whereby the power of ancestors could provide strength and knowledge to the living, aided with a fair dose of peyote. Specifically, existing morphs could be modified to have a Ghost Rider module, and with specialist integration techniques for special ancestors from The Fall period that had been kept "on ice". Hashkeh Naabah, a former security guard at the Cheyenne complex was integrated with Paco. Chihuahau, a security systems expert, also from the Cheyenne complex was integrated with Adrien. Mika, a nuclear scientist was integrated with Hermann, and finally Rolling Thunder, a medicine man and moral leader, a former local priest at Florence, was integrated with Vyvyan.

The new party, after some debate, went on what seemed to be a necessary diversion to Florence. Wide open land was between them and the prison. But even from there, they could see the defenses of at least two Think Tanks, and four warbots.

28.4 Florence and the Machines

With morphs in place and backups made the Proxies and the AGI were transported to New York, an eight-hour journey. The Big Apple had seen better days and was largely a ruin of molten glass, steel, and smashed concrete as a locus of major fighting during The Fall. Making fall at Harbortown, Perth Amboy, the convoy set on its day-and-a-half journey, through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, and finally into Cheyenne, Colorado, where they broke from the main convoy and sought refuge among the many nooks and caves around the mountains, including many new ones that had been created during The Fall. The complex had clearly been a target for transhuman forces with various nuclear weapons, bunker busters, and the like. But the Cheyenne Mountain Complex had been

The conflict was fast and devastating; initially, Adrien attempted to close and take over Think Tank but was spotted, but not before additional Stalkers and Warbots were identified. As he dropped back to regroup at the party's vantage spot, the battle began in earnest. Vyvyan was felled early by surreptitious Stalkers, who collected the body and talk it back to Florence ADX, and from that point onwards, in the fine tradition of medieval warfare, the two sides simply charged towards each other, guns blazing as they came closer into range.

There was no quarter asked or given in this battle. Adrien was next fall unconscious, and things were looking grim for transhumanity. Paco The Truck charged as fast as his sixteen wheels would carry him, absorbing the brunt of the many weapons from the Warbots and Think Tanks. There was a fortunate moment for the party when one of the Stalkers suffered a serious malfunction with their main gun as it literally blew up in their hands, and shortly afterwards concentrated fire from Paco and Hermann brought this machine down.

Although the numbers were seriously in favour of the TITAN forces, there was the serious advantage of Paco's vast bulk and armour. Coordinating their actions, Paco and Hermann were (eventually) able to bring one Warbot down, then another, and another. Unfortunately, by this stage, the Stalker carrying Vyvyan's unconscious form had entered the main ADX complex and had disappeared from view. Despite this, Paco, protecting Hermann, pressed on. The final warbot was dispatched and then the party turned on the Think Tanks. One was taken out surprisingly quickly, but the other fought on, and eventually Paco, having received enormous amounts of damage, finally ground to a halt in the desert sand, inactive but not destroyed. With not even a scratch on their morph, Hermann was able to dispatch the final Think Tank with relative ease and survey the damage all around. He dispatched the TITAN machines, buried Adrien in the sand, and ventured inside the Florence ADX complex.

28.5 Maximum Security Prison Break In

Breaking into the Florence ADX complex, Hermann found a stark and empty building, albeit one with clear signs of prior habitation. The entire design seemed to induce an isolating terror in its own right, and the thought did cross his mind why a TITAN would even want to subject transhumans to such a psychological torture. It seems so much more in line with the behaviour of 21st century humanity. Of course, Hermann was not entirely alone. Stumbling into one cell he was shocked, first by the putrid smell, by one cell that was entirely covered by human flesh. It left him nauseous, and a feeling not helped, as mouths formed on the mass of flesh, spitting acidic saliva onto him, burning through his armour. Whilst in shock, Hermann was a soldier at heart and fought through the waves of nausea and fired plasma into the howling flesh party, then used Mika, riding on him, to break through the locks into the corridor that would lead to NORAD.

Meanwhile, Vyvyan woke up in prison. Or at least it seemed to be a prison, hastily constructed from a disused storeroom. Calling out to others, he discovered that he shared neighbouring cells with one Askook and Yetso. He immediately formulated a plan to escape; a blanket over the camera brought precious moments. Pure strength was used to break down the door. A Griefer guard attacked Vyvyan, but he was having none of that. The others were released and he took the one real path available; run! It is from this running that he ran headlong into Hermann. Alas, for both of them, their reunification was optimistically shortlived. Three Stalkers approached the party demanding their surrender. Putting valour above expeditious retreat as a priority, they turned on the Stalkers. Here the Proxies showed why they are considered to be among Transhumanity's best. As one accidentally wrapped its chain around a trolley, Vyvyan took the initiative and shot it with its own plasma rifle. Meanwhile Hermann used his weaponary to make very short work of the others. The victory was short-lived however, and the doors shut around them, and the voice of NORAD called out for "negotiation".

From there Vyvyan and Hermann were taking the central control room of NORAD, and explained their case for the PARACELSUS 2.0 upgrade, which NORAD agreed to introduce in a sandboxed environment for exploration. NORAD expressed genuine curiosity in the mind of transhumans, and conducted a special test to determine how transhuman Vyvyan and Hermann really were. Passing the text for empathic reactions, the TITAN constructed a fork of them to be

placed in a Time Delayed Simulspace to subject the forks to extreme psychological torture. "The better we understand the human mind, the more we can control it", explained NORAD, providing reasons on why they should be one which had a Manifest Destiny to control Earth and indeed the entire solar system.

Meanwhile. Paco the Truck was repairing themselves, and at the same time being looted, but some scavenging soldiers all in US army uniforms. Adrien also woke up from the sand just in time to witness this. The scavengers were, in fact, remanents of the transhumanists from the US army, but had also become rather Luddite in their approach to technology, and who can blame them? They were about to destroy Mare Nostrum where Adrien intereveden pleading the virtues of this AGI-not-a-TITAN. Whilst they took Paco and Mare Nostrum back to their based, in the remains of a neighbouring golf course of all places, the Proxies made use of their radio transmitter to contact the one person whose orders they would respect; that of the President of the United States, Ms. Lisa Simpson, who had been living on a Reclamationist orbital since The Fall. After all, the wealthy and the powerful were the first to be rescued. As The Interdict was down, contact could be made, with a direct order to rescue the prisoners.

28.5 Zhōngjí rùqīn

As NORAD reviewed the effects of the PARACELSUS 2.0 upgrade, the complex went into a state of red alert. A massive invasion had been launched by an alliance of the three PRC TITANS against NORAD, transporting forces underwater to the west coast and subverting what detections that NORAD had emplaced there. The force was massive, perhaps even greater than what had been ever been marshalled even in The Fall. Vyvyan located dropships among the armada, that were releasing hordes of think tanks, warbots, and more, and made every effort to hack the systems and hand them over to NORAD control, whilst Hermann evaluated the grim situation. NORAD's forces were clearly outnumbered and outgunned.

Witnessing the sky turn black with the colour of the Chinese TITAN ships blocking out the dusty light of Earth, Adrien made contact with President Simpson for a general call to arms. The scattered remains of the NATO army, flung far across the continent, engaged in what they could in harassing fire against the supply lines using asymmetric and guerilla warfare tactics. NORAD invoked the NATO agreement and called upon the European Union to assist. The Planetary Consortium and the Lunar-LaGrange Alliance, both also weakened by their recent conflicts, offered support as well in the form of mass drivers.

But the numbers were still in favour of the Chinese TITANS, who out-numbered the NORAD forces at least ten to one. As the perimeter fell, an escape route was planned. Paco the Truck picked up Adrien and a few soldiers and they made their way to University of Colorado, Boulder, where a NORAD system, in the former supercomputer centre operated. Whilst of insufficient to be operational, it could hold NORAD. The TITAN began a "lights-out" approach, as it stored and forwarded its system to Boulder, and Hermann and Vyvyan made their escape with a Fetch to control any loose NATO machines.

The escape was made good as Cheyenne Mountain fell. It would only be a matter of time before however before their attention were turned to Boulder. As NORAD was encounched in the Boulder system however, Adrien and the soldiers rigged up Mare Nostrum beside NORAD and introduced the PARACELSUS 2.0 upgrade. Perhaps ethicists in the future would debate the morality of introducing empathy and consciousness to an effectively unconscious TITAN without their consent, and the transmission was made to transhumanity that NORAD was now also under the rule of sympathetic relations.

The battle however was still in favour of the Chinese TITAN alliance, and it seemed that the Proxies would have flat-pack NORAD and Mare Nostrum to make good another escape, perhaps to Canada. And then? Further north? To Thule and beyond? To be constantly on the run? It was at that moment that several large biological ships appeared from nowhere in the sky; the Factors had arrived, much to the disdain and disappointment of the Proxies who had quite enough of the dangerous and duplicitous aliens. But the Factors turned their attentions to the Chinese TITANs, and provided to be the decisive factor, pun intended.

Victory for transhumanity was achieved. The Factors explained that they were wrong about humans. They really were the first species that had survived a singularity event with their machines and not only survived, but had created conscious cyborgs, united organic and inorganic intelligence. They were, of course, still cautious about this new technology and wished to place the Earth solar system in quarantine. The gates would be controlled by the Factors, but with joint scientific operations. The Factors would retreat to the Oort cloud and observe how things progressed over the next twenty years.

Great ceremonies were held. The Proxies were elevated within Firewall to Server status. Awards were provided, with Adrien joining the joint exploration force, and Vyvyan heading a joint scientific organisation. Hermann, ever modest, simply wanted a job but would be surprised as he would be promoted to head interfactional security. Paco received a full upgrade from AGI to AI, and Ni-hai and Captain Renault would one day find special permission from The Factors to live out their time in a small colony on Echo IV.

There would still be tensions within the factions, with the factors. The remains of TITANs without the upgrade would still be a threat. But despite the great loss of life, and even a planet, Transhumanity had been saved. For the first time in many years, the sun rose over an Earth, and an entire solar system, that was at last at peace.

The advertisement features a large, glowing crescent moon in the upper half of the image. Below it, the words "ECLIPSE PHASE" are written in a white, sans-serif font. The "ECLIPSE" part is on the left, and "PHASE" is on the right, with the crescent moon positioned between them. In the lower half of the image, there is a vibrant, futuristic cityscape set against a dark background. The city is composed of various floating structures, some with glowing lights and others with more organic, organic-looking shapes. A large, circular structure, possibly a planet or a massive space station, is visible in the background on the right side. The overall aesthetic is dark and mysterious, fitting the theme of the game.

Your Mind is software. *Program it.* ■ Your Body's a shell. *Change it.* ■ Death is a disease. *Cure it.* ■ Extinction is approaching. *Fight it.*

ECLIPSE PHASE

The Roleplaying Game of Transhuman Conspiracy and Horror.

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IN PARADISUM: STEVE PERRIN AND TERRY K. AMTHOR

By Lev Lafayette

A few days ago (August 13) Steve Perrin passed away (<https://www.chaosium.com/blog/vale-and-farewell-steve-perrin-1946-2021/>), aged 75. It has taken some time for me to compose my thoughts on this.

Steve Perrin was the lead author of RuneQuest by Chaosium, the first roleplaying game I participated in, and one of the most influential books (<https://tcpip.dreamwidth.org/167593.html>) in my life. His wife, Luise Perenne was responsible for the iconic cover of that 1978 book. Unlike other FRPGs that essentially provided late 20th century life transported to a fantasy setting, with RuneQuest there was a greater fantastic and immersive quality of a premodern worldview. The game design was firmly based on the principles of "playable realism", and the writing was a superb example of clarity, depth, and brevity.

Steve Perrin was also the author or co-author of several other RPGs, including Worlds of Wonder, Stormbringer, ElfQuest, and Superworld. Overall, he contributed or wrote almost one hundred publications for a variety of roleplaying games and publishers. Superworld has been cited as the game that inspired the famous Wild Cards series, edited by George R.R. Martin, and Perrin was the creator of three of the characters in that series. He was also a founding member of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) in 1966, and worked in the console/computer game industry in the 1980s, doing game design and writing manuals.

If records serve me correctly, it was in 2005 that Steve and I started to correspond, initially through a playtest mailing lists for the Mongoose edition of RuneQuest, and then with other RuneQuest mailing lists, the Deluxe Basic Role Playing list, and the Quest rules mailing list for his own (never finished) game that effectively combined RuneQuest and the Hero System (which he'd also worked on) called SPQR (Steve Perrin Quest Rules), which I used for the Questworld by Chaosium.

Steve was kind enough to be an interview subject for the first edition (https://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_1.pdf) of the online RPG 'zine that I founded, RPG Review, in 2008 as well as writing an article for that issue on how RuneQuest was designed. Ten years later, when I organised the third RuneQuest Glorantha Con Down Under (the first in some twenty years!) he wrote an article (https://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_40.pdf) in RPG Review issue 40 on how RuneQuest



happened, which included the revelation that Glorantha's Ducks were effectively the Hobbits of the world, except with a fatalistic and even morbid personality.

We were friends on Facebook, of course. Whilst I never met the man in person, what I did know of him was that he was always considerate, open-minded, creative, clear-headed, and polite. These are good qualities for a person to carry even most of the time, but Steve did so without variation. He was incredibly influential during my formative years, and it was an honour and a pleasure to correspond and work with him over the past sixteen years.

I have even started looking at the correspondence we shared SPQR. I'd like to revive that, in his honour. For aesthetic reasons, I think it should be set in the late Roman Republic, Senatus PopulusQue Romanus. It's the least I can do.

In paradisum deducant te Angeli, Steve Perrin. Thank you.

Photos of Steve and Luise's wedding some fifty years ago!

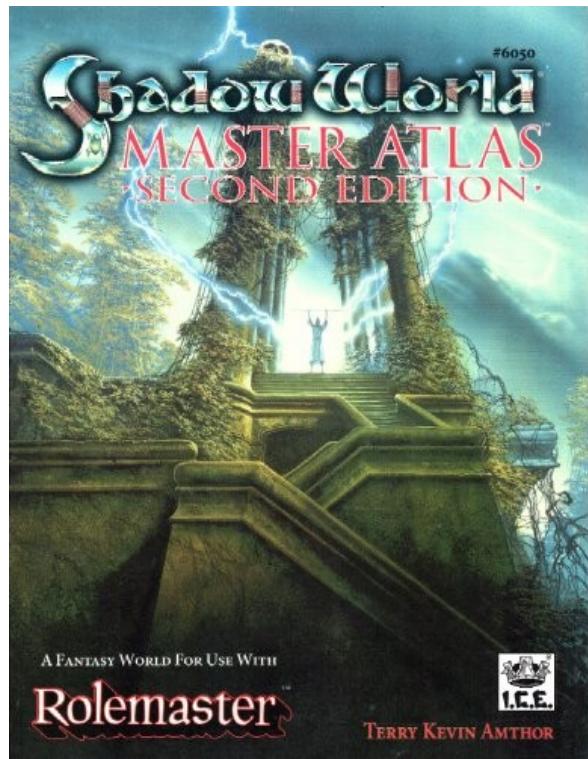
<https://www.facebook.com/rangleme/posts/10158691751544685>

Terry Kevin Amthor inspired me in my teenage and early twenty years with his science-fantasy imagination with a three-year Rolemaster game at the Murdoch Alternative Reality Society (MARS) in Western Australia, which led to the publication of Rolemaster Companion VI.

Many years later I had the pleasure of having him as an interview subject for RPG Review.

https://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_38.pdf The next issue (53, Dec 2021) of RPG Review will be dedicated to ICE games and Shadow World in recognition of his work,

I hope the RPG community can keep Shadow World alive. I think he would have liked that.



HOUSING, FOOD, AND CLOTHING IN IMAGINED WORLDS: THEORY

By Lev Lafayette

A History of Lived Experience

When most people think of history they often tend to concentrate on the pivotal battles and leaders, and the rise and fall of nations and kingdoms. There is no doubt that these things are very important and in the grand scheme of the unfolding of history. However, contemporary historians, following a West and East Germany approach in the 1980s called "Alltagsgeschichte" often look at the history of everyday life with a concentration which includes the experiences that are seemingly ordinary to the people experiencing them at the time, yet also are often quite unusual for those who do not. Not only does this concentration on ordinary life-experiences, a cultural rather than social history, mean describing the experience of prosaic objects, but also it means primarily taking up the principle of history from "ordinary people", "histoire vue d'en bas et non d'en haut" ("history seen from below and not from above", Lucien Febvre), and using smaller units of analysis, individuals and local communities, a micro-history.

All of this accords well with the thematic topic of this issue of RPG Review. It is not, however, the lived experience of specific characters in a setting that are being considered here. Articles that cover the character and setting examples, also in this issue, cover that ground. What is being looked at here is some natural, social, and cultural drivers that lead to these particular implementations with further elaborations on how these change in a magical or science-fiction technologies. In part, such as exploration is undoubtedly inspired by the experience of RPGs that give this very little or no thought whatsoever, often effectively transporting the "lived experience" of late 20th century people from advanced economies to a fantasy or science fiction setting. As one fellow gamer ruefully observes far too many villages that are allegedly in a feudal-fantasy setting seem to have an elected mayor, an enormously innovative position which first made an appearance in England quite early (12th century) but was rather rare outside of that setting. It is certainly more reminiscent of small towns and communes of modern times rather than the places that they are supposed to be representing. On the one hand such anachronisms provide an easier entry point to the setting on the grounds of familiarity. But it certainly doesn't help in the exploration of an otherworldly shared imaginary space.

The Primary Drivers: Necessity and Availability

When considering matters of the food, clothing, and buildings of a community, a designer needs to consider the needs of the people and their broad setting, including natural and technological resources. It may seem obvious, but it alas in game design is unfortunately rare. Needs are the first and primary driver, as humans will require sustenance. What are the food and water resources available for people? From this outset this will drive population capacity and density. Hunter-gatherer societies, for example, are often nomadic or semi-nomadic, following the ebb and flow of natural resources in their proximity, along with well-tested contingencies and tool variation where there is more extreme weather. A few, in particularly resource-rich areas, developed more sedentary lifestyles and more permanent housing. This would often occur in fishing communities e.g., the pre-contact Chumash people of North America, which had an estimated 21 people per square kilometre. This, of course, is an exceptional example. Take the opportunity to review maps of the ancient or modern world; those places that have good access to food and water are those that have the highest population densities. This, of course, applies to the human species. In a fantasy or science fiction genuinely alien species may have other requirements, but the principle remains true. The alien species will have the greatest

population densities in those regions that they are best adapted to.

"For with the Lydians, as with most barbarian [i.e., non-Greek] races, it is thought highly indecent even for a man to be seen naked"

-- Herodotus, "The Histories"

Apart from the requirements of food and water, other oft-assumed biological needs are more a case of environment. Nomadic and semi-nomadic people will have housing designed to last for the period of use; the San people of southern Africa would (and still do) have temporary shelters during the spring rains when there is a great deal of movement for new foods, to more established housing in the winter and early spring dry season and at permanent water sources. The housing and clothing of indigenous Australians also illustrated this relationship between need and resources. In some contexts there would be no housing at all with a community group resting among several campfires during the night and in other cases constructed or natural windbreaks would be sufficient. Clothing would follow suit, pun intended. In warmer environments clothing might not be needed at all, or perhaps to protect more delicate regions of the human anatomy. In cooler climes, cloaks made from animal skins (e.g., kangaroo or possum) were required. A comparison with semi-nomadic lifestyle of the traditional Inuit is worthy for comparison; the diet was heavily based around meat-consumption such as reindeer, seal, whale, musk ox, etc., heavy-layered clothing made from sealskin or deer, and temporary (igloo) and permanent (turf huts) shelters.

It is worth noting, of course, that communities are not just brutish expressions of satisfying necessities, but also with nuanced symbolism in cultural expressions even in subsistence cultures, and indeed, often more so. It is often a difficult fact for linear social evolutionists to accept, but for individual people the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to agricultural societies was actually a step backwards with reductions in life expectancy and leisure time. The advantage of agricultural communities was, of course, the greater number of people that could be supported through the agricultural techniques of farming and husbandry.

Cultural symbolic expressions can initially find themselves through sex (e.g., male/female/third sex) and age (e.g., child/adult/elder), through expected roles and behaviours with the distinctions depending on the particular culture and their norms. This includes clothing, food, and housing. Men of various mainly highland ethnic groups in New Guinea, who otherwise go unclothed, will sport penis gourds. Kayan women of Myanmar are known for their neck rings which push down on the collar bone, appearing to lengthen the neck. The specific reason is disputed (e.g., exaggerate sexual dimorphism, magical protection against tiger attacks, the resemblance of a dragon), and all are at least partially true. Food taboos have a known correlation with sex taboos, providing both incest taboos and counter-cannibalistic sense of in-group community. Particular foods can be reserved for social roles which reach a formal extreme in sumptuary laws, which of course also applied to clothing. These rarely have a biologically necessary or functional role, but their social functions are often developed to ensure cultural and political stability. In the case of sumptuary laws they often in a European context a status identifier for a feudal nobility, declining in wealth and power, to differentiate themselves against the rising burgher class.

Technological Changes

Where resources allowed for the development of surplus economies from stored agricultural produce, various social and physical technologies could also develop, including the opportunities for trade of goods (along with, of course, the technologies of war). The designer must also consider the distribution of natural resources on what is available for

trade, what a transition from hunter-gatherer to agricultural society would look like, and whether a transition is even possible or desired. In addition to potential food and water supplies the availability of beasts of burden for domestication is either assumed or overlooked. To use Earth as an example, the presence of the horse was critical for the development of European and Asian plains-cultures. Sub-Saharan cultures had no real equivalent (no, zebras are not a viable candidate for domestication), and the Andean civilisations had to make do with the llama; sure-footed, but only capable of carrying 25-30% of their fairly modest body weight. In India and southern Asia the water buffalo was critical for plowing rice fields ("the live tractor) and as pack animals.

Trade goods will, of course, depend on the capacity of a community to develop a surplus and the desire of trading partners for such goods. A principle of comparative advantage will tend to apply, sometimes described as the most successful counter-intuitive law in the social sciences. This states that where one community has an absolute advantage over another then it is still better overall for the less fortunate community to produce the good that they less of an absolute disadvantage in production. One particular change that comes with such economies is a transition of trade to be primarily based on establishing inter-community ties through a "gift economy", with high status awarded to the generous, to trade based on achieving mutual benefits through transactions and status expressed in private wealth. Of course, motivated through need and greed, humans will often consider war and pillage as an alternative.

The implementation of industrialisation and mass transport rapidly "shrinks" the world in terms of effective distance and reduces (but does not remove) cultural and contextually-specific satisfactions of necessities. Technology becomes more a driver over cultural expressions, although it is often expressed through a rapacious imperialism which has its own counter-nationalism for local emancipation; the experience of China in the twentieth century serves as an illustrative example. The distribution of goods and services through imperialism and trade, the distribution of people through colonisation and immigration, alters and even replaces indigenous cultural expressions in cuisine, clothing, and housing. When the much-heralded "post-industrial" or "information age" arrives this process continues further, representing a further capitalisation and automation of industrial processes, just the replacement of the agricultural age by the the industrial age was also an industrialisation of agriculture. One of the counter-intuitive effects of more cultural diversity is also increasing partial cultural homogenisation as universality requires the separation of aesthetic and legal expressions, the former diverse, the latter standardised.

Where and When? There and Then!

Putting it altogether designers need to be attentive to the setting when explaining "every day life", in terms of the resources and history of the setting. Travel to the old port in Oamaru, New Zealand, and one will find buildings in the style of the British Empire, but build from a local sandstone which hardened on exposure to air. In medieval Europe, rice was an exotic dish normally reserved for banquets (e.g., blancmange was once blankmanger, chicken and rice). Indigenous peoples around the world would make use of fish skin leather for parkas, mittens, and shoes. With the exception of a some cultures (many hunter-gatherers) and subcultures (e.g., some European knights) most people, for most of settled history, people only ate small amounts of mammal meat relative to contemporary times. What



we certainly don't find is generic foods like "Iron Rations"; that itself a very specific term, for the United States military around WWI, consisting of a cake of beef and wheat and some chocolate bars. The very idea of a fantasy troupe sitting down by a campfire to nibble some chocolate is sufficiently ludicrous to break the suspension of disbelief. Instead, the designer should make the effort to work out what a traveler's rations would be like from the setting.

Of course, this does not mean going down the path of excessive game-description of mundane things. It means being sufficiently attentive to generate a sense of immersion through verisimilitude, without weighing heavy on the game-system mechanics, real or implied. Consider these two descriptions of the common housing material, the brick. One leads to a mechanical consideration, which whilst accurate, does little for giving the players an experience of the world. The latter avoids the mechanics of production, assuming that the focus of the game isn't masonry, but does give a sense of the experience of how people actually live.

"A block of clay hardened by drying in the sun or burning in a kiln. Bricks come in numerous shapes and sizes. Bricks come in numerous densities and hardness depending on the baking process, parent material and the material mixed with it for hardening (pebbles, hay, grass, twigs etc[sic])." (Gary Gygax, "World Builder")

"More common are plain new red brick or white stucco Georgian style homes and terrace houses. Older homely Queen Anne era red brick houses." (Karl Brown, "Gulliver's Trading Company")

Adding the Fantastic

What happens when advanced technology or magic (call this rose by any other name) is introduced to the mix? The degree of such "magic" is, in literature, defined as the difference between "high fantasy" and "low fantasy". Some consider the continuum to be one on the degree of "gritty realism" in the setting, when the distinction is more about the degree of the fantastic that is included. If the setting has Elves and Hobbits (TM) (and one notes here the profound influence of Professor Tolkien in contemporary Eurocentric fantasy settings), walking into a local inn where the keeper is a retired adventuring wizard, then safe to say that the setting is heading towards the high fantasy side of the continuum, whereas if it is rare, subtle, and otheworldly and possible to interpret through normal technologies (such as the case with magical realism) one is dealing with low fantasy end of the scale.

Why is this degree important? Because the introduction of advanced technologies or magic increases the scope of everyday life, rather than replacing it. The higher the prevalence of the magic or technology, the greater the change from what would be considered the historical expectation. Certainly, there is an argument that with given resources, the existence of magic would mean that technological developments are slowed down. This might make for a nice post-hoc justification, but it doesn't make much sense on the context of every other technology or knowledge that has been introduced to a community. New productive resources tends to mean more and diverse production. Besides, it's far more interesting to make innovative uses of the technologies or magics to "everyday" life.

Many RPGs have picked up on this quickly, especially from a science-fiction perspective. The various cyberpunk games (Cyberpunk, Cyberspace, Shadowrun, etc) made quite a point of how the introduction of visceral technologies alter the everyday representation of the body. Eclipse Phase really pushed the envelope with characters adopting entirely new morphs, some more than a little exotic. In experience, the character was their ego, their morph was effectively a vehicle that would also be rare, expensive, and subject to insurance, and breakdowns. From a fantasy perspective, a combination of steampunk levels of technology and magic is present in Iron Kingdoms and Band of

Blades.

Mixing up cultural expressions is, of course, thoroughly encouraged. Osprey Books provide many examples of military uniforms which, of course, the standard RPG adventuring party would derive from. Various texts on the ancient or medieval world, especially those which are well-illustrated are a must (swallow your pride and immerse oneself in *The Illustrated Children's Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, for example). Combine the two and one can see plenty of opportunities for exotic analogues and references, but of course, always refer back to whether the combination is possible and probable given the resources and history. Despite its unforgivable hand-waving of the more numerous indigenous people the "Greek Africa" synthesis of Aesheba by New Infinities is just a minor example of what is possible. For something even more exotic, consider the Dharmic evolution of Dragonnews in RuneQuest's Glorantha.

Keep in mind how relatively common magic would influence food, housing, and clothing. Desert environments would be profoundly altered in D&D by Clerics who can create 4 gallons of water with a 1st level Create Water spell, and towns would find themselves in a distinctly non-medieval setting with the distributed application of the 2nd level Continual Light spell. The design of houses of the wealthy and the military would be influenced by those who would to protect sanctuaries from teleporting intruders. In a sufficiently high fantasy setting, elementals could provide quite wondrous changes to the plumbing and central heating (in the same way that ubiquitous fusion power would in a science fiction setting).

Bringing It All Together

The point being, returning to the original claims of the article, is that the drivers of need, wants, and resources will make the difference in the expression of clothing, housing, and food. Describing these differences assist in moving the experience of the story from an accessible but anachronistic expression of the cultural norms of where an RPG was published to a more immersive experience of the setting.

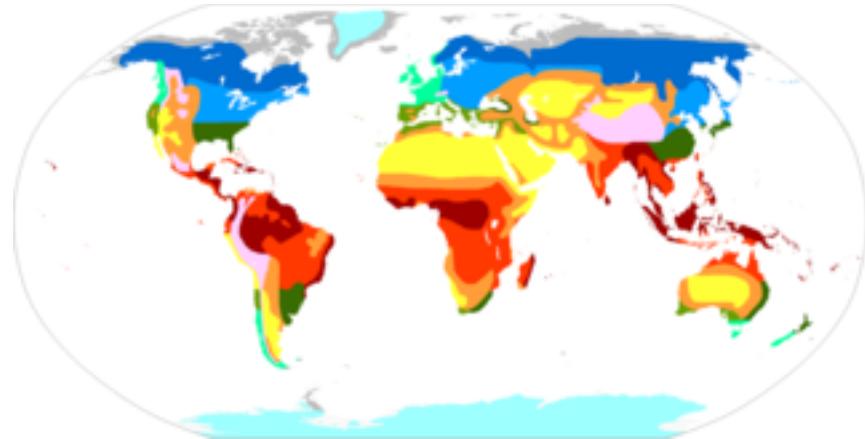
HOUSING, FOOD, AND CLOTHING IN IMAGINED WORLDS: APPLICATION

By *Lev Lafayette*

Introduction and Definitions

The following series of tables is based on the preceding article which outlined the theoretical principles for housing, food, and clothing in imagined worlds, including real world examples, along with various fantasy and science fiction elaborations. Two major components are included in these considerations, the first being the level of social and technological development (STG) which are derived from key texts in social theory and anthropology, the second being a coarse version of the Trewartha climate classification system. Examples of STG levels include RuneQuest (3rd edition), with technological considerations in GURPS (4th edition) (social and government types are dealt with rather poorly). Note that whilst "levels" do suggest a linear progression with time, it does not suggest moral or inevitable choices. A society with an STG lower than another may still be a better community, provide more freedoms etc, and may deliberately decide not to adopt a STG when offered. With regard to climate groups one of the few considerations in RPGs for climate can be found in Rolemaster's Campaign Law or Gamemaster Law. Both of these categories can be used for other purposes than just food, clothing, and housing of characters.

One important facet to note is that as STG levels increase the scope of habitation expands (this article assumes human and human-like species) and the housing, food, and clothing becomes more generic. For this reason, the climatic patterns are only dominant for the first few STG levels, and then the STG levels become dominant regardless of climate, and human housing, food, and clothing is sufficiently adapted to a variety of climatic conditions. An extension to climate groups (U, Underwater and V, Underground) is designed for non-human carbon-based species in such locales, whether of a fantasy or science-fiction style.



Climate Group A: Tropical climates. These have an average temperature about 18C for the entire year, and a frost-free throughout any cooler season. They may have wet/dry seasons or precipitation all year. On earth this will include large parts of South and Central America, nearly all of central Africa, the Malay archipelago, and the lands around the Bay of Bengal. Vegetation is multi-layered, with large trees forming canopies and dense forest floor. Such an environment gives rise to a great diversity of plant and animal biomass and species, and especially flowering plants.

Climate Group B: Arid and semi-arid climates. With very little (arid) or little (semi-arid) precipitation, usually in the cooler months, this climate group is hot and dry with cool nights. On Earth, this climate is found in the Sahara region, the Arabian peninsula, most of the Middle-East and central Asia, north and western China, west and central India, most of Australia, central and western South Africa, most of Patagonia, and centre and western North America. Animal and plant life is minimal, diverse, and seasonal with both evolved to minimise water loss. Plant life is mainly shrubs, animal life is insects and arachnids, small marsupials, and reptiles.

Climate Group C: Subtropical climates. Defined as having eight months with a mean temperature of 10C or higher, these are differentiated by dry or humid summers (and sometimes both). On Earth, this is found in the Mediterranean, south-east of North America and the west coast, the region around Uruguay in South America, the southern coastline of Africa, most of the southern and eastern coastline of Australia, northern New Zealand, southern China and Japan. Flora includes broadleaf deciduous forests, coniferous forests, and grasslands with significant mammal populations, including humans. These areas often are prone to agricultural development.

Climate Group D: Temperate and continental climates. This classification includes temperate regions those that have four to seven months with an average temperature of 10C and higher. It can include "oceanic" types where the coldest month is above 0C and "continental" types where the inland areas result in a temperature below 0C. Summers can be cool or warm. On Earth, this classification is found in throughout Europe, north of the Mediterranean countries, most of Russia, north and eastern China, most of Japan and Korea, northern, central, and eastern North America, most of Chile, the most southern parts of Australia, and southern New Zealand. Flora is mixed, including deciduous and coniferous forest. There is significant mammal fauna diversity. These regions are prone to human settlement and agriculture.

Climate Group E: Boreal climates. These are the subpolar regions, where low temperature predominates with only a few months above 10C and periods that are free of frost. On Earth, this climate zone is found in northern regions of North America, Scandinavia, and northern-central Russia. Also known as taiga, or snow forest, flora is heavily orientated towards coniferous forests with a scattering of deciduous trees in the typically nutrient-poor soil. Fauna has relatively low diversity and mammals tend towards large herbivorous mammals and long-distance predators.

Climate Group F: Polar climates. These climates have an average monthly temperature below 10C and consist of two main types, tundra and ice-cap. In tundra there is at least one month where the average temperature is above 0C. On Earth, polar climates are found in northern North America, the tip of South America, Antarctica, and Greenland. Vegetation is really only found in the tundra areas which allows the possibility of berries and lichen. There is little biodiversity and mammal species with large populations particularly rare, the seals being an exception.

Climate Group H: Highland climates. These are the regions where altitude defines the climatic classification that would differ otherwise, and are typically affected by cold and wind. On Earth this includes Tibet and the Himalayas in central-east Asia, the Swiss alps, the American Cordillera (Andes, Sierra Madre ranges, North American Rockies). Because such regions are often subject to intense radiation, cold, wind, and snow flora tends towards a variety of grasses and low-lying shrubs. Mammal species vary, but are typically in significantly smaller numbers than surrounding regions and adapted to the cold.

Socio-Technological Level 1: Primal Hunter-Gatherer. Hunter-gatherer obtained by foraging and hunting and represents the original and longest behaviour of human beings, ranging from pre-homo sapiens, throughout the paleolithic and mesolithic period, and was gradually replaced in the neolithic period. Communities are mostly nomadic

or semi-nomadic with equivalent housing. The means of communication is natural speech with knowledge embodied in a complex system of myth, and societal differentiation is minimal and economic distribution egalitarian, but usually with some division based on age and often a sexual division of labour. Hunter-gatherer societies are prone to natural challenges with low (c35 years) average life expectancy. Gaming example: Würm, GURPS Ice Age

Socio-Technological Level 2: Primal Pastoral. Early pastoral societies involve either a semi-nomadic or a more sedentary lifestyle, depending on resources and climate, making its appearance with the Neolithic revolution and the beginnings of monocropping agriculture, c12000 BCE. The more nomadic behaviour is represented by a larger dependence on animal meats and a wider range of travel. More sedentary versions are marked by a stronger emphasis on agriculture, more permanent housing, and pastoralism over more strongly defined territory. Proto-writing makes an appearance, and there is a more pronounced division of labour and the development of slavery. The agricultural revolution actually results in a lower diversity of foods with no improvement in average life expectancy, but with greater population density. Gaming example: Orkworld, RuneQuest.

Socio-Technological Level 3: Traditional Metallurgical. Primarily, but not exclusively, from the more sedentary pastoral societies comes the rise of city-states and empires, and a hardening of borders. This coincides with the beginnings of metallurgy, starting with copper and bronze, the invention of writing, and the codification of legal systems, and the development of specialised classes in rulership, religion, and warriors, of caste systems, the expansion of slavery, and the establishment of private holdings in land. All of this represents the beginning of the State in a formal sense, around 4000 BCE, first in Mesopotamia, then upper Egypt, the Indus Valley, central China, etc. Gaming example: RuneQuest, Qin: The Warring States.

Socio-Technological Level 4: Traditional Agronomy. A variety of technologies lead to a more empirical accumulation of knowledge and use in a more scientific manner, correlating with the global middle ages or more appropriately called "post-classical history", beginning around 500CE in a European context. This includes more extensive use of crop rotation in agriculture, resulting in increased yields and gradual improvements in potential population density. Other notable technologies include the development of milling, various mechanical devices, wootz steel, and gunpowder. The previously polytheism common is increasingly replaced by monotheistic world religions, and the establishment of the earliest universities. Gaming example: Dungeons & Dragons, Pathfinder, Ars Magica, Aquilarre, Rolemaster.

Socio-Technological Level 5: Modern Mercantile. The development of the movable type printing press with an alphabetic script (c1450 CE) leads a massive increase in publications, itself feeding both a breakdown of existing religious power structures and eventually the theological worldview being replaced with more secular approaches with the scientific revolution. Developments in seafaring allow for global exploration and subsequent colonialisation and the nationalistic economics of mercantilism, and in military technology, muskets and then other smooth-bored long guns. Time-keeping technologies result in a powerful cultural shift. The period is notable for initiating rapid growth in population, and global reach. Gaming example: Flashing Blades, 7th Sea, Honour + Intrigue, Gulliver's Trading Company.

Socio-Technological Level 6: Modern Industrialisation. The industrial revolution (c1780 to 1840) mechanises production processes with machine tools, harnessing steam, water, and coal as sources of power with rapid developments in chemical discoveries. The combination leads to a massive increase in population growth and standards of living. Industrialisation eventually witnesses developments ranging from the mass manufacture of steel, the automobile, hydro-electric and fission atomic power, all to such an extent that the global environment is stressed. Industrial technologies are utilised for war with global scale . Gaming example: Deadlands, Call of Cthulhu, GURPS WWII.

Socio-Technological Level 7: Postmodern Computerisation. The mass introduction of information and communications technology transforms industrial and agricultural production as well as leading the rise and then dominance of the knowledge sector of the economy in professional employment. The application of global satellites and near-Earth exploration extend the reach of the species beyond the planet. Energy is harnessed from mass solar arrays and other renewables, helping to reduce environment impact from energy use. Population growth stabilises and international conflicts gain new vectors with information and electronic warfare. Gaming example: Papers & Paychecks, Cyberpunk, Shadowrun, Paranoia.

Socio-Technological Level 8: Postmodern Transhumanism. The hypothetical transhumanist period could be initiated by massive development in improvements in genetic engineering, species uplifting, artificial intelligence, and cybernetic prostheses. On the Barrow scale, this would be a type IV minus civilisation where manipulation of individual atoms is possible, correlating with nanotechnology development, including molecular manufacturing, space-based solar arrays, biophotaliac and fusion atomic power as an energy source. The divergence of the species also means large scale developments such as aquaculture. The combination of energy source and new transhumanist forms allow for population of various corners of the solar system. Gaming example: Transhuman Space, Blue Planet, Eclipse Phase.

Socio-Technological Level 9: Far Future Kardashev Type I. The hypothetical Kardashev Type I socio-technological level refers to a point where energy harnessing is the equivalent of all energy on an Earth-like planet, and on the Barrow scale a type V minus level of development and engineering the atomic nucleus and their nucleons. Already in a post-human environment, the main sources of energy would require the discovery and harnessing of extensive supplies of antimatter (extremely rare in nature) or dark energy. Space travel is plausible via generation ships to nearby worlds or with some form of faster-than-light drive using Einstein-Rosen bridges (wormholes), warp-drives, tachyon hyperdrives. Planetary-wide governments are normal. Gaming examples: Traveller, Warhammer 40K, Spacemaster, Ringworld, Star Trek, Starfinder, Stars Without Number.

Socio-Technological Level 10: Far Future Kardashev Type II. Far Future Kardashev Type II. The hypothetical Kardashev Type I socio-technological level refers to a point where energy harnessing for a civilization is the equivalent of all energy produced by a Sol-like star, and Type VI minus on the Barrow scale where the elementary particles (quarks and leptons). Gaming examples: higher levels of GURPS Ultratech?

Climate Group A: Tropical climates

Socio-Technological Level 1: Grass skirts for clothing or none. Homes from thatch and wood. Low population density, of extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Grass skirts, animal hides for clothing or none.. Homes from thatch and wood. Low population density, of extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 3: Grass skirts, animal hides, leather for clothing. Homes from thatch, wood, and stone. Iron fittings. Low population density, of extended family groups.

Climate Group B: Arid and semi-arid climates

Socio-Technological Level 1: No clothing. Temporary housing from bark. Low population density of extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Loose-fitting textiles (e.g., cotton), animal hides, leather. Textile tents. Incidental metalwork. Low population density of extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 3: Loose-fitting textiles (e.g., cotton), animal hides, leather. Textile tents. Metal implements. Low population density of extended family groups.

Climate Group C: Subtropical climates

Socio-Technological Level 1: Grass skirts for clothing or none. Home from thatch and wood. Low-medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Grass skirts, animal hides, incidental leather for clothing. Home from thatch and wood. Medium population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 3: Animal hides, incidental leather, textiles, for clothing. Home from thatch, wood, and stone. Metal implements. Medium population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 4: Leather and textiles for clothing. Homes from thatch, wood, and stone. Metal implements. Medium population density, multiple extended family groups.

Climate Group D: Temperate and continental climates

Socio-Technological Level 1: Animal hides, fish skin for clothing or none. Homes from thatch, wood and stone. Medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Leather and textiles for clothing. Homes from thatch, wood, stone, concrete. Metal implements. Medium-high population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 3: Leather and textiles for clothing. Homes from thatch, wood, stone, concrete. Metal implements. High population density, multiple family groups, cosmopolitan.

Socio-Technological Level 4: Leather and textiles for clothing. Homes from thatch, wood, stone, concrete. Metal implements. High population density, multiple family groups, cosmopolitan.

Socio-Technological Level 5: Leather and textiles for clothing. Homes from thatch, wood, stone, concrete. Metal implements. Exotic imports. High population density, multiple family groups, cosmopolitan.

Climate Group E: Boreal climates

Socio-Technological Level 1: Animal hides, furs, fish skin for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Low-Medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Leather, furs, animal textiles, fish skin for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Metal implements. Medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 3: Leather, furs, textiles, for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Metal implements. Medium population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 4: Leather, furs, textiles, for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Metal implements. Low-Medium population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 5: Leather, furs, textiles, for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Metal implements. Exotic imports. Medium-high population density, multiple extended family groups.

Climate Group F: Polar climates

Socio-Technological Level 1: Multi-layered animal hides, furs, fish skin for clothing. Homes from stone, packed snow, animal hide and bones. Low population density, extended family groups.

Climate Group H: Highland climates

Socio-Technological Level 1: Animal hides, furs, fish skin for clothing. Homes from stone, animal hide and bones. Low-medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Leather, furs, animal textiles, fish skin for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Metal implements. Low-medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 3: Leather, furs, animal textiles, fish skin for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Metal implements. Low-medium population density, multiple extended family groups.

Generic STG Levels

Socio-Technological Level 7: Leather, furs, textiles, synthetics for clothing. Homes from wood, stone, concrete, glass and steel. Very high population density, multiple family groups, cosmopolitan.

Socio-Technological Level 8: Synthetics dominant for clothing. Building of concrete, glass and steel. Extremely high population density, multiple family groups, very cosmopolitan.

Socio-Technological Level 9: Synthetics for clothing. Direct energy provision replaces food as a necessity. Homes extend to underwater, space, other planets. No strong distinction between "home", "vehicle", and "body". Lower population density due to new environments (space, underground, underwater), very cosmopolitan.

Socio-Technological Level 10: Human or transhuman bodies no longer extant.

Climate Group U: Underwater

Like land, rivers, lakes, and oceans have temperature, climate, and bathymetric classifications. For the purposes of this article, descriptions are provided in terms of the relationship to surface weather patterns. Games like Blue Planet are recommended explore these environments.

Socio-Technological Level 1: No clothing, natural housing only. Geographic range limited to temperature, tropical, and subtropical on the epipelagic zone only. No fire, tools from bone, coral, etc. Medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Some cold weather clothing (skins, plant textiles). Artificial housing from coral, reefs, etc. Aquaculture and pastoral development. Medium-high population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 3: No fire, no metallurgical development. STG level 2 continues for an extended period before jumping to STG level 4, but with early and extensive use of water-power (tides, river flows, underwater vents,

etc). Geographic range extends to include temperate, tropical, subtropical and boreal. Medium-high population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 4: Instead of a STG level 3 for metallurgical development, equivalent social developments but with agronomy equivalent to STG level 4, with towns, extensive aquaculture and fishing. High population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 5: Exploration into polar waters and mesopelagic zone. Very high population density, multiple extended family groups, cosmopolitan.

Socio-Technological Level 6: Development of chemical fires, some metalwork. Industrial machinery at oceanic vents and equivalent. Extensive biological science. Exploration into bathypelagic zone. Very high population density, multiple extended family groups, cosmopolitan.

Climate Group V: Underground

Certain species, especially in fantasy environments, live most of their lives underground (e.g., Dwarves, Orcs). Whilst they typically do have some above-ground interactions as well, the sheer dominance of their underground life does pose some difficulties which are often hand-waved by game designers. Natural food sources are somewhat limited; small supplies of certain fish, bats, and fungiculture will dominate. Population density increases greatly with trade of metal goods for foodstuffs.

Socio-Technological Level 1: Surface animal hides, and furs clothing for clothing. Homes from natural stone. Low-medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 2: Surface-derived leather, furs, and animal textiles for clothing. Worked stone homes. Metal implements. Low-medium population density, extended family groups.



Socio-Technological Level 3: Surface-derived leather, furs, animal textiles for clothing. Worked stone homes. Metal implements. Medium population density, extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 4: Surface-derived leather, furs, and animal textiles for clothing. Worked stone homes. Metal implements. Medium population density, multiple extended family groups.

Socio-Technological Level 5: Leather, furs, textiles, for clothing. Homes from wood or stone. Worked stone homes. Metal implements. Exotic imports. Low-medium population density, extended family groups.

HOW VICTORIAN IS YOUR STEAMPUNK?

By Thomas Verreault

Also known as Victorian Science Fiction, Steampunk has become a major current in role playing games, wargaming, conventions and cosplay. It has penetrated popular culture in novels, comics, television and major motion pictures. It is a romanticized view of the Victorian era that focuses on steam power as a panacea power source, Victorian engineering with exposed gears, screws, analog clocks, and steam valves, and Victorian fashions of suits, top hats, waistcoats, long dresses and corsets. While we are fascinated by the Victorian era, we are a product of our time and challenge the morality and ethics of it in our portrayal of it in the Steampunk genre. It goes without saying that because our portrayal of the Victorian era is in many respects romanticized it is quite possible that what we game and play at with RPGs, wargames and cosplay may not be very Victorian at all.

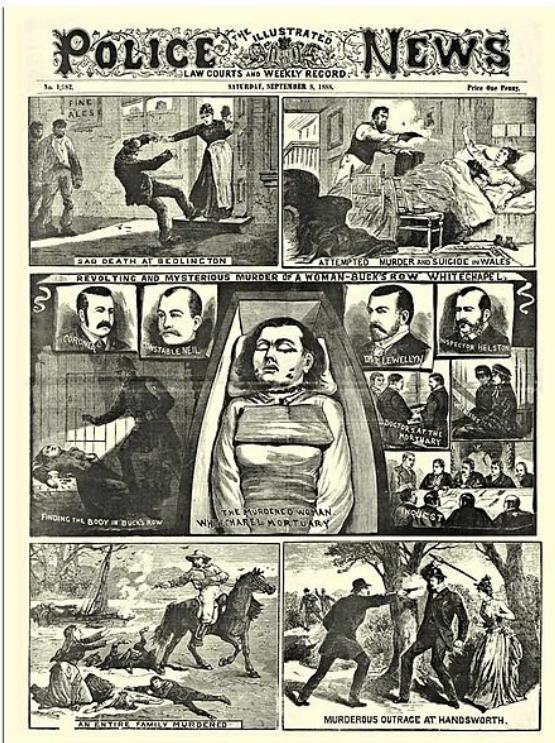
The Victorians certainly presented themselves a clean and righteous. The statements, “No sex, we’re British,” and, “when I hear his footsteps outside my door I lay back, spread my legs and think of England,” epitomize the prudish attitude of Victorians toward sex. There is an ethic of the domestic home setting being a shield against darkness and violence. Art movements in the Victorian era began to romanticism the medieval period. Science and progress were embraced for their own sake. Lets peal back the Victorian veil and see what might lie beneath.

Victorians were fascinated with death, the occult, and the macabre. It was a golden age of gothic horror in literature with the advent of Horace Walpole’s “The Castle Otranto” deemed to be the first gothic novel. However, Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein”, Bram Stokers “Dracula”, and Robert Lewis Stevenson’s “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” are more well-known examples of the genre.

The Ouija board was patented in 1890 but it was inspired by the “talking boards” sweeping the spiritualist scene. The desire to be able to talk to the dead became powerful urge during this time period especially after all the death during the American Civil War. Victorians were absolutely fascinated with ghouls, ghosts, monsters, curses, prophecies and horror.

When Jack the Ripper arrived on the scenes Victorians closely followed the accounts of the murders and the police investigation in the papers with avid morbid fascination the clearly left an imprint on the psyche of not only Britain but also America. The horror of the actual crimes seemed to increase the appetite for the macabre.

It is true that Victorians embraced steam power but not to the degree represented in Steampunk. I remember the first time I saw “Union Jump Troopers”, wargaming figures of ACW Union troops with a steam boiler strapped to their back that enabled them to jump much like a sci fi figure with a rocket pack. While I thought they would make a fun element in a sci fi wargame I also recognized that they were pretty silly. They are the epitome of the idea that just adding steam to everything will magically make it go from balloons to automatons to jump troopers. The reality is that Victorians viewed electricity in much the same way as modern gamers view steam power; the panacea for everything.



Although ill understood, electricity was seen as a magical means that anything could be done. Jules Verne imagined businesses transmitting documents over wires via machines and electricity in his novel “Paris in the 1980s” in a manner that much sounds like a fax machine. Electrotherapy was used to treat everything from sore muscle to gout. Weird electric devices can be found for sale in the Sears Catalogs of the day.

Photography became hugely popular during the Victorian era. The American Civil War saw the rise of war correspondents equipped with cameras. The market developed for a momentum mori of dead loved-ones and photography provided this with the deceased dressed and arranged in life like fashion. Post mortem photography became an industry for anyone with a camera. Sometimes the open eyes would be hand painted onto the developed picture. Stereoscopes were invented during this period and allowed people to enjoy 3D images of places and things. The Victorian infatuation with photography was widespread.

Victorians believed dangerous chemicals and drugs were beneficial. Arsenic, due to widespread industrial mining became readily available and was used in everything from wallpaper to children’s toys and even in skin lotions. Opium could be purchased from the Sears catalog. Sherlock Holmes was a famous user of opium and Samuel Taylor Coleridge claimed the poem, “Kubla Kahn” was composed during an opium induced dreaming event. The era gave rise to “snake oil” sold as a liniment useful for any health condition. Chemical quackery was a hallmark of the era despite the vocal embracing of science.

For centuries Royalty had maintained menageries of exotic animals for their own personal entertainment. In the Victorian era there arose the idea that animals should be studied for the advancement of science. Thus, the zoological garden was born. The London Zoo was originally only open to fellows of the Zoological Society of London but eventually was made available to the paying public in order to generate more funding. Victorians had a fascination with the natural world and during this era many natural history museums were founded as well as geographical, zoological and exploration societies.

A More Victorian Ethic in Gaming

Adding elements of Gothic Horror or the occult to your Steampunk or Victorian sci-fi game would certainly be “Victorian”. It might even qualify as a subgenre: Gothic Horror Punk perhaps? Darker grittier presentations of genres do have an appeal and the Steampunk genre can also benefit from this. One might even consider mixing Steampunk with a Lovecraftian type genre of man disturbing that which he ought naught.

A more Victorian Steampunk game setting might include an increase of elements involving electricity, photography, and chemical quackery right alongside steam technology. In fact, steam boilers on balloons and air ships might be replaced with the Sterling External Combustion Engine which was invented in this period and is far more plausible for powering a lighter than air vehicle. Pictured below is my Colonial Steampunk scout balloon powered by such an external combustion motor base on Sterling’s design.

Steampunk games do an admirable job of capturing the spirit of exploration of the era with many adventure locations set in the Far East and Africa. Organizations that promote such exploration like geographical and zoological societies as well as Leagues of Extraordinary Explorers can enhance this. Characters will benefit from backgrounds dedicated to the search for truth whether occult, science or natural history. Naturally, this very desire to pull back the veils of darkness and shine the light of truth on the unknown is what puts these explorers into jeopardy but that is what makes the game fun.

In short adding a little bit more “Victorian” in your Victorian science fiction can add more scope and depth to your game. It is true enough that at its heart Victorian sci-fi is really just a fantasy but nothing says it can’t at least be plausible with perhaps a little less steam power and maybe even a little more Victorian ideas of science fiction?

FOODIES: A BUFFET OF PREGENERATED CHARACTERS

By Karl David Brown and Brendan Hack

Jon Biddle “The Butcher of Shepherton”

Fantasy Fudge

By Karl David Brown

“Jon Biddle. Surely you ladies have heard of me? No? The notorious Butcher of Shepherton? Ha! Just my little joke, yes? Now, perhaps I can interest you ladies in some sausage?”

Jon Biddle is a burly butcher from a country town. Though he jokes about being ‘The Butcher of Shepherton’, everyone in town knows that when the town is threatened Jon is one of the most formidable fighters they have.

Fudge is not so much a game but a toolkit to create a game. John was created using the Fantasy Fudge example rules set given in the book but could be used for any genre using the 5-point Fudge version of character generation.

Fudge was reviewed in issue 46. http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_46.pdf

Attributes: Agility Mediocre, Health Good, Perception Fair, Reasoning Fair, Strength Great, Willpower Fair.

Gifts: Charisma, Pain Tolerance.

Faults: Dependents (widower with two children Janet 6 years and Sam 10 years), Obesity.

Skills: Brawling Good, Butchery Good, Cleaver (one handed axe) Fair, Club/Mace Fair, Fast Draw Good, Knife Great, Knife Throwing Fair, Read Opponent Good, Salesmanship Fair, Seduction Mediocre, Shopkeeper Mediocre, Wit Fair.

Equipment

Equipment was granted as a standard ‘traveller’s kit’ and one item somehow related to each skill. All weapons come with a sheath, loop, or baldric.

Clothing, boots, pack, long knife (+2 damage), throwing knife (+1 damage), large axe (+3 damage), wine skin, mess kit, tinderbox, cash box and key, leather butcher’s apron and mail gloves (-1 armour), whetstone, bludgeon (+1 damage), shaving kit.

Rodin the Rooster

D&D 5th Edition

By Karl David Brown

“Saved from the chopping block by a powerful elf I gained the ability to speak. I became the favourite of my would be executioner, the local henwife Agnes Blackbird. Agnes had pledged to that same elf, The King of All the Birds of the Air. From Agnes I learned the old magic of Elfland.”

Rodin uses the chicken race from this issue. He was built for the Green Isles British Fairy Tale setting that has appeared in other issues of RPG Review numbers 28, 31, 43. Rodin uses the chicken player character race from this issue.

Warlock of the Archfey (1st) Folk Hero Chicken, Chaotic Good

Age 2, Height 2'2", Weight 7 lbs, Orange eyes, Pink skin, Black, orange, and green feathers.

Strength 4 (-3), Dexterity 16 (+3), Constitution 14 (+2), Intelligence 11 (+0), Wisdom 14 (+2), Charisma 15 (+2).

Passive Perception 14 (Keen Sight).

Saves: Strength -3, Dexterity +3, Constitution +2, Intelligence +0, Wisdom +4, Charisma +4.

Skills: acrobatics +3, animal handling +4, arcana +2, athletics -3, deception +2, history +2, insight +2, intimidation +2, investigation +0, medicine +2, nature +0, perception +4, performance +2, persuasion +2, religion +3, sleight of hand +3, stealth +3, survival +4.

Languages: Common, Sylvan.

Proficient: in light armour.

Combat: Armour Class 14 (studded leather). Initiative +3, Speed 15. Max Hit Points 10, Hit Die 1d8.

Spurs +5 to hit, 4 slashing damage. Firebolt +4 to hit, 1d10, 120 ft. Peck +2 to hit, 0 piercing damage or 1 to Tiny opponents.

Equipment: Arcane focus crystal, pouch (5sp, 4gp), 2 potions of healing.

Traits: Tiny Beast. No Hands. No damage from falling and land on my feet. Ignore difficult terrain when dash. Long jump 20 feet. High jump 10 feet. Can scavenge enough food and water most of the time. If I drop my gear I look like a normal rooster. Fey Presence (10 foot cube, spell save or charmed or frightened. Recharge on a short or long rest).

Feature: Rustic Hospitality.

Characteristics. Personality Traits: I help those in trouble. Once I set my mind to something I don't stop. Ideal: Sincerity, there's no good in pretending I'm something I'm not. Quest Agnes wandered off one night without a word. I'm trying to find her. Flaw: I have trouble trusting my travel companions, they're adventurous vagabonds.

Spellcasting.

Spell save DC 12. Spell attack +4.

Cantrips (from race and class): *Firebolt, Mending, Minor Illusion, Mage Hand*.

1st level spells: *Faerie Fire, Sleep*.

Frorryn Fnippnim Follnor. Spice merchant.

D&D 5th Edition

By Brendan Hack.

"Frorryn's Salt is the best you'll ever taste, if you can ever convince him to sell it to you. And the Spice he sources has no equal! I always seem to end up overpaying though, no matter how firm I am on price before we begin negotiating. I don't worry too much, the King has plenty of gold!" - Ingra Ontheld, by Royal Decree Head Chef to King Aldoz."

Frorryn runs salt from the family mines in Klaknow down the coast to Y'm in the dry south of the continent to trade for Spice, the most fragrant, desirable, and of course expensive condiment in the land. Being a friendly and law-abiding soul, he can't help but feel a small pang of guilt whenever he surreptitiously uses his skills to enhance the family's profit. This quickly passes though, once the gold has changed hands.

The route has been getting more dangerous of late. Many a rival trader would do anything to learn the secret of blending Spice. This could prove especially troublesome for one on such good terms with the Y'mese. Any such plan contains a fundamental flaw though, entirely unknowable until well after it's completion. For one of the prime ingredients of Spice is Follnorian Salt itself, and no other will suffice.

Bard (1st) Guild Merchant Rock Gnome, Lawful Good

Age 150, Height 3'4", Weight 43lbs, Green eyes, Hearty skin.

Strength 10 (+0), Dexterity 12 (+1), Constitution 11 (+0), Intelligence 15 (+2), Wisdom 13 (+1), Charisma 15 (+2)

Passive Perception 11

Saves: Strength +0, Dexterity +3, Constitution +0, Intelligence +2, Wisdom +1, Charisma +4

Skills: Acrobatics +1, Animal Handling +1, Arcana +2, Athletics +0, Deception +2, History +4, Insight +3, Intimidation +2, Investigation +2, Medicine +3, Nature +4, Perception +1, Performance +2, Persuasion +4, Religion +2, Sleight of Hand +1, Stealth +1, Survival +1.

Languages: Common, Gnomish, Undercommon.

Proficient: Light armour, simple weapons, hand crossbows, longswords, rapiers, shortswords.

Tools: Cook's Utensils, Drum, Flute, Tinker's Tools, Viol.

Combat: Armour class 12 (Leather), initiative +1, Speed 25, Max Hit Points 8, Hit Die 1d8. Rapier +3 to hit, 1d8+1 piercing damage. Dagger +3 to hit, 1d4+1 piercing damage. Vicious Mockery DC 12 Wisdom save or 1d4 psychic damage and disadvantage on next attack roll before end of its next turn. Dissonant Whispers DC 12 Wisdom on fail 3d6 psychic damage and use reaction to move as far as possible away, on success half damage and no move. Unarmed strike +2 to hit, 1 bludgeoning damage.

Equipment: Scroll, Chest, Cinnamon (0.5lb), Fine Clothes, Traveler's Clothes, Cloves (0.5lb), Cook's Utensils, Dagger, Fire Starter, Ink (1 ounce bottle), Ink Pen, Lamp, Leather, Oil (flask), Paper (one sheet), Perfume (vial), Rapier, Sealing Wax, Salt (2lb), Soap, Spice (0.5lb), Tinker's Tools, Viol, 12 GP, 4 SP.

Traits: Darkvision (60').

Gnome Cunning have advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic.

Artificer's Lore Add twice your proficiency bonus to History checks related to magic items, alchemical objects, or technological devices.

Tinker proficient with tinker's tools and can use them to construct tiny clockwork devices.

Bardic Inspiration (bonus action), a creature (other than you) within 60 ft. that can hear you gains an inspiration die (1d6). For 10 minutes, the creature can add it to one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw. This can be added after seeing the roll, but before knowing the outcome. 2 per long rest.

Personality Traits

I believe that anything worth doing is worth doing right. I can't help it — I'm a perfectionist.

I'm full of witty aphorisms and have a proverb for every occasion.

Ideals

Aspiration. I work hard to be the best there is at my craft.

Bonds

The workshop where I learned my trade is the most important place in the world to me.

Flaws

I'll do anything to get my hands on something rare or priceless.

Spellcasting

Spell Save DC 12, Spell Attack +4.

Cantrips: *Message, Vicious Mockery*

1st level spells: *Charm Person, Comprehend Languages, Dissonant Whispers, Illusory Script.*

Frad. A mutant apple tree.

Gamma World 4th Edition

By Karl David Brown

Frad looks like a 380cm tall gnarled old apple tree with five thick roots that act as legs and five principle branches covered with twigs, green leaves, and little white flowers year round. Branches and roots are arranged radially around a trunk. One branch has three emerald orbs on the end which are the plant's eyes, another has leaves with a layer of fuzz that are for hearing. Two other branches end in several vines that act as manipulators. The last branch is hollow, ends in a shark-like maw filled with thorn teeth, and can draw in air to produce Frad's deep woodwind voice and enables them to smell and taste. Housed within the trunk are the brain, heart-like pump, and chamber holding nutrients drawn up through the roots and meat from the jaws.

Frad is trooper, an enforcer for the town of Two Temples and a member of the Commonwealth cryptic alliance. Despite their fearsome appearance the tree is a kindly person who believes in law and order.

Frad was created with my non-random character generation for my Gamma World Australia. However, ignoring their cryptic alliance will make them suitable for use in any region alongside characters generated with the random system in the Core Rules book. Links to relevant topics below:

<https://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewtopic.php?f=37&t=24030>

<https://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewtopic.php?f=37&t=24046>

Genotype: Mutant Plant (Tree)

Class & Level: Enforcer 1

Cryptic Alliance: Commonwealth. **Benefits:** +3 bonus to social interaction rolls when trading with other Commonwealthers or dealing with law enforcement or the courts in Commonwealther settlements.

Hometown: Two Temples

Tech Level: III

Genotype abilities: -2 AC or Health against cold attacks. Needs sun and soil rather than food. +1 CN per level gained.

Humanoid traits: speech, two manipulators, smell and taste.

PS 18 (+3), DX 8 (0), CN 19 (+4), MS 9 (0), IN 9 (0), CH 9 (0), SN 8 (0).

Attributes: THAC Melee +4, Damage bonus +3, Max Lift 180 kg, THAC Ranged +1 , Stealth 0, Base AC 15, Health 14, Mental Defence 10, Use Artefacts +0, Remain Unseen +2, Robot Recognition Never, Perception 8

Encumbrance: Light load 30kg, Medium load 60kg, Max load 90kg

Currently: Light Load.

Walk 9/6/3, **Trot** 18/12/6, **Run** 27/18/9, **Fly** Nil, **Swim** 3/2/1

AC with armour No armour 15

Hit Points 85

Domars 183

Class Skills: Combat Leadership 1, Makeshift Weapon/Armour 3, Size-up Opponent 8.

Common Skills: Swim

Physical Mutations

Carapace (from being a tree) MP11 AC15

Allurement MP11 Fragrance with a hypnotic effect on IN1 animals (GW27)

Attraction Odour: Sweet smelling perfume attracts hungry herbivores (GW27) Defect

Carnivorous Jaws: MP11 1d6 damage.

Fruit: MP17. 8 fruit each provides enough food for one character for one day.

Mental Mutations

Fear Generation: MP11 (GW31)

Gear

Pack 1kg Tech I

Lantern 0.5kg Tech III

50 matches 0kg Tech III

Flintlock rifle 3d8 10m ½ ROF 6kg Tech III

24 Musket balls, powder, and horn 4kg Tech III

Halberd 1d10+STR 7kg Tech II

Farmer Boldo Frampton

Mythras

By Karl David Brown

"I was born into a free-peasant family that had rented the same farm for generations. Years ago due to a case of mistaken identity I was convicted of a mugging I did not commit and was imprisoned for a time. To this day I would like to find that vagabond ne'er-do-well and remove the last doubters of my innocence. In the years since I have made myself more respectable by joining the local constabulary and even bought my own bachelor's cottage. I would also like to buy the family farm."

Note: Mythras is a generic fantasy game and no setting is provided. ** indicates a detail invented by me.

Race & Culture: Halfling (the GM has set the technology level at Enlightenment). **Gender:** Male. **Frame:** Medium.

Homeland: West Riding. **Age:** 23 (assuming halflings age at the same rate as humans we are not told). **Height:** 156 cm. **Career:** Farmer. **Handed:** Left. **Weight:** 63kg. **Social Class:** Peasant. **Description:** Boldo is a plain looking halfling with a ready smile and a husky build.

Experience Rolls: 0

Notes: Bachelor. Birth parent and one step parent alive. 5 siblings. 2 living grandparents. 1 Uncle. 4 cousins. My family has a poor reputation. 3 enemies/rivals. 1 enemy. These NPCs can be detailed during play to suit the narrative.

Money & Wealth: 10 sp. **Income/Cost of Living:** day 2sp, week 15sp, season 188sp, year 750sp.

Characteristics: Strength 8, Constitution 16, Size 9, Dexterity 18, Intelligence 13, Power 16, Charisma 12. **Attributes:** Action points 3, Damage modifier -1d2, Experience modifier 0, Healing rate 3, Initiative 16, Luck points 3, Movement rate 4.

Magic Points: 16

Standard skills: Athletics 41, boating 24, conceal 39, customs 66, dance 30, deceit 30, drive 59, first aid 31, influence 39, insight 34, locale 56, perception 39, ride 49, sing 28, stealth 31, swim 24, unarmed 26.

Resistances: brawn 32, endurance 47, evade 36, willpower 32.

Professional skills: commerce 55, courtesy 30, lore agriculture 56, lore animal husbandry 41.

Languages: Halfling* 65, Trade* 50.

Folk Magic: 43.

Passions: Loyalty to West Riding* 59, Love for the family farm 59, Hate heavy industry 62.

Magic: This campaign uses the *optional* Ubiquitous Folk Magic rule. Boldo took Folk Magic as a hobby skill. Spells: Preserve, Find Object, Repair, Calculate.

Hit locations. Max hit points by location (AP): Head 5 (3), left arm 4 (3), right arm 4 (3), chest 7 (3), abdomen 6 (3), left leg 5 (0), right leg 5 (0). Total armour ENC 10. Armour penalty -2. Bezainted armour. There was technically no armour of AP3 at Enlightenment technology level. Therefore I allowed bezainted armour even though it belongs to an earlier era.

Combat style: Halfling Constable 46 (shortsword, sling, shield as per the bestiary chapter. *PC combat styles should have a trait so I added Cautious).

Melee Weapons

Knife 1d3-1d2 S S Bleed, Impale – 5/4

Short sword 1d6-1d2 M S Bleed, Impale 1 6/8

Target shield 1d3+1-1d2 L S Bash, Impale 2 4/9 Ranged parry, passive blocks 3 locations.

Quarterstaff 1d8-1d2 M L Stun Location 2 4/8 Defensive

Ranged Weapons

Sling 1d8 N L 10/150/300 3 Stun Location - - 1/2

Throwing Rock 1d3-1d2 Y S 5/10/20 – Stun Location - - -

Clothing: 2 sets of the following: sturdy leather boots, broad straw hat, warm wool socks, tunic, trousers, farmer's smock, winter cloak.

Equipment (ENC)

Backpack (1): Sickle (2), 7 days rations, 6 hour torch (1), flint & tinder (-), 1 pair of leather work gloves.

Betsy work pony: horseshoes, saddle bag (2), two wheeled hayrick, Scythe (2), spade (1), hoe (1), pitchfork (1), spare clothes.

Daisy the chicken.

Boffin Erlenmeyer. Dungeon chef.

Tiny Dungeon & TinyZine Compendium 2019

By Karl David Brown

"Boffin Erlenmeyer's me name... No, ain't no joke name me old gaffer was a Boffin as was 'is gaffer. Seeing 'ow you're new to this 'ere survival in the darkest depths of fathomless oublieettes built for incomprehensible reasons you'll be needing my know-how to survive. I did say fathomless didn't I? What are you gonna eat when your fancy elfin way bread runs out? Other than each other I mean. Well, I know an 'undred ways to de-toximafy a tentacle grub, I ne'er saw a ten-eyed squat-maw I couldn't stew, an' you should try me antediluvian 'orra pie."

Heritage: Halfling: Heroic Heart and Halfling Cookpot (TZ10)

Hit points: 3

Traits: Gourmet Chef (TZ12), Alchemist (TD33), Exotic Ingredients (TZ12).

Weapon Group: Light melee. **Mastered:** Cleaver

Family Trade: Cook

Belief: The most important thing in the world is a full belly

Gold: 10

Gear: peasants' clothes and cook's apron, cleaver (light weapon), bedroll, flint and steel, belt pouch, rucksack, lantern, empty waterskin, oil, 50' rope, torch, warm cloak.

Prey Permit JA8G4T ('Jaitgeefortee'). Bandersnatch big game.

Ringworld (BRP)

By Karl David Brown

"My client 'Jaitgeefortee' uses their Prey Permit number when dealing with aliens. A large specimen, even for a bandersnatch but note the blue-ish tinge. Tanning from too much time away from the deep lowlands. Higher altitudes have degraded their health a little. However, the reflexes are sharp and they are experienced prey. The hands? By skill and a little luck my client has made enough money by being hunted to afford the prosthesis. The hunters so far have not been as lucky. Jaitgeefortee even turned a rifle on one hunter! Overall a worthy foe. What is your bid?"

Bandersnatch are huge white creatures found on the planet Jinx. Above the slug-like body waves a long headless neck topped with writhing sensory bristles. Two billion years ago they were created as food beasts by an advanced civilization. In the present they earn money by hiring themselves out as prey to human big game hunters and selling their delicious corpses. The hunters are carefully regulated to ensure the Bandersnatch win about two-thirds of the time. Ringworld is an out-of-print game set on the original Ringworld of Larry Niven's Known Space universe. It was the resource sent to authors collaborating on the Man-Kzin Wars collections of short stories. Ringworld is a game focused on exploration and investigation rather than combat. The game was reviewed in RPG Review issue 16. A new vehicle for the game was in issue 8. Links to PDFs.

Issue 16: http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_16.pdf

Issue 8: http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_8.pdf

The following guidelines were used to patch over the gaps in the rules needed to create this bandersnatch PC:

- Use the rules for creating a human explorer except as follows:
- Characteristics, speed, natural armour, hit locations, and natural weapon as per the entry in the Creatures book.
- Gender is asexual.
- Bandersnatch should re-roll the Boosterspice allergy defect and determine age as if they had the allergy to Boosterspice.
- Bandersnatch always have Jinx as their homeworld. Characteristics are NOT modified for high gravity.
- I used the soldier pursuit to represent big game hunting prey except remove Atmospheric Craft and Aquatic Vehicle then add Bargain and Sense.
- They begin with no clothes and need none. Bandersnatch *explorers* also have a modified micromind computer able to receive input from the sensory tuft loaded with a Bandersnatch/Interworld translation infotab. Otherwise, wealth and starting equipment are determined as normal.
- However, native bandersnatch communication is difficult to translate. PC bandersnatch must learn at least 10 points of Interworld using special interests points if need be. The maximum allowed starting interworld skill is 15 (Xenological Limits rule). Bandersnatch cannot speak human languages. They must 'speak' a pidgin of Interworld transposed into bandersnatch rustlings to use the micro mind translator. All bandersnatch have the Defect 'Translation Errors' which can be used to explain social skills failures or be used to be deliberately confounding for roleplaying purposes.
- Bandersnatch may wish to purchase prosthetic limbs before play. These are given in the Technology Book but no price is given. I use the strength score of the prosthetic -9 multiplied by 100 Stars per arm. Arms are usually bought singly or as a pair, more become increasingly ineffective as per the rules. Use the adjustments for Strength and Dexterity for tasks using the arms only. The arms are human sized and attached to nerve bundles about 1.5 meters off the ground just above the Bandersnatch's mouth.
- Observe and Scent skills replaced by 'Sense'.
- Base skills are different to other explorers representing Bandersnatch basic education but total the same amount. Astronomy 15% Bargain 10%, Biology 15%, Chemistry 03%, Debate 05%, Fast Talk 10%, Hide 10%, History 20%, Listen 05%, Musicianship 05%, Orate 05%, Own Language (INTx5), Perform 05%, Physics 17%, Psychology 05%, Search 15%, Sense 15%, Sneak 05%, Strategy 10%, Theology 10%, Track 05%.

Jaitgeefortee's hyperspace blindspot phobia is unlikely to be a problem. Given the huge size of a Bandersnatch, when they do make rare space journeys, they typically do so within the indestructible frozen time of a stasis net.

As a single player game you could play a bandersnatch who awakes alone in the cooling crater of the crashlanding of their stasis net when the failsafe timer deactivates the field. There is no sign of the ship that bought them here or their fellow travelers. Referees familiar with the Ringworld should be able to figure out what has happened.

Gender: Asexual reproducer. **Defect:** Hyperspace Blindspot phobia. Translation Errors.

Chronological Age: 38. **Physiological Age:** 38. **Species:** Bandersnatch. **Homeworld:** Jinx. **Gravity:** High.

Characteristics: STR 35, MAS 89, CON 15, INT 11, POW 9, DEX 10, APP 13, EDU 19.

Attributes: Damage Modifier 10d6, General Hit Points 104, Health 45, Reasoning 33, Luck 27, Dodge 30, Action Ranking 5, Speed 10m/im (but check Athletics/Run in the Explorer Book).

Hit locations (AP/HP): 1-18 Main Body 6/104, 19-20 Braincase 10/52.

Length: 4.45m wide, 22.25m long.

Crushing Attack: Opponent can dodge to avoid being ‘run over’. Each impulse Jaitgeefortee is on top of a target it can make a crush attack for 9d6 damage. Given Jaitgeefortee size (see above) they can crush multiple foes at once.

Pursuit: Big game hunting prey (see above).

Skill Allotments: Education 120, Pursuits 420, Special Interests 110.

Final Skills: Astronomy 15%, Athletics 45/Run 80%, Bargain 60%, Biology 15%, Chemistry 03%, Debate 05%, Emergency Treatment 30/Bandersnatch 60%, Fast Talk 10%, Hide 90%, History 20%, Listen 05%, Musicianship 05%, Orate 05%, Own Language 55%, Second Language 15/Interworld 15%, Perform 05%, Physics 17%, Psychology 05%, Search 85%, Sense (like Scent or Observation, but using bandersnatchi sense organs) 115%, Sneak 85%, Strategy 10%, Theology 10%, Track 20%, Unarmed Combat 90%,

Stars in Bank 8000. **Cash** 12 Jinx Stars. **Intrastar** Of Jinx Debit Card: 180 Stars. **UNI-CREDIT chargecard** to C-level credit rating. **Credit Rating X**

Equipment: Pocket instrument, 3 minute pay-phone token, combination pocket tool, Jinx ID card, Passport ID, pamphlet of unspecialized memory plastic tools. Micromind computer loaded with a Bandersnatch/Interworld translation infotab.

Pair Prosthetic Arms: Strength 20 (Effective 28), Dexterity 7.

Krizecha Blurg aka Krizy the celebrity chef.

Traveller5.1

By Karl David Brown

T5.1's character generation system provides a rough sketch of the character's backstory; using this I wrote the following:

This is a rags to riches story. Her family were poor. Even by the standards of their poor neighborhood. Her homeworld Glor (A567344-Cstar:G9V Lo) has just enough technology to build a decent star port for the highly transient population consisting mostly of off-world workers and holiday makers. As a teenager she learned to fly the light-planes locals use to travel between the world's small settlements and enrolled in the Standardized Chef Qualification Program to learn catering. She discovered she has a flair for cookery and aspired to be not just a cook but a renowned culinary artist earning big bucks in the fancy resorts and known throughout the sector. However, much of her first four years out of training spent learning how to do the books and run someone else's restaurant. To make matters worse in the following year the rise of a local celebrity chef drives her reputation into obscurity. However, her skills as a chef increase remarkably during these first eight years. Stuck running a restaurant in a middle class holiday spot she seems doomed to never get the fame she craves.

Then a traveling food documentary maker cruising the budget spots of Ghlor is astounded by her creations. After the holo is aired she becomes an overnight celebrity and people start to call her 'Explosion Krizy', after a memorable dish, and then later simply 'Krizy'. She is invited to the University of Imbar Visiting Artist Program culminating in a banquet for the Marquis of Imbar! After this she travels the worlds of the Ghlor and Imbar systems following the foodie circuit and working cruise liners for years becoming familiar with shipboard life and getting unusual ingredients past customs officers. Eventually, the rigors of a traveling life and age begin to take their toll. Krizy spends more and more time in the gym, meditating, and doing mental exercises to fend off the cruel effects of time. In the end she voluntarily steps out of the limelight to go work part-time for a rich acquaintance, the eccentric Zeltha of Ghlor.

On announcement of her retirement from public life she was knighted in recognition of her contributions to the cultural life of Ghlor and Imbar. Due to her salt of the earth origins she finds the knighthood a little embarrassing and has not leveraged her title to improve her social standing. She was also granted a life membership and fellowship by the Traveller's Aid Society." -Entertainment LibData, Imbar Consolidated Media.

Traveller5.1 is latest edition of Traveller a science fiction game set in the far future. Traveller5 was much maligned after the layout and writing issues of the first print edition. Traveller5.1 resolved those issues. Traveller5.1 is a very complete game including topics other science fiction games have spread over many publications. Unlike the human military focus of early edition's core rules characters can be virtually any career type and non-human options are available.

In my previous articles I reviewed Traveller5 and created a sub-setting.

Issue 45 looks at the improvements made by 5.1 http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_45.pdf

Issue 22 reviews Traveller5 warts and all http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_22.pdf

UPP: 964473 (Genetics 631 Soc4) **Homeworld** Ghlor. Age 59 (Life Stage 7). **Career** Entertainer (Chef, Fame 17 (known throughout the Ghlor and Imbar star systems), Talent 12)

Skills Knowledge Grav (Flyer-0), Chef-10, Broker-5, Admin-2, Bureaucrat-7, Language-3 (see below), Sensors-5, Astrogator-2, Sensors -2, Zero-G-1, Knowledges Small Craft-2 (Pilot-0), Vac-suit-3, Hobby default Animals-0. Knowledge Career Entertainer-6, Knowledge Ghlor-6, Knowledge Imbar-4.

Languages: Farhome Anglic-7, Fr'tz-6, !rik-5, Blerg-4

Benefits: Knighthood, TAS Fellow, TAS life Member. Credits: 275 000. A handwritten 'ultimate melody' written for her by a famous ex-lover with the scrawled remark 'some wrong notes'.

Life Pursuits: Hertz Riding (Dexterity Animals C+S=12, hobby)

Baldabarbo the Projector

Gulliver's Trading Company.

By Karl David Brown

Note: the free beta of *Gulliver's Trading Company* has been taken down. This is so some of the language written in the 1990's, can be updated. A new version of the beta will be released soon.

"I went into another chamber, but was ready to hasten back, being almost overcome with a horrible stink. My conductor pressed me forward, conjuring me in a whisper "to give no offence, which would be highly resented;" and therefore I durst not so much as stop my nose. The projector of this cell was the most ancient student of the academy; his face and beard were of a pale yellow; his hands and clothes daubed over with filth. When I was presented to him, he gave me a close embrace, a compliment I could well have excused. His employment, from his first coming into the academy, was an operation to reduce human excrement to its original food, by separating the several parts, removing the tincture which it receives from the gall, making the odour exhale, and scumming off the saliva. He had a weekly allowance, from the society, of a vessel filled with human ordure, about the bigness of a Bristol barrel." – Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

Discussion: Before starting character introduction (generation) the group gets together to discuss the coming campaign. The style will be satirical, and the referee allows extraordinary nationalities. The model will be a ship's crew working for the Gulliver's trading Company. Characters will have the standard four parts. I decided to recreate a minor character from Gulliver's Travels.

Nationality: Balnibarbian. **Current Goal:** Balnibarbian (he seeks passage home). **Ambition:** Universal Artist

Concept: A projector investigating how to turn excrement into food. Aboard ship Baldabarbo can earn his passage by acting as both ship's surgeon and cook.

Parts

1 A Born Student: I was born into a patriotic academic family and received a good education (Educated, literate, debate, chymistry , mathematics).

2 Inspiration Strikes!: On the toilet I saw very clearly the solution to hunger in my nation and began a life's work (Projector, Iron-stomach, projection, begging, cooking).

3 A Traveller From A Distant Land: In my 60th year I met Mr Gulliver I began to study science from Europe (Old, alchemy, physick, persuasion, apothecary).

4 The Journey To England: I sailed to Japan and boarded a Portuguese ship. From Portugal I sailed to England (Thirst for Travel, geography, logistics, English, Portuguese).

Description: An older man dressed in stained Oxford's academic robes yet obviously foreign from his accented English. He gaunt with the intense focus of an obsessive as he goes about his foul smelling work with chymistry glassware and cookpots. His fingers stained yellow from repeated exposure to tincture of the gallbladder.

Aspects: Balnibarbian O, Educated O, Projector of Excrement* O, Old O, Thirst for Travel O.

*Combines 'projector' with the ability to invoke to represent the filth and smell associated with his project.

Conscience: Enlightenment 1, Quality 0, Corruption 2, Pride 0.

Extras: Iron Stomach O, Literate O.

Skill	Ranks	Rnk-X	Adjective
Projection	3	-1	Mediocre
Physick	3	0	Average
Begging	2	1	Fair
Apothecary	2	-2	Poor
Cooking	2	0	Average
Chymistry	2	-2	Poor
Debate	1	-1	Mediocre
Alchemy	1	-3	Terrible
Portuguese	1	-1	Mediocre
English	1	-1	Mediocre
Logistics	1	-2	Poor
Geography	1	-2	Poor
Persuasion	1	-1	Mediocre
Mathematics	1	-1	Mediocre

ETTIN: A D&D5e RACE FOR TWO PLAYERS

By Karl David Brown

ettin (n.)

an old word for "a giant," extinct since 16c., from Old English *eoten* "giant, monster," from Proto-Germanic **itunoz* "giant" (source also of Old Norse *iotunn*, Danish *jætte*), perhaps "immense eater," or "man-eater," from suffixed form of PIE root **ed-* "to eat." – www.etymonline.com

Abbreviations: Player's Handbook (PHB), Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG), Dungeon Master (DM).



For a food issue of RPG Review I thought I'd present a new player character race notable for it's appetite. The ettin is a fun experiment in having two players crammed into one character body. It's not for everyone but if you excel at teamwork or just enjoy bickering the ettin is for you.

Ettins are stupid monstrous giants with two heads that eat other humanoids. In some campaigns civilised settlements are hostile to you until your reputation for good deeds becomes widely known. Perhaps one of the other player characters could vouch for you? On the other hand, you can pass through the camps of orcs, ogres, and other monstrous peoples more easily than elves and humans. However, none of this is set in stone. Backgrounds are often a good way to give your character a back-story that keeps the pitchforks and torches away. For example, the Folk Hero background from the PHB makes you well known as a champion of the peasants. The Far Traveller background from Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide gives you an 'All Eyes On You' feature that plays on the curiosity of others so you can go all kinds of places from noble courts, to sage academies, to county fairs. Your ettin has one figure if you use miniatures; the ettin is a classic monster and lots of companies make ettin miniatures. Despite this, an ettin is as close to two separate PCs as they can be. If unsure about a rule, the answer is probably to treat your character as a separate PC. Exceptions to this rule of thumb are noted below.

Ettin names: An ettin has four names in my non-canonical scheme. Each ettin head has their own name the two of which are combined in either order to refer to both. For example, if Ig is the right head and Bror the left, then to call to both use Igbror or Brorig

Creating an Ettin

To create an ettin first two players must agree to play one because each ettin is in fact two player characters. Each player character controls one head of the ettin's body and has primary control of one arm, one is right-handed the other left-handed. Who is left or right is the first thing you can bicker about.

Both characters making up the ettin have the same racial traits but can have different mental ability scores, classes,

skills, and characteristics. One way to organize things is to have three character sheets, one for shared information, one for information unique to the right head, and another for the left.

The following procedure is based on the steps of character creation in the PHB.

Ettin Traits

You first both choose the ettin race and note the traits below.

Ability score adjustments: Add 5 to your shared strength, and 3 to your shared constitution. However, your shared dexterity is reduced by 1. Both characters reduce their separate intelligences by 2 and their separate charisms by 1. We will assign ability scores in a later step.

Before 20th level all scores have a maximum of 20. However, once both of an ettin's reach 5th level and they become Large Size the optional split strength rule can be used if the DM allows (see end of this article).

Hunter's senses. You are both proficient in the perception skill.

Age. An ettin is considered an adult when they can hold their own in a brawl against their parents, usually around 12 years of age. There are reports of venerable ettins of up to 75 years of age in menageries. However, ettin culture is violent and few survive long once old age weakens them. Both heads obviously share the same age.

Alignment. Most ettins are brutish with violent tempers making them chaotic evil. PC ettins can be any alignment. Each head of an ettin can have the same alignment or they may differ. Ettins whose heads have different alignments find it more difficult to cooperate and achieve their goals.

Size. At 1st through 4th levels you share Medium Size. At 1st level you are between 6 and 7 feet tall and mass 240 to 300 pounds. However, you are growing rapidly, gaining around 3 inches and about 80 pounds each time either head gains a level until reaching full size, when both heads reach 5th level. When both heads reach at least 5th level you become Large Size and are 9 to 11 feet tall and mass 800 to 950 pounds. You can even use double damage dice large weapons. The first time each head earns the Extra Attack feature a d10 hit die and associated hit points (6 hit points) is gained instead.

Type. You share the Giant type rather than the Humanoid type of most player characters.

Speed. During combat rounds each player character making up the ettin has a separate base speed of 20 feet. You can move your body (miniature) around during your turn in combat without the other player in your pair having any control.

When working together outside of combat rounds, they have a combined base speed of 40 feet.

Darkvision. Both heads can see within dim light within 60 feet of them as if it was bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of grey.

Languages. All player character ettin heads can speak read and write Common, Orc, and Giant. If one head learns further languages the other does not automatically know these.

Two mouths to feed. You are two player characters in one body. Use the race space of your character sheet to record whether you are the left or right head.

1. You share strength, dexterity, and constitution scores. Each head has their own hit dice, xp, class level, inspiration dice if any, proficiencies, and proficiency bonus. Each head acts on a separate initiative in combat (based on the shared dexterity) and has their own action, reaction, and bonus action allotment.
2. However, hit points, and hit point maximum are pooled together and shared. Constitution modifier is applied to every allotment of hit points from the classes of both heads, eg. at first level the constitution modifier is added to the pooled hit points twice. The combined creature also shares any temporary hit points as if it was one creature. However, each head controls when their own hit dice are used for recovery.
3. Record saves for each head but also the best of each pair of saves on the shared sheet. You use the best of your two saving throws for any save except as described for 'In Two Minds' below.
4. Your armour class is shared using the highest available to both characters, again record all three even though individual AC is *never* used. Armour and shield proficiencies are also shared between characters. If a shield is used both head benefit.
5. During combat each head has control of one arm. If the other hand is empty, you may use it during your turn. You cannot drop or stow items held in the other head's hand during your turn. You can attack with the other arm if it holds a weapon using the usual rules for off-hand or two weapon fighting. You can use anything held in the other hand during your turn. Outside of combat if the heads disagree on a course of action the referee may initiate combat rounds or simply rule that neither head achieves much until the dispute is resolved.
6. As a shared trait you eat and drink twice as much as other creatures your Size. When you become Large, see DMG111 for the food and water requirements of Large creatures.

In Two Minds. Against illusions, blindness, deafness, and mental influence each head counts as a separate creature. Even if the effect was created by the other head! If one head is frightened of the other, then the frightened head cannot use their movement.

Midnight Snacks. When one of the ettin's heads is asleep, its other head is awake. Despite this both always take a long rest simultaneously and for the usual amount of time (8 hours).

Ham Fisted. Your Unarmed Strikes do 1d4 plus your strength modifier bludgeoning damage.

Protective Blubber. Your thick hide and layer of fat provides an armour class of 13 plus your dexterity modifier. If features or equipment provide an armour class determine each separately and for each player character, then both player characters share the highest of these.

Immense Eater. With this shared trait, as an action you may take a bite out of a dead or incapacitated creature that's even vaguely edible, i.e., most organic beings. When you do so you gain temporary hit points equal to twice your constitution modifier and the pair of you cannot use this trait again until you finish a short or long rest. An incapacitated foe that is bitten takes 1 piercing damage.

Hungry Adolescent. Because of this shared trait you take up the same amount of space on a grid or battlefield as a Large creature. When you are Medium sized you determine your carrying capacity, and the weight you can push, drag, or lift as if you were Large.

Tenderizer. You are both proficient in battle axe and morning star.

Choose Classes

Each player of the pair should decide on their class. Since they are actually two different PCs, heads need not have the same class. Deciding on your class now will determine your primary ability score(s) (PHB45) thereby helping you assign your ability scores.

Determine Ability Scores

The two PCs that make up the ettin share strength, dexterity, and constitution scores but have different intelligence, wisdom, and charisma scores. If your table does not randomly roll, then the flexibility of the point buy method is superior here because two characters with potentially differing class primary ability scores will be sharing their physical ability scores.

Standard Array

Players decide by bickering or random roll who will choose first.

First player chooses one of the following:

14, 13, 12 (leaving 15 10 8 for mental attributes)

OR

15, 12, 8 (leaving 14, 13, 10 for mental attributes)

The second player gets to assign the three physical scores.

Each player assigns their own separate mental attributes using the same 3 remaining values but in a different order if they wish.

Point Buy Method.

Each player has 7 points to distribute between STR, DEX and CON. Add the points from each player to determine these shared physical attributes. If a total is 6 8 or 10 or greater subtract points to the next lowest allowed value on the table (PHB13) and assign each character the same number of extra points for their mental attributes (see below).

Each head has different mental attributes. Each player has 13 points to distribute to INT, WIS CHA.

For example, if both players assign 3 points to dexterity for a total of 6 points, then 5 points are assigned to dexterity and each of the heads gets 14 points for mental ability scores (13+1).

Describe your Characters

Each head has its own alignment. However, you may want to make both player characters the same or similar alignments to help them cooperate. Since they are held together in one body where one PC came from so did the other. Both PCs have the same background and the same detail from the background detail table that comes with each background. However, each may make different choices within that background, including equipment that is a choice and characteristics.

For example, the heads of an ettin might share the outlander background and both have the origin of Tribal Nomad, but each plays different musical instruments, speaks different languages, and has different personality traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws.

Choose Equipment

You begin with the starting equipment of both of your classes but only one set of equipment from your background except for where the background offers you a choice then the two of you may choose an item each. You may end up with redundant gear such as two sets of armour or two backpacks, you can trade these in for their full value in coins before play starts. If you decide to take starting gold to buy equipment each head gets the usual amount for their class. Through levels 1 to 4 your character is assumed to be steadily growing but still just barely Medium Sized. When both characters reach 5th level, they have undergone a last growth spurt and become Large. When this happens your old gear no longer fits or is too small, you need double-sized Large equipment.

Large sized armour does not differ in AC from Medium scale, cost is x4, and weight is x2. These rules could be used for any worn equipment including packs. Large weapons cost x2 and weight x8 but double the number of damage dice. For food and water buy medium size rations, note the weight bought then consult DMG111. For other non-worn gear my best guess is cost x2 and x8 mass. The exception is items with value based on their materials, such as gold jewelry; those increase in cost as per weight.

Beyond 1st level

The ettin race is designed to be played from 1st level but does not gain its most powerful feature until 5th level, Large Size. 1st to 4th level ettins are Medium Sized adolescents nearly but not quite big enough to qualify for Large size. This may make ettins feel a little underpowered before 5th level.

If you are not starting a character at 1st level, then apply the usual rule for your table for assigning level and experience points to each of the two PCs that make up the ettin separately.

Option Split Strength Rule

The following optional rule can be applied to Large ettins.

Before 20th level if the character's strength would be raised above 20, they instead acquire a split strength. For most tasks 'general strength' is treated as 20. For lifting and carrying as well as the encumbrance rule (PHB176) the character's 'carrying strength' over 20 is used. The maximum allowed for this carrying strength is 23. The optional rules dealing with life after 20th level (DMG230-231) are beyond the scope of this article.

CHICKENS FOR D&D5e

By Karl David Brown

A delicious new monster and player character race for D&D 5th edition.

DMG Dungeon Master's Guide, PHB Player's Handbook, TCE Tasha's Cauldron of Everything.

Most D&D worlds are something like our world in the 10th to 16th century. During this period chickens provided much needed protein and vermin control for the multitudes of landless poor. Chickens should be everywhere! So, when was the last time your players encountered an uncooked chicken?

This article on chickens is written for “The Green Isles” British fairy tales campaign setting. In the Green Isles ‘hen wives’ are poor single women who keep chickens for a living. Hen wives, and the similar ‘ale wives’, are the source of many of our tales of witches. They are keepers of traditional knowledge some of which predates the arrival of Jhoeda’s Church when contact between fairies of Elfland and mortals was more common. Therefore, chickens are associated with old magic and magical chickens are a common feature of the folktales that The Green Isles draws on for inspiration.

Other Green Isles articles can be found in issues 28-29, 31, and 43. There is also a topic to discuss the Green Isles on The Piazza forum here: <https://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=18430>

Chickens as Monsters

Below is the stat block for normal chickens. Starving PCs might encounter chickens when they try to quietly steal them. Characters who anger an NPC henwife might face a flock of angry chickens. PC’s might have chickens as familiars, ranger companions, flavour for the swarm keeper ranger (TCE) or a beast master’s beast of the sky (TCE), or as a PC’s sidekick (TCE).

Talking chickens are the same as normal chickens except that Intelligence is 10, they have an alignment (any), and they speak a language. They commonly appear as NPCs that aid or frustrate the PCs in non-combat encounters.

Chicken

Tiny Beast Unaligned

Armour Class 11 Hit Points 3 (1d4+1) Speed 15 ft.

STR 4 (-3), DEX 12 (+1), CON 12 (+1), INT 2 (-4), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 4 (-3)

Skills Perception +3 **Senses** Passive perception 13

Languages – Challenge 0 (0xp or 10xp for a rooster)

Keen Sight. The chicken has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Wing assisted dash. When a chicken takes the Dash action it can ignore difficult terrain

ACTIONS

Peck. Melee Weapon Attack: -1 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 0 damage or 1 damage to Tiny creatures.

Roosters also have spurs.

Spurs. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. Hit: 1 slashing damage.

Wing assisted jump. The chicken's long jump is up to 20 feet and its high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

Talking Chicken Player Character Race

Talking animals of all kinds are common on the Green Isles and the nearby dimensions of Elfland. However, this race is on par with those in the Player's Handbook and could be used in any D&D world. The talking animals of the Green Isles are not anthropomorphic; they are otherwise normal animals that are as smart as humans and talk.

Talking chickens are not a true race. Some are created by henwives, elves, or other spellcasters. Other chickens are given intelligence and speech by exposure to powerful magic as is often found in Elfland. Therefore, chickens have no homeland, culture, or naming traditions of their own.

No one in the Green Isles would be surprised by a chicken that talks. However, they are rare enough that other people regard talking chickens with curiosity. As animals talking chickens care little for riches but instead adventure to help others and smite their enemies. Many are companions of hen wives, elves, fairies, and other adventurous magical people.

Chicken Traits

Chickens have two very limiting traits, their size and lack of hands. To compensate they have numerous traits that grant them mobility, keen senses, and skills or magic.

Ability Score Adjustments. Your Constitution, Dexterity, and Wisdom are all increased by 2. Your strength is reduced by 4. Your maximum strength before 20th level is 4, this replaces the usual maximum of 20. Therefore, if using point buy or standard array you must assign 8 to Strength.

Size. You are around two feet tall and mass about 6 pounds. Your Size is Tiny. Whenever your Size places you in danger or prevents you from doing something critical your dungeon master might award Inspiration (PHB125). If your Size makes something more difficult but not impossible apply Disadvantage. At character creation pay the usual price for all equipment. After character creation armour and other worn gear cost is x 1/16 and weight is x 1/4. If armour normally requires Str 13 or Str 15 to avoid a reduction in speed, then these kinds of armour require Str 4 or Str 5

respectively to avoid the Speed penalty. For food and water buy medium size rations, note the weight bought then consult DMG111. For other non-worn gear my best guess is x1/4 cost and x1/64 mass.

No Hands. You have wings, not arms and hands. You are unable to use any weapons, shields, or tools. Cannot don or remove armour without help. Cannot open locks, disable traps, pick pockets, open a doorknob, or write. A wizard must take *Mage Hand* as a known spell at first level. To enable them to write into their spellbook. For those without hands a spell focus can replace most material components and can be simply grasped or worn. Spells requiring specific material components with a gold piece value require an active *Mage Hand*. Can cast these spells where a focus can substitute for material components. Cannot use a component pouch without an active *Mage Hand*. Somatic components require your whole body to be free to move; assume you can interpret somatic components into complex sets of movements you can perform in your natural form.

You cannot begin play with equipment you cannot use in your natural form (gain its value in coins instead), nor proficiencies in weapons, shields, or tools you cannot use. Using the starting gold option (PHB143) might be better. Though you cannot put on armour and other worn gear yourself, you can still use them and therefore gain these items and proficiencies etc.

You do not gain any class features you cannot physically do in your natural form, for example a chicken rogue cannot use finesse weapons nor most ranged weapons and therefore can only Sneak Attack with their spurs attack if they are a rooster. Similarly, a chicken fighter can only use two of the PHB Fighting Styles, Defence and Archery with dropped objects, because they cannot wield weapons nor use a shield. Of the new fighting styles (TCE41-42, 57) a chicken can use: Blind Fighting, Superior Technique, Unarmed Fighting, and Druidic Warrior (TCE). A chicken granted a fighting style by a class may take the Crusher, Piercer, or Slasher feat instead (TCE79-81).

Whenever these limitations place you in danger or prevent you from doing something critical your referee might award Inspiration (PHB125). For example, chicken might be rewarded Inspiration for not being able to open a door to a room where the rest of the party was losing a fight but not if the door went into an inn on a warm summer night.

Beast Type. For better and worse you are affected by magic and other rules that target the Beast type and not those that specifically target Humanoids.

Speed. You have a base speed of 15 ft.

Languages. You read, speak, and write Common and one other language of your choice. In the Green Isles this second language is often Sylvan or Elvish. You can communicate with normal chickens.

Weak Wings. You cannot truly fly but you can use your wings to help you move around.

- When you fall or leap down you rate of descent slows to 60 feet per round. You take no falling damage and can land on your feet.
- When you Dash you can ignore difficult terrain.

- With the assistance of your wings, your long jump is up to 20 feet and your high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.



Keen Sight. You have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) check using sight.

Chicken Senses. You are proficient in the Perception skill.

Pecking Order. If an ally wounds a foe with slashing or piercing damage, you gain advantage on attacks against that foe on your next turn. Your unarmed strikes do 1 piercing damage to Tiny creatures and 0 damage to Small or larger creatures. Chickens do not apply Strength modifier to these attacks.

Roosters also have spurs and can opt to do 1 slashing damage with their unarmed strikes. Spurs have the finesse quality.

Traditional Knowledge. From hen wives, elves, or faeries you have learned a store of skills and lore. You have 3 slots of traditional knowledge. At character creation each slot can be filled with either a cantrip or proficiency in one skill. All cantrips must come from the same class list and

that class determines the spellcasting ability score. In the Green Isles choosing these skills and cantrips from those available to Warlocks (PHB107,210) is recommended but not required.

Cheap To Keep. In almost any environment a chicken can survive on seeds, greens, bugs, slugs, vermin, and table scraps. Chickens almost never need to carry food or water.

False Appearance. If you don't speak or wear any gear you look like a normal chicken.

BLADES OF SHAGAL FOR RUNEQUEST

By Lev Lafayette

Summary

A blood-sucking dagger grows in size according to the Fatigue Points it drains, converting itself to a shortsword, broadsword, greatsword, and beyond. Statistics are for RuneQuest (3rd edition), but can be easily changed to another edition of the game, or game system, or even setting.

Runes

Death (inverted), Chaos † 

Mythos and History

In the Godtime Humakt used a dagger on Eurmal's feet and made him tell of a new weapon, Death, which was protected by Vivamort. This would make Humakt even more powerful, so they travelled the Underworld. In that journey, Eurmal cut his feet again on the Sword Bridge, leaving behind a trial of blood. Nevertheless, as Humakt argued with Vivamort to give him Death, Eurmal evaded the Shadow of Vivamort and stole it, and Humakt returned to the surface world, where Eurmal convinced Grandfather Mortal to try out Humakt's new power of Death. This story is well-known [1], but what is forgotten is how Vivamort tried to fashion a weapon using the Blood of Eurmal.

Another tale involves Shagal, an Humakti refugee in the lands of Prax in the Third Age. Shagal was a great warrior, a Rune Lord, and known for bringing down many with his skills at sword and dagger, despite his youth. Many years of a warrior lay before him, and he had much blood to spill. In a dream Shagal saw a vision of him finding Storm Bull's sword in The Devil's Marsh, following the HeroQuest of Waha and Death [2], except it appeared to him as a dagger. Nevermind, it was still a weapon of the Gods. However, unbeknownst to Shagal, he had been Enthralled by a Mostal Vampire, Zerwick The Artificier.

In a previous life, literally, Zerwick had been a weaponsmith however now he found great discomfort at looking at daggers, swords, and the like, due to the association with the Death cross. With unique Ritual magics, and a great deal of time, he fashioned a fellow smithy to slowly make a blood-sucking, soul-sucking dagger and place it in The Devil's Marsh.

With the location of the the dagger placed in Shagal's mind he ventured into The Devil's Marsh, and like many before him (and as Zerwick had planned) he fell under the taint of Chaos. When the dagger was discovered, Shagal's alignment changed, he inverted his sword-cross pendant, expelled the Allied Spirit, and adopted a Chaotic spirit instead. From then on, when Shagal fought he used the dagger which, apart from the usual damage, also drained the target of magic points and fatigue points. Over time the sword grew with more victims, eventually become a shortsword, a broadsword, and finally, a greatsword. Beyond that it even spawned a new dagger.

Nevertheless, Shagal remained mortal in all his time and, as is so common with Humakti, was felled in a battle with broos in the Wastes, where his weapons have been passed around by these chaotic beings. It is possible that adventurers will either directly encounter a tribe of broos with these weapons, or hear the story from a victim who has strange tales of being stabbed with a broo weapon, but also feeling weakened in strength and spirit beyond what the damage would indicate.

Ritual of Zerwick

Zerwick, who loved creating bladed weapons before his unfortunate transformation into a vampire, was frustrated by the unease he felt in the presence of these symbols of Death in his new form. Already a student of sorcery, he took the opportunity to learn the Tap spells, as vampires often do, and study how to vary magics based on Enchantment rituals.

What Zerwick came up with was an enchantment hat could create forge a new weapon from the blood of sapient beings. The initial step required the extraction of iron from "donated" blood (a variant Tap spell), in this context "donated" usually meant those who had been Enthralled, or those who had been brought along by those Enthralled. With a process of trial and error, but only a few losses along the way, Zerwick discovered that that draining the blood of the equivalent of 100 people he could extract enough iron to make a dagger.

Sadly, Zerwick did not consider this an optimal use of his time (even if he was technically immortal) and concluded the experiment. It is possible that in his abandoned forge that his notes and ritual spell grimoire could be rediscovered.

Statistics

In most respects, Shagal's Blades do the same damage as a normal iron weapon of their design. However, they also drain Fatigue points equal to the damage inflicted. A clever user of a Shagal blade will incapacitate their opponent and then let the blade slurp up the blood to acquire maximum FAT from the victim. Note that this FAT loss is semi-permanent, and unlike regaining normal FAT, i.e., 1D3-1 per round, it recovers at 1D3-1 points per day of rest.

Dagger 1d4+2, ENC 0.5. Requires 10,000 FAT points to be constructed and the Ritual of Zerwick.

Gladius, 1d6+1, ENC 1.0. Requires 20,000 FAT points.

Broadsword, 1d8+2, ENC 1.5. Requires 30,000 FAT points.

Greatsword, 2d8. ENC 3.5. Requires 70,000 FAT points.

At 80,000 FAT points a Shagal Dagger bursts from from the Shagal Greatsword.

Gloranthan Science

A human contains roughly 4 grammes of iron in their blood. "At .004kg of iron in the average man, and assuming complete iron extraction from each corpse, forging a [1.45 kg] sword from blood-iron would have taken 358.69, or 359 dead men" [3]. With some very rough rounding and assuming that the hilt does not have to be pure iron, 100 people are required for a RuneQuest dagger, 200 for a gladius, 300 for a broadsword, and 700 for a greatsword.

Death from blood loss can be represented in RuneQuest by loss of Fatigue. Fatigue is equal to a character's CON+STR which is approximately 22 on average. Unconsciousness (optional in the 1993 official errata) is reached at -FAT, on average 44 points of FAT. From pure blood loss this would represent about 50% of volume [4]. Complete extraction would then be reached at roughly twice this value, for the sake of rounding 100 points of FAT per dead human. As Shagal's blades do not require the victim to actually die, such generosity, the values for transformation can be measured in FAT points alone.

Note that the values are for humans and ducks. Seafolk, elves and trolls have no iron in their blood. The seafolk have aluminum, elves have copper and trolls have lead. Dwarves will have twice as much and iron Dwarves four times as such. Nobody has worked out what Dragonewts have and they're not telling; some scholars suggest that their blood changes composition according to their Stage, but probably includes a mixture of warm magma and liquified obsidian.

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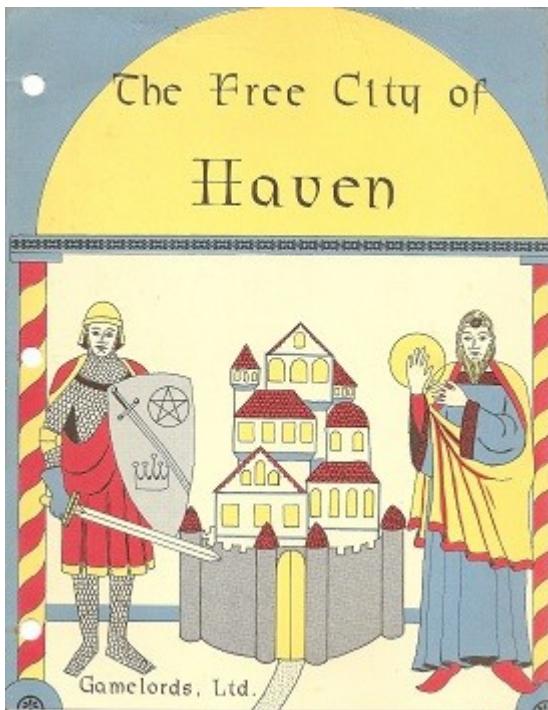
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CITY AND FOOD REVIEWS

By Lev Lafayette

The Free City of Haven (Richard Meyer, Kerry Lloyd et al 1981)

Introduction and Physical Description



The Free City of Haven is an old classic of the early days of RPGs, representative of the style and finances of time. With approximately 128 pages of loose-leaf, three-hole drilled pages provided in a zip-lock bag (a second edition came in a boxed set). The content is presented in a very dense two-column justified text in a very small font, there is no doubt that every effort was made to produce this with a tight budget. The colour cardstock cover is evocatively in the style of medieval European art, a city and walls flanked by a knight and a wizard. Also included is an A1-sized, colour map of the city, which looks rather like medieval Paris, the north and south of the city separated by a wide river some 2000ft across with a significant central island. The black and white artwork and maps throughout the product is evocative and shows good technique. The writing style, like the actual format of the text (the medium is the message?) is typically dense, but with occasional moments of light-heartedness, and a lot of distracting ramblings.

Following a broad breakdown of the city map, the product is described in several chapters. Apart from an Introduction and Overview sections, the chapters have a section notation, i.e., Section H (The Heights), Section N (The North Corridor), Section T (Trade Island), Section C (The

Commons), Section O (The Outlands), Section S (The South Corridor), Section L (The Labyrinth), and Appendices for street encounters and NPC statistics. These chapters form the basis for page numbers, (e.g., T-3, O-1) and whilst there is a fair table of contents, there is no index with the exception of the NPC chart references by ID. The "back cover blurb", makes reference to "over 100 distinctive shops, 64 random encounters, and 300 NPCs" along with "Over 25 complete scenarios", all of which sounds over-promising given the size of the publication. It should also be noted that that game statistics for Haven is for the Gamelords, with the exciting title "Fantasy System", which is a pretty close to AD&D in most respects.

Haven In General

With the first few paragraphs one gets a strong sense of the importance of Haven, a place that has been populated for some 5000 years, with a current population of a notable 80,000. There is a history as well, once part of the mighty Namori Empire, then ruled by a leading noble family, and now by a council of Guilds. A feature of the city is that slavery has been abolished, although indentured labour is still common. The city is home to numerous non-humans, "elves, hobbits, dwarves, centaurs, orcs, kobolds" etc, and one is definitely given the idea that this a bustling and vibrant place of trade, scholarship, which is of course great for RPG adventures, although the closest seaport is some 150 miles away which is really quite improbable. The regional map doesn't help either; yes Haven is on a major river,

but a much more impressive confluence can be found some 50 miles north.

In terms of politics the rather blunt assessment, "Haven is a city at war" is provided. Not literally, but rather with a major power conflict between the ruling Guild houses and the entitled Noble families, with the latter losing power some two centuries ago and losing further wealth and power since then, resulting in a number becoming increasingly frustrated and aggressive. The city's sections constitute boroughs, with a number of councillors proportional to residents and from the council a mayor is elected. Behind the scenes, and effectively controlling the elected representatives, are five powerful and wealthy Guild families. Whilst an advanced burgher democracy has its place, this quite advanced political system is also quite improbable; a relatively easy fix would be to add certain property requirements or otherwise restrict the suffrage. One additionally curious component, but rather charming, is the centaur-controlled public transport system. With a random generation system for the shops, and a few rather evocative examples, the two introductory chapters give a strong impression of a something like an Italian trade city-state of early modernity.

The Districts and The People

The bulk of the text is made up describing the various districts and their inhabitants. Each of the districts has a particularly flavoursome and immersive text. The old money district, "The Borough of the Heights", literally looks down on the rest of the city, and is full of people in finery from another age, and includes jousting and fairs. Next door is "The North Corridor" is the new money of serious trade and commerce and is the wealthiest part of the city, also home of the major temples, guildhalls, and government. Moving south is "Trade Island" which, as the name implies, is largely an open-air bazaar with a transient population, although noting the island as consisting of grasslands is rather optimistic for anyone who has encountered a bustling bazaar. Still on the north side of the river is "The Commons", the most populous and largest borough of Haven, home of numerous journeyman, piers, and "factories". Oddly, the authors didn't describe them as workhouses, which would have been a more apt description as the rest of the text describes the harshness of life in the district where power is the hand of a rival Thieves Guild and absentee landlords. Unfortunately, this Borough is reduced to a few pages with promises of a future supplement to more fully describe the region.

The south side of the river is more exotic in many ways. The Outlands district is a good example, home of the non-human species, the major groups having quarters similar to the own homelands. A forested and grassy hill region is home for elves and hobbits respectively, the dwarves mostly living underground (of course). The Dwarves are a source of some political discontent as they feel that they have been unfairly treated by the Guilds. Nearby is the South Corridor Borough, home of the performing arts, magicians, and, a somewhat odd inclusion, the horse market. Nearby is The Labyrinth, once a merchant's borough, now having suffered seriously decline and impoverishment. It is the location of brothels, and is claimed by none of the Guild families. The city guards don't play a heavy hand on this "red light district", but rather ensure that everything stays within that District.

NPCs, Locations, and Scenarios

A real strength of Haven is the description of the NPCs and the Locations. There is literally hundreds of colourful NPCs from all walks of life cogently described in a paragraph or two, in terms of their physical description, their property, their personality, and their relationship with institutions and other NPCs. They are interesting characters, unique, with their own motives and ideals, and overall probably the best content in the product. The locations, quite often shops, are also well-described with a summary heading, a description of the owner or persons present, interior and exterior, quality of goods pr services, and outstanding items. As a bit of a missed opportunity there is not much description on the integration with other institution, suppliers, and the like. This would have provided a much greater depth to the locations without much additional text required.

The inclusion of the various scenarios is an important and necessary addition to a supplement like this, and one would be justly horrified if they were not included. They are far from "complete", but do offer a good summary of plot outlines, usually of around half a page in length. Many of the plots are deeply integrated with the motivations with the NPCs involved and, as one would hope, are somewhat incorporated in the setting, with references to locations and

existing NPCs. The type of scenarios are varied; horse races, break-ins, interpretation of dreams, missing persons, and so forth. Although relatively straight-forward, nearly all have a plot twist or complication of some sort. They are episodic scenarios and "low level", and do not play too deeply into the wider politics of the setting or its tensions, although that could certainly emerge over time and with continuing interactions.

Concluding Remarks

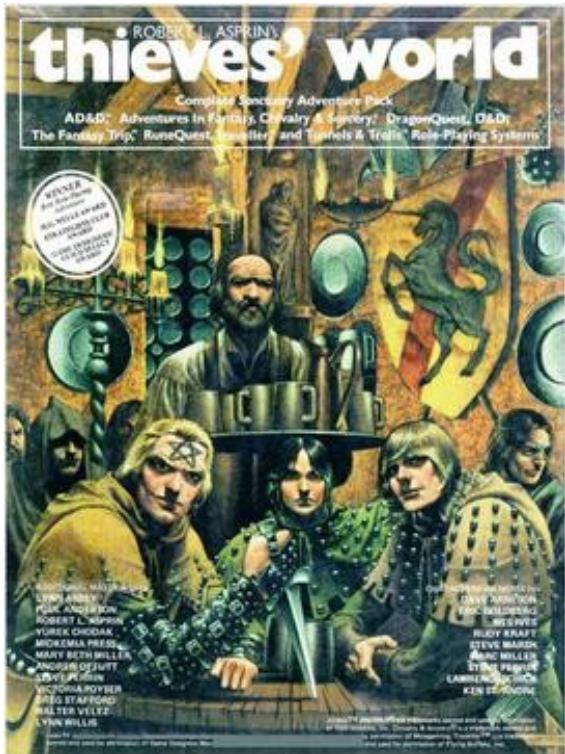
The production, format, and writing style are quite less than optimal. There are some improbable matters concerning geography and politics, although these be resolved through some minor changes. However, the greatest weakness in Haven is the fact that it hand-waved any sense of completion, reducing the largest and most populous area to a mere four pages. Once one accepts these issues, there is however a very solid product, with plenty of evocative material and especially NPCs to work with in creating a sense of a genuine city. The fact that this was done relatively early in the days of RPGs is a significant credit to the designers.

Style: 1 + .3 (layout) + .6 (art) + .5 (coolness) + .3 (readability) + .3 (product) = 3.0

Substance: 1 + .7 (content) + .6 (text) + .7 (fun) + .6 (workmanship) + .5 (system) = 4.1

Robert L. Asprin's Thieves' World (Abbey, Anderson, St Andre et al, 1981)

Introduction and Physical Product



The shared world fantasy series Thieves' World, created by Robert L. Asprin in 1978 (first publication 1979), had a rapid and influential effect on the genre at the time, and as the title suggests a view of urban adventuring from the perspective of those who begin with little, but are prepared to undertake grand risks. This in part both coincided with The Chaosium's clever publication of the setting, but with the product also contributing to the world's success; a side-effect is that the publication only deals with the earliest books in the series. The phrase 'clever' is used because like the novel series it adopted a multi-author and multi-system strategy the sort of co-operative effort in the industry where intellectual property assertions were suspended in favour of a common good of engaging and encouraging players in the hobby. Designed for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, Adventures in Fantasy, Chivalry & Sorcery, DragonQuest, Dungeons & Dragons, The Fantasy Trip, RuneQuest, Traveller, and Tunnels & Trolls, the product was an eye-opener to both the rich setting but also to a variety of game systems, from which one could glean a core understanding of the various game systems.

Determining editions of this publication which has resulted in a bit of a challenge. As Rick Meints recently commented there were nine printings and sometimes the boxes and

books became a little mixed. For example this review is based on first printing booklets and a second printing box; this can be ascertained by the paper cover books of "Personalities of Sanctuary" (64p). "Game master's Guide to Sanctuary" (64p), and the "Player's Guide to Sanctuary" (16p). In latter printings this would become a studier cardstock cover.

However the box lid is from the second edition notes that the product was the winner of the HG Wells Award, Strategists Club Award, and the Game Designers' Guild Select Award. The product consists somewhat sturdy box, the packed booklets (page numbers, two column justified sans-serif, table of contents, short index), which really did not be converted to a sturdier cover, and three maps; a huge fold out of the city of Sanctuary, a map of densely-populated subsection known as The Maze, and a map of the Undergound of the Maze, excuse spoilers it's only a rumour, people in the Maze can barely afford a two-storey building that's not falling over. "Only those that seek death or sell it enter the Maze".

As a multi-author supplement where sections and system notes were written by different authors it would be unsurprising to see significant stylistic differences. This however, is largely not the case with all authors providing a largely consistent matter-of-fact approach to the task assigned to them. On other stylistic matters, the interior artwork is really quite high quality, deeply generating a sense of presence in their representations of personalities and locations. In further aesthetic considerations the box-lid features an evocative colour piece with fair technique, replicating the cover of the first eponymous anthology.

The Setting, Personalities and Systems

The main descriptions of the setting come from the Player's Guide and the Game Master's Guide. The former, apart from a practical foreword on the advantages of city-based adventures, starts with a fine essay on heroic fantasy and a sense of setting realism by Poul Anderson even if it is specific to Sanctuary as such. This follows with a good overview of the setting, including history, city size and major regions, and some highlighted areas on magicians, "working women", the S'danzo (wandering people), and the major NPCs. Robert Asprin contributes a short story on the Hekiem and the Hell Hounds, which has sidebar content on a chronology of Sanctuary, followed by a Sanctuary-specific glossary. This is all Player's information, the sort of content that any character in the city would know from being there. Following on from this the Game Master's Guide which delves into the sort of details that occur behind the scenes and which would become apparent by experience, especially a series of essays on bribery, the application of law (civil and canon), the gods and religion, and the sewers of Sanctuary.

For actual in-game play several pages of a series of random encounters is offered, differentiated by district location, major or minor thoroughfares, and time (day, evening, night), and then drilled down to numerous specific examples. The Maze, The Bazaar, Street of Red Lanterns, and the slums of Downwind get their own session. As with all such tables, I find it more helpful to determine the in advance of actual play as plot devices, either as a contribution to the main-plot or a minor tangent. This is quite possible as the examples often do provide sufficient detail for further elaboration. The "Populating Sanctuary" section allows for the random generation of businesses and residences on a building-by-building basis. Of note is the surprising number of 'empty' buildings (up to 60% in The Maze) which seems highly improbable; Different Worlds #27 had an article that specifically 'filled' these. Some 28 sample businesses and layouts are offered, again differentiated by district and with brief description of the NPCs, their business, and motivations. The floorplans, in The Chaosium style, are quite excellent, although they do consume a great deal of space rather than content text.

The third book, Personalities of Sanctuary, begins with single-paragraph sketches of some 34 major NPCs, and shorter descriptions for just under 70 more minor NPCs. Each of these are references by the appearance in the fiction publications, which would give a pointer to GMs who wish to integrate the characters in their own stories. The bulk of the book however is taken up by the game system statistics, from "Prince, Retinue, and Officials", "Residents", "Transients", and "Monsters". The sections included major designers and contributors of the respective systems, making it quite a "who's who" of the gaming world for the time. Thus, it includes Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (Lawrence Schick), Adventures in Fantasy (Dave Arneson and Richard Snider), Chivalry & Sorcery (Wes Ives), DragonQuest (Eric Goldberg), Dungeons & Dragons (Steve Marsh), The Fantasy Trip (Rudy Kraft), RuneQuest (Steve Perrin), Traveller (Marc Miller), and Tunnels & Trolls (Ken St. Andre).

Each of the game system stat blocs are prefixed by a short essay describing issues of implementing the characters into

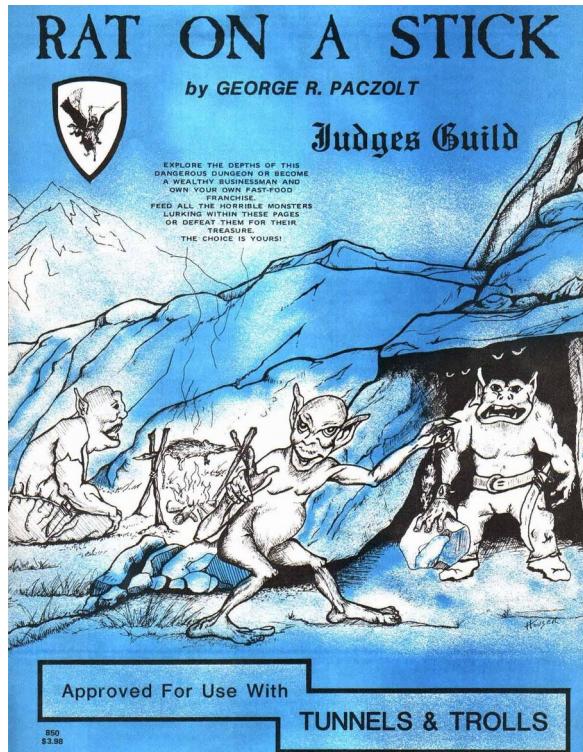
the respective systems, especially issues relating to the magic systems. Schick, for example, notes the stylistic differences used by different characters which challenges as consistent game mechanic. Miller's contribution is especially interesting, with options that treat the magic as a precursor advanced technology or, in a quite prescient manner, that Thieves' World is effectively multi-player online roleplaying game. It must be pointed out that there is some inconsistency in the actual characters and the respective power levels by the various authors. In the AD&D section, for example, one will find ten characters under the "Prince, Retinue, and Officials" section, whereas Adventures in Fantasy provides only four. As an example of the differences between power levels Aye-Gophlan is described as a 7th level Thief/4th level Fighter with 25 hit points for AD&D, whereas for D&D they're an 8th level fighter with 56 hit points. The book concludes with a handful of scenario ideas and characters by story (which had already provided in a different form). None of the scenarios are particularly outstanding. Some well-developed scenario ideas is something that a product of this size and a setting this detailed could really have benefited from.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, Thieves' World is a solid product in terms of style and substance. It is an imaginative and evocative setting provided in a very attractive publication. The aforementioned problems, and they are problems, do not strongly detract from what is a very worthy publication which, of course, witnessed several associated published scenarios in the setting. Nevertheless, it would have been strongly preferred if several superfluous pages were taken out (e.g., the two pages from the personality record form, the characters by story) to make room for more complete scenarios. Still, the product does go down in gaming history as a well-deserved reputation as a classic co-operative publication.

Style: 1 + .6 (layout) + .8 (art) + .8 (coolness) + .6 (readability) + .6 (product) = 4.4

Substance: 1 + .7 (content) + .7 (text) + .8 (fun) + .7 (workmanship) + .5 (system) = 4.4



Rat on a Stick (George R. Paczolt, 1982)

Summary and Physical Product

"Rat on a Stick", designed for Tunnels & Trolls (or Monsters! Monsters!), is a product of some fame within the RPG world. It effectively gives PCs two options. The first, of fairly standard fare for the era, is take the band into a dungeon, kill monsters, and take their stuff. The second option of play is to "become a wealthy businessman and own your own fast-food franchise". After all, all those monster living in a hole in the ground, which is "a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell" need to eat something, and going topside is dangerous. Of course, Tunnels & Trolls (and Monsters! Monsters!) are games that didn't really take themselves very seriously, so this review is written with that in mind. One should not expect a hardcore simulationist creative agenda. Indeed, the designer's notes explicitly say that the puns can kill you. The scenario is really designed so that low-level characters can set up their fast-food franchise, make a bit of money and experience points, whereas higher level characters can delve in dungeons deep.

At 32 pages of light-stock paper, saddle-stapled, it is a

fairly typical product from Judges Guild at the time. The text is presented in a single-column, sans-serif font, and wastes precious little space on whitespace or artwork for that matter. What artwork does exist is smattering of filler pieces by Kevin Siembeida, some which are actually quite good. His illustration of a rat, for example, is the sort of competency that you would hope would come from someone who has actually seen a rat. This is not something I can say about all RPG illustrators. Mind you, medieval illustrators were so bad at drawing lions that there's even a Twitter hashtag, #notalion. The cover art, by Rick Houser, shows some goblins cooking up a rat on a stick (this one doesn't look like a rat). One cannot give it much credit for the illustrator's talent, but it does display some creativity and does what it says on the cover. The writing style is surprisingly (given the puns) mostly straight-forward, formal, and an exercise in brevity, as it describes the ten dungeon levels, each of which is referenced in the table of contents and with room numbers prefixed to the level, rather like in an apartment. The dungeon maps are pretty simple and to the style of the era, which means nothing like an actual dungeon (or catacombs, or cave system) would look like, with frankly enormous rooms.

Content

The opening pages give some general ground rules to the dungeon (e.g. all doors are made of wood unless stated otherwise), a rumour table, and a wandering monster table. The latter, again true to the era, doesn't contain much rhyme or reason, but at least does include giant rats. There is also a handy "intent table" for the more sapient beings which is a good idea, but without much in terms of execution. However, it does include the offer to set up a rat-on-a-stick franchise. The table is a little brief and after several encounters it is almost certain that the options will be used it. A GameMaster will really need to read through the product and get a few ideas to give it the necessary complexity. The designer makes the point that it is possible to go all the way from the first level to the last level without engaging in the levels in-between, which is a good design if it was actually true (it fails its own test by the second level).

A page is dedicated to the supplementary rules for setting up a rat-on-a-stick franchise, which includes the cost of a license, stand, additional seating (extending it into a small restaurant), and "national advertising", only with the cost of rats (and sticks). The mark-up is pretty generous, but of course one runs the risks of customers who may attack the stand-holder, steals their stuff (and supplies). The wandering monster table determines what sort of customer arrives, and if it's a giant rat they'll attack immediately! The franchise is pretty busy; every five minutes there's a possibility of a customer, although the odds are strongly in favour of those who advertise. The supplier of the franchises is an garrulous cyclops named Cy, who has a bag of infinite rat holding. He's can be very annoying, but it essential to stay on his good side for business and survival reasons.

Each dungeon level is described in one to three pages, with a longer emphasis on the initial levels. The first level contains multiple rat-on-a-stick franchises and some of the NPCs have names worth a giggle (e.g., Mighty Max, Wallopin' Willy). There is also a number of "Black Hobbits" on this level, a term which was enough to cause a grimace with the association at the time and is downright unacceptable now. The claim that the term refers to their political alignment ("Evil Hobbits") rather than their skin tone (c.f., description in Monsters! Monsters!) is simply not good enough, even if it is deeply embedded into fantasy culture ("The dark lord" Sauron etc). In any case, a good GM should be able to make some mirth of the foodie-stereotype of Hobbit-kin and the provision of BBQ rodent for their dining pleasures.

The deeper one goes the greater the challenges presented, although their randomness and placement requires significant suspension of disbelief. A set of cubicle rooms on the second level is a case in point with a Flame Demon, a Vampire, a set of Ghouls, a wounded adventurer, and a bunch of rats, all living next door to one another. Even Sesame Street had a greater level of social coherence than this. Another 'feature' of the dungeon is the array of traps and tricks. Some are of the boring "pit with spikes" variety, others are just simply quite random; one level consists of a number of "addition" and "subtraction" rooms; walk into the room, roll some dice, and gain or loose gold, etc.

Then there are the pun monsters. The Burgundy Dragon, whose breath weapon causes inebriation worth encountering, but I less sure about the Elkaholic, the Ether Bunny, let alone the Chocolate Moose. The woodland creatures meme is

varied with the Bad Gnus, but finally there is a Muenster, a semi-soft cheese monster. It must be mentioned that there are a couple of death-traps in the dungeon as well, the sort of encounters where it is pretty much guaranteed that at least one of the PCs will meet their fate. Finally, there is a "boss monster" as well, but not one which has much intel on the entire environment. More like a mindless blob that crawls around, gibbers, and destroys everything it encounters, and curiously leaves behind remains that it shouldn't.

Concluding Remarks

Rat on a Stick had one schtick and whilst what was given was fair, it would have been even better with more extensive elaboration. The pun monsters were fine, but disappointingly weren't incorporated into the menu. Apart from that Rat-on-a-Stick is a funhouse mirror-hall sort of scenario but without that much fun. With low production qualities, a fairly uninspiring dungeon crawl designed without reason, and GameMaster making use of the product will have to do a lot of work to make into something entertaining. Rat-on-a-Stick is, unfortunately, a quirky collectible in the history of RPGs but not much else.

Style: $1 + .4 \text{ (layout)} + .4 \text{ (art)} + .6 \text{ (coolness)} + .6 \text{ (readability)} + .2 \text{ (product)} = 3.2$

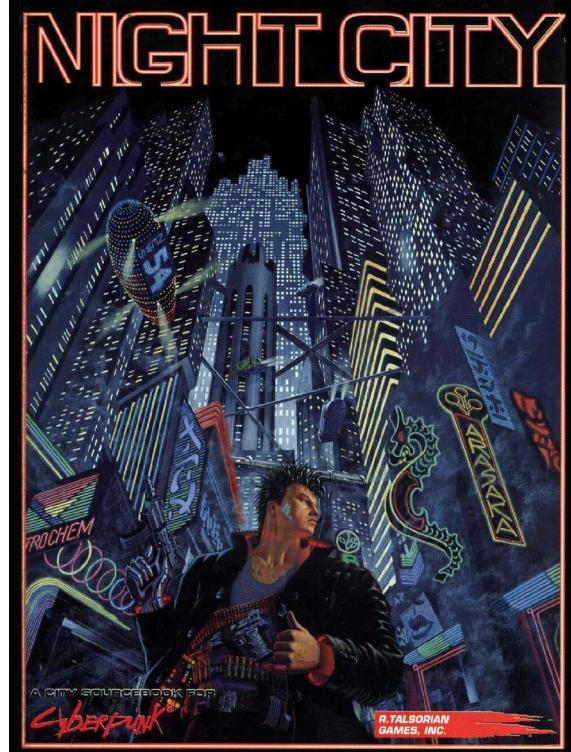
Substance: $1 + .1 \text{ (content)} + .5 \text{ (text)} + .2 \text{ (fun)} + .2 \text{ (workmanship)} + .4 \text{ (system)} = 2.4$

Night City (Edward Bolme, Colin Fisk, Mike MacDonald, et al. 1991)

The Product

Designed for Cyberpunk 2020, Night City is a default setting for that game. The publication comes in a 184p softback with solid binding with a colour cover of an armed individual with urban office towers looming over them in a menacing manner. The back-cover blurb is notable for its ugliness, red shadow text on a blue background, and preparing us for floor plans, personalities, transit maps, area views, security information, gang turfmaps, and a 2'x3' colour map. Many of these are described as "3D Maps" by what is meant is orthographic perspectives. The book comes with a brief table of contents and what it calls an index, which is really an a more elaborate table of contents to some key sections. The internal artwork, of in comic style, is of average quality, both in terms of creativity and technique and, with the exception of maps and characters, is rarely contextual. This said, the character portraits and maps themselves are of a very good quality. The two-column sans-serif text is dense and manages to keep a formal style, despite the number of authors. Each page has page numbers and chapters clearly marked, although the notion for the Controlled Urban Zones is less than helpful (e.g., Section B6, instead of "New Harbor").

Overview



The first two chapters ("Fax on File", "Flashmaps") provide an excellent overview of the setting. There is plentiful, matter-of-fact short descriptions of the city's general background, geographical location, weather, transit systems, vehicles, hospitals, police services, personal and financial services, and media. The Flashmaps start from the state-scale location (Free State of Northern California, near the Southern California border), then major freeways, airport, ferry, and bus depots, bus and rail routes, then multiple maps for the inner city region for hotels and lodgings, nightclubs, performing arts and sports, restaurants etc, etc. These probably could have been either broken up into smaller sections and more inclusive and in actual play flicking between the pages to find out what's next is less than optimal.

The next two chapters cover the state of America in what is now the retrofuture of 2020 and a history of Night City. True to the genre, the state of America is one of ecological collapse, plagues, a lost military conflict, economic collapse, and the break-up of the states. The big cities have survived as they had the resources and economic diversity to do so. These urban centres are surrounded by environmental wastelands and ghost towns, fairly high-tech and with major cities having "Free Fire Zones" where people can settle their interpersonal disputes by force of arms. As for Night City, it owes its founding to one Richard Night who amassed capital and investment to build the place pretty much from scratch. For a while the city was taken over by The Mob until the corporations had enough and moved in with paramilitary troops in assault vehicles. The city now is fully under control of the corporations who rule with draconian power under the guise of security and safety.

The next three chapters are "People", "Security", and "Gangs". By "people" what is meant is geodemographic groups, such as Corpzoners, Edgerunners (the cyberpunks), Beavers (suburbanites), Streetscum (urban poor). The method is quite sound, combining the features of location with economic status leading to general cultural and behavioural norms. The "Security" chapter (just two pages) is a rather oddly placed rules expansion whereby Threat Codes and Security Levels are determined from a scale of AA (the most deadly) to E (the least), thus covering everything from weapons, armour, locks, and the various security groups. Nevertheless, these are not applied to the various gangs which are basically aesthetic youth subcultures with weapons and a criminal interest, ranging from heavily cybered fighting machines, to vampire-goths, to clowns - the 1979 film, "Warriors" has a lot to answer for.

Controlled Urban Zones

Taking up around 2/3rds of the book, the Controlled Urban Zones is a piece-by-piece description of the 20+ major areas of Night City, which is presented in a largely grid formation. The areas includes ethnic zone ("Japantown", "Little China", "Little Italy"), criminal aras ("Northside"), harbourside areas, arcological ("Lake Park") and higher education precincts ("NC University"), corporate centres, wealthy part of town ("Westhill"), and the old town ("Downtown") which is also home for the urban poor. It is really in the style of 1980s urban design and class expectations, a fairly safe and almost prosaic representation, rather than what has actually happened (the urban poor are on the suburban fringes, something about land prices, "Downtown" has become gentrified). Adding to this one must include the datemap, which acts an overlay to the city and briefly provides the major nodes along with presence of sysops and AIs.

What is quite remarkable about these zones and their accompanying maps is that, following some introductory text, every single building is described, with at least a paragraph dedicated to each, along with "sidebar" entries for matters of particular interest. In addition, each zone comes with the major personalities of the precinct, plus encounters and contacts. Whilst the personalities are stereotypes (Little Italy has its Mafia don, Northside has a Irish Roman Catholic Priest, City Center has a mayor who's a corporate puppet etc), they are recognisable tropes and the number of characters presented gives a certain richness. With a little work, an imaginative GM can quickly convert the contacts into scenario seeds in their own right. It must be said, it does come across as a little incongruous to have such rich descriptions, so many potential plot seeds, but none actually offered.

Despite this, the CUZs are absolutely packed with the stylistic description, vibrant personalities, and the sense of a living, breathing city on the edge. It will require work on the part of the GM to weave all the potential stories out of what is offered, and the interrelationship between individuals and organisations is not always as strong as it should be, but that is not something too onerous for a GM to sort out on their own. Credit must be given to the designers of the

city who have managed also to include the precincts in such a manner that they are somewhat logical. The corporate centre is actually in the centre of town, the wealthy area is nearby, the arcology is nestled between the university, the weathly, and the corporate centre and so forth.

Concluding Remarks

Night City is a pretty fine supplement, overall. There are minor issues, such as the lack of proper indexing, and the fact that there is insufficient scenarios seeds directly provided (although plenty which are indirectly provided). The artwork, whilst not to my taste, is mostly appropriate, although greater attention to context would have helped. But these really are minor issues for a product that is densely packed of information for a genuine Cyberpunk 2020 game setting. Night City, with a bit of work from the GM, could very easily become a single location setting for an entire campaign, although the big world of cyberpunk usually involves a fair bit of globe-trotting. But for a fictional era of globalisation and corporate cookie-cutter cities, wouldn't it be fascinating if every city that the edgerunners made their way to was Night City, just under a different name? Such speculations are outside of the scope of a review, but it would be one way to make use of this deep, dense, and detailed product that is deserving of a great deal of use for any Cyberpunk 2020 story.

Style: 1 + .5 (layout) + .4 (art) + .7 (coolness) + .4 (readability) + .6 (product) = 3.6

Substance: 1 + .8 (content) + .8 (text) + .8 (fun) + .7 (workmanship) + .4 (system) = 4.5

The Lost City of Gaxmoor (Luke and Ernie Gygax, David Moore, 2001)

Physical Product and Introduction

Designed for D&D3e under the Open Game License, "The Lost City of Gaxmoor" comes as a 136p softback with solid binding. The wrap-around colour cover art, of average skill and below average creativity, shows a battle outside the city walls between adventurer-types and gnolls. The internal greyscale art and maps is actually somewhat better in both regards and is almost always contextually placed. The product also comes with a gloss map of the city which, whilst simple, is quite attractive (even with wonky perspectives) with key notations to the main text. The internal text uses a two-column justified serif font with text in bold for the DM's introduction to players, standard text for detail and boxed for encounters or treasure. Each page is numbered with the chapter heading. There is a brief table of contents for the chapter and maps.

The title, of course, harkens to the surname of the authors and of course, Gary Gygax himself, with the suffix associated with Dave Arneson's "Blackmoor", the earliest D&D campaign setting. The Dungeon Master's Introduction provides the "hidden" story (which the PCs will discover soon enough), that the wall city was lost for many years, returned to Erde (the gameworld setting, with the story elaborated in an appendix), and was taken over by "humanoids" that are now in conflict. After a handful of suggested rules modifications, there is a Player's Introduction provided in a traditional "DM to Players" manner and an equally traditional set of cryptic clues ("what was forgotten has returned") and threats ("none that have entered this city have returned").

Outside, Outer City, and Graveyard

The Player's Introduction contains a few antagonist encounters outside of the city which shows some creativity with what was then the new rules, however the most important will be meeting with some humans of the city itself which should be quite revealing and in accord with the DM's introduction. The encounters here pull no punches, either which will be a running matter throughout the entire publication really. Whilst the 'blurb claims that the publication is designed for character levels 1-10, lower-level characters will find the going very tough indeed, and perhaps it is fortunate that there is sufficient NPCs encountered who could join the party. This is also a section where one NPC is

described as both a gnome and a human in the text and of 4th or 5th level; the former is recommended in both cases as it is what the stat block provides. Not that all the stat blocks in the scenario are entirely correct, either.

Stylistically, the city is also revealed at this stage to have a rather Romanesque flavour, despite a thoroughly Germanic name. The city itself is at the crest of a rather steep hill which would make it very defensible, and a pain to supply. Also included in this section are the major factions and persons within the city. The factions which include various groups of orcs, goblins, bugbears, hobgoblins, gnolls, ratmen, crocodilians, and a hardy band of remaining humans. As for the major NPCs, you will have no less than a dragon (of sorts), a mage or two, a demon, and a deity. There is some 44 outer city encounters which are quite thoroughly described. There is a degree that some come across as a bit more random than even a city in conflict would suggest, although many do have connections with the interior allowing for an emergent plot. Careless PCs will run the risk of stirring up a very large hornet's nest of orcs in this area, although they are possibly already very angry for being crammed into an impossibly small building.

Also outside the city proper is the graveyard, a collection of dungeon-style mausoleums for the well-to-do families of Gaxmoor. It is perhaps unsurprising to discover there is quite a number of undead that lurk the area, some rather impressive and deadly traps, and proportionally impressive collection of treasures, so much so that it is somewhat perplexing that none of the faction leaders have arranged for a contingent of cannon-fodder to force their way in. This said, there is quite a lack of especially magical treasure (ignoring the standard D&D rules) in other locations, so bulk up whilst one can. There is also one very interesting NPC who is sufficiently powerful (CR 18) that they could easily take anything of worth from the area; however they are supposedly imprisoned, despite the fact that they have well in their disposal the means to free themselves.

Inner City, Citadel, Labyrinth, and More

Rather like the layers of an onion, and like the dungeons levels of a classic D&D adventure, each ring of the city is progressive tougher than the previous with a few encounters acting as exceptions to this general rule. The inner city, within the walls, has some 70 encounter areas, and is teeming with various humanoids. One fairly large building has close to 250 goblins in it alone! There is also ongoing gladiatorial "games" in a colosseum (no spoilers here, the PCs should be able to hear the roar of the crowd) which has an unspecified number of attendees, but probably close to several hundred. The groups are heavily factionalised and could theoretically be defeated in detail, however the sheer numbers would require some very high level characters or some extremely clever players skilled in alliance building and breaking. Sometimes the rulers of a faction seem to be running a bit of a risk with their own followers; two relatively low-level goblin leaders in one case are noted for bullying their almost 150 followers into submission.

Within the citadel is the nominal leader of the humanoids who found himself with far more troops than was necessary and which have now become a little uncontrollable as he tries to find the real treasure which will allow control of the city's location, along with other abilities befitting a moderately-powered artifact. He'd be embarrassed if he knew where it was! The citadel region has more than its fair share of demons, with a good number of gnolls making up the main humanoid contingent. Hidden among them all are a handful of human survivors and the governor (a Underneath the city there are more ratmen and giant rats of course who, whilst numerous, are rather less powerful than what lives above. Not for the first time there is an egregious representation between the number of ratmen that are supposed to be in a particular encounter location and the space allocated for this to be a reality.

There are a number of supplementary components that follow from this collection of city encounters. Firstly, there is a description of the semi-artifact itself, and the difficulties involved in acquiring it. Secondly, there is the collection of statues and pools within the city, some of which have magical effects. Why these are not in the main body of text is a matter for the editors, and little is gained by having them all described in one place as they don't have any relationship to each other. There is also the aforementioned history, a collection of additional monsters (an irksome error; the plural of hyena is not the possessive clause "hyena's") and a collection of new magical spells and items, none of which are particularly creative or add to the scenario environment. Some of the spells are notable for being contrary to the 3e rules themselves (e.g., protection from infravision)

Conclusion and Evaluation

The Lost City of Gaxmoor certainly possesses a great deal of the style of scenarios from the early days of Dungeons & Dragons, but that also includes those elements which break the sense of immersion. Whilst it technically can be played "as is", but as a setting there is some work to do by the DM to make this a workable product, perhaps by treating it as a setting with numerous piecemeal adventures. Something should be done about the food supply for example - with some two thousand (at least) humanoid inhabitants in the city, what do they eat? There are grain silos (where there is grain there are rats), but where does new grain come from? Perhaps not the stuff of high adventure, but there simply isn't enough clerics to cast Create Food and Water for the beings that inhabit the location.

Overall, this is a big dungeon-crawl with the buildings being a collection of rooms and the "big room" being the outside passages that connects them altogether. It isn't really a city scenario at all. Whilst the product is fair, the editing and workmanship definitely needs improvement. There is potentially a narrative and dynamic in the setting but from what is provided it is quite absent. There is a sort of sense of style with the Romanesque presentation and fairly enthusiastic interpretation of Roman naming conventions, but this is marred by the rather random collection of creatures that incongruously pop up at various points in the setting (another 'feature' of early D&D scenarios). The core idea of the scenario is a quite a good one, and one can get plenty of ideas from the publication, but it could have been so much more.

Style: 1 + .5 (layout) + .4 (art) + .6 (coolness) + .4 (readability) + .6 (product) = 3.5

Substance: 1 + .4 (content) + .4 (text) + .4 (fun) + .4 (workmanship) + .4 (system) = 3.0

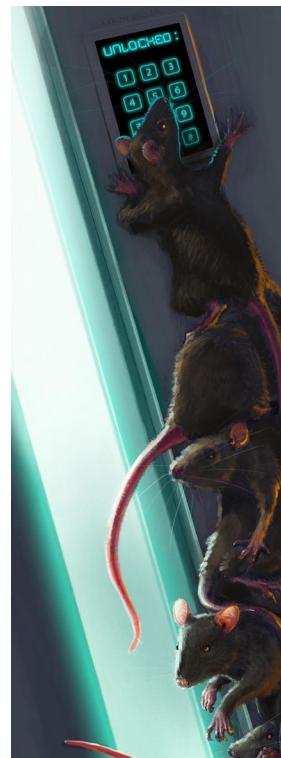
Eclipse Phase Panoptican (Lars Blumenstein, Rob Boyle, Brian Cross, et al, 2011)

Physical Product and Introduction

Like other books in the Eclipse Phase series, Panoptican has quite an impressive presentation. The hardbacked book, some 178pp gloss pages in length, features an octomorph and a neo-gorilla morph in a staged combat. The internal full-colour art is also of high quality, evocative of the setting, and contextually appropriate. A personal favourite is a pyramid of smart rats that are unlocking a keypad lock. The page layout is mainly two-column justified with a serif font, with rather thick outside margin which, nevertheless, includes page numbers and chapter titles. This book is an extensive table of contents and index, and the writing style switches between a formal, if often verbose, main text and a narrative style for a fairly good introductory short story and some sidebar information.

There are four main chapters to Panoptican, "Surveillance", "Habitats", "Uplifts", and "Game Information". Most of the publication is a series of essays on the finer points of the setting according to these titles with the relevant game system information included in the final chapter. Chapter are around 45 pages each, except for the "Game Information" chapter which is around 35 pages, the separation between setting information with the game mechanics a common and useful feature in Eclipse Phase supplements.

Setting Information



Drawing from the title, the "Surveillance" chapter begins with quite a lengthy history of how a transparent society (a deliberately wry description, as it doesn't always apply) has been created, a combination of technology and subtle appeals to publicity, but also the notion of "sousveillance" the recording of society from below. Identity systems are then described noting the different systems between the various factions and groupings in the Eclipse Phase landscape, both technological and ideological, and also according to different morphs and other characteristics (eg., identification systems for psionic characters). Also included here there is the technologies of counter-sousveillance.

This is the same approach used throughout the other setting information chapters, "Habitats" and "Uplifts". As a game set on the premise of solar system colonisation and even alien planets through gateways, it is appropriate that there are a collection of descriptive sections on more unusual habitats appropriate to the climates (aerostats, bathyscapes, etc). There is a very extensive discussion on space habitats, partially because there is so much of it and also because there are morphs designed for being in space. In the other hand, there is only a minor discussion on exohabitats. Whilst there is also excellent discussion on habitat systems (e.g., defense, emergency, infrastructure, mesh etc) hazards, and the psychological effects of habitats, one must say that the chapter does not give even close to proportionate discussion on where transhumans actually live.

The "Uplift" chapter begins with definitions and history, followed by the science behind uplifting technologies for modifying the brain, body, language, and socialisation. As often, the exceptions make an interesting opportunity for plots and in this case "defect escapes" are certainly worth noting. Following this is the description of the various uplifted species, from the very likely (neo-hominids, neo-pigs, neo-neanderthals) to the exotics (neo-cetaceans, neo-avians, neo-octopi). Whilst not quite on the same level there are also "smart animals", with specific sections for dogs, cats, monkeys, and rats. Also included are the producers of uplifts (mainly hypercorps), legal and ethical issues, factional affiliations, and a delightful section on uplift habitats all of which should be considered plot seeds in their own right.

Game Mechanics

The hefty chapter on game mechanics represents a big shift from where the product is largely descriptive to one which dives deeply into the crunch of the actual game mechanics, but nevertheless follows closely with what has been provided. The chapter opens with some 14 new morphs, sometimes elucidated from those in the existing core rules (the neo-gorilla), and then a number of new traits, positive and negative, which in one reputation case show that the game system could have been simplified to include reversals of one trait. As a gear-heavy game Panoptican there are more than a dozen pages dedicated to new equipment, including bioware, robotics, communications equipment, drugs, sensor systems, smart animals, software, survival gear, and vehicles.

The elaboration and compilation of existing rules for sensor systems is a notable inclusion in this chapter as well. The "Comprehensive Sensor Chart" being one of those which every Eclipse Phase GM (and player) should always have on hand as in actual play this is one of the most constantly challenging aspects to run, as protagonists and antagonists are often both engaged in a high-tech version of cat and mouse. This dovetails quite well into the rules for surveillance and avoidance, along with the section on "habitat hacking" which, let's face it, because a lot of PCs are getting into places that they shouldn't be. Almost as a big reveal the very last set of rules involves habitats as morphs and resleeping into a habitat. The opportunity is taken here to refer to Usher, were-house from RPG Review #9 September 2010 (http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_9.pdf).

Overall

As a slice of life from the personal level of the transhumanist setting of Eclipse Phase, this is a very good book in terms of scope and mechanics. It concentrates exactly on what is important to elaborate from the core rules and does so in a manner which provides a great deal of food for thought, and a good number of edge-cases and tangents as plot devices. If the supplement provided more of such features at the expense of some the verbosity performed in the essay

pieces there would be no doubt that this could easily move into the category of an excellent supplement. What is certainly excellent is the production qualities, a genuine work of beauty.

For Eclipse Phase players and gamemasters this is a very worthy book to add to the collection and explore. Even for players of other transhumanist games it is a worthy supplement, even if the mechanics have to be redone for a particular game system. For what it provides are tools for describing the look and feel of the physical and digital environments that the PCs will inhabit, which will provide for greater immersion, and a more satisfactory experience from your game.

Style: $1 + .7 \text{ (layout)} + .7 \text{ (art)} + .7 \text{ (coolness)} + .5 \text{ (readability)} + .9 \text{ (product)} = 4.5$

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

THE REDISTRIBUTORS

By Paddy Hutchinson

People starve in this city. You know. You've seen how often your neighbours go hungry. But one of those armoured trucks that takes food from the impoverished rural farms to the fancy supermarkets in the Exclusive Communities by the beach. You know, one of the suburbs with the sniper towers and augmented watchdogs.

But if you can bag that truck, you and your crew can feed your tenement for a month.

Desperate times, pal.

OBJECTIVE: Take control of the armoured food van and get it back to your neighbourhood.

BONUS: If you can get the truck back to Jackdaw's workshop without a police tail, she can strip it for parts and you'll probably never pay for auto repairs again.

Challenges

THE TRUCK: a rugged, armoured refrigerated vehicle. You'll need to either find a way to stop it or another way to board if you're going to get it under your control.

DRIVER AND SHOTGUN: two armed security staff with light firearms. They're alert and professional, and will ALERT THE PIGS once shit goes down if they get a chance. They are, however, very tired and not willing to die over this.

NAUTILUS: the truck's dogbrained digital systems, that will ALERT THE PIGS if the truck goes too far off course or the container is forced. It will continue to do so until disabled.

THE PIGS: if local law enforcement are alerted, they will pursue and try to halt the truck and arrest or kill the characters. Pursuit cars travel in pairs, each containing two heavily armed and armoured Officers. If they get on your tail, you'll need to shake them, trick them or drive them off.

HOSTILE GROUND: the roads around your neighbourhood have been left without maintenance for years. Expect to have to manoeuvre around wrecks, garbage and sinkholes, which is bad enough when you're not being pursued.

Good luck kids.

ONE LONG SEASON

By Paddy Hutchinson

You each had your own reasons for agreeing. It was a weird proposition. The urban farmers need you to watch their backs and keep “trouble” off their turf until they can bring in the harvest. They don’t care if you’re taking other jobs in the interim, but they need you wild young things to keep their produce safe. Most jobs these days are one off, smash and grab, instant gratification. A season is a long time. A lot can go wrong in a season.

The following is an oracle for when your group of cyberpunk rogues has made a commitment to help protect a farming commune in the leadup to harvest. It’s a long term commitment, and you can play out other encounters, opportunities and temptations as they do.

To begin, gather the Hearts suit out of a standard deck of casino-style playing cards. At the start of each in game week, draw a card to see what new trouble has arisen on the farm. If you’re stuck for what this urban farm might be growing in the cyberpunk future, see “What’s for Dinner?” in RPG Review issues 49-50

- 2 Some scavenger or parasite has been at the crop. Find how it got in and make sure it doesn't again.
- 3 There's trouble brewing between neighbouring factions. Make sure the farm stays out of the crossfire.
- 4 An unexpectedly quiet week. You have time to rest and recuperate
- 5 There's a quarrel between two of the farmers. Sort it out before someone does something rash.
- 6 The water supply has gone bad. Find an alternative while the farmers try to fix it.
- 7 Foul weather rolls in. Its all hands on deck to keep the farm's infrastructure from being damaged
- 8 Some hungry neighbourhood kids start hanging around. They're starting to get desperate.
- 9 A farmer is injured in a fight with another local. Sort it out before it escalates.
- 10 The farmers throw a party as part of a traditional holiday. You're absolutely invited, but keep an eye out for gatecrashers.
- J A stormy enforcer from one of the local factions starts making demands for protection or tribute that the farmers cannot afford.
- Q A local power player starts making inquiries about purchasing some of the harvest. Stay on hand to keep the negotiations clean.
- K Some armed locals mount a raid on the farm. Try to drive them off before they cause too much damage.
- A The first pickings are in, and the farmers invite you to feast with them. Plenty of time and supplies to rest this week.

When all 13 cards have been played, assuming the farm survived all these trials, the characters will be drafted to haul in the final harvest. Give them some final celebratory scenes to revel in their success, and ask how they enjoy the harvest festivities.

D&D 5E: THE DEVIL COMES TO THE GREEN ISLES

By Karl David Brown

This article is part of a series describing The Green Isles a setting for D&D 5th edition based on the folk tales of the British Isles and to a lesser extent life in Britain just before the introduction of gun powder in 1326CE. Previous Green Isles articles appeared in issues 28, 31, and 43.

An oral tradition

This article collects together information on the Devil as he appears in British fairy tales and therefore the Green Isles. Devils and especially The Devil rarely appear in British fairy tales which might seem strange for a traditionally Christian nation. However, one must remember that the fairy tales of Britain are the last surviving fragments of a rich oral tradition thousands of years old that was all but destroyed by the Christians. In that context how infrequently devils appear is to be expected. Like all mythologies those of Britain were never entirely consistent and certainly the remaining fragments cannot be sewn into a whole cloth. Therefore, to create a setting detailed enough for a roleplaying campaign details consistent with the original tales needed to be added. Player characters might uncover the information in this article from hen-wives, elves born in ancient days, or by use of the Religion skill to interpret what they find during their adventures. The Green Isles uses Religion rather than Arcana to represent knowledge of devils, angels, faerie lords, Elfland and Hell.

Monsters from without

The Green Isles are largely tamed with little wilderness for monsters to dwell in. Instead monsters come from beyond. The sea, Elfland, and Hell are all places from which horrors come (see RPG Review issue 43 for cosmology). Hell, also called the Netherworld, is an alternate plane of existence ruled by The Devil. Fortunately, Hell is not directly connected to the Mortal World, but devils might traverse some of the Kingdoms of Elfland to the Mortal World or magic might summon devils. Hell is a vast kingdom Fields of fire, burning deserts, frigid glaciers, and poisonous swamps; the environments of Hell are varied but uniformly hostile to normal life. The inhabitants are devils, damned souls, evil fey, and potent witches.

The antagonism between mortals and The Devil begins in the Third Invasion of the distant past. In the Age of Heroes, the Devil led an invasion of the Mortal World intent on creating his own kingdom in the Mortal World. However, the coalition of devils, bogies, evil elves, and monstrous giants was defeated by mortal heroes, human and giant, and their elf allies. The blood cost of this victory was terrible and ended the Age of Heroes. Only on the wilder Northern Isle have evil faeries and giants from the Devil's ancient defeat survived.



The Devil

The King of Hell and most powerful of the devils is simply known as The Devil. Despite the failure of the Third Invasion, The Devil's political power from that ancient age remains. He rules over Hell and many allied kingdoms of Elfland still send tribute to Hell. From these kingdoms The Devil and his allies send agents to attack and corrupt mortals in preparation for an eventual invasion of conquest. In the DMG11 classification scheme The Devil is a Quasi-diety.

The Devil is described as a stunningly handsome man with black hair and cloven hooves, which he frequently hides below trews to deceive mortals. Despite the difficulty of travelling from Hell to the Mortal World many believe he is active there. Across Hrangland mounds and standing stones built by the Kortics during the Age of Heroes are wrongly believed to be the works of The Devil by superstitious followers of Jhoeda (the appearance and size of The Devil as described in British fairy tales is not consistent with him shooting standing stones as arrow-heads or dropping huge hills worth of dirt). They say he is sometimes seen in South-west peninsula of the Southern Isle at night riding a horse and accompanied by a pack of Devil's dandy dogs. All these beasts are coal black with fiery eyes and horns. The Devil hunts mortal travellers but praying to Jhoeda will turn him away (use hellhounds and a nightmare from the Monster Manual to represent the fiendish beasts). Indeed, if the devout prey out loud to Jhoeda them that may keep at bay all manner of devils and evil faeries.

His servants

The Devil has many servants and allies including devils, evil faeries, and corrupted mortals. In the DMG12 classification scheme The Devil's devotees tend to view themselves as the dark portion of a tight pantheon. They work with some Faerie Lords but are opposed by other Faeries, the Moon, and especially Jhoeda. Allies of The Devil use the Infernal Language to communicate with each other. There are innumerable kinds of devils. Devils other than The Devil are dark, not the black tone of some humans, but a skin of supernatural darkness from which light cannot escape and details cannot be discerned. Unless summoned by foolish wizards, Archfiends, like Beelzebub, act from the shadows directing their agents to corrupt mortals. Among those agents are incubi, succubae, and the least of the devils the tiny black impets who are often encountered by travellers (use D&D imp stats).

There are the Kingdoms of Elfland allied with The Devil. Some kingdoms of Elfland have even come to be ruled by devils, such as the Kingdom of Blooded Swords which is ruled by the devil Marlzeebal. Evil faeries include elves, pixies, and other kinds but the most common evil faeries are the bogies. Bogies are ugly fey with a long association with devils. Bogies often have devil ancestors in their bloodline giving them devilish features such as horns or a tail. Bogies make up the rank and file of the armies of evil Elfland kingdoms and of Hell's vast armies. The blending of bogies and devils, and the existence of evil pixies has led to the accounts of rustic storytellers frequently using the word 'imp' to mean bogie, evil pixie, or impet. A confusion encouraged by the Church of Jhoeda which is antagonistic to all faeries.

The corrupted

Devils also recruit or corrupt mortals, especially humans and bats. Like devils, bats are most active at night. Bats also have excellent senses and can fly unseen through the night spying on the Mortal World. However, the most useful agents for furthering The Devil's plan for conquest of the Mortal World are humans and giants. Devils especially enjoy corrupting the holy, paladins and saints. A lone mortal might be contacted but small covens are more common. Humans are tempted into Devil worshiping covens with promises of fulfilment of wishes, power, or revenge. Often impets are sent to advise mortal covens. Sometimes more magical benefits are granted, for example enemies of the coven could be transformed into frogs by a devil's curse or cultists could be trained to use magic themselves (often Warlocks of the Fiend in D&D terms but 4th and higher level spells are rare secrets that might tempt Wizards). Unlike many D&D campaigns a warlock's devil patron is not just someone in the background, expect the patron, or an agent of theirs, to

show up approximately once per level and not only train the PC but also meddle in their affairs, or present them with quests. The knowledge to create magic items might also come from a devil. Use the faction rules (DMG22) to measure a PC's standing in a coven and which gifts they are given access to. In exchange for these boons the mortals give up their immortal soul condemning themselves to an eternity of slavery and torture in Hell after death. These covens are typically small and secretive, those that are incautious or become too large are unmasked by Jhoeda's faithful and put to death.

Devotion or deception can result in the breeding devils with humans to create devil-blooded bloodlines. Many with devil's blood have obvious features such as horns or glowing eyes, but never wings (represented by Tieflings in D&D but ignore the backstory given in the PHB or even just use the human race and apply cosmetic features). Such tainted individuals must live in hiding because mortal settlements pledged to Jhoehda will attack them on sight. However, others, like the famous Merlin son of an incubus, can pass as ordinary humans. In Elfland kingdoms reactions are less extreme, in kingdoms that sided with the Devil during the Great War a Devil Blood may even be treated with admiration. Often those from devil-tainted bloodlines manifest magical power. In D&D terms these might be human sorcerers, bards, or develop the Magic Initiate (Sorcerer) feat.

His enemies

What then of The Devil's enemies? Chief among them is Jhoeda who is the Sun and is proclaimed to be the one true god by his mortal followers. Jhoeda's followers believe that The Devil was once an angel of their god who was banished for his ambitions. If true, then Jhoeda is The Devil's most ancient enemy. In the present day, the hold of the Church of Jhoeda on the mortals of the Green Isles makes the Church an obstacle to The Devil's plans for harvesting souls and conquest. Under church law it is illegal for mortals (non-fey) to deal with devils or summon them in mortal kingdoms. Fey may deal with devils but those who do so risk being tried for other crimes by Hundred, County or Royal courts for crimes such as being an enemy of the state. People are deeply suspicious of anyone known to be in communication with devils. Jhoeda's saints smite devils whenever they encounter them.

Whatever the truth of The Devil's origins most of his enemies date back to the Third Invasion thousands of years ago before anyone on the Green Isles had even heard of Jhoeda. In the Thir Invasion The Devil tried to conquer the mortal world. The most powerful of these is the Moon. Devils are most active in the Mortal World on moonless nights when she is not watching over the world. However, the Moon can leave the sky on other nights and sometimes does so to aid those beset by devils and bogies. Many Kingdoms of Elfland who sided with the Mortals during the Third Invasion continue to oppose The Devil and often also punish the crime of consorting with devils with death. However, not all of The Devil's enemies are powerful entities. Mortal heroes often outsmart devils (PCs who do so gain 120 x Challenge bonus xp in this setting). Even peasant hen-wives know that the wood of a Rowan tree is impervious to devil magic, even if crafted into a ship.

For now, The Devil's plans for corruption then conquest are held at bay by gods, faeries, and mortals who are unfriendly to each other. How long can such divided forces hold the guile and might of The Devil, his servants, and allies at bay?

Modified Turn Undead

The power of prayer to keep faeries and devils at bay is represented by the Turn Undead feature for clerics of Jhoeda (only) also affecting Evil alignment creatures of with the Fiend or Fey type.

New Feat: Devout Prayer

Requirements: Mortal, Lawful Good Alignment, Worships Jhoeda

Benefits: You may use the Turn Undead feature as if you were a Cleric. This feature also affects Evil alignment creatures of with the Fiend or Fey type.

Further reading

The Buried Moon, (Traditional)

Black Bull of Norroway (Traditional)

Duffy and the Devil. (Traditional)

The Master and his Pupil (Traditional)

Tom-tit-tot (Traditional)

The Laidly Wyrm (Traditional)

English Fairy Tale (Joseph Jacobs)

More English Fairy Tales (Joseph Jacobs)

Abbey lubbers, Banshees, & Boggarts (Katherine Briggs)

An Encyclopedia of Fairies (Katherine Briggs)

THE SHORES OF MYSTERIAL AEONS

MAGE THE AWAKENING

By Tim Rice

Concept

After being caught up in a series of uncanny events, four ordinary New Englanders begin to realise an extraordinary and terrible truth: the everyday world which everyone takes for granted is just a small island of stability poking out of unspeakable depths. While most people remain almost wilfully oblivious, it's not possible to unsee the immanent danger and mystery having apprehended it once.

What lives amidst the sunken ruins of cyclopean infrastructure, just offshore from mundanity?

What wonders and horrors wash up according to the whims of otherworldly tides and storms?

What other lands are out there, beyond the Osculum where the Ouranoi meet Bythos?

Inspiration for themes and mood

Clive Barker (extensive Gnostic horror corpus, eg The Hellbound Heart, Weaveworld, The Great & Secret Show, Imajica, Jericho), Philip K Dick (concepts of "the Black Iron Prison" and "the empire never ended"), Mass Effect: Andromeda (the mechanic of scanning cyclopean ruins to unravel ancient mysteries is particularly evocative for MtAw 2e.), The Nag Hammadi., Current 218., Thomas Karlsson (Qabalah, Qliphoth and Goetic Magic, Magical Course 1.0.), Aleister Crowley (Liber ABA, The Book of Lies, The Book of Thoth), Peter Carroll (Liber Null), Stephen Mace (Stealing the Fire from Heaven), Donald Michael Kraig (Modern Magick), Max Stirner, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault

The Process of Awakening

We take a custom approach to having mortal Chronicles of Darkness characters gradually Awaken as Mages. There are similarities and differences to the rules presented in Signs of Sorcery (SoS).

Key principles:

For pedagogical purposes (as not all players are familiar with Mage or the occult), Awakening is broken up into stages. New concepts such as Gnosis, Obsession, Arcana, Paths, Orders, Praxes, Rotes and Yantras are introduced incrementally.

To avoid the contrivance of everyone Awakening simultaneously, dice are rolled each session based on attributes: $\text{max}(\text{Mental}) + \text{max}(\text{Social})$. For each character, different stages of Awakening are reached according to cumulative successes.

The following outlines the stages and summarises key concepts that you'll come across at each stage.

Stage One: Resistance

Recent experiences have caused your character to begin rethinking existence and their role in it. They are no longer content to be pushed around; they feel hardened, fortified and refocused, ready to tackle something new and begin producing change.

Effects:

Add one to a Resistance State, either Stamina, Resolve or Composure.

You start to become Obsessed with some topic. (cf Nascent Obsession in SoS.)

Nascent Obsession

Something is itching at your mind, leading you to doubt what you thought you knew, provoking you to seek a new or deeper perspective on existence. What could it be?

A particular item, person, location, material, or type of energy? A particular historical era or event? A specific cult or an obscure religious sect? A certain fantasy, scifi or horror series or author? Some type of fringe theory or pseudoscience? An unusual type of technology? Something else?

Stage Two: Enter the Lustrum

The world is malignantly useless; it is a Fallen World where everything conspires with everything else to corrupt, constrain and conceal. Mundanity is a splintered facade barely covering unspeakable horror, and you have started to see through the cracks. You Awaken to the realisation that you and everyone you have ever known are ensnared in a Prison and a Lie: a web of delusion that fogs the minds of almost everyone.

Acquire Gnosis 1.

You may begin to acquire Arcane Beats/Experience.

Your Nascent Obsession becomes a real Obsession.

Convert Integrity to Wisdom.

Acquiring Gnosis 1

This comes with three perks: Peripheral Mage Sight, Supernatural Resistance, and Nascent High Speech.

Peripheral Mage Sight: You get pinged in the presence of supernatural objects or events. (NB: default rules only let you notice supernatural events. As a house rule, we slightly relax that constraint.)

Supernatural Resistance: When subject to supernatural attacks, your Gnosis helps resist it.

Nascent High Speech: Strange symbols, sounds and sensations pull at your awareness. Gnosis can be rolled to briefly unveil the supernatural. You can't understand much yet, but it can give hints. The existence of five Paths may be foreshadowed.

Acquiring an Obsession

The weird topic you've been focused on obviously contains the secrets that will lead to truth and freedom!

You gain an Arcane Beat whenever you shirk your responsibilities to pursue your Obsession.

Once you have milked a topic for all its secrets, gain an Arcane Beat and swap it for another Obsession.

Converting Integrity to Wisdom

Realising the Lie, you are no longer shocked by events of the Fallen World. You are able to take supernatural horror in your stride. Thus you are no longer subject to Breaking Point checks, and Integrity becomes meaningless.

However, you are now saddled with the realisation that your every decision simultaneously changes yourself while inviting consequences from the universe. Therefore, when you assert your will without regard for consequences, you need to check for an Act of Hubris.

Key concepts for Wisdom and Hubris:

The more Wisdom you have, the easier it will be to conduct powerful magic.

The more Wisdom you have, the more you are conscious of subtle Acts of Hubris.

Every time you check for an Act of Hubris you get an Arcane Beat.

Checking for an Act of Hubris risks losing Wisdom. If reduced to zero Wisdom, your character becomes an NPC and you better start statting up your next character.

Stage Three: The Adyton

Choose a Path

You have become aware of five possible Paths for seeking Truth and Liberty, an escape from the Prison and the Lie. Each Path brings knowledge of two aspects of magic referred to as Arcana. However, to walk any Path is a one-way journey: once you make the choice, there is no turning back to choose another way.

Furthermore, each Path has a Downfall, another Path running counter to your own. You must choose an Arcanum from your Downfall Path at which you will always be Inferior. Which one shall you choose?

Acanthus: The Fae Path of the Witches of Time and Fate. They weave oaths and chance into the long-ago and the yet-to-come. Capricious yet fascinated by rules and consistency, their Downfall is the high-minded authority of the Obrimos.

Mastigos: The Devilish Path of the Warlocks of Space and Mind. Proximity and obsession beget one another, while the blackness of infinite space is coterminous with unconscious depths. Disciplined and libertine, their Downfall is the

fickle causality of Acanthus.

Moros: The Dread Path of the Alchemists of Matter and Death. All things are but swirls in the cauldron of existence, an ever-changing concoction of remnants and residues. Crafty and sombre, their Downfall is the inspired vitality of the Thrysus.

Obrimos: The Ecclesiastical Path of the Clergy of Forces and Prime. Bolts from the blue, purifying flames, and divine relics are all Providenced by celestial Authority. Optimistic and righteous, their Downfall is the grim reality of the Moros.

Thrysus: The Wild Path of the Shamans of Life and Spirit. Reproduction, speciation, competition and symbiosis are just aspects of nature's spiritual unfolding. Primordial and visceral, their Downfall is the alien mentality of the Mastigos.

House Rules

Experience: Communal yet Individual; Stable yet Flexible

Experience belongs to the player

If your character is removed from play due to death or madness, your new character will receive the same amount of experience as the old one.

When creating a new character, you can spend 12XP to begin as a Mage, using the Mage: The Awakening (Second Edition) rules. If you prefer more flexibility, you can keep those 12XP and start as a newly-Awakened Chronicles of Darkness character. To build such a character, start with the default CofD Mortal rules, then add the following:

Gnosis 1

One dot in each ruling Arcanum, plus another Ruling dot per Inferior Arcanum (see Path Symmetry).

Until you reach a total of six Arcana dots, you may buy additional Ruling Arcana for 1XP per dot, and additional Common Arcana for 2XP per dot (see Getting Up To Speed).

Reliable XP increases

All players will receive one XP per gaming session they attend.

Whether this is allocated to Mundane or Arcane XP will usually be decided based on trying to keep these balanced for each player.

Bonus XP increases

In addition to the reliable per-session increase in XP:

Players will continue to receive additional Beats in the usual ways.

The ST may also award bonus Beats based on considerations such as showing leadership or cleverness, good roleplay or doing something funny, and overcoming story challenges.

Skill Down-Payments

You can invest one experience point in a zero-dot skill to remove the penalty for lack of training. This counts towards

the first dot of the skill: if you later spend one more XP, you get the full first dot.

This stacks with other aspects of skill acquisition. Eg, you can pick up a specialization for an unlocked zero-dot skill.

Transmogrification

By stepping outside of their comfort zone, a Mage can undertake initiatory rebirth, redefining who they are. This requires time and risk in an unfamiliar environment. The bigger the change, the more time is required; however, it is easier to produce change faster if you have more Gnosis.

Transmogrification is available to all characters with at least Gnosis 1. You must go weaponless, toolless, moneyless, anonymous and friendless, without any form of identification or telecommunication, into a challenging and unfamiliar environment, for at least 24 hours. There is but one concession: you may wear a set of uninteresting casual clothes.

Any attempt to ameliorate the risk (such as preparing gear, arranging to sleep on a friend's couch, meeting someone you know, or performing surveillance and memorisation of the new environment) prevents the Transmogrification attempt. Therefore, Transmogrification is usually either a solitary pilgrimage into uninhabited wilderness, or a journey to a city you have never visited before to sleep on its streets.

Note that it is permitted (and expected) to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. You can speak to strangers and convince them to help you; you can squat in an abandoned building; you can get a job or rob a convenience store for cash and spend the cash on a new phone or identity (so long as you don't use them to contact anyone you know); you can build shelter and weapons, hunt for food, and build a fire. However, all such efforts may only be made using resources discovered during Transmogrification.

Likewise, Magic is permitted, but it cannot be pre-prepared, and you can't carry your magical tools into Transmogrification. Any beneficial magical effects on the character must be cancelled or suppressed prior to embarking.

Furthermore, Transmogrification requires an Act of Hubris check. When people change, it affects the people around them, often leading to hurt feelings and re-evaluated trust. And to even make the attempt in the first place shows that you were unable to accept yourself as you were.

Mechanics:

Every 24 hours, make two checks: Adversity and Metamorphosis (see below).

At the conclusion of Transmogrification, check for an Act of Hubris against Understanding/Wisdom.

Adversity:

The environment attacks you with a dice pool of 5, dealing Lethal damage. The attack cannot be resisted with Defense, Dodge or magic. Your only protection is to make skill rolls such as Streetwise or Survival, according to the environment and source of danger.

Each success on your skill roll protects against one point of damage. Each Dramatic Failure converts any environmental damage to Aggravated for that day.

Metamorphosis:

Roll Gnosis. Successes can be accumulated over multiple days. At any time, you can spend successes to buy modifications to your character; more dramatic modifications are unlocked by spending more successes.

Any single success can purchase the following:

Reset your most recent XP expenditure (cumulative with more successes over the full duration of the Transmogrification attempt).

Change one Virtue, Vice, Aspiration, or Obsession.

Add or resolve one Condition, subject to ST veto.

Liquidate one Merit for its XP, no matter how long ago you bought it. (Can't be used on Merits which weren't bought with XP.)

Convert one Arcane XP to one Mundane XP, or vice-versa.

By spending two successes at once, you gain access to these more substantial Transmogrification effects:

Forget a known Rote and acquire another Rote which was previously unknown.

Forget a known Praxis and acquire another Praxis which was previously unknown.

Move one Skill dot to any other Skill.

By spending five successes at once, you gain access to even more significant Transmogrification effects:

Move one Attribute dot either vertically or horizontally (eg between any Mental Attribute and any other Mental Attribute, or between any Resistance Attribute and any other Resistance Attribute.)

Liquidate one permanent Attribute dot which was not purchased with XP, to gain 3 Mundane XP.

Liquidate one permanent Skill dot which was not purchased with XP, to gain 1 Mundane XP.

Purchase a Merit which can only be purchased at character creation, such as Giant or Small Framed. (This still requires spending XP. Transmogrification only unlocks the potential.)

Furthermore, by spending a number of successes equal to your current Wisdom, you can gain a point of Wisdom. (See also the rules for Hubris Survivalism.)

Caveats:

Any XP reset or liquidated is returned as the same type it was spent as, unless you explicitly spend an extra Success to convert it.

Or, if no XP was spent in the first place (eg you received it at character creation), any XP returned does not become a permanent asset of the player: these XP are instead tied to the character.

No Attribute can be taken below one dot using these effects.

Each Dramatic Failure imposes a negative persistent Condition on your character, such as Amnesia, Broken, or Madness.

Freebies are not sacred

When Merit dots are granted as a quest reward, Sanctity of Merits does not apply to those dots. Sanctity of Merits only applies to dots acquired as part of character creation or later purchased with XP.

Survivors gonna survive

Take two characters who are close to death: one is fairly tough and the other is fairly frail. Who would you expect to most quickly return to full health?

Well, according to the default rules, the tougher character takes longer to regain all those health points.

We add a new stat: Recovery = Resolve + Stamina. The following mechanics apply:

All Medical Care rolls now have a target number of 10 regardless of patient Size + Stamina.

Recovery adds dice to Medical Care rolls. (They can't be applied without someone, maybe yourself, doing medical care at the same time.)

Instead of automatically recovering one point every 15mins/2days/1wk (according to Bashing/Lethal/Aggravated damage), instead use those time periods for performing reflexive Recovery rolls where each success heals that many points.

When bleeding out (i.e. Health track filled with Lethal damage), three or more successes on a Recovery roll will prevent one of the points of increasing Aggravated Damage.

New and Altered Merits

Serpentine (● to ●●●●; Style)

Prerequisites: Dexterity ●●, Wits ●●, Athletics ●●, Firearms ●

The default rules don't permit serpentineing to avoid gunfire. Presumably, untrained characters are too intimidated and/or just don't move in a way that effectively gets the bead off them.

With this merit, you're trained in avoiding gunfire.

Rabbit (●): You can use half-Dodge against gunfire from one opponent. The only other action you can take this turn is to move at your normal Speed.

Mother Ducker (●●): You keep feinting and weaving around in combat, so gunmen find it hard to get a bead on you. You may use half your Defense against gunfire. Your own attack is at -2.

Snake Bite (●●●): While using Rabbit against an opponent, you can also return fire against that opponent with a -1 penalty.

Gun Kata (●●●●): Spend a point of Willpower. You can use your full Defense even against all sources of gunfire, with no penalty to your own attack. (Supersedes lower ranks.)

Bullet Time (●●●●●): Spend a point of Willpower. You can use full Dodge regardless of whether or not any given opponent is using a firearm. (Supersedes lower ranks.)

Familiar (● to ●●●●)

The default rules for the Familiar Merit say to build the Familiar using the rules for Ephemeral Entities. However, the rules for Ephemeral Entities are pretty incoherent, and it's particularly hard to make out how they apply to Familiars. We completely revamp Familiar to be kind of a hybrid between Retainer and Mentor.

You have formed a pact with a supernatural entity which follows you around and provides various types of aid, in return for Mana and furthering the entity's agenda. Without effort, you can telepathically communicate with your Familiar at any range. If you successfully Meditate, you can spend a point of Mana to telepathically share your Familiar's senses.

The Familiar may take control of simple animals such as cats, rats or owls. If the animal is unwilling, it may be required for the Familiar to achieve five successes on an extended Power + Finesse roll, resisted depending on the sophistication of the animal. Only one animal at a time may be "possessed" in this way.

Your Familiar has a base one dot in each of Power, Finesse and Resilience, or whatever is appropriate for the animal form. Each dot in the Merit provides an extra dot to be allocated to one of these traits. (So if a 1-dot Familiar possesses a cat which has Power/Finesse/Resilience of 1/3/1, the combined traits could be either 2/3/1, 1/4/1 or 1/3/2.)

Your Familiar has a number of Skill dots equal to its Merit dots. If your Familiar's skill is higher than yours, you gain a beat every time you increase that skill, representing the Familiar's tutelage. Each session, you can ask your Familiar to use one of their skills. Each additional request beyond the first costs one Mana.

Instead of Skills, the Familiar may instead have Numina, on a one-for-one basis. Use of the Numen requires spending Mana equal to the usual Essence cost. For example, a Familiar ●●● themed as a robber-fairy could have Larceny 2, Innocuous, and Essence Thief; and activating Essence Thief to drain a ghost would require spending a point of Mana.

Even without an animal host, the Familiar can perform basic interactions with the environment, such as moving light objects, opening doors, and performing minor illusions appropriate to its nature. For example, our robber-fairy could cause sparkling lights or tinkling laughter at will. A Familiar will also automatically give you a heads up when it notices something interesting or dangerous.

In return for Mana, the preceding effects can be amplified. For example, a Familiar can't usually open a locked door, but if they have the Larceny skill and are fed a point of Mana, they could make the attempt. This is true even if they are not in an animal form appropriate to lockpicking, or if no lockpicks are available: it would appear to be a telekinetic ability.

Each additional two points of Mana beyond the first provides the equivalent of an equipment bonus to these abilities. So, by spending five Mana, our robber-fairy would not only be able to attempt opening the lock, but would also have the equivalent of a Lockpicking Kit. Likewise, a Familiar can't usually attack, but they could launch a ranged attack similar to the Blast Numen, so long as you provide 2 Mana per point of "weapon" bonus.

If fed a point of Mana and told to "watch", a Familiar gets 9-Again on their Perception checks, or 8-Again for two Mana. While engaged in Watching, they can't do anything else except move.

Similarly to Bans in the default rules, each Familiar has an agenda, such as "cultivate mushroom rings". Furthering your Familiar's agenda provides either a Beat or a favour.

In return for a favour, the Familiar will perform more subtle but far-reaching effects than its usual localized powers. This has the effect of temporarily granting another Merit, like Resources or Contacts, at half the Familiar's Merit dots (round up). Instead of a favour, payment may be made by spending Mana equal to the Familiar's dots.

Choose a Path for your Familiar. Your Familiar reduces your cost of increasing the Path's Arcana by 1XP (to a minimum of 1XP, if you already have XP reductions for some other reason). If the Path isn't the same as yours, the Familiar allows you to use this Path's Tools as a Yantra, in addition to your native Path Tools. If the Familiar does have the same Path as you, it instead provides 9-Again on any spell cast using a Path Tool Yantra (similar to "As Above, So Below" on p166.)

Order Status

It seems to be the default that most Awakened will join an Order; yet, for newly Awakened characters, the induction process seem a little unclear. Where do Order Rote Skills come from, and why should the Order trust someone just because they spend some XP to buy a point of the Order Status merit?

These house rules attempt to clarify the situation.

No experience necessary

You may acquire Order Status dots without spending XP. We will refer to these as Conditional Order Status dots. You will need to prove your trustworthiness in other ways, and betraying the trust will demand either atonement or punishment (depending on severity).

Each of the following grant a point of Conditional Order Status:

Give the Order one of your Soul Stones (which may be recovered by performing three services on behalf of the Order.)

Make an Oath to protect the Order's secrets, uphold the Order's tenets, and honour the Order's rulings.

Significantly further the Order's goals or resources (eg donate non-trivial research and artifacts to the Order).

Put yourself at risk to defend the Order against a substantial threat.

Demonstrate leadership within the Order, such as recruitment, offering succour to other members in need, resolving conflicts, formulating strategy (and having it prove effective), and acting as an exemplar of Order values and standards.

Demonstrate ability in all of the Order's Rote Skills (note that this does not automatically turn it into an acquired Order Rote Skill for your character.) The demonstrations need to be witnessed and approved of by existing members.

Caveats:

As these burdens do not inherently cost experience (and indeed might even result in increased experience), the Sanctity of Merits does not apply to Conditional Order Status.

Acts such as violating the Oath or stealing your Soul Stone back (for example) will cause loss of Order Status until the lapse is atoned for.

Particularly heinous violations of Order trust may result in punitive action, such as use of your Soul Stone to torment you.

Each level of Status with any other Order costs one Conditional Order Status dot. This works both ways on every Order pairwise, squaring all costs. Eg three Orders imposes a $9 \times$ cost, so can't really be accomplished with Conditional dots alone.

Using these rules, it should be not too hard to immediately acquire up to three Order Status dots for newly Awakened: by gifting a Soul Stone, taking an Oath, and demonstrating ability under test conditions. Whereas, higher dots require more substantial experience and ability.

Order Rote Skill acquisition

Recall that when using a Skill as a Mudra Yantra for a Rote, you can add your Skill dots to the casting roll. An Order Rote Skill is then similar to a Specialization, in that it not only lets you use your skill dots, but adds a further +1 to the roll.

However, the rules as written do not explain how a neophyte actually acquires this +1 bonus. It seems unlikely that merely having a dot in Order Status is sufficient to gain Order Rote Skill training for that Order. For example, a side-effect would be that falling out with your Order would cause you to "forget" how to use your Order Rote Skills; whereas it seems reasonable that renegades would still retain their old Order's training.

So, provided you have at least one dot in Order Status, you can spend one Arcane XP per skill to learn how to use it as an Order Rote Skill, gaining a +1 henceforth to all Rotes linked to that skill. Furthermore, by spending a little time with your Order, you can usually obtain some training which contributes one Arcane Beat towards each such expenditure.

For example, acquiring all three Order Rote Skills usually requires 3 Arcane XP, but if you first spend a few hours with your Order to get their basic training, you would receive 3 Arcane Beats back as soon as you spend the XP.

Note that it isn't necessary to already know the skill. You will just be using it untrained when trying to cast associated Rotes. (Yes, this stacks with the Skill Down Payments house rule.)

Also yes, this allows acquiring the Order Rote Skills from a different Order, provided you have the necessary Order Statuses. Furthermore, you hang onto these acquired Rote Skills even if you later need to leave the Order for any reason.

Path Symmetry

Each Path has two Ruling Arcana and one Inferior Arcanum. Yet, this Inferior Arcanum is always a Ruling Arcanum for one other Path. This induces a kind of oppositional yet complementary relationship between Paths: each Path has a weakness ruled over by another Path.

Eg, in the default rules, the Inferior Arcanum of Moros is always Spirit, and Spirit is a Ruling Arcanum of Thrysus. This suggests the terminology that Thrysus is the Downfall of Moros. Likewise, Moros is the Downfall of Obrimos, and Obrimos is the Downfall of Acanthus.

If you look at a diagram of these relationships, you see something unusual:

Path Oppositions

Acanthus is the Downfall of no other Path.

Moros is the Downfall of two different Paths.

There is almost a cycle: Acanthus -> Obrimos -> Thrysus -> Mastigos, but then Mastigos breaks the pattern.

To restore symmetry and furnish players with more flexibility, we adopt the rule that all Mages choose from either Arcanum associated with their Downfall path, and the Downfall of Mastigos is Acanthus. It makes sense: Mastigos balance liberation and discipline, while Acanthus throw out snares of Time and Fate with a fickle and unpredictable hand.

Thus the choices of Inferior Arcanum per Path are like so:

Obrimos: Matter or Death.

Mastigos: Time or Fate.

Moros: Life or Spirit.

Acanthus: Forces or Prime.

Thrysus: Space or Mind.

Furthermore:

If you take a second Inferior Arcanum when signing the Watchtower of your Path, you immediately acquire a free dot in one of your Ruling Arcana.

Getting Up To Speed

Cheaper initial Arcana

We started with Chronicles of Darkness characters, but Mage characters usually start with six Arcana dots. Let's make the initial hurdle a little easier. While your total Arcana dots is less than six:

You may purchase Ruling Arcana dots for only 1XP.

You may purchase Common Arcana dots for only 2XP.

(Inferior Arcana still cost the usual amount of 4XP.)

Multiple "Maximum" Arcana

Depending on your Gnosis, your Highest Arcana Max and Other Arcana Max can be different to each other. In this case, you can only have one Arcanum at the maximum; all other Arcana must be less.

We permit having all your Ruling Arcana at the "Highest Arcana Max". All non-Ruling Arcana must adhere to the Other Arcana Max. Eg, a Mage with Gnosis 3 and a Legacy which provides a third Ruling Arcanum could potentially have all three Ruling Arcana raised to four dots. However, this Mage may raise no Common or Inferior Arcana past three dots.

Hubris Survivalism

In the core rules, it costs 2XP to increase Wisdom by a dot, and yet Wisdom is a constantly depleting resource. We prefer that when players sink XP into a resource for their character, this should be a relatively permanent improvement, rather than something which could be stripped away based on a dice roll.

It makes sense that characters with high Wisdom could quickly lose it through unwise choices, but it also makes sense that someone already running low on Wisdom could make modest changes to improve their position. It makes least sense of all that someone stripped to minimal wisdom through dice rolls would then need to spend a lot of XP just to come back to normalcy, only to risk losing it again on yet more dice rolls. We attempt to ameliorate this.

Wisdom recovery is easier when Wisdom is low

Rather than a flat 2 Arcane XP, increasing Wisdom costs a number of Arcane Beats equal to the current Wisdom. You can also trade in 1 Arcane XP for 5 Arcane Beats for the purpose of this rule.

For someone who already has high Wisdom, this is approximately the same cost as the default rules, since 2XP is equivalent to 10 Beats. On the other hand, for a character at risk of Madness, it now only takes 1XP to claw their way back from the edge.

ΦΛΕΓΕΙ ΓΑΡ ΠΕΡΙ ΜΟΥ Ο ΑΓΘΡ ΤΩΝ ΠΙΕΝΤΕ

Even amongst Sleepers, any elementary exposure to magical practice will come with instructions for the performance of "banishing rituals", such as the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram [1], and the recommendation to perform such a ritual daily.

Mages (especially Guardians of the Veil) may disseminate such rituals to Sleepers as a way to distract, attract, screen or protect people who have potential. Although different rituals might have subtly different intentions or effects, to most Sleepers a typical banishing ritual is simply equivalent to Meditation (CofD p75). Yet, the form of these rituals wasn't pulled from a hat: they do indicate practises which the Awakened use to fortify themselves against Hubris and Paradox.

Mechanically, a Banishing Ritual is an extended action with a pool of Presence + Occult + Gnosis, target successes 10, and an interval of 5 minutes. Yantras such as Tools, Concentration, and Mantra may be used; and a Sanctum offers the usual bonus to Gnosis.

Effective performance of a Banishing Ritual requires the ability to move freely and vocalize loudly. If you are in a cramped or cluttered space, or if you are unwilling or unable to attract attention with the sound of your voice, suffer -2 (cumulative) to each dice roll.

After a Banishing Ritual is complete, for the next 24 hours, the character may spend Willpower to aid Act of Hubris checks and to suppress any Paradox rolls.

For Act of Hubris checks, spending a Willpower point in this way adds +3 to the dice pool.

For Paradox rolls, spending Willpower subtracts 3 dice from the Paradox dice pool.

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RK14DqNobeg>

GAMMA WORLD: AUZYA AND ZELUND ANIMAL BASE STOCKS

By Karl David Brown

Auzya Campaign

This article is the first in a series describing a version of Australia in Gamma World, "Auzya" (pronounced Oz-ya), that reflects the political and cultural background of Australia. There have been other attempts to create fan versions of Gamma World Australia, notably in the now extinct Australian Realm magazine and by the Google Plus community, also extinct. The first featured some overblown assumptions about sea-level rises and by trying to cover all of Australia did not contain much detail on anywhere. The second felt too USA-an in its approach (most, not all, of the contributors were not Australians) and was focused on a small area of NSW with little information on the rest of the continent to provide context.

This first article describes the whole continent with a broad brush. The nearby islands of Nezund (Neh-zund, New Zealand) will also be described somewhat. In addition, new animal base stocks are provided to allow players in Auzya and beyond to take on the roles of Australia and New Zealand's remarkable wildlife. Future articles will detail cryptic alliances, locales, and technology for the campaign.

This article was developed with feedback from The Piazza Gamma World forum and more about Auzya can be found there. <https://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewforum.php?f=37&sid=a0da6f333f856a5f9002ceab9e7ba123>

Tone

The GW4e rulebook describes two different tones 'Wahoo' and 'Serious'. The setting presented here favours a more serious approach. One branch of GW fandom has embraced the 'Wahoo' style often with lots of contemporary pop-culture references. By the 7th edition, the backstory of Gamma World was even changed to facilitate this kind of play.

However, at least until the 4th edition the core rules also supported a more serious mood (GW6) and emphasizes how far into the future Gamma World is and how very little will be familiar. A serious tone better supports characterization and exploration of a strange immersive far future science fantasy environment. A serious game can include political and military manoeuvring of the Cryptic Alliances as part of prolonged long running campaigns.

That is not to say that this approach is realistic, but neither is that serious long D&D campaign where wizards shoot lightning bolts out of their fingers. Gamma World is science fantasy where the impossible is cloaked in comic-book science (GW5). As in superhero comic books and films the science is unrealistic, the action exciting or suspenseful, and we care about the characters and their missions. The idea is to be realistic enough to suspend disbelief during an extended campaign.

A key component of the approach is the appreciation of time. We are hundreds of years into the future and after a

cataclysm, almost nothing of our early 21st century will survive and therefore characters will encounter no truly familiar places. However, regenerating things like animals, plants, and culture do carry on and mutate creating forms that are strange but echo faintly with what we know. To mis-quote Terry Pratchett "The future does not repeat, but it rhymes".

When thinking about the effects of time and maintaining a serious tone the book "The World Without Us" by Alan Weisman can provide ideas, though the Ancients did not simply vanish as imagined in the book, they devasted the world first.

One useful conceit is the technology of the ancients is not only more advanced than ours in obvious ways, they also developed many subtle techniques to ensure technology lasted. These subtle advances were motivated by raising the standard of living while reducing environmental damage and our voracious consumption of resources on Earth and beyond.

The keys to this setting are a few themes true to Australia and New Zealand of the 21st century and of Gamma World: invasion, the short arm of the law, the desert and the sea, ancient and new.

Invasion

Australia and New Zealand's unique organisms and the battle to preserve them in the face of invading species (which if we are honest includes humans, our crops, and livestock) is a major preoccupation of the culture. In Gamma World Antipodes this struggle continues. The PCs feel this theme through Cryptic Alliances like the Sahul Society and might even be mutated native species.

The short arm of the law

In the 18th to 19th centuries geography and sparse population produced indigenous fighters and bush rangers because the authorities struggled to extend their rule of law into the wilds. In Gamma World society has faltered and that same empty geography was waiting for the outlaws and freedom fighters to return. Once again troopers from the city states cannot protect travellers and settlers from bush rangers and those who lived on the land before the roads were rebuilt.

The Desert and the Sea

Another theme is the contrast between the dry inland and the sea. Both are inhospitable environments for most people and therefore sparsely populated, poorly explored, and lawless. Despite this the adventurous are drawn to these places. The deserts contain riches in the form of gold, silver, opals, and artefacts of the Ancients that attract treasure hunters. Merchants sail the seas between the city-states chasing profitable trade and fighting pirates. Explorers gaze wistfully at the horizon or the depths and wonder what discoveries a brave ship's crew might make.

Ancient and New

Auzya and Zelund (pronounced 'Zel-und') are homes to ancient species and cultures. In Auzya the land itself is old and eroded. In the 18th century Europeans swarmed over these lands. The result was new colonies with no history building everything new. Thus, Auzya and Zelund became a clash of the ancient and the new. In the 21st century the nations tried to reconcile the old and new, indigenous and invader. During the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd centuries, before the cataclysm, respectful blended cultures emerged, and ancient species were restored to life by advanced science. When the cataclysm hit traditional knowledge helped some survive and build new cultures. Radiation, biological weapons, and devastation saw the rapid evolution of the restored paleolithic fauna into new mutant species.

Same but Different

Auzya and Zelund both have a history of invasions, untamed wilds, and a love of the Sea. Each also must protect its own unique fauna and flora. These similarities create a bond of understanding between the two land masses. However, they differ greatly in history, culture, and geography. Those differences have become even more pronounced since the cataclysm.

Mutated Species

Mutant Animals

Auzya and Zeland have very different species of animals. Players can use any base stock from the Gamma World rules or one of the new base stocks provided here.

Shared Fauna

These animal base stocks (GW12-13) are common in both Auzya and Zelund.

bat (the only native mammals in Zelund are the lesser short-tailed bat and long tailed bat), bull, brush-tail possum (treat as raccoon, a feral species in Zelund), duck, fox, frog, grasshopper, hawk, horse, mosquito, octopus (including gloomy, blue-ringed, reef etc), pray mantis, ring-tail possum (treat as monkey), sea lion/seal, shark, spider (including red-back, huntsman, funnel web etc.).

Auzya Fauna

Auzya has a mix of native and introduced species. The following existing base stocks (GW12-13) are recommended: camel, crab, crocodile (treat freshwater species as alligator), Kangaroo (use for grey kangaroos, wallabies, pademelons, quokkas etc), snake (for various venomous snakes including dugite, tiger snake, taipan, red-belly black snake etc.), sugar glider (treat as flying squirrel), termite, turtle (small river turtles including long-necks, not sea turtles), wasp, and wombat (treat as badger).

Zelund Fauna

Zelund was a land of birds and reptiles before humans arrived. The non-mammals on the shared fauna list above should be used to represent native species. The weta are giant cave crickets, treat as grasshopper.

Shared new animal base stocks

Ant: PS7 DX8 CN4. Bite for 1d6 damage. Sting 1 damage and poison of 1d4 Intensity. Exoskeleton has base AC of 14. Multiple limbs (legs) as the mutation. Base speed of 12 (even if walking upright). Burrows at speed 2 through earth. Climbing attempts are one difficulty level easier than normal.

Cat Domestic/Feral: PS9 DX14 CN5. Claw/Claw/Bite for 1d4/1d4/1d6 damage. Leap 3 m. Base speed of 24 (18 bipedal). Has heightened hearing, heightened smell and night vision as the mutations.

Chicken: PS2 DX6 CN3. Females peck for 1d4. Males can Claw/Claw/Peck for 1d4/1d4/1d4. Weak wings merely double all jumping distances. Any fall is treated as if the height was 2 meters less. Base speed is 14 even if walking upright.

Corvid including Crow, Currawong, Chough, Magpie, and Raven. The Zelund Raven is a product of de-extinction. PS2 DX15 CN6. Claw/Claw/Peck 1d4/1d4/1d4. Has wings, but with a flying base speed of 20. Walking base speed is 5 (even if walking upright). Heightened vision as the mutation. Corvids can mimic ordinary sounds up to the volume of normal talking, not mutant powers using sound. They can automatically speak without having to take this humanoid attribute. This leaves them eligible for the extra mutation if they choose not to take humanoid traits.

Dog, Domestic/Feral: PS7 DX12 CN9. Bite for 1d6 damage. Has heightened smell and heightened hearing as the mutations. Base speed of 16 (10 bipedal). A dog has two robot recognition scores. The first is the usual to be Mistaken for a human. The second adds +4 to the first. Many household, police, and rescue robots were programmed to ignore or even work with normal dogs. If the first robot recognition fails and the referee deems the robot specially programmed to recognize dogs, then roll for the second. On a success the robot treats the character as they would a normal dog.

Fish (cod, trout, salmon, or similar sized carnivorous fish): PS7 DX5 CN6. Assumed to be adapted for land dwelling. Bite for 1d6 damage. Gills as the mutation. Base land speed 8 (horizontal) or 7 (walking upright). Swims at base speed 9. Non-carnivorous versions, such as carp, have no effective bite attack and CN7.

Dolphin: Assumed to be adapted for land dwelling. PS12 DX13 CN11. Bite 1d6. Base speed 7 (walking upright). Base speed in water 36. Immune to the chilling effects of cold water. Base AC is 13 from layer of blubber. Has Sonar as the mutation but the ability only functions underwater and does not require large ears. Can hold breath underwater for 12 rounds.

Mouse (can also be used for various mouse-like Auzya marsupials): PS4 DX15 CN3. Bite 1d3. Base speed of 10 (8 bipedally). Has Night Vision, Heightened Hearing and Heightened Smell as the mutations. +2 bonus to climbing.

Parrot including budgies, cockatoos, galah, lorikeets, rosellas, twenty-eights etc. PS3 DX13 CN5. Claw/Claw/Bite 1d4/1d4/1d6. Has wings, but with a flying base speed of 22. Walking base speed is a 4 (even if walking upright). Heightened vision as the mutation. Parrots can speak without losing the extra Physical Mutation for not having humanoid traits.

Rat: PS6 DX13 CN6. Claw/Claw/Bite 1d4/1d4/1d8. Base speed of 12 (7 bipedally). Has Night Vision, Heightened Hearing and Heightened Smell as the mutations.

Whale, Baleen (includes humpback, right, blue, etc) Assumed to be adapted for land dwelling. PS18 DX2 CN16. Base speed 6 (walking upright). Base speed in water 34. Immune to the chilling effects of cold water. Base AC is 14 from layer of blubber. Has Sonar as the mutation but the ability only functions underwater and does not require large ears. Tail slap for 1d8 at -2 THAC. Can hold breath underwater for 18 rounds.

Whale, Toothed (includes orca, pilot, sperm, etc): Assumed to be adapted for land dwelling. PS17 DX2 CN15. Bite

1d12. Tail slap for 1d8 at -2 THAC. Base speed 6 (walking upright). Base speed in water 34. Immune to the chilling effects of cold water. Base AC is 14 from layer of blubber. Has Sonar as the mutation but the ability only functions underwater and does not require large ears. Can hold breath underwater for 24 rounds.

Auzya New Animal Base Stocks

Cassowary: PS10 DX8 CN10. Claw/Claw for 1d8, 1d8. Base speed 15, even if walking upright. Base swimming speed of 4. Has Heightened Sense Hearing as the mutation. +1AC against physical attacks aimed specifically at the head.

Crocodile, Saltwater: PS17 DX2 CN14. Tail slap for 1d10 at -3 THAC. Bite 2d6+2 damage. Natural AC of 12 before DX modifier. Base Speed 16 (9 bipedal) 8 in water.

Flying Fox/Fruit Bat: PS4 DX7 CN8. Bite 1d4. Base speed 5 (6 bipedal). Flying base speed of 16. Has Heightened Hearing and Night Vision as per the mutations.

Echidna: PS8 DX3 CN6. Two oversized claw attacks 1d8/1d8. Base speed 6 (4 bipedal). Has spines (as the quills/spines mutation, spines can't be thrown) that do 1d6. Natural AC of 12 before DX modifier.

Emu: PS 8 DX 6 CN 8 Kick for 1d6 damage. Base speed of 14, even if walking upright. Can survive in hot, dry conditions twice as long as normal using half as much water.

Goanna: PS9 DX12 CN6 Base speed 14 even if bipedal. Claw/claw/bite for 1d4/1d4/1d6 damage and the bite has intensity I debilitative poison. Tail whip at -2 THAC for 1d8 damage.

Hermit Crab. These are assumed to be descended from air-breathing hermit crabs or coconut crabs. PS8 DX5 CN5. Two pincers for 1d6/1d4. Base Speed 9 (6 upright) cannot swim, sinks. Can breathe saltwater. Has Heightened Smell as the mutation. Has the partial carapace mutation except covering limbs and head/thorax but not abdomen and tail. Can wear mutant giant snail shells, oil drums, etc on the unarmoured abdomen and tail. Giant sea snail shell AC +6, Cost 40, weight 20 Tech Level 0. Metal drum AC +5, Cost 30, weight 25, Tech Level II.

Kangaroo, Red: PS 13, DX 10 CN 9. Two rear claws 1d4/1d4. Can jump 10 meters forward and 3 meters up. Base speed of 14, even if walking upright.

Koala including slightly larger de-extinct species: PS9 DX5 CN5. Claw/claw/bite for 1d6/1d6/1d4 damage. Base speed 7 (5 bipedal). Pre-cataclysm koalas could only eat a few species of eucalyptus. However, only mutants who became able to feed on other food survived the dark years. Although mutated versions of the eucalyptus forests have returned, non-mutated koalas are extinct.

Megalania (de-extinct giant lizard): PS16 DX6 CN12 Base speed 15 (10 bipedal). Claw/claw/bite for 1d8/1d8/2d6 damage and the bite has intensity I debilitative poison. Tail whip at -3 THAC for 2d6 damage.

Mihirung (Dromornis stirtoni): PS14 DX 4 CN 12. Kick for 1d8. Base land speed of 16, even if walking upright.

Platypus: PS7 DX5 CN4. Claw/claw for 1d3/1d3 if male each successful claw attack also delivers a intensity 2 debilitative poison. Base speed 8 (5 bipedal) and a base swim speed of 6. Night Vision as the mutation. When underwater a platypus can sense electrical currents including those of devices, robots, power cables, and even the bodies of animals. The currents are perceived as a detailed 3D image enabling the platypus to use perception to spot these charged objects and creatures normally even in murky water or complete darkness.

Procoptodon: PS15 DX9 CN11. Only one rear claw attack at a time 1d6. Can jump 5 meters forward and 2 meters up. Base speed of 12, even if walking upright

Python: PS15 DX9 CN4. Base speed 12. Has no "walking upright" position. Once the python has grabbed something, it can constrict for one point of damage per full 5 points of PS.

Quinkana: PS15 DX6 CN12. Tail slap for 1d8 at -3 THAC. Bite 2d6 damage. Natural AC of 12 before DX modifier. Base Speed 18 (12 bipedal).

Quoll: PS7 DX12 CN5. Claw/Claw/Bite for 1d4/1d4/1d6 damage. Leap 2m. Base speed of 19 (12 bipedal). Has heightened hearing, heightened smell and night vision as the mutations. If food is fresh raw meat, then no drinking water is required.

Thylacoleo: PS16 DX10 CN13. Two huge thumb claws and a bite for 1d6/1d6/2d6 damage. Base Speed 10 even if bipedal.

Thylacine (de-extinct marsupial carnivore that could run on all fours and hop like a kangaroo): PS8 DX14 CN7. Bite for 1d8 damage. Can jump 8 meters forward and 3 meters up. Base speed of 14, even if walking upright.

Zelund New Animal Base Stocks

Pouakai (Haast's eagle): PS6 DX10 CN6. Claw/Claw/Bite for 1d8/1d8/1d6. Has wings, but with a flying base speed of 28. Walking base speed is a 4 (even if walking upright). Heightened vision as the mutation.

Kakapo: PS6 DX10 CN6. Claw/Claw/Bite 1d4/1d4/1d8. Walking base speed is 9 (even if walking upright). Kapapo have Heightened Smell, Night Vision, Attraction Odour (D), and Diminished Sight (D) as the mutations. Unable to fly but small wings enable them to 'parachute' rather than fall. No damage from falling and can travel 1 meter horizontally for every 3 meters of fall. +1 bonus to Remain Unseen in natural land environments.

Kiwi: PS4 DX8 CN6. Base speed 14 even if bipedal. Heightened Smell, Heightened Hearing, and Diminished Sight (D) as the mutations. Beak is too fragile and sensitive to use as a weapon.

Moa: PS14 DX4 CN14. Base speed 13/12 even if bipedal. Kick for 1d8 damage.

Tuatara: PS10 DX5 CN9 Base speed 13 (8 bipedal). Bite for 1d6 damage. Night Vision as the mutation. Can burrow at a speed of 1 meter per minute.

Sentient Plants

As per the core book. All the plant base stocks are present. Treat eucalypts as Evergreens (GW14).

BENEATH

By Aidan Parker



“You!”

Fuck.

I glance back as the sudden yell cuts through the patter of the rain. She stands, staring intently at me, her hand pointed. “You, yes, you!” she says, jabbing her finger at me. “Come up here! Will someone bring her up here?” I raise my eyebrow beneath my mask as I watch a couple of excitable members of the crowd break away and scramble towards me. I tense, clutching my bag close with one hand, the fingers of my other curling as they near me, electricity beginning to bubble between my fingertips. They walk past me.

Wait, what?

I glance back as they step past and grab the arm of a woman as she stares in terror at the mob. She doesn’t struggle as they drag her back towards their group, hauling her up onto the pedestal with their leader. I let out a quiet sigh, relaxing my muscles as I watch the helpless woman stand beside the pontificating do-gooder. The leader gazes at the woman, eyeing her smooth, pale, ceramic mask, little pink dots spattered across its surface, purple flowers colouring the cheeks. It’s quite pretty, actually. A far-sight better than those company-made ones.

“You don’t need this,” the leader says to the masked woman, a soft, crooning voice, yet full of power. “The world can see you. See that you’re beautiful.” The masked woman looks across, fear and worry in her eyes as she stands, frozen. “What’s your name?” the leader asks. The woman stares for a moment longer, before stuttering quietly.

“Sarah,” she mumbles. The leader nods.

“Okay, Sarah,” she says softly. She slowly raises her hand to the woman’s face, reaching out her young, smooth fingers towards the ceramic mask. “Let’s show the world how beautiful Sarah is.” She grips the mask between her youthful fingers and slowly, delicately, lifts it from the woman’s face.

There is a silence that grips the crowd as the woman’s pale features are bared, her eyes glancing about nervously, her

“No more masks!”

I walk past the crowd as that single nutbag stands on a makeshift pedestal, her sign held aloft as she swings about wildly. She shrieks into the megaphone, yelling to the crowd as they cheer and echo her.

“No more masks! Let us see your face!” I grunt in annoyance as I listen to her continuing. “You don’t need to hide! You’re all beautiful!” I pull my coat collar up against them, trying to walk past as quickly as possible without drawing their attention. They pay no heed to me as they focus on this leader, fists raised and cheers of agreeance rippling through the crowd.

I touch my hand to my mask, wiping raindrops off its metal surface. I can see a droplet sitting at the very edge of my left eye hole, threatening to drip in. I brush it away, wiping the hard, metal cheeks and smooth front. Some people prefer masks with a mouth opening, or to at least have sculpted lips like a human face. I’ve never been one for realism though.

cheeks sallow and tight, her lips pressed together in fear. Across her nose is a massive, black scar that stretches just above her right eyebrow and down to the left of her lips, twisting much of her nose and carving into her flesh. I sigh.

Poor woman.

The crowd cheers. The leader smiles excitedly as she holds the mask away from the woman's face.

"See?" she exclaims excitedly, leaning closer to the woman. "You are beautiful! You do not need this!" She waves the ceramic mask around wildly. I grunt, watching as the unmasked woman lets out a soft, nervous laugh, her gaze darting around the crowd. She seems happy, almost. Empowered by the acceptance. I glance about.

Is this going to go the same as yesterday's...?

Yep.

I see the man standing there, proudly holding up his phone as he films the entire event. Proof of this leader's greatness. I grit my teeth.

Poor woman.

I gaze at the scar. Skin condition, fairly common. Majority of the people in this city have had it at least once. Sometimes it scars the face, sometimes it doesn't. We don't care. It tends not to be overly contagious, and most of us have friends with a scar of varying sizes.

Her boss will fire her the instant he sees that video though.

The suits don't like the scars.

I sigh heavily and continue walking, leaving the excitable crowd as I make my way towards the train station. As I near the building, I hear a cheer erupt from the crowd. I wince. I hope that mask wasn't too sentimental to her.

I walk down the steps of the station, wiping droplets from my mask again as I near the platform, the train arriving just as I reach it. I finish wiping the last of the droplets off as I step into the carriage. I know the porcelain ones don't rust, but they also seem so fragile. Constantly cracking, breaking, chipping. I remember a woman I met who had started filling the cracks with gold. She said she'd learnt it from a friend. Kinkugi, I think she called it? Kingsgi? I don't remember.

I glance about at the carriage. It's calm for a weekday. I glance across at a man sitting by the door, his head buried in the newspaper, absorbed within its frail pages. He looks across at me, a nervous, suspicious look in his eye as he tries to resist frowning, before he looks back at the paper. I grunt.

Even when it's quiet, there's always one.

I glance down at my watch, pressing the button on the side. Yellow lights flicker on and the small image is projected just above my wrist, hovering in the air.

I sigh.

They better be on time this time.

The train slides to a halt and I pause, waiting for the door button to alight. Finally, the thing flashes green and I press. The doors slide open in an almost painful grind, letting the wind rush in as it claws at my throat and around my mask. I walk across the platform, hearing the rain patter on the roof as I walk towards the exit.

It's only a five-minute walk to his apartment, but the rain begins to pick up as I make my way along the footpath, droplets slipping down my mask and dripping off my chin, soaking into my shirt and padded coat. I glance up at the sky, the black clouds squatting overhead as the rain plummets down. I growl. It's been raining for days now.

Sometimes it makes you think it'll never fucking stop.

I walk up the steps to the set of apartments, glancing behind me as I quickly scan the street before pressing the buzzer by the door.

"Fred? Fred?! Yo, mate, it's me," I call, leaning towards the intercom. There's a few seconds silence, before I hear a gentle click. I nod. "Thanks," I grunt, pushing open the door as I escape the rain.

I walk through the foyer, dragging my hand along my face as I reach the lift. I glance down at my bag as I wait, flipping the flap open. I quickly feel around, making sure the rain hasn't soaked into any of the food.

The lift pings and the doors slide open. I step in and press the fifth floor, waiting. The thing grinds and grumbles as it slowly trundles upwards. With a pained ding, the doors slide open once more and I step out, walking quickly towards his apartment. I glance about, but no one else is around, the hallways empty, no sound coming from within any of the other apartments. I approach Fred's door and knock quickly.

"Hey mate, it's me," I call. There is a shuffling from behind the door, before I hear hands fiddling with the line of locks. There is a final click and the door swings open, catching suddenly on the tiny chain.

"Damn," I hear Fred mutter, before he slams the door closed once more. There is a scraping clack and the door opens fully this time. I step inside, the quiet muttering of the radio growing louder as I near the kitchen.

"You going alright?" I ask, glancing back at him as he shuts the door. Fred stands by it for a moment, staring through the eyehole. Finally, he steps back, nodding to himself.

"What?" Oh, uh, yeah, I'm fine. I'm fine." He shakes his head as he walks towards me. I cock my head slightly, eyeing him. His metal mask is far more ornate than mine. The eye sockets press against his skin perfectly, leaving no gap between the padding and his flesh. The nose along the front of his mask is finely sculpted. It's perfectly normal, as noses go, but on a mask it is remarkable. The lips too, similarly normal, but exquisitely crafted for a mask.

Ornate perhaps was the wrong word.

His mask is far more *real* than mine. It looks like a silver, unmoving face.

He walks into the kitchen and leans against the bench, looking up at me, his hand clasped in front of him, his thin arms looking even more bony in the dim, white light. I reach into my bag and withdraw the food I had bought. Packets of rice, cans of beans, some croissants in case he felt like something nicer.

"Here," I say softly, placing the items on the bench. He gazes at them, his eyes widening.

"Thanks," he breathes heavily. There is silence for a moment as I continue unloading my bag. He stares awkwardly, seeming not to know what to say. I don't mind, though. I know he appreciates it. I know he needs it. I see him eyeing the croissants excitedly as I finish placing the items on the bench.

"I wouldn't mind one," I say gently, grinning beneath my smooth mask. He looks across at me. I see his eyes widen, light up.

"Okay, cool, yeah," he says excitedly, grabbing the packet. He begins tearing off the plastic as he walks through the kitchen towards the oven. "Hey, did you hear about that actress?" he calls back.

"Which one?" I ask.

"Oh, the uh, one from that film," he says, grabbing a tray from one of the drawers. I grunt.

"Oh, yeah, *of course*. *That* one." He glances back at me as I chuckle. He lets out a nervous laugh.

"Oh, uh, yeah. Umm...Jess...Jess...Jessica something or other, I think?"

"Jessica Castle?" I ask. He nods.

"Yeah, her."

"No, what about her?"

"She took her mask off during an interview. Said she was inspired by others or something. Wanted to show her face on TV finally, since everyone had only seen her mask." He slides the tray into the oven and closes the thing, fiddling with the knobs as he glances at the clock.

"And?" He glances back at me.

"She has Nomacoris," he responds. I purse my lips.

"Oh."

"Yeah," he mutters, walking to the fridge.

"If I look up articles about the interview, then? Have a read of what people saying, I'm guessing it'll be...?" He nods as I trail off.

"You can be ugly underneath. Just not *that* ugly," he grunts, slamming the fridge shut. "Gotta be the correct ugly."

There's a thud downstairs, like someone slamming a door shut. Fred jumps, his whole body tense, his eyes darting around. He pauses, staring at the ground, before he shakes his head and keeps moving about the kitchen. I watch as he grabs plates and knives from the cupboard and places them on the bench. I watch his hands shaking gently, his knuckles white as he holds the knives.

"Are you doing alright?" I ask, leaning against the bench. He grunts, shaking his head.

"I'm fine," he responds curtly. He stops, leaning against the sink. He looks across at me.

"I hope I'm like you when I'm your age," he says, gazing straight at me. I grunt.

"I'm not *that* much older than you," I reply, chuckling. He shrugs.

"Yeah, I know. But you seem so much more...with it. I mean fuck, you get my food cause I'm too afraid of them." He sighs and looks down at the sink. I watch him silently, tilting my head.

"It's okay," I say, leaning forward. "They're scary. Very scary. They've been getting more and more aggressive lately, and it makes sense you're scared." I pause, watching him, though he remains silent as he gazes down at the sink.

"Besides, if they take off my mask, I'll be fine." He stands, silent.

"I just feel so fucking weak," he mumbles.

"You're not weak," I say softly. "You have a perfectly good reason to be scared." He sighs heavily. He walks towards the oven and bends down to look through the glass.

"Yeah," he sighs.

We stay silent for the next few minutes as the croissants cook. The only sound that meanders through the air is the newsreader describing another set of mass murders caused by the 'mask menace' they've dubbed them. I frown, listening.

Was that a shout?

I glance towards Fred, but he seems not to have heard anything this time, instead staring vacantly at the glass on the oven door. I hear another noise, deep, low, like footsteps moving through a corridor. I glance towards the door.

"Okay, all ready," Fred says, pulling my attention back to him as he opens the oven. A plume of smoke rises from it. "Oh," he mutters. I let out a soft chuckle.

"It's fine, I'm sure they're still nice," I say. He sighs.

"Sorry," he murmurs. He drags the tray out of the oven and places it on the stovetop. The black croissants gently smoke as they sit on the metal. I grin wryly beneath my mask.

"Oh, shit!" he mutters, suddenly racing towards the bathroom. I watch, raising my eyebrow.

"Forgot again?" I call. He walks back out of the bathroom, the small tube of ointment held in his hand. He nods, slowly squeezing a drop onto his finger. "How long since the last one?"

"Four hours."

"Shit, okay." He nods knowingly, lifting his hand to his mask.

A shout suddenly erupts from down the hall.

Oh shit.

I look at Fred as his eyes widen, his gaze locked on the door in terror. Heavy footsteps begin to reverberate through the wall. I glance towards the door as the footsteps draw closer.

The bang is loud, shuddering through the apartment. I jerk back in surprise, glancing about. I can hear more voices now, hear them yelling, crying. I look across at Fred as another bang erupts from down the hall.

Fuck.

"It's them!" Fred shrieks, stumbling back against the bench.

"Do you have a fire exit somewhere?" I say quickly. He stares at me, eyes wide. He points a shaky finger towards the door.

Fuck!

"Okay," I growl, glancing about the apartment. "We need something to stop them, maybe, something that can—"

I stumble back as the explosion rocks through the room. I cough, wiping dust from my mask as I look towards the massive hole in the wall. The four of them enter, heavy boots stomping across the ground, body armour covering their torsos as they heft guns on their shoulders. I stumble to my feet as one of them approaches me, lifting the butt of his gun towards me. I hear Fred scream, try to move to him, try to—

I blink, feeling my head pound. I try to lift my hand to my mask, but I feel the ties wrapped around my wrist. I grunt, glancing down, realising I'm sitting on one of Fred's crappy wooden chairs, my arms pulled through the flimsy spokes and tied behind my back. I roll my wrist. Rubber-plastic mixture, high quality, new.

Shit.

I take a deep, shuddering breath. I glance about. We're in Fred's front room still, the door and part of the wall obliterated. Fred is next to me, slumped over, his eyes closed within his mask, his hands tied behind his back also. A man stomps up to us, a large shotgun held on his shoulder. He looks down at me and spits a large globule of phlegm onto my mask. He looks across at Fred and snarls, before slapping him across the face with a glove hand.

"Wake up!" he barks as Fred jerks awake. The kid glances about, terrified, looking up at the man before glancing towards me.

"Oh god," he breathes, looking about at the broken door and debris-laden floor. "Please," he begs, looking up at the man. "Please don't hurt us, please. We didn't do anything, we're just—"

The man's hand cracks against his face once more, thudding into his mask. Fred whimpers and goes silent. The man glares down at us.

Where the fuck are they?!

"What are you hiding?!" he barks, looking between us. "You masked fucks, what are you keeping from us, huh? You secretly ugly as shit, huh? That it?" He stands upright, shaking his head. "We're all man enough to show our faces. Man enough not to wear those *things*." He spits at Fred as the poor kid whimpers softly, tears dripping down his mask. The man leans forward. "Show us what's under there. And look at how fucking horrible you are," he snarls.

I feel my heart drop.

I had forgotten.

The man walks behind us and grabs something, letting out a heavy breath as he lifts it. He steps between us, the large, full-length mirror held in his grip. I swallow, watching as he walks in front of Fred and places the thing down, facing it towards the kid.

Fred screams. He begins to shriek and struggle, trying desperately to break free. I watch in the mirror as the man stands beside him. Behind us three others stand, watching on. One of them holds a shotgun up, aimed at me, waiting for me to move.

The man beside Fred reaches towards his mask as the kid screams and cries and tries to rip out of his restraints. I stare, unable to do anything. Unable to stop them. The man's hand grips the metal, elegant mask, his fingers curling around the edges.

"Reveal to us what is beneath there," he growls, and pulls. Fred screams.

The mask slides from his face, hanging in the man's hand as Fred stares at himself in the mirror. I watch him, his pale, young face, barely 22, his unblemished skin, lips trembling, eyes wide, small nose almost identical to the one on his mask. He looks so very normal for a split second.

The blood dribbles from the edges of his face, beginning to seep out in a ring around his head. He screams as the blood grows thicker, as the ring that runs around his whole face, from his chin up his cheek, over his forehead, and down the other side, begins to widen, to stretch.

Very, very few people are unable to rebind their flesh. Normally, the skin knits back together after trauma, creating a seal over our hidden skeleton once more.

Normally.

Fred's face begins to slip as he screams. The skin begins to shift, sliding down his skull as his face slowly, painfully slides off his head, taking with it the muscles that hold tight to the flesh. He screams as his face slides off his skull and splats to the floor, blood pouring from his head, his mouth still open in a skeletal scream.

He continues to scream until the man shoves the barrel of the shotgun against his head. Until the trigger is pulled and the back of his head is ruined just as much as the front. I feel his blood and brain hit my mask.

I swallow heavily as I watch the man drag Fred's seat back, tipping his body over as he steps towards me.

"Now you," he snarls, grabbing my chair as he drags me in front of the mirror. He stands beside me as I gaze forward at the blood-splattered reflection. I stare at my padded coat, dusty and bloodied, at my metal mask, a small dent in the top right corner. I gaze at the emotionless metal, completely flat and expressionless, my eyes the only indicator of a human as they stare from within the smooth eye holes. I watch as he reaches towards me, his thick, grimy, gloved hand gripping my mask. I watch in the mirror as he looks back at the other three before turning to me.

"Reveal to us what is beneath there," he growls, and pulls.

I stare at my face. My eyes gaze at me, my skin smooth and soft, my cheeks high, my lips pressed together in a tight line. A few errant strands of my hair hang across my forehead and near my eye.

I look tired.

The man stares down at me.

"But...but..." he stammers, staring at my normal features. I sigh heavily.

"It's quite unremarkable, isn't it?" I muse, my voice sounding exhausted as I stare at my reflection. He stands, dumbfounded. I frown slightly. That's weird, seeing my face crease like that. I stare at the mirror, glancing about at the three men behind me. The one still holds his shotgun at me, while another has his by his side. The third has a large bag slung over his shoulder. All of them have a handgun on their hip. I sigh again. "Are you done?" I ask the man beside me. He stares down at me, blinking.

I jerk forward, tucking my head against my chest, watching in the mirror as the man behind me yells and pulls the trigger.

Good boy.

The buckshot blasts through the back of the chair, thudding into my bulletproof coat, shoving me forward as it shatters the spokes that restrained me. I stumble forward and turn, sliding my leg under the rickety chair seat and kicking up, tossing the broken chair at the three thugs. I jump, tucking my knees to my chest as I swing my hands under my feet, bringing them in front of me as the thug beside me raises his gun. I lift my arms and push the connecting band between my restraints over the muzzle of his shotgun, tilting my head to the side as he fires. The shot rips through the rubber and plastic, releasing my wrists, bits of pellet firing past my head. I drop one hand onto the barrel of the gun, pivoting towards him as I bring my other hand in and elbow him in the jaw. He grunts as blood spatters from his mouth, and I drop my curled fingers down, sparks leaping from my fingertips as I grab his unpadded groin. He shudders and twitches as the electricity surges through him, his fingers spasming. I wrench the gun from his grip and fire down, reducing his knee to shredded flesh and bone before I turn and fire it towards the trio as they scramble to lift their weapons, catching the front-most thug in the chest, knocking him to the ground. I walk forward, firing again. The man nearest the kitchen, his shotgun raised at me, halts as half his head is ripped apart, the pellets shearing through skull, brain and skin. The man with the bag fumbles at his hip, unholstering his handgun as I near him. I reach forward, grabbing his wrist as he tries to lift it. I drop the shotgun and curl my fingers, lifting my hand towards his head. White lightning darts between my fingertips, the tiny pieces of metal embedded in my fingers glowing as the energy flows from the generator implanted in my palm. I press my hand to the side of his head and he shudders, his teeth clenching, his eyes wide as his whole body begins to spasm. I drop my other hand to his pistol, the hammer pressing into my palm as I pull it from his twitching grip and flick it in my hand, lifting it up to his chin and firing.

One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve thirteen fourteen click.

I toss the empty gun aside as he falls, his face collapsing in on itself as he strikes the ground. I glance back as a man grunts, scrabbling for his handgun, pellets dropping from his bullet-proof vest. I bend and lift the shotgun from the ground, turning towards him as he lifts his gun towards me. My shot obliterates his hand, splattering chunks of flesh and fingers across the ground as he screams, staring at his bloodied stump. I step towards him, looking down as he shrieks. I let the shotgun hang down, pushing the barrel into his mouth. He chokes for a moment before I fire, the shot ripping through his jaw and splattering his throat across the floor. He gurgles and hisses, air from his lungs bubbling through the blood that floods his shredded neck. I gaze down at his staring, horrified eyes as he quickly bleeds out, his gaze soon going vacant.

I step over his body and walk towards the man by the wall as he sits against it, his eyes closed, his breathing shallow as his severed knee bleeds heavily. I bend down, plucking my mask from the gore-stained floor. I wipe the flesh and phlegm from its shiny surface, running a gentle thumb across the dent along the corner. I look across at the semi-conscious thug, my thumb sliding down the edge of the mask to the sharp chin. I stride towards him, grabbing his forehead. He grunts, his eyes fluttering open as he stares up at me in surprise and confusion.

"Wha...?" he murmurs. I grip the top of my mask and stab down, shoving the chin through his throat. He chokes and gurgles, vainly fumbling at his neck as he stares up at me. I bring my hand back, eyeing his terrified gaze, before slamming my palm into the top of my mask, embedding it deep in his neck. He slowly topples to the side, his hands still feebly clawing as blood drains across the surface of my mask and drips through the eyeholes.

I stand over him, staring down at his body as he slowly dies. He makes one last attempt to remove the thing from his neck. I watch, frowning slightly. I bend and grip the edge of my mask. I rip up, pulling it from him, splattering his blood across my boots.

I stand by his corpse, wiping the metallic surface of my mask clean. I look about at the gory interior of Fred's apartment. I glance down at Fred's body, his one eye that still remains staring, terrified, up at the ceiling. I tilt my head, eyeing him, his brains splattered across the dirty floor, his skull shattered into little pieces.

Poor kid.

I glance about at the apartment once more, my eyes wandering over the corpses.

They didn't come.

Fuckers.

I stride towards the three mangled bodies and kneel, feeling their wrists. After a moment, I find the chip lodged in the wrist of the thug with the sack. I stand, placing it into my watch as I walk towards the demolished wall and out into the hall. A new image flickers to life on my watch, slowly turning, the yellow gently glowing. I glare at it, punching the button to the lift. I glance down the hall as I wait, seeing the blood spattered across the carpet, the bodies tossed onto the floor, the walls broken and smashed. I stare, counting.

The ringtone begins to sound.

“*You found them?*” she asks, her staticky voice pulsing through the little speaker in my ear.

“They found me,” I respond, stepping into the lift.

“*Are you compromised?*”

“No.”

“*Casualties?*”

“Yes.” There’s a pause.

“*How many?*”

“Seven unknown, one confirmed: Fred.”

“*I’m sorry to hear that,*” she says, her voice softer. I growl.

“Where the fuck were you?” I snarl, stepping out into the foyer.

“*You completed the contract,*” she says, her voice dropping back into a professional tone. “*Backup was not deemed necessary.*” I clench my fist, staring out the window at the rain as it pours down outside.

“You used me. Again,” I growl.

“*You are effective. You do not need help.*” There is a pause. I glare at the window, gritting my teeth, the rain pouring heavily. “*You know your next contract. Good luck*” she says.

“Fuck you,” I snarl, before tapping my earpiece.

I stare out the window, breathing heavily, feeling the blood already beginning to dry on my face. I snarl, my eye twitching. I watch the droplets fall, watch them splatter against the glass and slide slowly down. I look down at my mask clenched in my fist. I stare at the bloodied reflection facing back at me. I stare at the angry, exhausted woman that I don’t even recognise. I take a heavy breath. I look back at the rain.

I place my mask on my bloodstained face, feeling it slide into place and lock against my skin. I feel my body calming, feel my mind relaxing. I snarl once more, pushing open the door as I step outside, raindrops pelting my mask, pattering against my coat.

It feels like it’s never going to stop raining.

MOVIE REVIEW: STOWAWAY

By Andrew Moshos

dir: Joe Penna, 2021

One of us ain't leaving this room, and it won't be me!

Stowaway is not really the kind of thing you expect to watch on the telly, at the movies or on a streaming service. There are no explosions, people speak calmly to each other. No-one gets shot or stabbed with a lightsaber. No aliens chomp off anyone's faces.

It's science-fiction, I guess, but it tries to be depicting space travel, or a mission to Mars, with technology we're used to seeing from "real" NASA footage, or the International Space Station. Believable science of today, rather than magic science of the future.

I'm no rocket scientist, so I have no idea how accurate any of it is. Three people, three astronauts, set out on their mission, 2 years round trip to Mars, with the eventual goal of having a permanent manned base on Mars.

The Commander (Toni Collette) is Australian, for no other reason other than that they thought it would be okay. A biologist (Daniel Dae Kim) who's going to be experimenting with algae, and a doctor (Anna Kendrick). They all get along fairly well. They're going to be together for two years, so you would want them to be chill with each other.

Instead of always talking to NASA or to Houston, with their problems, they talk to Hyperion. In one of the grand gestures of complying with the current milieu, it's possible it's a corporation, like SpaceX and Virgin Blue and whatever Jeff Bezo's space company is called.

You know, those companies billionaires start in order to thrust their proprietary phallus-like rockets into the stratosphere, just to find somewhere new to fuck up.

These astronauts aren't like that. They're calm scientists, or, in one case, a doctor, and they're all about doing what needs to be done and following procedures and listening to every order given by Hyperion back home and following it.



I don't think it's meant to indicate compliance or obedience on their part: not too dissimilar to the relationship between the astronauts in space in Apollo 13, and the NASA nerds back on Earth at Houston in mission control, there are too many variables for three people to cover, no matter how adept.

That's what you need the legions of nerds to figure out for you.

Thing is, though, this isn't a situation where the ingenuity of scientists or the collective action of oodles of people will change the result. This isn't a story about the triumph of American courage or American values or Tom Fucking Hanks.

This is a story where Science can't magic up a solution to an impossible problem, and when all avenues are exhausted, someone might have to be sacrificed for The Greater Good (the greater good).

Sorry, couldn't resist a reference to Hot Fuzz, though I did resist typing "crusty jugglers".

There is the crew of three highly competent peeps on their way to Mars, but what they don't know is that through some kind of accident, there's another chap on board.

The craft has oxygen and supplies and such for these three people. A fourth person throws everything out of whack.

Not only that, but the manner in which this extraneous jerk somehow got packed away with all the other equipment leads to a carbon dioxide scrubbing piece of equipment being destroyed.

So unless they find a solution, not only won't that fourth person die, but everyone else as well.

These are competent, calm people. The newcomer, Michael (Shamier Alexander) is pretty confused, but is also pretty quiet and happy-go-lucky.

In a different kind of movie, he would turn out to have done this on purpose, because he feels space flight is an affront to the gods or something, or because he really demanded, like Bezos or Richard Branson, to go instead of someone else.

Or, if Stowaway went the baffling way Danny Boyle's Sunshine went all those years ago, as scripted by Alex Garland, the plight of a group of scientists trying to save all life on Earth by restarting the Sun wasn't perilous enough, so in-between trying to complete their mission, a fucking serial killer would pop in and starts trying to kill everyone.

There is no serial killer, no added jeopardy beyond a group of people trying to figure out how to survive. At first they hope that if they do the things they're good at, all will be well. Or, at the very least, if they do what they can, eventually the big brains back on Earth will figure out the solution. There is always meant to be a solution. Given enough time and inspiration and luck, all will be well.

What happens is, without too much fanfare, all the options start to fade away, all the alternatives don't pan out, the moments of inspiration fall flat, and the terrible choice keeps being reinforced: for the three to survive, the one must be sacrificed. If the fourth remains, all four die.

It's a cold kind of equation.

From being primarily about science and coping with the difficulties of surviving in space, it at least for a while becomes a story about the ethics of asking someone to kill themselves in order to save everyone else. As the commander of the mission, Toni Collette's character is apologetic but practical. When she's told a date by which the fourth interloper has to be gone by, she's seems the type of person who'll say "sorry, but..." before stabbing you with a pair of scissors. David, the botanist, seems horrified, but also values his own safety over another person's life, even if he doesn't' have any particular animus towards them.

Michael, himself, the guy they're asking to off himself, seems horrified but resigned. In trying to think of reasons why he shouldn't be offed, he can't really come up with anything other than that he has a disabled sister back home who will miss him terribly. David has a family, and OBVIOUSLY he deserves to live. Because only single people should be sacrificed to the gods of convenience.

But what about Zoe, the ship's doctor? This is where the overwhelmingly ethical nature of the argument is expressed, or at least through whom the argument is made: it's one thing for a person to volunteer to sacrifice themselves in order to save the lives of others – it's a different kettle of stinky fish to tell someone, or nominate someone to kill themselves in order to save the group.

It gives the flick an ending, heroic at that, of sorts, but I have to say that the film kinda cheats. It creates a scenario by which a perilous attempt outside of the primary vehicle presents some kind of hope, but out of nowhere a danger appears (a foreseeable one, I'm not arguing it's like murderous space piranhas swooping out of an asteroid or something) which allows someone to sacrifice themselves nobly but really seems a bit contrived considering how much danger they were already in.

I have some quibbles with that ending, but I guess it's appropriate for this kind of story.

It's also not particularly exciting. It portrays survival in space as being hard, grinding work, as opposed to an adventure, and I can see a lot of people complaining that the flick is deliberately boring. In fact, I have seen such complaints, and to those complainers I blow a raspberry in their general direction.

Though this might seem to be like the "realistic" science fiction of stuff like Gravity or The Martian it's really not exciting, not action based like those are, nor does it have the intimacy of the first or the "we're all in this together" feel of the second, with the whole world watching.

It's nothing like those. The performances are uniformly excellent, especially the exasperated Toni Collette, but

especially Anna Kendrick as Zoe. She brings her charm and humour to a role that doesn't seem like it would require it, but definitely benefits from it. Daniel Day Kim is solid, too, but for much of the flick he seems baffled by what he's doing, or how he ended up on set. The guy playing Michael, the stowaway of the title, doesn't really stand out, but I guess he does okay.

Stowaway – a film made for an imagined audience that likes movies set in space but without aliens, explosions, conflict, excitement or Tom Hankses. Imagine that.

7 times I too would sacrifice myself, but only for a new jet ski out of 10

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"Guys, this is not a call for a solution. The entirety of Hyperion is down there trying to figure this out. I'm only telling you this because I need you to be mentally prepared for what's gonna happen." - Stowaway

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*Games and Worlds of ICE:
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