

RPG REVIEW

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LAW AND POLITICS

Burning Wheel 30 Year's War ... Politician Characters ... Strange Laws ... RuneQuest Empires ... Alien Law and Politics ... Lost Faith: A Noir Scenario ... Werekin for Tunnels & Trolls

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ADMINISTRIVIA

RPG Review is an irregular online magazine which is available in print version every so often (e.g., Issues 40 and 44 for RuneQuest Glorantha Con Down Under). All material remains copyright to the authors except for the reprinting as noted in the first sentence. Contact the author for the relevant license that they wish to apply. Various trademarks and images have been used in this magazine of review and criticism. Use of trademarks etc are for fair use and review purposes and are not a challenge to trademarks or copyrights. This includes Burning Wheel by Luke Crane, Warhammer by Games Workshop, RuneQuest by Chaosium, Alien RPG by Free League Publishing, Noir from Archon Gaming, and others. Cover art from the Papyrus of Hunefer (c. 1275 BC), shows the scribe Hunefer's heart being weighed on the scale of Maat against the feather of truth, by the jackal-headed Anubis. The ibis-headed Thoth, scribe of the gods, records the result. *Defenestrations of Prague* by Karel Svoboda, *Saturnalia* by Antoine Callet. Back cover Statue of Liberty from Wikipedia from user Mcj1800 .

EDITORIAL AND COOPERATIVE NEWS

It would be fair to say that this issues is a long time between drinks. Indeed, it is the only issue for the year, which may seem a little unusual for something that was advertised as a quarterly 'zine. This follows a decision of the RPG Review Committee that the journal would change from being a quarterly 'zine to an irregular publication. Simply put, a great deal of effort in involved in producing this and the benefits to the organisation and the contributors outweigh the demands on a strictly quarterly publication.

This said, part of the reason was the fact that we have kept the journal as a 64-page publication for fifteen years now, and extraordinary period of time. For quite a while this year, we hovered around 80 pages or so of content, not nearly enough. So your editor had to make a decision on whether to delay publication even further, or to bite the proverbial bullet, take a couple of articles out for the next issue and release an issue for this year. The latter path, obviously has been chosen.

Thus we find another issue of RPG Review on the virtual shelves with the subject matter of law and politics and three main contributors; yours truly with a review of two editions of RuneQuest Empires for the old Mongoose line, and a series of interesting historical laws from the past which can be provide inspiration for RPG campaigns. Karl Brown (et al) has provided an excellent collection of politician characters across multiple game systems, plus an article on Werekinn for Tunnels & Trolls which is not at all related to law and politics (sometimes we do that). Tim Rice provides the politics and law in the recent Alien RPG, plus a scenario for the overlooked gem, Noir which comes with plenty of

law in politics in its own right. Finally, Justin Akkermann's provides amazing mash up of Burning Wheel, the Warhammer Death of the Reik campaign, and the historical Thirty Year's War add an early modern take on a "low-fantasy Europe". In addition there is the interview style, RPGaDay for 2022, which is not unusual for this publication

but does include contributions from a good friend of the Cooperative, Jason Durall from Chaosium

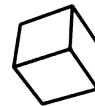


Although we have not been bringing out many issues of our 'zine, the RPG Review Cooperative has been engaging in our other events. Of particular note was our Annual General Meeting for 2023 held at The Rose Hotel in Fitzroy, as we often do. As can be determined by the minutes (follows) our meetings are quick thus allowing for a good social occasion for all present. In addition, the Cooperative had a two-table stall at Conquest where members were able to sell their various second-hand RPGs to attendees, as well as raise some money through sales of our publications. Finally, we also held a new logo competition, which we will be using in

the new year and is included below, which follows the positioning of the Southern Cross but with typical RPG dice.

Lev Lafayette
lev@rpgreview.net

RPG
Review
Cooperative



Annual General Meeting for The RPG Review Cooperative, Inc.

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Held on Saturday 28th January 2023 at The Rose Hotel, 406 Napier St, Fitzroy.

Meeting opened at 1210 pm.

Present: Jacob Aharon, Elizabeth Bowman, Rodney Brown, Karl Brown, Michael Cole, Andrew Daborn, Lev Lafayette, Andrew McPherson, Andrew Pan (online) Tim Rice, Simon Stainsby & Charmaine Thomas Daborn.

Apologies: Adrian Smith

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement of Country was given by Lev.

Confirmation of the 2022 General Meeting Minutes

Apologies were accepted.

Minutes of the previous AGM were tabled.

"THAT the minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting of the RPG Review Cooperative be accepted"

Moved Michael Cole, Seconded Charmaine Thomas Daborn, Carried.

Committee Report and Financial Statements

The committee report and financial statement for 2022 was tabled.

Charmaine raised the need to consider insurance given the value of our library. This will be an item for the incoming committee.

The following motion was raised:

"THAT the committee report and financial statement be accepted"

Moved Elizabeth Bowman, Seconded Rodney Brown, Carried

Election of Committee Members

The following motion was raised:

"THAT the number of ordinary committee members for 2023 shall be two."

Moved Charmaine Thomas Daborn, Seconded Rodney Brown, Motion carried



Nominations received for the committee were tabled and opened for further nominations. The nominations were as follows:

President: Lev Lafayette

Vice President: Tim Rice

Secretary: Andrew Daborn

Treasurer: Michael Cole

Ordinary: Karl Brown, Elizabeth Bowman

Nominees for all positions filled won unopposed.

It was noted that Tim Rice was stepping down as treasurer, with Michael Cole taking up this role.

It was noted that Michael Cole was stepping down as Vice President with Tim Rice taking up his role.

Membership and Annual Subscription Fee

Simon Stainsby raised the concern that low membership left associations with assets at risk of takeover and recommended that the new committee prioritise a membership drive.

The following motion was raised:

"THAT subscription be capped at \$10 for annual membership and \$100 for lifetime membership for the coming year"

Moved Andrew Daborn. Seconded Simon Stainsby. Motion carried.

Library

Charmaine and Andrew reported that the library had been transported to Tim Rice's house on 27/01/2023 and that he was now the new librarian.

"THAT the RPG Review Cooperative thank the Thomas Daborn household for their contributions as librarians"

Moved Lev Lafayette, Seconded Michael Cole. Motion carried.

Meeting closed 12.33 pm.

2023 Committee Report

The RPG Review Cooperative held its founding meeting in December 2015, and was subsequently incorporated by the

State of Victoria on January 7th, 2016. The following is a review of our fifth year of activities.

All activities have been in strict accordance with our objectives. The committee members for 2022 were Lev Lafayette (President), Michael Cole (Vice-President), Andrew Daborn (Secretary), Tim Rice (Treasurer), Elizabeth Bowman, Cameron Duffy, Karl Brown, and Adrian Smith (ordinary members).

In the past year, we have published only two issues of the RPG Review journal (Issues 53 and 54 inclusive), with a double issue outstanding, a total of 128 pages of gaming material. All copies of the ISSN-registered RPG Review journal have been submitted to the National Library of Australia. The RPG Review website received 17,394 unique visitors in 2022, a decrease of 33%. Top downloads for RPG Review being Issue 53 receiving 361 complete downloads and Issue 21 receiving 356. These are the PDF downloads only, rather than any views of HTML pages. From the latter, "Pirate and Swashbuckler RPGs" from Issue 27 received 901 visits and "A History of Dungeons & Dragons" received 872, with the HTML version of Issue #51-52 receiving 730.

The Cooperative's Library consists of 773 gaming publications, 115 gaming magazines, and 3 fiction books. We also continue to provide various IT support mechanisms (github, mailman mailing lists etc) with hosting donated from one of our members. For game authors, we also offer discount ISBNs which we gain an advantage from bulk purchasing.

Membership has contracted down to 12, although nearly all of those are life members. The Cooperative has continued with online store for members to sell their second-hand or new games to the public, which included one member's sale of c\$8.5K worth of product to raise funds for the UNHCR. Another positive for the Cooperative has been the re-evaluation of the library to a more realistic figure which has massively increased our Capital and with no expenses for the year (although some reimbursements owed) the Cooperative achieved a small surplus - sales of "Papers & Paychecks" and its supplements have continued to provide a long tail, as expected.

This will be a year of re-evaluation and revival for the Cooperative. The Cooperative is proud to announce that we will be returning to the convention circuit in 2023 with a place secured at ConQuest in autumn and plans to attend other conventions through the year. Additionally we are very excited to announce that we will be holding RuneQuest Down Under in Queensland later in the year! Further details to come in the near future.

Draft Financial Statement

2022 Profit and Loss Statement

Income

Membership	40
Stock Sales	90
ISBN Sales	29.14
PDF Sales	69.2
Donations	28
Subtotal	256.34

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Expenses

Subtotal Nil

2022 Balance Sheet

Assets

Bank 6106.80

PDF Account 13 (DriveThruRPG)

RPG Review 425 (Issues 40 and 44, c85 copies)

Library 15558 (Estimated value from 750 games, 94 magazines, 3 fiction books)

Stock 5000 (Estimated at 500 PnP and Cow's in stock)

Liabilities

Reimbursements 106.43 Annual Statement 2022, Post office box

Capital 26996.37

Notes: Bank balance includes RuneQuest Glorantha Con Trust of \$3915.39

POLITICS OF THIRTY YEARS WAR AND THE ENEMY WITHIN FOR BURNING WHEEL

by Justin Akkermann

I ran The Enemy Within for Warhammer Fantasy Role Play as it came out in the late 80's. I got as far as finishing the haunted castle on the Reik and getting the game relocated to Middenheim before I moved from the US to Oz. This broke off the game due to the tyranny of distance brought on by Real Life. Now 30 years on, I am back at it. I have since changed some of my ideas on Warhammer and gaming in general. It is pretty clear that "The Empire" of the Warhammer world is The Holy Roman Empire around the start of the 30 Years War. The Sigmar-Ulric schism is a good analogue to the ructions around the Protestant Reformation. The last chapter of the campaign, even though I have yet to read it, would run well alongside the kick off of the 30 Year's War. So I am taking a stab at the last one.

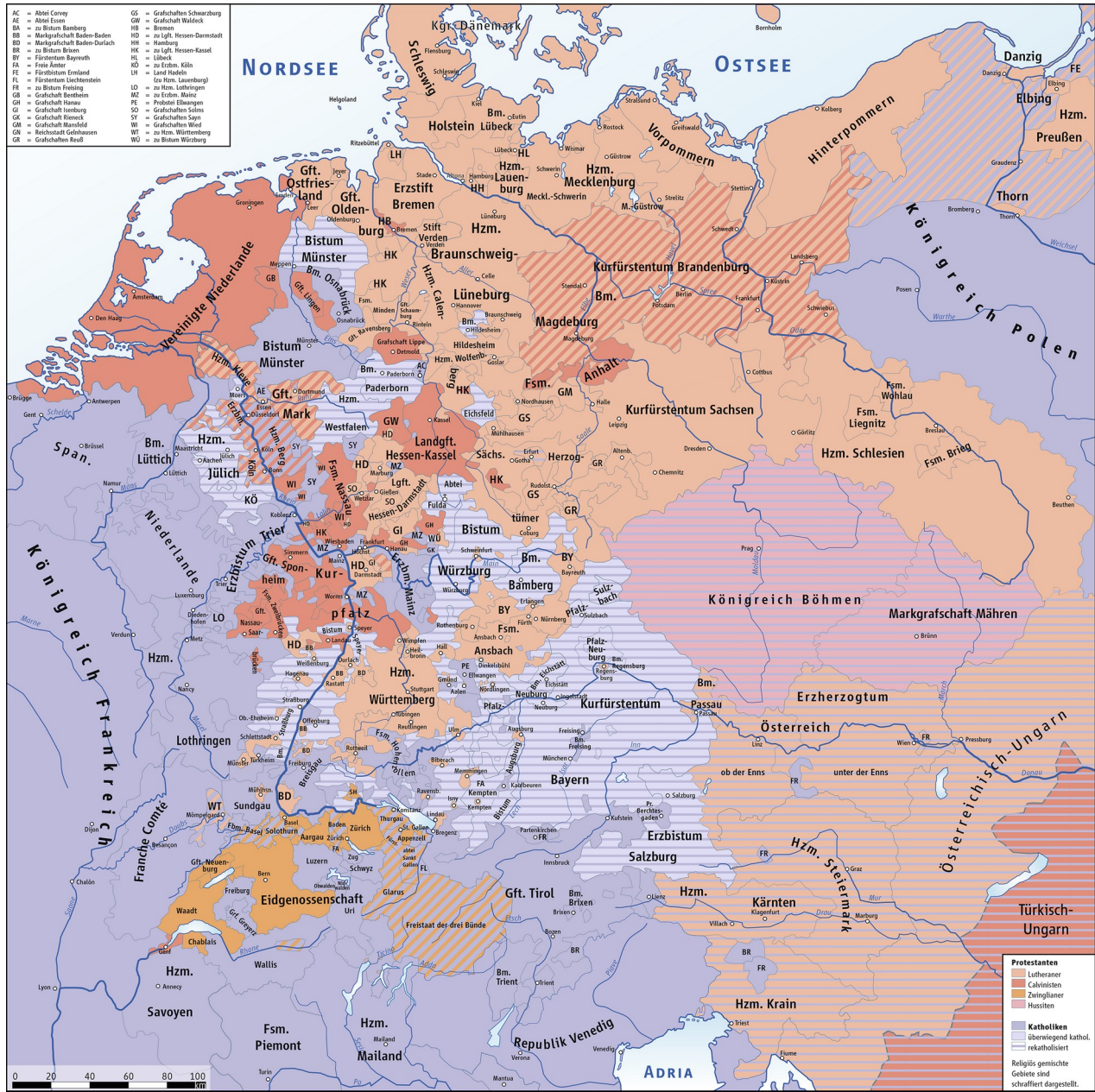
Once I got to Australia in 1988, I stopped roleplaying for a couple of years as I got into university, parties and booze. So I don't rightly know what happened in the Power Behind the Throne or The Empire in Flames that followed.

I do want to run it again, but I had some decisions to make. I was torn between running the game in the Warhammer Old World and the other options of running the game in Early Modern Germany. After some back and forth, I decided to go with running the game in the "real" world. I have felt better with every step made since. First off, I like reading history. So reading history and using this to spark ideas for a game is a sincere pleasure. For example, I bought a copy of The Demonology of King James the 6th of Scotland and the 1st of England. He published this in 1597 after he had been involved in witch trials investigating people conjuring up bad weather to wreck the ship carrying his bride to be from Denmark to Scotland. He wrote this work as a Socratic dialogue between one who had gnosis of witches and another who was a doubter. This book was intended to inform judges and prosecutors on finding and combatting witches. Reading this book made me lose any hesitation in adding fantasy elements to a historic locale. If one can charge someone in court with having congress with Satan and secure a conviction, then game on! King James, he of the King James Bible fame, had access to the most educated people of the age, in spite of this he was concerned with spreading the good word on how to ferret out and prosecute sorcerers. This gave me a green light to add necromancers and the odd goblin to the game, or at very least a black hound from hell to haunt a moor. One should not get too hung up on objective reality when setting a game in the "real" world.

Another joy of playing in the real world has been coming upon the maps of Johann Baptist Homann. He worked in Nuremberg in the early 1700s. Given the explosion of printing that was coeval with his work, you can still buy originals of his maps for a couple of hundred dollars.



They are extant. One of the auction houses has reached an agreement with wikipedia and whenever they sell one, they take high resolution photos and share the files with the world. An internet connection and the local officeworks print shop makes them highly detailed and affordable. They have a psychedelic level of detail. They were made about 80



years after the period we are playing in but the locations of towns, rivers and hills does not change much back then, or now. The gap of years is of little concern to me. It has been a delight to see the players come up with characters from the setting that spring to life. They have been able to pick aspects from the period, react to them and incorporate these into their characters. One of the players has chosen an obscure aspect of the religious movements of the time and is choosing to spread this philosophy. I would describe them as choosing "personal conviction". Given the heterodoxy of

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the time they are taking part in the thought explosion that happened before the hammer of counter-reformation comes down. Another of the players has is a faith based miracle worker. Though many people in the setting are willing to kill each other over points of law and doctrinal differences (and many who are not, just not enough of them) this character who is what in many game systems would be a "cleric" or what in a historic realistic reading would be an unrecognised saint. This character ignores doctrine. It is simply not important to them. Another of the characters is a soldier of the wars. Though this is the dawn of the Thirty Years War, there have always been wars on the continent. Somewhere there is a demand for those who will fight and die for someone or something – visible or invisible.

That this time is the Early Modern period has many implications of what was and what will be. It is a liminal time when by Janus both are visible. One is dawning and the other in its gloaming. Law is passing from being decided through trials by ordeal to collected books of law and lawyers who know them. These changes are driving the importance and the specialisation of lawyers. In this backdrop, some of the bloodiest witch-trials in Europe's history are taking place. The prohibitions against torture that protect participants in trials are suspended when witchcraft is the charge. The patchwork jurisdictions of the Holy Roman Empire mean that the legal landscape is broken and uncertain. One of the features of the law here is that all criminal trials are citizen against citizen. They are not brought on by a state prosecutor. The consequence of this is that if an accuser loses, they open themselves up to immediate countersuit.

The nature of the state is changing. This is acute in the the Holy Roman Empire. It is a fractal extension of overlapping medieval jurisdictions and exceptions by privilege. This has reached its maximum tension and is about to explode with the Defenestration of Prague. With the conclusion of the war and the Peace of Westphalia, it is a canard to say that the modern notions of the term sovereign state and international relations begins.

These leave delicious choices to make. One such choice is where is going to be the city of Middenheim. Salient facts are that it is the centre of the cult of Ulric in an empire that has Sigmar as its patron. I am taking this as the corresponding city is a large city from the North where the rulers are strongly protestant. A standout candidate is Magdeberg. It ticks the boxes and it gets reduced to ashes in 1630 in an orgy of violence.

A less than delicious choice is how to handle Skaven. Should they be left as fantastic bipedal rats? I am pretty cagey about mapping them to any particular ethnicity. It would reek of racism and I have no interest in that. A possibility is that they are a remnant of Neandethals who have lived among us and have been conspiring in the shadows for milenia, waiting and plotting.



POLITICIAN CHARACTERS

by Karl David Brown, Peter Bergman, Lev Lafayette

Politicians?

This is a collection of characters for various games that somehow wield political power whether by birthright, conquest, wealth, or the will of the people. The game system for each is given in parenthesis after the character's name. After the description of the character is short review of the how the game supports political play followed by the 'stat block' of the character.

Marcus Maximus Valerius (Age of Antiquity, D&D 5e) (by Karl David Brown)

Marcus Maximus Valerius was born to a venerable family of Rome said to be descended from the god Phoebus, whom the Greeks know as Apollo. The power of this divine ancestor enables Marcus to manifest subtle magics. Marcus was raised as an elitist and an expansionist patriot. He has grown into a young man with a passion for politics whose bullish debating style and imposing athletic physique crows liberal voices holding opposing views.

Age of Antiquity (AA) is an unofficial campaign setting using the D&D 5th Edition ruleset (carefully never naming that game). It is not a stand-alone game. Half of the book describes opposing cultures of mortals and pantheons of gods in a setting ripe for intrigue and clashes of nations. However, unlike the older AD&D and BECMI D&D, neither AA nor D&D 5th edition provide rules for gaming out international politics, mass combat, or even ruling of a domain. The closest AA comes is mechanics that helps you sway audiences with oratory.

Class Sorcerer (God-Blood)* 1. Race Human (Variant). Background Patrician*. Alignment LN. Languages Latin*, Gaulish*. Age 20. Height 5'10". Weight 175 lbs. Hair short black perfect. Eyes Black capable of intense focus. Skin Healthy olive, taut over lean muscle.

STR 16 (+3), DEX 14 (+2), CON 14 (+2), INT 11 (+0), WIS 11 (+0), CHA 16 (+3)

Passive Wisdom (Perception). 10. Proficiency Bonus +2

Weapon & Tool Proficiencies. dagger, dart, sling, quarterstaff, light crossbow, harp.

Saving Throws. STR +3, DEX +2, CON +4, INT +0, WIS +0, CHA +5.

Skill Proficiencies. Athletics +5, Insight +2, Intimidation +5, Persuasion +5, Religion +2.

Armour Class. 12 (15 Mage Armour). Initiative +2. Speed 30. Hit points 8. Hit Dice 1d6.

Weapons. Fights with two daggers hidden in the folds of his toga. When travelling keeps his javelin handy. Javelin +5 1d6+3P thrown 30/120. Two daggers using the standard D&D rules for two weapon fighting +5 1d4+3 light, thrown 20/60.

Coins. 30gp. Equipment Spellcasting focus crystal worn as a pendant. Backpack (see below), fine linen toga embroidered with family crest, scroll of pedigree, fine sandals.

Backpack contents: bedroll, mess kit, tinderbox, 10 torches, 10 days of rations, waterskin, 50 feet hempen rope, small bag for coins, two old lead toy legionnaires one missing a head.

Personality Traits. I am above the plebs and flaunt it. I'm proud of my athletic looks.

Ideal. Expansionism: The Empire survives through growth.

Bond. My family's fortunes wax and wane with the wealth of the Empire.

Flaw. I anger easily and bully those who oppose me with words.

Features and Traits. Feat from human race: Crowd Pleaser* (helps convince groups).

Arcane Focus use. One re-roll of skill, attack, or save per long rest.

Slaves* from Background. In the Patrician Background these are described as "servants (or slaves)".

Felix of Telesinia the chef, a debt-slave.

Alex of Athens the cleaner captured during a minor skirmish between Athens and the Empire.

Iantumaros the Gaulish Hairdresser/Beautician. His family captured in the Guallish campaigns and have been slaves in Rome for several generations.

Magic

Spellcasting Ability Score Charisma. Spell Save DC 13. Spell Attack Bonus +5

Cantrips. Bladeward, Friends, Message, True Strike.

Level 1 slots 2. Spells Known Paranoia*, Faceless Wanderer*, Mage Armour, Comprehend Languages. Sky Spells from Sub-class* Bless, Divine Favour.

*Indicates options from AA.

Citizen Wang Alizon (Shu City, GURPS 4e Biotech, 140pts) (by Karl David Brown)

Alizon was born to designer genes and old money. In a fortified palace in full gravity 'Downtown' Citizen Wang Alizon was raised to rule. Now 104 years old she has fulfilled that destiny. She is 'first among equals' among the First Families that rule Shu City as an Athenian Democracy. Her aristocratic title, wealth, and position in Shu's government grant her regard among the 'Great and the Good' is that usually reserved for Heads of State of powerful nations. Those who get past her stunning beauty and aura of power discover an intelligent woman used to getting her own way and rooted in tradition with a tendency to rely on past experiences to understand the present. These traits have resulted in decisions that have angered some. After the first attempt on her life by the Black Leaf terrorists she rarely leaves highly secure areas, like Shu City's Downtown, and has started carrying a weapon. After she politically outmanoeuvred a First Families Matriarch Smifsen Aisha that experienced operator has been seeking a way to discredit Alizon. Alizon has slowly developed an obsession with long life. She avoids dangerous situations and is actively seeking to stockpile anti-aging therapies.

GURPS true to its name provides the tools to create all kinds of characters including those who wield political power. However, there is little in the Basic Set regarding how to apply political power in the game beyond various circumstantial bonuses to social skill rolls. Wealth and ranks in important organisations such as government administrations provide free bonus status. There is also a text box discussing how to handle Classless Meritocracies (B28). There is a supplement called "Social Engineering" that offers further social rules and may cover political power in more depth, but I don't own that book.

Omega Human Aristocratic Administrator

Height 5'11", Weight 135 lbs, Age 104, right-handed.

Appearance: A beautiful female human of indeterminate race. A 'silver fox' who looks about 50 dressed in expensive clothes and jewellery hides a thin ballistic vest. In her expensive handbag is an electro-laser pistol and phone. She is wealthy enough that that's all she ever needs to carry.

Attributes: ST9 DX10 IQ14 HT9 [60]

Secondary Attributes: Damage 1d-2/1d-1, BL16 HP9 WILL14 PER14 FP9 [0] Basic Speed 4.75, Dodge 11, Basic Move 4, SM0. [0]. DR16/4 (torso). Parry 8 unarmed 5 v. weapons. Block 3.

Languages: Aisee-ish (native). Cultural Familiarity: Shu City (native) TL 9/10 (biotech), Status 8,

Advantages: Beautiful +2/+4 [12], Longevity [2], Resistant to Disease [3], Status (by Birthright) 5 (8 when modified for wealth and rank) [25], Filthy Rich [50], Administrative Rank 5 [25], Independent Income 2 (\$40 000) [2] Subtotal [119].

Modifications: Nil

Perks: Nil

Disadvantages: Hidebound [-5], Stubborn [-5], Obsession Immortality (control number 6) [-20] Enemies The Black Leaf Democracy Cell (5 people who are hunting her to kill her) [-10], Enemy Smifsen Aisha (First Families Rival with more points) [-10]. Subtotal [-50].

Quirks: Nil.

Features: Nil.

Skills: Area Knowledge Shu City 14 [1], Computer Operation 14 [1], Administration 14 [2], Bioengineering (Genetic Engineering) 13 [2], Current Affairs (Politics) 14 [1]. Subtotal [7]

Equipment (carried): Clothes over a ballistic vest (TL10 biomaterials), handbag, cell phone, Electrolaser Pistol 1d-3 with Surge (B103), Acc 4, Range 40/80, RoF 3, Shots 180(3), ST 4, Bulk -2, Rcl 1, LC 4, Can stun see B280. Default skill only DX-4 = 6.

Drugs: Nil.

Money: \$1997550 in Shu City electronic credit.

Eloisa Romano (Dragon/Fantasy AGE) (by Peter Bergman)

Antivan spy with an apostate past, caught in the political web of guild lies and trade intrigue.

Eloisa is the kind of person who fits in anywhere, comfortable in most situations and able to keep up appearances even when things get intense. She wears the classic Antivan features with grace, dark hair and olive skin of pirate inheritance, and there is a certain amount of integrity that shines through in all her interactions. Perhaps this is why she has managed to hide her apostate leanings and training for all these years. Walking through a crowd, none but those who truly look would suspect Eloisa of using the arcane arts to weave her web of connections, alliances and influence. Her connections are mainly located in the coastal City of Antiva, as is her old mentor, spymaster Giorma and her comrade in secrets, Salaste duPontare. But by extension, the ruthless trade politics of the Antiva plutocracy demand journeys throughout the land. Eloisa treads a narrow path, with her magical abilities always avoiding the relentless eye of the Templars, but she does thrive in the face of adversity.

With the Dragon Age TTRPG treatment of Thedas as setting and resource, this character was made using its sibling system Fantasy Age (FAGE) to get slightly more variation and flexibility. And with FAGE there are a few details and rules to use that might enhance a political campaign. Have a look at the Diplomat and Spy Specializations for political characters at Lvl 4. Also, be sure to use the Relationship rules for important allies and connections, as well as the rules for Organisations. Both of these rules add flavor and opportunities for immersion and involvement in a political context.

Culture: Antiva. Background: Apostate. Class: Mage, Level: 3. Social Status: Middle Class

Abilities: Accuracy: 2, Communication: 3 (Focus: Intrigue), Constitution: 0 (Focus: Swimming), Dexterity: 1, Fighting: 0, Intelligence: 4 (Focus: Politics, Divination Arcana), Perception: 4 (Focus: Empathy), Strength: 0, Willpower: 2

Secondary attributes: Speed: 13, Defense: 13, Armor: 1, Mod: 0, Health: 37, Mana: 30, Conviction: 3

Powers, Talents & Specializations:

Speaks the Trade Tongue.

Eloisa has a golden wristband on her arm for use as an arcane power object. It is carved in the likeness of a branch with tiny leaves.

Talent: Divination Arcana (Journeyman)

Talent: Fate Arcana (Novice)

Spellpower: 13

Weaponry:

Arcane Blast, Range 16m, Damage 1d6+4. Dagger, Damage 1d6+1

Equipment:

Healing elixir, Heal 2d6, CON TN11 for side-effects. Poison liquid, TN18, Damage 3d6. Mana concoction, Regain 2d6 Mana

Magic:

Agent of Fate (Fate Arcana), Puppets of Fate (Fate Arcana), Bloodhound (Destiny Arcana), Bloodmark (Destiny Arcana), Scrying (Destiny Arcana)

Relations:

Spymaster Giorma (3) "Ours is a friendship beyond mere mundane politics and crude intrigues"

Salaste duPontare (4) "My comrade in mischief, the sister I never had, we face the plots of the trade guilds together"

Persona:

Calling – Adventure. Fate – Daring. Destiny – Cynical. Corruption (0)

Goals: Take down the Jago Trade Guild. Create an independent spy cell in Antiva City. Gain recognition with the Crows.

Inquisitor Hestia 'Abjure the Impure' Gazraeldottar (Warhammer 40K, Wrath & Glory) (by Karl David Brown)

Fickle fortune chose the inquisition for Hestia. Her family was killed by a rogue psyker and the young Hestia's zeal thereafter was seen by the investigating inquisitor. An orphan of the Imperium, she was raised within the harsh and rigid Inquisition and still favours an orderly and formal existence. The heart-felt zeal of a child wronged has been tempered into deep hatred for mutation away from the purity of humanity and she is driven to hunt out mutants, psykers, and other perversions of the human form. Her apparent dogmatic fanaticism for the Imperial cult and loyalty to the God-Emperor are in truth secondary to her desire to eradicate mutants.

Soon after being made full inquisitor, she uncovered a plot for mutants to infiltrate the Astra Militarum. Since then she has worked diligently and been rewarded for her service several times with rejuvenating treatments so that the Emperor need not lose such a valuable tool to old age. Over the decades the memories of the murder of her parents have faded but now hate for the heretic is an ingrained habit of mind. Perhaps understandably, she fears that the exposure to corruption necessary for her work might one day warp her flesh with mutation.

She recently arrived in the Gilead System, braving the Great Rift in the Varonius Flotilla. Her mission is to root out heresy believed to be rampant in the system because it is so exposed to the warp-corruption of the Great Rift. Her few friends were fellow Inquisitors who had, over decades, come to know her despite her cold formality, now she is separated from even those close colleagues.

Politics in Wrath & Glory: Surprisingly for an RPG based on a wargaming property, Wrath & Glory has many mechanics that reflect political power and allegiance. First every character belongs to a faction and has keywords assigned for the faction and sub-group membership. Keywords then interact with many rules throughout the game. Characters also have an influence score indicating their authority within their faction. None of the cultures are capitalist; what gear you can requisition is determined by your allegiances and influence. Once you have gear it is easier to repair familiar technology produced by your own faction. Character generation also sketches out a character's backstory and motivations which are linked to the faction they belong to. As well as these universal features some characters also have special abilities such as the Inquisitor archetype's Unchecked Authority. Framework: The inquisitor is for a tier 4 (400xp) Imperium framework. Frameworks away from the frontlines of battle that feature a lot of social interactions and/or investigations work best.

Tier 4, Rank 1, Species Human, Archetype Inquisitor, Age 132, Languages Low Gothic, Eyes Piercing blue. Hair Brick red kept in a short tight braid. Height 6'4", Feature speaks with intense and deliberate enunciation.

Keywords: Imperium, Inquisition, Ordo Hereticus.

Attributes: S3, T4, A3, I3, Wil6, Int6, Fel4. Defence 2/3 v. melee due to sword. Resilience 5 +3 armour =8. Max Wounds 10. Determination 4. Max Shock 10. Corruption 0. Conviction 6. Resolve 6. Passive Awareness 5. Influence 5. Wealth 4.

Skill Totals: Athletics 4, Awareness 9, Ballistics 4, Cunning 6, Deception 6, Insight 11, Intimidation 10, Investigation 11, Leadership 10, Medicae 7, Persuasion 8, Pilot 5, Psychic Mastery N/A, Scholar 8, Stealth 5, Survival 7, Tech 7, Weapon Skill 5.

Weapons.	Dice Pool	Damage	ED	AP	Salvo	Range	Traits
Power Sword	5	(S)+5	4	-3	-	-	Parry, Power field,
				Imperium			
Master Crafted Las Pistol	4		10	1	-	1	12/24/36 Pistol, Reliable, Las, Imperium

Armour. Flak Coat AR3 (Flak Imperium, Astra Militarum)

Gear. Inquisitorial Rosette

Princess Jolasun Durodola (Gulliver's Trading Company) (By Karl David Brown)

Princess Jolasun is a tall regal woman in her mid-twenties dressed in head-cloth, blouse, shawl, and long wrap around skirt all in bright colours. She glitters with a fortune of gold jewellery and her feet are protected by beaded sandals. Behind her looms her bodyguard and his improbably large sword.

To become a respected scholar Jolasun wishes to go out into the world and bring new knowledge back to Oyo.

Jolasun was created for demonstration games of Gulliver's Trading Company at PAX AUS 2022. As an aristocrat she qualifies as a politician and for inclusion in this article. However, she is also a natural philosopher. A dedicated politician character would have higher levels in intrigue and other social skills and more aspects and extras representing alliances at court. Though created for Gulliver's Trading Company, which is still in development, Jolasun should be easy to convert for use in other Fate games particularly historical settings between about 1700 to 1900CE.

Since Gulliver's Trading Company seeks to emulate the novel Gulliver's Travels, it includes rules to emulate social interactions, political intrigues at court, the clash of national armies, and maritime conflict. Every character must declare a nationality as an aspect, linking each to the actions of nations on behalf of their leaders. In Fate-based games aspects are a flexible mechanic able to emulate almost anything including political allegiances, connections, status, and wealth. Numerous political aspects are included in the example aspects in the book including: Big Ender, Questionable Bloodline, Friend of the King, and more.

Synopsis

Nationality Oyo (Yoruba). Goal Become well-travelled. Ambition To be recognised as a genius of natural philosophy. Concept Aristocratic scholar of natural history.

Parts

A pampered princess of Oyo. I'm the youngest daughter of an 'Oba', king of one of the central provinces of the Empire. Aspect Aristocrat. Skills Etiquette Dance, Singing, Strut.

Educated by scholars. An idle mind turns to philosophy and nature. My father could afford the best tutors. Aspect Well-read. Extras Literate. Skills Natural History, Morality, Reason.

The ascension. My father is killed in the war with Dahomey. The Imperial Prince Regent visits for the funeral and to confirm the ascension of one of my brothers to oba. Aspect Inherited Gold. Skills Intrigue, Politics.

I embark on a voyage. I decide that I need experience to further my learning from books. My brother the oba insists I take a bodyguard on my journey. I buy passage on a European ship bound for Brobdingrag. Aspect Idowu Sijuwola, my bodyguard. Extras: Bodyguard his family has served mine for generations, Ida, Poison Coated. Skill Language English. Play Sheet

Aspects. Yoruba of Oyo O, Aristocrat O, Well-Read O, Inherited Gold O, Bodyguard is devoted to the family of the oba O.

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

Extras. Literate, Bodyguard Wields a Massive Ida (box on NPC sheet), Bodyguard's blade is poison coated (box on NPC sheet).

Skills (Rnk/Rnk-X/Adjective). Natural History (4/2/Good), Etiquette (3/0/Average), Reason (3/1/Fair), Strut (2/1/Fair), Morality (2/0/Average), English Language (2/0/Average), Dance (1/-1/Mediocre), Politics (1/-2/Poor), Intrigue (1/-2/Poor), Singing (1/-1/Mediocre).

Idowu Sijuwola

Idowu is an NPC bodyguard protecting Princess Jolasun. Generally, he does as she asks but he is actually played by the referee who may decide Idowu would not follow a particular order or act on his own initiative. The referee can veto any aspect or conscience you would like Idowu to spend. If a player character is removed from play you may decide to let that player take over Idowu.

Youth NPC

A young man but tall for his age and broadly built. He dresses in the loose fitting brightly-coloured tunic and trousers of his homeland and sandals. Idowu has been assigned to guard a princess of the family his family has served for generations. He privately thinks the princess spends too much time reading when she should be learning 'real' practical skills, but it is not his place to say so. Idowu is proud of his family's history of service and courage and his own martial abilities.

Nationality: Yoruba of Oyo (Medium Scale) O

Aspects: Bodyguard devoted to the family of the oba (box on PC sheet) , Wields a Massive Ida (D 3 Rnk-3=0 Average) O, The blade is poison coated O

Notes on Aspects: This ida is an 8-foot-long sword flared wide at the end that takes considerable size, strength, and skill to wield. This might suggest non-combat uses for this aspect. Poison coating weapons is entirely acceptable among the Yoruba.

Conscience: Pride 3.

Skills (Rnk/Rnk-X/Adjectives) Weapon Skill D (3/Varies/Varies), Stewardship (3/1/Fair), Strength Feats (2/1/Fair), Intimidate (2/1/Fair), Strut (2/1/Fair), Resist (1/0/Average), Athletics (1/0/Average), Language English (1/-1/Mediocre), Weapon Skill W (1/Varies/Varies), Weapon Skill S (1/Varies/Varies), Weapon Skill T (1/Varies/Varies).

*Weapon skills: D Double-handed melee, W bows, S single handed melee, T thrown.

Kleon of Sun Dome Temple (RuneQuest Roleplaying in Glorantha, Lev Lafayette)

Noble of Sun County (Prax), Initiate of Yelmalio. Standard of Living Noble Income 200 L Ransom 1000 L

Kleon is a young man of Sun Dome temple in a minor noble family that is distantly related to the great founder Arinsor Clearmind, from which the family gains much of their reputation. To describe Kleon as "serious", despite his youth, is quite the understatement. He has become quite expert in the celestial mythology and sees the world as ordered, structured, and with all the cults subservient to the Sun God, and all worshippers of the Sun God subservient to the nobles and priests of that cult - he hopes to become a Noble-Priest of some standing himself in the future and has a deep respect for Count Solanthos Ironpike. His great weakness is the mirror of his strength; he has virtually no knowledge of the in the activities of more normal folk, and has never expressed an interest in that regard, which makes him a rather ripe target to be led astray, if one could overcome his overwhelming passion of Honour. "Authoritarian, stable, and cohesive" is a description of Sun County, and Kleon matches that behaviour to the letter - for now. The next few years as he enters military and adventuring life should be quite interesting.

Characteristics: Strength 15 75% Constitution 10 50% Size 15 75% Dexterity 16 80% Intelligence 14 70% Power 14 70% Charisma 12 60%

Attributes: Damage Bonus +1D4 DEX Strike Rank 1 Hit Points 11 Healing Rate 2 Magic Points 14 Spirit Damage 1D6+1 SIZ Strike Rank 1 Movement Ground 8

Runes: Air Air 60% Earth Earth 40% Fire/Sky Fire/Sky 30% Fertility Fertility 75% Man Man 75%

Rune Points: (Yelmalio) 3/3 Rune Spells: Catseye Fire/Sky Beast 1 Sunbright Fire/Sky 2

Passions & Reputation: Hate (Darkness Creatures) 60% Honor 80% Loyalty (Sun County) 60% Reputation 15% Spirit Magic: Befuddle Demoralize Detect Enemies Disruption Light 0

Skills

Agility (+5%): Ride (Horse) (5) 20%

Communication (+0%): Dance (10) 15% Intrigue (5) 50% Orate (10) 65% Sing (10) 20% Speak (Flamespeech) (0) 40% Speak (Heortling) (0) 10% Speak (New Praxian) (0) 50% Speak (Tradetalk) (0) 20%

Manipulation: (+10%)

Knowledge (+5%): Celestial Lore (5) 50% Cult Lore (Yelmalio) (0) 45% Customs (Sun County) (0) 30% Customs (Yelmalio) (0) 25% Farm (10) 45% Homeland Lore (Sun County) (30) 60% Manage Household (10) 55%

Read/Write (Heortling) (0) 15%

Magic (+5%): Meditate (0) 10% Spirit Combat (20) 40% Worship (Yelmalio) (0) 25%

Perception (+5%): Insight (Human) (20) 60%

Ranged (+10%):

Melee (+10%): 1H Spear (5) 60% Pike (15) 35% Shield (+10%) Large Shield (15) 40% Medium Shield (15) 65% Stealth (+5%):

Melee Attacks (Skill Damage SR HP): 1H Short Spear 60% 1D6+1+1D4 4 10/10 Medium Shield 65% 1D4+1D4 5 12/12

Ranged Attacks (Attack Skill Damage SR Range): Light Crossbow 35% 2D4+2 1 100m

Equipment: Bronze cuirass (6pts) Bronze greaves (6pts) Closed helmet (5pts) cultural weapons two riding animals noble clothing (60L) 200 L in coin 450 L in jewelry, vessels and luxury goods

Capitan Leonardo Antonia dos Santos (Megatraveller, Lev Lafayette)

Even as the Imperium is falling apart at the seams, the bureaucracy still trundles on and the recently retired Leonardo Antonia dos Santos has received a commission to bring a crew together to deal with increasingly unruly acts of piracy in the Trojan Reach Sector; the sector is famous - and many would say notorious - for being a loose confederation between the Imperium and the Aslan Hierate. The relatively young Captain Leonardo sees this commission as an opportunity for glory and quite prepared to run risks to achieve this. He's proud of his sense of style, poise, and carries his naval broadsword with an air of one who knows how to use this archaic but deadly weapon. Indeed, he really doesn't know too much else. What Captain Leonardo lacks in knowledge, he makes up with style, *savoir-faire*, and violence. One would think that that the delicate world of diplomacy between two major space empires with pirate nations in-between perhaps would not be suited by such bravado, but so far Captain Leonardo has flourished in the environment and runs the real risk of achieving even greater status.

Homeworld: Perrior, Trojan Reach UWP: A633966-B

UPP: ACB796 Age: 30 Terms: 3 Career: Marines Rank: Captain (Rank 2)

Skills/Experience: 8 / 13

Skills: Large Blade-4, Intrusion-2, Handgun-1, Vacc Suit-1, Computer-0, Energy Weapons-0, Grav Vehicle-0

Cash: 10000 Cr Pension: 0 Cr/Year Benefits: Low Passage

THE LAW IS NOT AN ASS

By Lev Lafayette

The phrase "the law is an ass" is meant to convey the idea that certain laws are contrary to common sense, and therefore ought to be changed. The phrase first appears in what is presumably Henry Glapthorne's play "Revenge for Honour" published posthumously in 1654 and available among George Chapman's works and often quoted briefly as follows: "Ere he shall lose an eye for such a trifle... For doing deeds of nature! I'm ashamed. The law is such an ass."

When one looks at the play in context, it is much more sinister:

"Which the severe law punishes with loss
Of nature's precious lights, my tears will scarce
Permit me utter't, for a rape committed
On the fair wife of Mura.
Was it for nothing else, and please your Grace?
Ere he shall lose an eye for such a trifle.
Or have a hair dimioish'd, we will lose
Our heads; what, hoodwink men like sullen hawks
For doing deeds of nature I'm asham'd
The law is such an ass."

Charles Dickens made the quote famous in a contemporary sense in *Oliver Twist*, published in 1838:

"It was all Mrs. Bumble. She would do it," urged Mr. Bumble; first looking round, to ascertain that his partner had left the room.

"That is no excuse," returned Mr. Brownlow. "You were present on the occasion of the destruction of these trinkets, and, indeed, are the more guilty of the two, in the eye of the law; for the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction."

"If the law supposes that," said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, "the law is a ass — a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience - by experience."

In both cases the quote is not arbitrary laws, but very specific laws relating to status and behaviour, and in both cases raising the question of the autonomy and expectations of women. The point being that whilst laws could be arbitrary, usually they are not. The law is not an ass; it exists to establish and enforce political and economic rights and privileges. At times these may appear, especially to our contemporary eye, to be strange at the very least. But in their context, they existed for a reason. In part it serves as a counterpoint to "random" decrees, such as the scenario posited in Douglas Niles' *Dungeons & Dragons* module X3 "Curse of Xanathon". Unsurprisingly, the Duke has been afflicted by a chaotic curse in that scenario.

"Recently, the town has been thrown into an uproar by several rather peculiar decrees that have originated from the Duke's palace. Ten days before the start of this adventure, the order was issued that all taxes must be paid in beer, not

money. Many kegs have been delivered to the palace, and now it is very difficult to purchase even a small glass of beer in the taverns of Rhoona. This has contributed to grumbling and complaining among the thirsty populace, but people are in such a fear of the Ducal Guard that no protest has been made.

Three days ago, a second decree was issued, declaring that horses ridden within the town boundaries must carry the riders facing the mount's tail. Since only the very wealthy ever ride in the town, this decree has resulted in some very entertaining sights for pedestrians, as merchants and nobles struggle to maintain balance and dignity in the awkward position. Even so, more rumors have been spread regarding the odd nature of the last two ducal pronouncements. Many people are frightened by the thought that the Duke is no longer rational."

The following is a collection of some historical laws of this nature, which can be applied in a historical fiction campaign or, in a modified form, in fantasy campaigns. They definitely seem strange, harmful even, but they are definitely not random. "Law is order, and good law is good order.", wrote Aristotle (Politics Book VII, 1326.a29, c350 B.C.E). The following can sometimes be considered bad laws, protecting and promoting a bad order. And what better place to begin, than ancient Hellenes?

1. Harmony in the Locrian Mode

The Locrian code was the first written European laws devised by Zaleucus for the Epizephyrian Locri (in contemporary Calabria, Italy) in the 7th century BCE. It includes the following restrictions on clothing and movement; these laws were introduced because they introduced a symbolic meaning, as a means to prevent the behaviour by bringing potential shame onto the actor.

"A free-born woman may not be accompanied by more than one female slave, unless she is drunk; she may not leave the city during the night, unless she is planning to commit adultery; she may not wear gold jewelry or a garment with a purple border, unless she is a courtesan; and a husband may not wear a gold-studded ring or a cloak of Milesian fashion unless he is bent upon prostitution or adultery."

According to the Athenian Demosthenes, there was another interesting example to ensure the stability of the legal system and protect it against frivolous changes (and probably stopped a number of sensible ones as well): "that a man who shall propose to make any new law shall do it with a rope about his neck, which he shall be strangled in, if he do not carry his point: which has been such a guard and defence to the laws, that there has been but one new one made in MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED YEARS."

The idea of a rather Draconian means for protecting legislation of course does lead to consideration of how the legislature operates. In the case of Locris, it was determined by a Citizen's Council which means that they are open to persuasion and probably demagoguery. One can easily imagine taking up a similar approach to a meritocratic council of experts (for example the Vulcan Confederacy), which would be very challenging to argue against and, of course, the stakes are high.

2. Something to Dye For

The Romans, often famous for activities of indulgences, also introduced laws to provide excessive expenditure in food and clothing, the most well-known being the use of the purple dye extracted from the mollusk *Murex brandaris*. About a quarter of a million of the sea-snail were required for a fluid ounce of the dye, with one drop of glandular mucous is

extracted from each mollusk. Following a process of exposure, the addition of salt, a three-day dissolving period, then heating and filtering over a nine-day period before the addition of fleece. In Imperial Rome it was declared by both Julius and Augustus Caesar that only the Emperor and his household were allowed to wear the purple, and in the Republic it was restricted to senators and magistrates, with the second-class property owners, the equites, was the permission to wear a purple stripe in the robes - to be admitted to the equites required wealth of 400,000 sesterces; the average legionary was paid 900 per year sesterces. Continuing into the Byzantium Empire, one would be referred to as "born in the purple" for members of the Royal family. During the Roman Empire, the laws regarding the wearing of Tyrian purple were rigorously enforced and breaking it was considered treason, so punishable by death.

Wearing a particular colour is a symbolic representation of power and belonging to a particular class of law-makers? Wearing the wrong colour is treason punishable by death? Friend Computer, this sounds like Alpha Complex! But of course, it is not just the Romans that had legal restrictions on dress; it's just a particularly famous example. Traditional China, for example, the Hongwu Emperor, regulated graves and mausoleums with the nobility and highest officials receiving the best, of course. Nobody, however, outdoes the Japanese shōguns. There sumptuary laws were of an extreme level of detail and scope. Everybody was subject to strict sumptuary laws of housing, clothing, food, and tools. As modernity and trade grew the merchant class (chōnin), became far wealthier than the samurai who sought to maintain the strict sumptuary laws, but eventually shogunate allowed some concessions - such as high prestige merchants being allowed to wear a single sword.

3. Orthodox Chews

Whilst sumptuary laws for housing and clothing have largely fallen out of fashion, they are still commonly applied by religious practitioners when it comes to food and, in non-secular states, these are often embodied as laws. Whilst these often reflect symbolic values, the complexity can get quite challenging. For example, it is relatively straight-forward that in the Judaic tradition there is a separation between the earth and the sea, but then along comes these shellfish, prawns, and lobsters and the like who just don't quite seem to be following that neat demarcation, let alone not having fins and scales (which marks out the eel). Quite clearly, not very kosher of them. There was also a question of cultural demarcation as well; Egyptian priests would *only* eat the meat of even-toed ungulates (e.g., pigs, camels) and the rhinoceros.

Things get a lot more complex however when confronted by context. Catholics are well known for not eating meat during Lent, with the exception of fish. In two different New World locales, this became a matter of interest. In the 17th century, Francois de Laval, the first bishop of Quebec made a request to Paris that beaver meat be placed on the menu for Fridays during Lent, as it liked to spend a lot of time in the water. The request succeeded. The bishop was apparently following in the footsteps of Padre Sojo, a Venezuelan priest, who apparently went to Rome at the end of the eighteenth century and obtained a papal bull approving the capybara for lent. After all, it lives in the water, has webbed feet and, living mainly aquatic grasses, tastes a lot like fish. Sure, beavers and capybaras might be rodents in other regards, but for the purpose of eating them in Lent? They're fish.

Take all this further; a conflict between Roman and Celtic Christians on whether to drink wine or cider. The probable failure the Greenland viking settlements due to a food taboo. The consumption of tiger penis in soup for virility in Chinese culture. The legal prohibition and cultural practise of eating but one ortolan bunting during one's life in contemporary France (Mitterrand, always French but breaking convention, had two as his last meal). Rebellious youth chew gum in modern Singapore and importers are threatened with fines and jail. "You are what you eat" as a cultural practise and legal requirement is another strange set of requirements designed to strengthen identity and belonging.

4. Io Saturnalia!

"The first inhabitants of Italy were the Aborigines, whose king, Saturnus, is said to have been a man of such extraordinary justice, that no one was a slave in his reign, or had any private property, but all things were common to all, and undivided, as one estate for the use of every one; in memory of which way of life, it has been ordered that at the Saturnalia slaves should everywhere sit down with their masters at the entertainments, the rank of all being made equal."

- Justinus, Epitome of Pompeius Trogus



Saturnalia was an ancient Roman festival and holiday in honour of the god Saturn. It started on December 17 (Julian calendar) and went on until December 23. It should be evident that these festivities and gift-giving was easily and readily adopted by Christianity. Saturnalia was considered of great theological importance it was seen as a return to a "golden age" when the world was ruled by Saturn. This was such a good time, apparently, that it involved days of public banquets, modest private gift-giving (e.g., small figurines), gambling, orgies, and overturning of social status (e.g., aristocrats and masters would provide service to slaves), everyone (slaves, freedmen, citizens) wore the conical pileus cap. The festival would include the election of a "King of the Saturnalia", who gave often comical orders to people. Schools and courts were closed. There are hints that this

was also a time of human sacrifice but there is no evidence of this during the Republic. Horace wrote two satires of the week which provide some excellent insight into the festival:

"I've listened a while and wanted to say a few words
But being a slave daren't." Are you Davus? Yes, Davus,
A servant fond of his master, quite virtuous, but not
Enough so to die young." Come on, then, use the freedom
December allows, since our ancestors wished it: speak!

Imperial Rome claimed that the festival included the election of a "Saturnalicus princeps", a master of ceremonies, whose capricious (although rarely dangerous) commands would be followed by those at ceremonies, reflecting the chaotic, often embarrassing but amusing spirit of the season. Whilst not in Republican Rome sources, it was continued in medieval France and Switzerland where a boy would be elected "bishop for a day" on 28 December, the Feast of

the Holy Innocents and could issue pronouncements. The equivalent in English towns was the election of a "Lord of Misrule" as MC over the "Feast of Fools".

A society which enforces a period of festivities is of no surprise; one which does so with reversals of social roles or enforced social equality would give the initial appearance of being chaotic, especially when matched with capriciousness; see the edicts of the previously mentioned Duke of Rhooona in the Dungeons & Dragons scenario, "The Curse of Xanathon" for an example. Whilst presented as a curse in that scenario, it is worth remembering that something as grand as the Roman Republic dedicated a week to such entertaining chaos - but who doesn't like a week of fun? Doesn't this period provide a release for the poor and downtrodden, whilst also providing entertainment for those who rule for the rest of the year? The law is not an ass, and even Saturnalia served a social function.

5. Strange Laws Are Not So Strange

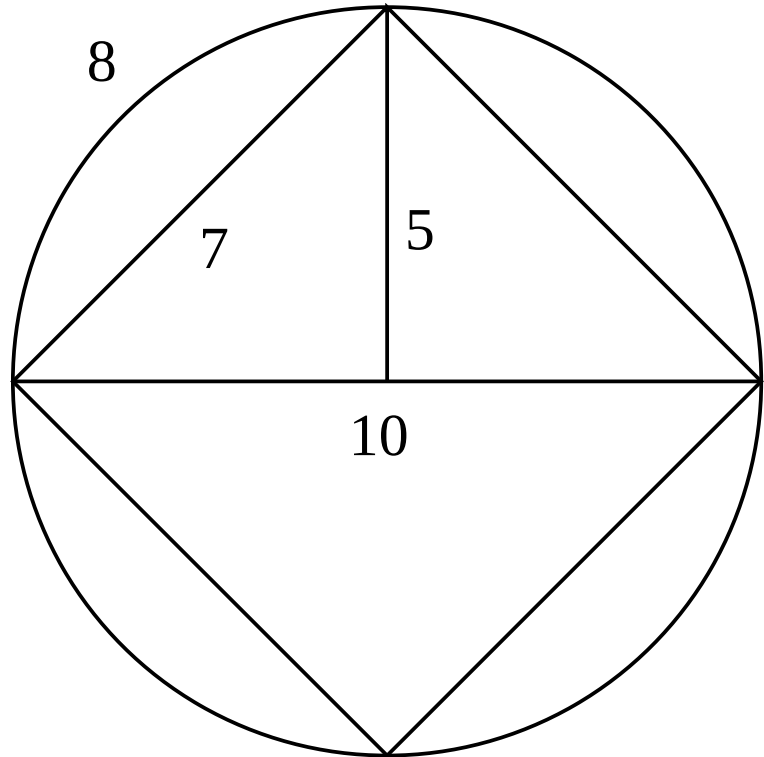
Popular as unchecked memes or hyperbolic articles in tabloid newspapers, there are numerous examples of "strange laws" that readily make one think "the law is an ass". However, when a bit of investigation is conducted one discovers that usually such strangeness is not so strange at all. Either the law in question is completely made-up, missing explanatory context, or, in some cases may actually be a bit odd and have a strange history.

For example, it is sometimes suggested that it is "legal to shoot a Welshman with a longbow on Sunday in the Cathedral Close in Hereford; or inside the city walls of Chester after midnight; or a Scotsman within the city walls of York, other than on a Sunday". (See: http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/app/uploads/2015/03/Legal_Oddities.pdf). Only one of these has any historical basis, and that is an ordinance of the city of Chester in 1403 which may have imposed a curfew on Welshmen in response to the Glyndwr rebellion. Obviously such an ordinance is no longer applicable, regardless of whether one is using a longbow or, in contemporary terms, the sniper rifle or attack helicopter that all use the same name.

What is true however in the UK is the 1313 Statute Forbidding Bearing of Armour or Coming Armed to Parliament Act. This was enacted in 1313 during the reign of Edward II. This occurred after a traditional period of dispute between parliament and the King, which led to a set of ordinances two years prior that were imposed on the King by the nobility and clergy to restrict Edward's power. At the time the king's favourite, one Piers Gaveston, was prone to insulting the nobles which was pretty impressive considering his low birth. In an attempt to sway parliament several earls made it the habit to turn up in arms and armour, a truly subtle move. The Statute, apparently, didn't entirely work and at least one (the Earl of Lancaster) continued the habit of attending parliament. This eventually ended in outright rebellion and the Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, and fellow "Contrarians", were defeated at the loyalist Despenser at the Battle of Boroughbridge in 1322. Thomas was captured and executed. As for Edward, well he was overthrown a few years later. But that's another story. The main thing is that the Statute still exists, although there has been no need to enforce for quite a while.

One should not ignore an early carrier-sense collision-detect protocol with enforced deadlocks, available in a US transport statute. Specifically, in 1855 the Legislature of Massachusetts passed a law (chapter 452 of Act of 1855) that all trains approaching a grade crossing should come to a full stop within 500 feet of the crossing, not to start again until a proper signal had been shown. As a majority of the Legislature of that year was of the "Know-Nothing" party, it was called the "Know-Nothing Legislature" and hence the stops caused by that law became known as "Know-Nothing stops." Again, context matters.

Of course, the parting remarks must belong to the notorious attempt to set the value of pi to 3 in Indiana. This was actually never passed, but rather it was an attempt by physicist, Edward J. Goodwin, who believed that he had found a way to square the circle. Goodwin proposed the bill to state representative Taylor I. Record. The bill included a series of mathematical claims along with a list of how awesome Goodwin was. It caused confusion in the House with some wanting sent to the Finance Committee, another to the Committee on Swamplands, and finally it was transferred to the Committee on Education, which reported in favour of the bill, returned it to the house, who passed it without a dissenting vote. Fortunately, by the time it reached the Senate Purdue mathematics University professor C. A. Waldo, visiting to secure the annual appropriation for the Indiana Academy of Science, had an opportunity to speak to senators who postponed the bill indefinitely with one correctly observing that the assembly lacked the power to define mathematical truth.



If only we could say the same of Australian Prime Ministers:

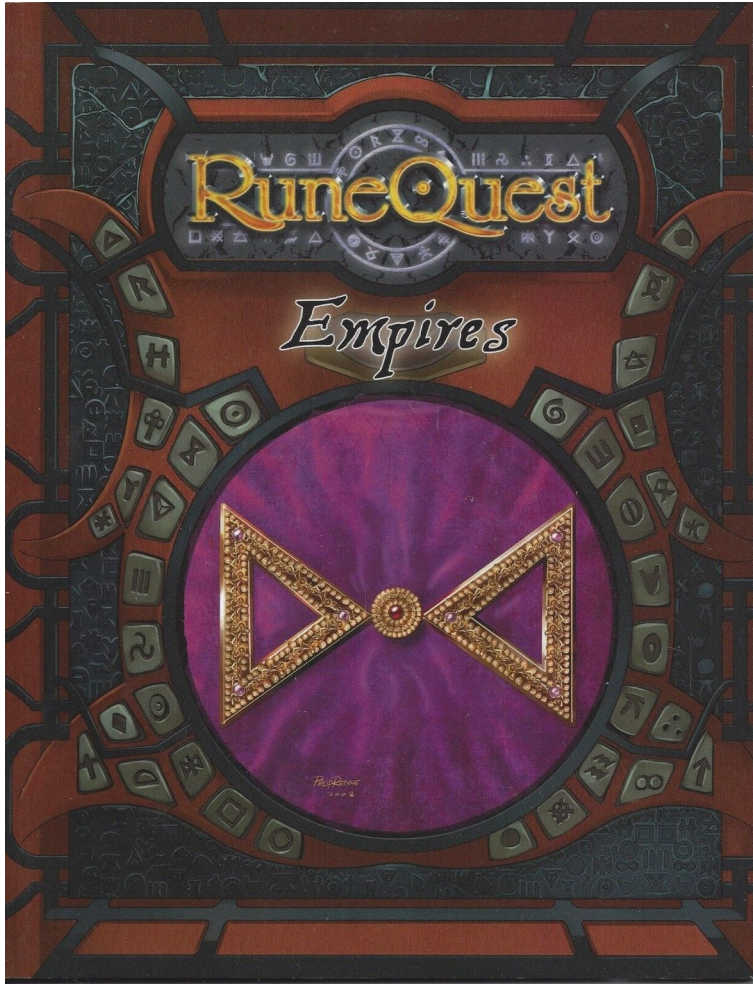
"Well the laws of Australia prevail in Australia, I can assure you of that. The laws of mathematics are very commendable, but the only law that applies in Australia is the law of Australia."

-- Malcolm Turnbull, July 2017

RUNEQUEST EMPIRES REVIEW

By Lev Lafayette

Mongoose RuneQuest I Empires



Introduction and Physical Product

One might be tempted to think that RuneQuest Empires, as part of the Mongoose RuneQuest line, might be about the Empire of Wyrms Friends or the Godlearner Empire, two of the most powerful factions of Glorantha in the second age setting. However, a careful reading of the back cover blurb should dissuade such opinions: "This RuneQuest supplement enables you to create and define kingdoms and empires as playable entities. Simulate the rise and fall of mighty imperial states, managing their resources and economies, resisting and predations of rivals and dominating those who would move against you... And, at a more human level, manage estates and holdings from year to year keeping the populace happy whilst dealing with the ravages of nature, rivals and the demands of your peers. RuneQuest Empires provides all the tools needed for running high-level games, and for integrating RuneQuest characters into the action. A game within a game, it aims to add a new dimension to the rich world of RuneQuest."

In other words, Empires allows you to manage estates, kingdoms, and empires as a sort of character. It is a pretty big objective, and the supplement attempts to do it in a mere 96p softback book, which is well-bound. There is a short introduction and definition (2 pages each), characteristics of RuneQuest Empires (16 pages), Economics of Empire (12 pages), Empires at War (14 pages), Empires and Religion (8 pages), Building Kingdoms (25 pages), Imperial Characters (6 pages) and Sample Empires (9 pages). The book comes with a short table of contents and a one-page index. The layout is a consistent two-column serif font, and each page has the page number and chapter clearly marked out. I have never been over-fond of the very hefty margins, although there is some style to the artwork. The writing is dense but quite readable and interspersed with plenty of examples. The management of white space is much better in this product than in others in the line, and although the artwork is hardly inspiring in technique or creativity, it is contextually appropriate.</p>

Definitions and Characteristics

Empires are defined as the will to build something greater than a single state, which is more a definition of imperialism, but the gist is there. Using a scholarly source, the game bases mechanics around three sources of expansion; uncoerced annexation, coerced annexation, and conquest. Benefits are noted with references to the Roman Empire and an opportunity is missed to quote the famous "What have the Romans ever done for us?" scene. This aside, the mechanics of Empires illustrates the approach taken in the publication. Empires are provided six characteristics; MIL (military strength), LAW (capacity and scope of the legal system), SIZ (population), COM (strength and performance of internal communication), REL (religion, spiritual strength), WLT (wealth in terms of property and natural resources). The SIZ table indicates that the characteristics are very close to linear and are based on the Roman Empire of c1AD. States can be generated randomly (a 3D6 roll) or through a points allocation method (80 points or set values totalling 50, plus an additional 20). The second points allocation or the rolled method seems to be a trap for the numerically illiterate.

In addition to these characteristics, states are also provided "capabilities", the equivalent of skills, and are differentiated by basic and advanced capabilities. Expressed as percentages base values are calculated either by the sum of two characteristics or by a characteristic plus 10. The basic characteristics are Commerce (WLT+SIZ), Dogma (REL+LAW), Espionage (WLT+LAW), Government (LAW+COM), and Warfare (MIL+REL). The advanced characteristics are Magic (REL+SIZ), Culture (COM+10), Technology (LAW+WLT), Diplomacy (COM+LAW), and Loyalty (LAW+COM). Loyalty is a measure of loyalty to the imperial power.

Modifications to basic characteristics and capabilities depend on the cultural background, which includes Barbarian, Civilized, Maritime (civilized with seafaring), and Primitive. The latter is particularly interesting, insofar that as a pre-State society they cannot form Empires, but can be part of one. They also suffer -1D3 to all characteristics (and none can exceed 10) and have no starting advanced capabilities. It is worth pointing out that this means with the standard point-buy method Primitive "states" will have excess points left over. It is arguable that the SIZ characteristic should be restricted even further (perhaps to 5), and the magic advanced capability available in compensation.

All cultures can select two government types that provide characteristic and capability bonuses. It seems that these cultures may select advanced capabilities that they otherwise would not have access to. The government types include; Autocracy, Aristocracy, Democracy, Despotism, Diarchy, Gerontocracy, Meritocracy, Monarchy, Plutocracy, Theocracy. The bonuses provided are notably quite balanced; there could be an argument to expand the list and limit choices according to culture. A Primitive Plutocracy seems unusual, for example, although it may be that Primitive cultures cannot choose a government type: "Primitive societies have no form of government beyond simple tribal rituals." In addition to the government types, states also have attitudes, consisting of temperament (aggressive, defensive, neutral) and stance (expansionist, open, insular, passive, stable). Free capability points are added at this point, restricted by culture. Barbarians are prohibited from selecting the Technology advanced capability, and Primitives only have access to Magic. States may make four improvement rolls per year to increase capabilities or spend three to increase a characteristic by one point.

Finally, Imperial Seats, the centre of power, are defined. These start with higher characteristics and capability points and gain benefits to their characteristics based on the dominion characteristics, with SIZ equalling the sum of all dominions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the aggressive and passive conquest procedures, that are elaborated on in the upcoming chapter on war.

Imperial Economics, War, and Religion

The economy of a state goes through an annual cycle. It starts with its WLT, including any surplus from previous years, as an annual budget, and improvement checks for characteristics and capabilities. It then pays tribute and taxes to the Empire and its debts. Following this, there are 1D4-1 events from a table of 20 that must be resolved; these include civil unrest, natural disasters, technological discoveries, and the like can modify characteristics and capabilities. The WLT characteristic is then used to determine upkeep for other characteristics with a somewhat coarse dropping of fractions (e.g., 1 WLT pays for 5 SIZ, so optimal SIZ values are 4, 9, 14, etc). Unfunded capabilities (where tapped resources or borrowing is not carried out) result in a loss of capabilities or increased potential for insurrection. Following this is the option for carrying out war, and finally the test for insurrection. Various capabilities come into play when making these tests. For example, Commerce or Technology can be used when tapping resources, resulting in a gain of 1D3 or 1D4+1 wealth (success or critical), 0 (failure), or -1D3 (fumble). After dominions, imperial seats resolve their annual cycle with the additional bonuses of tributes, and the implementation of decrees. and the potential of outside interference. There is also the potential for collapse, such as when characteristics are reduced to zero. Empires are limited to $(WLT+LAW)/2$ in dominions before collapse effects occur as well.

The chapter on War presents an abstract method where only the results of a conflict count, based on six-month campaigns. WLT is used to fund MIL, however, in war, there are escalating costs with each year a conflict carries on. Magic capabilities can be used to increase a character's warfare capability or MIL characteristic, whilst Espionage can reduce an opponent's warfare. Opposed tests on warfare determine a degree of victory with damage based on MIL to the opponent's fielded MIL. In addition, there are special effects such as seizing assets, damaging morale, or a propaganda victory. The spoils of victory is not just the acquisition of dominions, but also additional WLT, but occupation also runs the risk of insurrection. When two of a dominion's characteristics are reduced to zero through insurrection rebels may attempt to take over, with characteristics and capabilities recalculated if successful.

The short Religion chapter raises the prospect of religious domination. Starting with a table that correlates a dominion's REL characteristic with description, a sufficiently high REL (17+) may attempt to dominate and impose their REL on another state through opposed tests of the Dogma capability, with submission achieved with the defending REL is reduced to 1/3 or less. The advantage of imposing a religion on another State provides benefits to commerce to both dominions and magical benefits to the converted dominion. A dominion's REL also determines magic points and magnitude for the impressive rituals that modify characteristics, capabilities, and dominion loyalties conducted throughout a society ("we pray for rain", "curse our enemies", etc).

Building Kingdoms and Imperial Characters

The large "Building Kingdoms" chapters change the scale of activity down to the Noble character level and the management of their estate. It has a plainly-state English medieval style to it which does run the risk of being anachronistic to the previous chapter's examples based around the Roman Empire. Noble characters, as per the profession in RuneQuest core rules, are further distinguished according to rank (Duke, Earl, Viscount, Baron, Baronet, Knight) that provide a differentiated standing modifier, entitlement, and income. Expenses are interestingly based on income; the greater one's income, for example, the greater the "lifestyle" expense. Noble standing can be increased or decreased by appointments (serving on the privy council) or deeds (e.g., building a cathedral, victory in battle).

Building, the great domain of nobles, costs time (including labour) and money. Fourteen different public buildings are provided with these values, along with the effects and additional staff. For example, a mighty cathedral will cost 750,000 SP, take 30 years to build, has a maintenance cost of 1,000 SP per year, adds 1D4+1 to Noble Standing, and comes with a head bishop, 1D8 clergy, and 1D8 servants. Construction time can be reduced by hiring additional skilled workers, specifically journeymen and foremen. A notably cheap gain is the Hunting Lodge, which only takes six months to build, costs 8,000 SP, and provides 1D4 Noble Standing. Castles are a building of their own right, differentiated as small, medium, and large with appropriate increases in Noble Standing. Some eight major component types and twenty-three components are on offer to construct a bespoke castle each with their own build time and cost, or one can have an "off-the-peg" castle from the RuneQuest Companion.

In addition to their lordly domain, there is an annual year of events based around the seasons, again very much with a medieval European flavour. Each season the mood of the subjects is checked (ranging from "rebellious" to "devoted"), modified by weather (especially weather), events, and the actions of the noble. Of major importance is a seasonal Noble Standing check. The event tables are seasonal and standing events may be restricted (e.g., no building during winter).

The Imperial Characters chapter notes that the authority of office can provide skill bonuses to a character when recognised through the dominion's capabilities. For example, a dominion's technology effectively augments an official's engineering, evaluate, and mechanism skills through a combination of knowledge through osmosis and reputation. Bonuses can stack if they come from different capabilities, although this will require an influence check. A new Legendary Ability is added; "Supreme Executive Authority" along with Imperial professions (Ambassador, Counsellor/Politician, Imperial Governor, Monarch). Finally, the product concludes with a collection of example dominion "character sheets" for Glorantha's Empire of Wyrms Friends, Elric's Bright Empire, and the Roman Empire.

Concluding Remarks

A great deal of attention has been paid to RuneQuest Empires for creating a content-dense abstract metagame environment for managing dominions as well as the annual play of empires. To provide additional grounding, it would be worth adding the effects of geography to this otherwise fully abstract approach of dominions (for example, a line about dominion-to-dominion conflicts between contiguous areas, such as in Empires of the Middle Ages or, following that game, with additional modifications for familial ties, language, and cultural similarity, and the lack).

The issue of Primitive cultures is challenging, to say the least, to the system (suggestion: they have very impressive magic). It is tempting to try to shoehorn the model provided into some sort of functional sociology, following Talcott Parsons's AGIL schema (for example), just as the RuneQuest cultures follow the anthropology of Lewis Morgan.

However, overall the first edition of Empires is an extremely impressive piece of work. In many ways this is a bit of a hidden gem in the roleplaying world and could easily be adapted to game systems other than just RuneQuest.

Style: 1 + .7 (layout) + .5 (art) + .8 (coolness) + .8 (readability) + .5 (product) = 4.3

Substance: 1 + .8 (content) + .8 (text) + .8 (fun) + .7 (workmanship) + .8 (system) = 4.9

Mongoose RuneQuest II Empires

History and Product

A year after the publication of Empires for Mongoose RuneQuest I, a new edition was published for Mongoose RuneQuest II in 2010. Of immediate note is that this version comes as a faux-leather hardback and has an additional 30 pages of text. The layout changes with the addition changes as well, with the artistic edges removed in favour of a more functional, clearer, and page real-estate-friendly layout. There is a notable improvement in catching the handful of typographical errors from the previous edition. The artwork is improved in terms of technique and is still contextually appropriate, but still lacks creativity. The index is still a single page but with more entries.

Befitting the increased page count are new chapters on Factions and Guilds, Imperial Service, and Renown. Apart from this, however, a careful review of the text illustrates an enormous degree of word-for-word similarity in style, description, and content.



Empires, Warfare, Religion

Empire characteristics are, for example, the same but the point allocation has dropped to a much fairer 65, albeit with the assigned values still below equivalence. Attributes, derived from characteristics, are now included for Military Damage, Population (the same as the SIZ value), and Military Initiative (based on $(MIL+COM)/2$). The basic and advanced capabilities are the same, as are the cultures. The government types are the same, although there is an unclear implication that Primitive cultures have no option here ("The government types can occur in any of the three cultural backgrounds", the cultural backgrounds are Barbarian, Civilized, Maritime, and Primitive).

There are slight changes to the dominion time cycles, with Improvements to characteristics and capabilities occurring after paying taxes, debts, and Events. Events are no longer modified by a Governance check, but rather are differentiated as Fortunes and Mishaps, across the categories of Cultural, Economic, Military, Nature, and

Political/Religious, all providing a substantially more extensive array. The function and application of the WLT characteristic remains the same in this context, as does the effects on Empires and their potential for collapse or stagnation.

Unlike the previous edition, the timescale for warfare is slotted into a more convenient and understandable annual cycle. The increasing cost of war remains the same, as does the role of the espionage capability, but also now with the additional modifications due to dogma and technology or magic. The introduction of the Initiative value means that the winner gets to determine the objective of the battle (e.g., invade, contest, fortify, retreat), which determines the resolution method and effects. Consistent with the new edition of the rules for RuneQuest comparative levels of success apply, and in addition there are now military maneuvers (ambush, capture baggage, entrap, genocide, hit and run, holy war, steal initiative etc), providing extra colour and tactics within the process. Surrender, a very sensible tactic, is also added. In addition, the effects of a campaign on individual adventurers are included based on the outcome of the battle and the attitude (bold, dutiful, cautious) of the adventurer, with NPC tables for individual combat encounters.

The Religion chapter is expanded to include the role of myths with bonuses and ordinal rankings of Resonance to creation, perpetuation, protection, and treasure myths. For example, the Creation myth's Resonance multiplied by five is added to the Dogma capability, whilst Treasure Resonance adds to Initiative. The religious domination process is roughly the same, but with the removal of MIL modifiers to damage, a new initiative-based sequence with objectives (steadfast faith, contest, reconcile, retire) and with resolution outcomes based on the objectives and defined by the levels of success with new religious advantages coming from these successes (e.g., attain insight, create schism, evangelical conversion, steal initiative, etc). Like the changes to the warfare system, it is a more colourful and tactical approach. The ritual magical system and its spells are similar, but there is also the addition of effects of Runes, which a dominion can attain through a successful magic check, representing a HeroQuest. For example, an attuned Beast rune will provide a dominion an additional 15+1D10% to their Warfare capability, and the Man rune will do the same for the Government capability. As expected, these effects last a year and only one rune can be attuned to at a time.

Factions and Guilds, Imperial Service

The new "Factions and Guilds" chapter expressly states itself to be a summary of the "Factions and Guilds" book from Mongoose RuneQuest I. Both are defined by a Framework, goals, and ideals. The framework uses Affinity Points for strength and certain resources, with Points based on the organisation's size. An organisation's size means that a minimum LAW is required for bureaucratic management. The operation of an organised faction is the existence of a power base, which costs 1-5 APs according to type. A loose group of sympathisers will cost only 1AP, whereas a powerful cult with extensive operations will cost 5. The power base also determines a related skill for carrying out operations, with varying characteristics.

Faction, Guild, or Individual Affiliations are also created through the spending of Affinity Points, assuming their goals are not opposed, with the cost based on the strength of the alliance, and the individual Renown. Faction resources, or Affinities, can also be purchased and these include types like Informers, Spin Doctors, Rabble Rousers, Corrupt Officials, Thugs, etc. Faction membership also comes with Passions of Love and Hate for characters which are treated like an advanced skill, which can be used as an augmentation in skill resolution when appropriate. In comparison, Guilds are differentiated as merchant or craft Guilds, but can add additional trade affiliations through APs. Allied affiliation in Guilds provides training in skills and magic, but at a reduced cost depending on the strength of the

alliance. There is, of course, a financial and practical cost to Guild membership and the possibility of punishment for transgressions. Both Factions and Guilds have membership ranks for responsibility and power.

Another new chapter is "Imperial Services", which expands the individual involvement in military campaigns to include missions; Diplomatic, Espionage, Political, Religious and Trade. Apart from their type, Missions are defined by their Risk (low, medium, high) which modify the Fortune and Mishaps check which is also modified by relevant skills according to Mission type. Magic may also modify this check. In addition to Fortune, there are also Rewards and Penalties, depending on Mission success or failure. Mission events may even result in character death! This is a table-heavy chapter with each mission type having its table for Fortune and Mishaps, as well as a table for Injuries and Rewards and Penalties.

Building Kingdoms, Imperial Characters

The new "Building Kingdoms" is similar to that in the first edition. It notes explicitly that it is "geared to the Civilised culture", but argues that the rules can be applied to any culture (Primitive?) with minor alterations to the terminology. Speaking of which, whilst descriptions of titles continue to follow the English peerage system, equivalent titles are now offered for Barbarian, Civilized, Nomad, and Primitive cultures, although there is a big gap between in the middle titles for the latter two. Primitives, for example, only have a Chief (equivalent of Duke) and a Champion (equivalent to a Knight). It is arguable that given the SIZ of primitive cultures and their egalitarianism, the chief is really the equivalent of a Knight. Certainly, that would be the case when considering entitlement, income, and expenses. History does not speak of any Primitive tribal chief who controlled multiple earldoms, a major city, dozens of manors, etc. Apart from this, the chapter has the same rules for income, expenses, Noble standing, construction, etc., the same seasonal year, popular mood level, and seasonal events.

The new "Renown" chapter is a mere four pages and essentially describes a reputation system and is treated like a skill, with an extensive table of modifications. Apart from being recognised, Renown is also used for Boasting and Declaiming and hampers attempts to disguise. This chapter could easily be part of the following one, "Imperial Characters" which, like the previous edition, discusses authority and augmentations and new professions. Finally, this edition also concludes with sample Empires, extended to include the God Learners as well as the Empire of Wyrms' Friends, as well as Elric's Bright Empire, and Imperial Rome.

Conclusion

Whilst the first edition of Empires is an extremely impressive piece of work, the second edition is even better, both in terms of style and content. It provides more additional and more interesting options for conflicts, more opportunities for adventures, tidies up the layout and text, and provides a better physical product.

Style: $1 + .8 \text{ (layout)} + .7 \text{ (art)} + .9 \text{ (coolness)} + .8 \text{ (readability)} + .9 \text{ (product)} = 4.9$

Substance: $1 + .9 \text{ (content)} + .8 \text{ (text)} + 1.0 \text{ (fun)} + .8 \text{ (workmanship)} + .8 \text{ (system)} = 5.3$

LAW AND POLITICS IN ONE ALIEN RPG CAMPAIGN

By Tim Rice

In late 2021, my regular group of roleplayers were thinking about what to play next. I'm a huge fan of the Alien franchise, and had heard good things about Free League's *Alien: The Role Playing Game* (often denoted "Alien RPG" in casual discussion,) so I offered to run it for a while. The system doesn't really lend itself to long-term campaign play (as favored by my group), but it seemed like a fun way to fill out a few months while we thought about what to run for our next major game.

There is a lot that could be said about Alien RPG: it feels like a love letter to the first three films and the 2014 Sega video game *Alien: Isolation*; and the core mechanics are pretty solid and fun; but using random tables to make decisions about cinematic events like panic and xenomorph attacks is perhaps not to everyone's tastes. However, the scope of this issue of RPG Review is Law & Politics, so I shall focus on how we touched on those themes, rather than providing a comprehensive review of the game as a whole.

We only played for six months, which allowed time for three major missions. The middle mission was simply my own spin on adapting the *Dead Space* video game. Whilst that might be of interest to some readers, it is off-topic for the current issue. The first and the last missions, however, do lend themselves to more political discussion.

The characters were the crew of a modest G-class ship called *The Harpocrates*, or "the Harpo". (Fellow fans of the franchise may recognize G-class as being the same type of vessel as *The Anesidora* in *Alien: Isolation*.) The characters were ostensibly free traders who travelled here and there doing odd jobs and ferrying goods between star systems, but the thing about interstellar spacecraft is they aren't cheap. So, to help pay for the ship and to ensure a more steady supply of living expenses, the crew routinely acted as off-the-books agents and gophers for Weyland-Yutani. Depending on your point of view, they were either privateers and spies with a veneer of independence and legitimacy, or they really were independent contractors who also happened to have Weyland-Yutani as a major client. In any case, the Harpo was captained by the sole android on board, a 341-B (aka a "Bishop" model), named Doc. Henceforth, we will simply refer to the entire outfit, crew and all, as the Harpo.

Now, the first mission was focused on exploring a couple of out-of-the-way star systems on a potential new shortcut route betwixt the colonial Far Reaches and the populous Core Systems worlds. In particular, Weyland-Yutani were interested in reports of mysterious Seegson activity around the Ross 627 white dwarf system which was generally regarded as too cold and uninteresting for potential colonization. In return for spying on Seegson, the Harpo would receive a basic retainer as well as a commission based on all interesting discoveries and intelligence.

Upon arriving at Ross 627, the Harpo found it to be as cold and barren and empty as expected. Just one small ice planet with an even smaller misshapen ice moon; the pair were soon dubbed New Pluto and New Charon. Upon getting closer, it turned out that New Charon was not as it first seemed. Its fine structure was really more like a three-dimensional fractal, a giant space caltrop with spines like Christmas trees a hundred kilometers tall and 10 kilometers thick, bristling with other smaller trees only one kilometer thick. "That's no moon," one might say. Yet, its scale dwarfed anything that could be produced by humanity.

Upon landing, Doc began acting strange, and was soon leading the way into the interior of one of the erstwhile trees. The other characters followed along, monitoring the situation without interference. Soon Doc arrived at a chamber and was then absorbed into a kind of biomechanical cocoon. It wasn't really clear what happened to him, but after some time he emerged with milky android blood seeping from a thousand little puncture wounds; he seemed unphased by this, but expressed the need to get some important information to Weyland-Yutani as soon as possible.

Although this aroused very strong suspicions amongst the players, a scan found nothing untoward. They relieved Doc of duty anyway, pending a full diagnostic by Weyland-Yutani. To this he complied. Returning to the hub location of Anchorpoint Station, Doc was whisked away by Weyland-Yutani, and after some time was returned with a clean bill of health. Such a mystery!

Well, although we did not explore the full consequences in detail, there was some hidden world building and back story which, while I'm afraid it deviates from Alien canon, does bring us to the point of all this. In my mind, the New Charon megastructure had been built by an ancient artificial intelligence which had feelers spread through the entire Milky Way galaxy. It had detected the signatures of similar galactic AIs in other galaxies such as Andromeda.

Playing the long game, it was preparing for an intergalactic war a billion years hence, when the slow work of gravity will bring Andromeda careening right into the Milky Way. This "galaxy-mind" didn't really have too much interest in humanity, but why not make the most of every available resource? Furthermore, while humanity itself might not seem very exciting, their developments in artificial intelligence were not completely without merit.

So, it had already infected Seegson, and was then able to use Doc to seed a toxoplasmosis-like trojan into Weyland-Yutani systems. This placed the immense resources and influence of Weyland-Yutani essentially at its disposal. In the long run, therefore, I suppose humanity would be relegated to the role of minor vassal to the galaxy-mind, our distant descendants scheduled for a billion years of subtle eugenics and social engineering before finally being sent in for annihilation as cannon fodder against Andromeda. All because Weyland-Yutani put a lot of stock in its synthetics and MU/TH/UR artificial intelligence systems in favor of human interests.

The moral of the story, then, is that when a society makes decisions in a mechanistic way, with deference to automated efficiency optimization and machine learning algorithms, it invites gaming and subversion by system hackers. And maybe it's just me, but when I look at how the world has changed in the last fifteen years, with the rise of the personal tracking devices that everyone willingly carries around in their pockets, stuffed with attention-harvesting algorithms, along with the inexorable corporatization of every aspect of society, I think maybe there is something to this moral.

Anyway, onto something more fun. Our third mission began on Anchorpoint, where the Harpo's Weyland-Yutani contact Ryan Middlebrook suddenly appeared and warned that something terrible was about to happen. He didn't look too healthy himself, pale and sweating, but he impressed the importance of leaving immediately. While rushing through the Anchorpoint port, a pair of xenomorphs appeared from the interior of the station, triggering a panic as they began efficiently slaughtering people, a bladed dance, whirling death machines. The Harpo successfully fled the station before a quarantine could be implemented. Ryan insisted on getting to the Core Systems world of Alexandria; once the course was set, he bedded himself down for cryosleep.

The five month voyage from Anchorpoint to Alexandria allowed plenty of time for news about the xenomorph infestation on Anchorpoint to spread, so although the Harpo faced no quarantine when leaving, it faced one upon arriving. However, Ryan used Weyland-Yutani codes to demand an exemption, so soon enough the Harpo was able to

land at a Weyland-Yutani lab down below. That is when Ryan's chest burst open with a xenomorph pupa, almost like I had timed it that way. The pupa, (more commonly known as a "chestburster"), killed one scientist outright and badly injured another before slithering off into the surrounding forest, and disappeared.

While attempting to hunt the xenomorph around the nearby city of Shekhinah, it became clear that the creature was able to reproduce parthenogenically. When the trail went cold, it was time to switch to a minigame I designed to simulate the collapse of civilization as the xenomorph presence spread. I gave the players control over Shekhinah forces such as police and marines, abstracted as dice pools. Each turn represented about eight hours. Every turn, the players had to choose how to distribute these forces amongst the regions of Shekhinah, and in the same amount of time I also had hidden rules governing how the xenomorphs could reproduce and spread.

I don't claim it's perfect, but it was fun and may be of interest, so I now present the minigame: The Fall of Shekhinah.

The Fall of Shekhinah

First, initialize the game as follows:

- * Shekhinah has four zones: North, South, East and West.
- * Each zone has four stats: Xenomorph Presence, Public Awareness, Public Panic, and Infrastructure Damage.
- * Each player starts with four dice worth of resources.

Then cycle through the following steps every shift:

1. Upkeep:

- * Each point of Xenomorph Presence may transfer to one of the other zones.
 - * However, if a zone has a queen, she can't move, and migrations may not reduce her zone's XP below 3.
- * Human characters may decide to sleep for the coming shift, and must do this once per day.
- * If it is day shift, and if the character is not sleeping, each human PC gains +2 resource dice and synthetics (eg Doc) gain +1. (This difference represents the distrust held towards synthetics. On the upside, synthetics don't need to sleep.)

2. Statements of intent: players take turns to allocate their resource units.

- * Available resources are at -1 during evening and morning shifts, and +2 during business hours. This is in addition to the increase of resources per day.
- * Resources may be allocated to either xeno search-and-destroy, public order, infrastructure repair, or R&D.
- * For each unit allocated, choose what zone it goes to (N, S, E or W.)
- * Sleeping characters cannot effectively marshal their forces, so the dice pool is halved (round down) for this shift.

3. Public Order:

- * Units allocated to public order reduce the zone's Public Panic by one each. There is no need to roll.
- * Of course, this does **not** reduce Public Awareness.

4. Infrastructure Repair:

- * Units allocated to infrastructure repair reduce the zone's Infrastructure Damage by one each. There is no need to roll.

5. Xeno Search-and-Destroy:

- * Roll a d6 per resource allocated, ***minus the zone's Infrastructure Damage***. (It is harder to search when the place is in ruins.)

- * Each 1 means your unit was clumsy and attracted attention to itself, raising Public Awareness in the zone by 1. "Why are all these police and helicopters around, something must be going on."
- * Each 6 means effective xeno detection:
 - * If Xeno Presence is currently 0, the GM will inform you that the zone is definitely clear ... for now.
 - * Otherwise, the GM rolls Xenomorph Presence for the zone:
 - * Each 1 means the xenos were clumsy so the squad made a successful attack, reducing Xenomorph Presence in the zone by 1.
 - * If there is a queen in the zone, she is always the last XP to be destroyed.
 - * Each 6 means the xenos successfully kill the unit which detected them, reducing the player's resource dice by one.
 - * Both of those results are capped by the number of detections.

6. Research and development:

- * Roll a d6 per unit, minus the zone's Infrastructure Damage.
- * Each 6 provides a Tech point that can be spent on perks (see below). These perks apply to everyone, as Tech points are shared.
 - * Each 1 increases Public Awareness in one location of the player's choice.
 - * (Optional) After doing research, if enough Tech points have been accumulated, these can now be spent.

7. Xenomorph Presence increases in each zone:

- * The number can double (or less), but increases the zone's Public Awareness 1-for-1, minus the zone's Public Panic. I.e. it's not possible for xenos to reproduce without abducting hosts, and this attracts notice; on the other hand, once people start rioting it helps xenos slip under the radar.
 - * If Xenomorph Presence is already two or greater, one of the available increases can be allocated to growing a queen.
 - * She takes longer to grow, so skips the entire next shift, being unable to contribute to hive growth or defense until mature.
 - * The benefit of a queen is realized in the next step: she allows harvesting the public when they grow complacent.
 - * Once each sector has a queen, and once total Xenomorph Presence exceeds 40, the queen in the largest nest will moult and become an empress.
 - * This requires one shift of inactivity by the moulting queen.
 - * The presence of an empress means game over for Shekhinah. The minigame is complete; you may drop to tactical time to see if your characters can navigate the ruins to escape before the planet is quarantined.

8. Roll Public Awareness. This is at -1 during evening and morning shifts and +2 during the day. It is also reduced by Infrastructure Damage, since people can't access media and telecommunications as easily to send and receive news.

- * Each 6 indicates a significant observation of xeno activity. Public Panic increases by one in this zone, and increases Public Awareness by one in **all** zones.
 - * Each 1 decreases Public Awareness. ****If there is a queen, these 1s convert to increased Xenomorph Presence without increasing Public Awareness.****

9. Check panic effects: each zone rolls a number of d6 equal to current Public Panic.

- * Each 6 increases Infrastructure Damage.
- * Each 1 reduces Public Panic by 1.

In the above cycle, steps two through six are mainly for the players and steps seven through nine are mainly for the GM.

We now look at the perks which can be purchased as a result of Research and Development. Each perk costs 5 Tech points times its own level, i.e. 5 Tech for level one, an additional 10 points to go from level one to level two, and so on.

These are the available perks:

- * Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance (ISR) upgrade: Whenever you roll your search and destroy dice, one of them can be re-rolled.
- * Defensive upgrade: Xenos need to roll an additional 6 in order to destroy a unit.
- * Offensive upgrade: Each time a unit reduces Xenomorph Presence, it reduces Xenomorph Presence by an additional 1.

As an aside, note that when we trialed these rules, I gave the first xenomorph a certain amount of plot armor. I reasoned that the first few times the police or other forces encounter a xenomorph, they will freak out and not be able to mount an effective attack. It takes time and experience for the search-and-destroy squads to build effective manoeuvres and confidence. This also ensures that you don't have an anticlimactic situation where no sooner do you start playing this minigame than some lucky shot kills the xenomorph before it can start reproducing.

This was the nature of the plot armor:

- * The first three times a xenomorph would otherwise be killed, the result is ignored due to the terrified squad freaking out and fumbling.
- * This plot armor wears off after 24 hours, which is enough time for units to develop tactical playbooks and psyche themselves up.

In other words, three lucky shots all in the first shift would be enough to penetrate the plot armor without waiting any longer, and a fourth shot would end the game. But if you don't get any shots at all, that's not a permanent barrier to effectiveness, you can begin functioning normally after three shifts have passed.

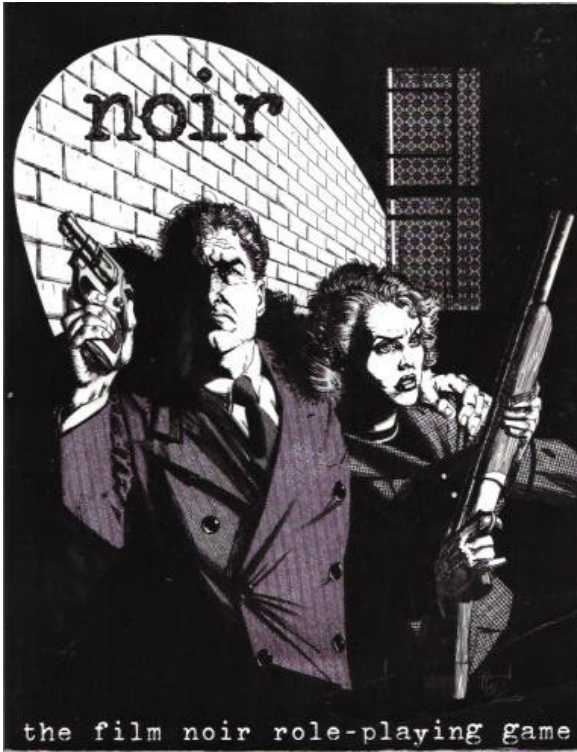
We found that the exponential growth rate of the xenomorphs resulted in some ridiculous dice pools which would be frustrating with physical dice; these rules were only able to function because I have software dice.

Allowing the players to trade off resources between xenomorph hunting, public order, research and infrastructure made for some interesting interpretations. When one of the players spent points on Public Order, there were jokes to be had about sending in the jackboots. Despite the levity, there was a real sense that hard decisions were being made about civil liberties, the threat of panic to infrastructure, and how these niceties should be weighed against a threat to millions of lives.



A LOST FAITH: A NOIR SCENARIO

By Tim Rice



Introduction

Noir: The Film Noir Roleplaying Game (which I'll just call *Noir* from now on) was a game which had a single print run in the mid-1990s, published by Archon Games with Lisa M Manns at the helm. I picked up *Noir* from a bargain bin when visiting Tasmania about 20 years ago, but never saw the opportunity to play it until recently. During the COVID years, my gaming group had become accustomed to purely online play (which favors games where pdfs are available.) However, in 2023 we agreed to get out of our latest comfort zones and meet up in person for the first time since 2020. To this end, it seemed best to focus on a one-shot scenario, and I took the opportunity to blow the dust off my old copy of *Noir*. At last, a chance to try out this intriguing game!

It is a relatively lightweight system with some similarities to its contemporary World of Darkness systems by White Wolf. The core mechanic of *Noir* is to roll a number of six-sided dice equal to Trait rank + Skill rank, add them together, and check if the sum surpasses a given Difficulty Number. The dice can "explode", i.e. any sixes contribute

to the sum, and are then re-rolled, allowing for occasional bursts of unexpectedly good results. In the 2020s, it's a bit more arithmetic than you would expect from a game called "lightweight," but for the 1990s *Noir* is decidedly on the lighter side of the crunchiness scale. There are five Traits (which other systems call abilities, attributes or stats), and there are nearly 50 skills with noir-themed names like "rattle" (for intimidation) and "shutterbug" (for photography.)

Interestingly, there doesn't seem to be any kind of "passive perception" skill, so when preparing and running the following scenario, I decided to lean on a concept I'd heard about in *Gumshoe*: always give the player-characters all the clues they need to keep advancing the plot. Assume competence, and don't leave up to chance what is required to keep the game moving. However, if players want *more* information than they strictly need, they can still use their skills to actively rustle up something extra.

The following scenario is designed to be run in a single session of a few hours. Rather than asking the GM to familiarize themselves with many NPCs, I'll focus on the narrative skeleton of the scenario, which is amenable to improvisation. The scenario is my first attempt to use a Jaquays design, i.e. always offer multiple ways forward, and each choice loops back to the others. While it assumes you have your own copy of *Noir*, the scenario could probably be adapted to other systems easily enough.

Noir leaves the place and time generic. However, not all players are comfortable with ambiguity, so before running the following scenario, it may pay to have a discussion with your group about whether a particular setting should be pinned down. I think the scenario can work in any USA city in the second half of the 20th century, although I'll just assume the game's default setting, called "The City." I assume cars and telephones are ubiquitous. Cellphones and computers may or may not be available, according to your tastes. Even if there are cellphones and computers, the internet is probably not widespread, and definitely not mobile.

Setup

Design note: To give the characters a reason to work together, we start by saying they all work for a small "grey" company called Troubleshooters Inc. There are some pre-generated characters in an appendix, but you could give your players the option of making some other character from scratch if their concept would fit in at Troubleshooters.

Start by reading this out to the players:

> The sign on the door to your office says:

>

> "TROUBLESHOOTERS PTY LTD: Private Investigations, Arbitration, Risk Management & Security Consultancy"

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> Sometimes that front even brings in legitimate business. Cheating spouses. Background checks. Debt collection. Patrol gigs. Audits. Such regular work doesn't pay the bills so well, but no one says it isn't nice cover.

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> But anyone in the know, knows that the sign is really a euphemism piñata.

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> Most of your income doesn't come from "troubleshooting" the boring problems of boring people. Instead, you have a certain reputation amongst the shadier elements of society. You're fixers, bounty-hunters, money-launderers, spies and thieves who can get pretty much any job done ... for the right price.

>

> Not that you agree to every job. You're not animals. You have a reputation for professionalism and honorable conduct. Your clients appreciate your even-handedness and level-headedness. And most of all, they appreciate your discretion.

>

> Example. Your most recent big score was last month. A Ghiloni family wiseguy suspected he had a rat on his crew. The cops kept showing up where they shouldn't be, and some lucrative games were disrupted. Naturally, he couldn't turn to anyone on the inside for help, he would've been eaten alive. So he came to you, hat in hand, with a couple of fat stacks in the hat.

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> Within a few days, you had a shortlist of his associates who didn't all seem to be on the up-and-up. Within a week you had recordings which proved one of them was an undercover cop who got in thanks to a reference from an informant. Within two weeks you not only had proof on these two guys, but also a second informant, and two unconnected guys who were spying for Lou Dewey, a psychopathic rival capo.

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> * Now, introduce yourselves.

> * Tell me about your office: where is it located, and what does it look like inside?

This Dame Walks Into My Office ...

Read something like this out to your players:

> You're in the office on a summer afternoon, orange light filtering in through the dusty windows, an old air conditioner clanking in the next room. You all know that the money from the Ghiloni job last month will run out sooner or later, so there is a vague sense that you should really find the next gig sometime soon. Hooch doesn't pay for itself, you know.

>

> You hear the bell on the front door tingle and a woman with shoulder-length wavy black hair pokes her head in, eyes wide and darting nervously around. Once her head is committed, the rest of her body follows. Her appearance is pastel: a tight hoodie the colour of cigarette smoke, business pants like dishwater, a purse too plain to be called beige, pale eyes in a paler face. The subtle creases around her lips and eyes put her at too old to be in her 30s, but the fit figure and glossy black hair are too young for 50.

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> She seems uncertain about how to proceed.

At this point, hand narrative control over to the player-characters. Presumably they will want to introduce themselves, draw her out of her shell, and get her to tell them what work she wants done. Focus on the roleplay here, try not to rely on the dice to decide what happens.

Once they get her talking, the woman makes the following information known:

* Name: Donna Basso (ni Vasquez); she still keeps her late husband's name (although you notice she isn't wearing a ring.)

* "Well, it's my brother you see. Emilio. He's gone missing, since a few weeks ago. And I get the feeling he was involved with some ... disreputable people. And the police are completely dismissing it."

* Emilio is, or was, the padre in a local parish, Iglesia Santo Sangre in El Barrio.

* Inspector Roy Tremblay at TCPD was looking into the disappearance, but then he started acting all cagey. He must be in on it!

* "I don't have much. This is half my life savings. I can give you the other half when you find out what happened to poor Emilio." She offers a stack that is decidedly thinner than what you got for the Ghiloni job, but hey, it's decent work that will pay the bills for a while longer.

* Here is a file with information about the case. It looks like that poor fool Emilio might have been in cahoots with the police and made some enemies. He was last seen walking home. Looking at Emilio's picture in the file, it would be a stretch to say he resembles his sister.

* Here is a phone number where you can contact Donna if you find something. She refuses to hand over an address. If pressed for an address, she'll say she's moving between motels since she's only in town for a little while to look for Emilio.

Do the characters take the gig? Of course they do.

Behind the Scenes

* "Donna" is actually an ambitious and corrupt police detective by the name of Marlene (Marl) Atgood.

- * She is looking for Emilio because he is in the bad books with a cartel. The cartel will give Marl a good payday for finding out where Emilio has disappeared to.
- * If Emilio is dead, she also has a vague plan for framing her superior, Inspector Roy Tremblay, for the murder. If Roy were out of the picture, she would be up for promotion.
- * Note that even if the players suspect something off about Donna, Marl will never overtly break character here. Even if she is outright accused of lying she will simply act upset and confused and deny everything.
- * The phone number Donna provides is registered with the TCPD ("The City Police Department".) This information can be provided if the Troubleshooters think to ask the phone company for a reverse-lookup. The phone company operator will be surprised that she is being asked about a police number.

****Design note:**** I wanted to give a nod to the "femme fatale" trope ubiquitous in the noir genre, while subverting and avoiding the trope's more sexist manifestations. While thinking about how to make this work, I got a picture in my mind of Ruth Wilson as Marisa Coulter in *His Dark Materials*. An ambiguous melange of maternalism, coldness, strength and sneakiness. So when roleplaying "Donna" in the Troubleshooters office, it may help to imagine Ruth Wilson trying to act like a boring mouse and yet somehow not quite pulling it off.

Down Three Dark Streets

Based on what Donna told them, the players will likely spot the three most obvious ways forward:

- * Go meet with Roy Tremblay to get his side of the story about why he stopped investigating Emilio's disappearance.
- * Go to Iglesia Santo Sangre to begin an independent investigation into what happened to Emilio.
- * Tail Donna.

All three can be done in basically any order, although the option to tail Donna may be lost if it isn't taken immediately, since she never handed over an address, only a phone number. Be prepared for the characters to split up, with one or two of them tailing Donna while the rest go follow the other two leads.

Roy Story

Roy is easy to find but doesn't necessarily make himself available to everyone who just wanders by without a good reason. He has a secretary, whom my players dubbed Roxie to rhyme with Moxie, and Roxie acts as Roy's gatekeeper.

Roxie knows everything about the Emilio case, so she'll be happy to triage the characters through to Roy as soon as they state their business. After all, if someone is really doing an independent investigation into Emilio's disappearance, Roy definitely wants to know about it as soon as possible.

Whereas, if the Troubleshooters try acting coy, Roxie will stonewall them. "Sorry, Inspector Tremblay is not available right now. If you leave a number, I'll file it in the right place and he'll get back to you at a time he finds convenient."

Assuming they get past Roxie (simply by being honest) the first meeting with Roy can take place.

- * Roy is tall, thin, wears a nice dark suit, tidily-cut black hair and thin-rimmed spectacles. His blue eyes are clear and sharp. His general demeanor is someone who is clever, disciplined, and plays his cards close to his chest.

* In this discussion, he has a motivation: get as much information from the Troubleshooters as possible without giving too much away. They think they are there to question him, but it's a two-way street. He isn't passive or naive, he's smart and knows how to run an interrogation, and you should roleplay Roy as easily turning the tables on the Troubleshooters. After all, he has probably heard rumors of their clandestine activities, so it would be easy for him to hint about causing trouble for them if they don't play ball. However, he would prefer to avoid playing hardball while more subtle avenues remain.

* If the Troubleshooters try being evasive, he'll spot it a mile away. "You're not being honest with me. If you aren't willing to talk, then why are you here?"

* Once the Troubleshooters mention Donna, Roy will let slip a certain amount of confusion and curiosity. "Wait, Emilio has a *sister*?"

* Roy admits the investigation isn't closed, but he makes an excuse like "One missing person needs to be weighed against all the bad things that happen in this city. Do *you* think I should keep chasing after this one priest who is probably just on vacation somewhere, when I've got a queue of unsolved murders that keeps growing every day?"

* When Roy talks about the Emilio case, he does seem to act cagey, which is consistent with Donna said. He is definitely hiding something, but it isn't possible to pin him down on a lie. In fact, he tries to avoid lying, preferring to simply be evasive and turn any questions around to point at the other person. He really doesn't want anyone to find out what happened to Emilio, and he really wants to know what everyone else knows about it.

Behind the Scenes

Roy knows what happened to Emilio, because Roy made it happen. It wasn't anything bad, quite the opposite. Emilio was going to get whacked for opposing the cartel. Convincing youths to avoid a life of crime, while passing on confessions and other reports of illegal activity to the police, turned out to not be good ways to befriend the cartel. So when Emilio got in touch saying that he thought the cartel was onto him and would kill him soon, Roy arranged witness protection.

Roy will do anything to protect his witness. Roy isn't rigid about the law and he's not perfect, but he believes in preparing solid cases for decisive prosecutions, which requires a general level of firmness and honesty. He is okay with being a little dishonest about the Emilio case only because the ends justify the means; in Roy's mind, if Emilio were discovered and killed, it would be a huge setback in the cold war against the cartel.

Roy understands Marl is cold and ambitious, but he doesn't suspect that she is in the pay of the cartel. In fact, he's been thinking about applying to go to the FBI, and he was going to recommend that she be promoted to replace him. If he ever finds out that in fact she is corrupt and was planning to frame him for murder, he would be both devastated and furious (but even then he would quickly try to recover his cool and simply pursue a vigorous prosecution against her, only resorting to violence if physical self-defense became necessary.)

Once the Troubleshooters leave his office, you can assume that Roy would initiate a surveillance program against them. They never notice anything, but you can use this as an excuse to introduce police interference later if it seems appropriate to the narrative.

A Proxy for Faith

Iglesias Santo Sangre is a cheap building made from concrete, wood and plaster, protected by a tin roof on top and steel bars on the windows. The front door is open, however.

The church may or may not be under surveillance by the police and/or cartel; play it by ear and possibly make the information optional, depending on how the Troubleshooters are fairing and what questions they ask.

As you step into the cool, shadowy interior, you see someone in priest garments with brown-ish skin and a dark goatee talking to a group of youths, boys in their mid-teens. He looks away from the conversation to give you an appraising look as you enter. He says something quietly to the youths, possibly in Spanish. They smirk and nod and file out, giving you cool interested looks as they go.

* "Welcome to Iglesias Santo Sangre. I am Padre Juan Perez. How may I serve the Lord for you today?"

* You notice some tattoos are trying to escape from his clerical outfit, solid blue-green tendrils of ink peeking from out of his sleeves and shirt collar. You would need to see the whole tattoo to be sure, but something about the color and shape of what you can see gives off cartel vibes. If questioned about this, he'll admit we all do things in our youth that might be frowned on later, and he is fortunate to have been chosen to do something more with his life.

* "Oh yes, Emilio Vasquez. Very sad, him disappearing like that. Unfortunately, the business of the Lord sometimes requires those who seek a better world to be at odds with those who are happy with the status quo."

* "I was stationed in La Cuidad, down in Colombia. When the church got news of Emilio's disappearance, orders came down that I should make my way here pronto. It has been interesting adapting to life in USA, but I see much potential in my new community."

* "There's no rectory here, the church gives us a stipend to help us rent somewhere. No, I live somewhere different to him. Here is his address."

* "Yes, feel free to look around Iglesias Santo Sangre, and of course, we'll get in touch if we hear anything. Emilio's poor sister, not having any closure like that must be terrible."

* Three of the youths are still outside the back of the church, talking amongst each other and horsing around as teenage boys do.

* Names: Carlos Hernandez, Gustavo Ramirez and Ignacio Cruz.

* They are street-smart and will act dumb and non-chalant at first, but will drop hints that they could be bribed. "Oh, we're so poor mister. How can we remember anything with our bellies rumbling like this?"

* With escalating bribes, they can be coaxed to reveal as much as they know about the former padre, which isn't that much really. "That padre, he was okay to us, but he didn't know how to get along with certain people, you know? Nice ... but naive."

* "And he spoke to the wrong other sort of people. He was friendly with the cops. Did you know that not everyone likes cops? Strange but true. What me, no, I never get in trouble, what are you trying to say? The cops are nothing to me personally."

* "So the cartel got mad. Now he's gone. Who can say what happened? One day he was here doing the Lord's work, the next day he was gone, and the day after that Padre Perez shows up. Life is full of mysteries."

The address provided by Padre Perez matches the one in Donna's file. If investigated, it is a single-storey house with a private backyard. No one is around, and no one is inside.

If entered (eg lockpicking or other breaking-and-entering) it looks clean. The drawers in the bedroom are out and empty, and toiletries from the bathroom are missing. The refrigerator is still running, but the milk inside is spoiled.

Behind the Scenes

The cartel know that they weren't the ones who "disappeared" Emilio, therefore they suspect he is in witness protection. The new padre works for the cartel directly; they chose him with the expectation that he will take control of the situation. He does actually have formal clerical training, but unlike Emilio he didn't take it seriously. He's all too happy to just use it as a cover while helping the cartel. He also knows that "Donna" is just a cover for a corrupt cop, so he fully supports the Troubleshooters' investigation. He wants the Troubleshooters to find Emilio so that the cartel can exact an appropriate revenge on the rat.

The youths are not (yet) directly working for the cartel, but Juan Perez will certainly try to guide them in that direction. They have had rough backgrounds, but while under Emilio's guidance, they were on the path to finishing highschool, going to college and becoming upstanding law-abiding tax payers. That will probably change now.

Emilio's house is intended to seem like he left in a relatively orderly manner, but never-the-less in a bit of a hurry. This should strengthen suspicions that he's actually still alive somewhere.

A Woman's Secret

If Donna isn't immediately tailed after she leaves the Troubleshooters' office, it might still be possible to tail her later. For example, the Troubleshooters might call her phone number and convince her to have another meeting. She'll be open to this if she thinks they have information to share with her.

In keeping with the Gumshoe philosophy that all essential clues should be provided without contest, you can simply allow the Troubleshooters to succeed at the tail if you think they could use more clues. Alternatively, if you want to ratchet up the tension, you can run this with a series of checks using the Tail skill. Use a couple of "clocks" (ala Blades In The Dark) in the following way:

- * Draw two circles, each divided into four segments. One clock is called Progress and the other is called Spotted.
- * Each time the driver's Tail check succeeds (Difficulty 15), Donna gets closer to her destination without realizing she is being followed. Mark one segment on the progress clock.
- * Each time the driver's Tail check fails, they can still mark a segment on the progress clock, at the cost that they also mark a segment on the spotted clock. If they don't want to pay that cost, they lose sight of Donna and the chase is over.
- * Once all four segments have been marked on the spotted clock, it means the tail has been spotted. The destination will change to a motel, consistent with Donna's story. If the Troubleshooters confront her here, she'll act scared and confused.
- * Once all four segments have been marked on the progress clock, "Donna" pulls up at TCPD, goes inside, and disappears.
- * If she is followed in, the police will seem confused if the Troubleshooters ask for "Donna." Depending on the Troubleshooters' line of questioning, the police may admit that they saw Marl just come in and head to her office.

Smelling A Rat

In our playthrough, the above leads took a couple of hours to work through. Treating this as a one-shot, it's time to start wrapping up.

The players should be ready to draw at least the following conclusions:

* Not only is Emilio alive, but he is also in witness protection. (This conclusion should be clear based on Emilio angering the cartel, Roy's evasiveness, and the orderly disposition of Emilio's house.)

* Donna is a cover to help the cartel find Emilio. (This conclusion is based on her lack of resemblance to Emilio and that Emilio is in witness protection.)

Depending on how things went, it's possibly not yet clear at this point that "Donna" is a crooked cop. Still, there is enough to keep moving forward without that understanding. At this point, the Troubleshooters need to make a decision about how to proceed.

Siding Against The Cartel

The Troubleshooters decide that they don't like the idea of the cartel finding and killing someone who is basically just a nice guy trying to make the world better. There are at least a couple of different ways this can play out, with different possible consequences.

* The team could simply renege on the job, handing back their initial retainer. This would probably not be a death sentence, since they took the job under false pretences. "If you'd told us what the job really was, we wouldn't have taken it. We'll keep our mouth shut, but we're not going to keep working with people who lie to us." It's plausible that the cartel would consider this a reasonable position and won't press the matter. You might hint that the cartel just finds someone else to do it instead, so Emilio ends up dead anyway, but at least Troubleshooters kept their hands clean.

* The Troubleshooters could take everything they know to Roy. If they have evidence of Marl's corruption, Roy will be extremely interested to hear it and will do his best to protect the party and ensure they get a reward. This is certainly a death sentence though. In addition to the cartel, it may earn the ire of other criminal organizations who might be afraid of the Troubleshooters ratting them out. Still, it's the best option if the people at the table like to play good guys.

Siding With The Cartel

* Once the Troubleshooters realize they are being played by the cartel, it would be reasonable to re-negotiate the job. It's up to the players to think of this though.

* If it were possible to find Emilio using data logged in the police system, Marl would have found it already. Therefore, the only conclusion is that Roy has taken a very close interest in Emilio's case and is handling it personally. Although Roy doesn't suspect Marl, he is conscious of the possibilities of corruption. Therefore, he tries to keep Emilio off the books as much as possible.

* Since it was a one-shot and my players sided with Roy against Marl and the cartel, nothing was decided about what would happen next. If I was carrying it over into a second session with players who want to walk a darker path, I would probably set it up so that Roy has a small holiday house somewhere, which is where he has stashed Emilio until something better can be arranged. The Troubleshooters would then need to do a more thorough investigation of Roy to learn about the location of the holiday house. This would possibly introduce new entanglements due to some other faction also keeping tabs on Roy, and/or it may lead to a violent showdown at a scenic location.

Appendix One: Sample Player-Characters

We leave the characters unnamed so that the players can quickly customize them at the start of the scenario.

Unnamed Grifter

Concept: You tried being an upstanding pillar of the community, once, but you could never stop noticing all the opportunities that others miss. Why not lean into your strengths? (This character is loosely based on Saul Goodman in the Breaking Bad franchise.)

Moxie: 1

Schticks: Grifter: 2 Lawyer: 1

Primary Traits: Brawn 1 Guts 3 Moves 3 Savvy 4 Smarts 1

Secondary Traits Reflexes 2 Toughness 2 Body 16

Pros Charm (Grifter edge) Gut Feeling (Lawyer edge) Lucky 2 (6) Member in Good Standing (5)

Cons Bad Rep (-5) Weasel (-5)

Skill	Trait	Rank	Total
Acting	Savvy	1	5
Carousing	Savvy	1	5
Dodge	Moves	1	4
Forgery	Smarts	2	3
Haggle	Savvy	3	7
Law	Smarts	1	2
Leadership	Savvy	1	5
Legwork	Smarts	2	3
Local	Smarts	1	2
Manners	Savvy	1	5
Paper-pushing	Smarts	1	2
Search	Smarts	1	2
Seduction	Savvy	1	5
Smooth Talk	Savvy	2	6
Street Smarts	Savvy	2	6

Gear: Games of Chance (Marked & Straight), Fake Credentials, Disguise Kit, Fake Credentials, Various Costumes, Briefcase, Business cards, Law Books, Suits, Office, Degrees & Certificates

Unnamed Private Eye

Concept: Once upon a time you were a cop who was pressured into participating in corruption. Disillusioned, you've moved to the private sector. But are things really any better here? (This character is loosely based on Mike Ehrmantraut in the _Breaking Bad_ franchise.)

Moxie: 1

Schticks: Cop: 1 Private Investigator: 1

Primary Traits

Brawn Guts Moves Savvy Smarts

2 4 3 3 2

Secondary Traits

Reflexes Toughness Body

3 3 30

Pros: Straight Faced (Cop edge), Sharp Eye (Private Investigator edge), Combat Reflexes (10), Thick-Skinned (15)
Cons: Dependent (-10), Ethics (-10), Stone-Faced (-10)

Skill	Trait	Rank	Total
Armed (Blunt)	Moves	1	4
Pistol	Moves	2	5
Rifle	Moves	1	4
Shotgun	Moves	1	4
Unarmed	Moves	1	4
Doc	Smarts	1	3
Dodge	Moves	1	4
Grease Monkey	Smarts	1	3
Grill	Savvy	1	4
Law	Smarts	1	3
Leadership	Savvy	1	4
Leadfoot	Moves	1	4
Legwork	Smarts	2	4
Local	Smarts	1	3
Lockpicking	Moves	1	4
Rattle	Guts	1	5
Tail	Savvy	2	5
Writer	Smarts	0	1

Gear: Handcuffs, Nightstick, Pistol, Stationery

Unnamed Hitman

Concept: You've been trying to avoid the consequences of your past decisions, but you'd be dumb to think you can run forever.

Moxie: 1

Schticks: Torpedo: 3, Troubleshooter: 1

Primary Traits: Brawn 2 Guts 3 Moves 3 Savvy 2 Smarts 2

Secondary Traits: Reflexes 3 Toughness 3 Body 20

Pros: Combat Reflexes (Torpedo edge), Jack-of-all-trades (Troubleshooter edge)

Cons: Dark Secret (-10)

Skill	Trait	Rank	Total
Armed (Edged)	Moves	3	6
Pistol	Moves	3	6
Rifle	Moves	3	6
Unarmed	Moves	3	6
Dodge	Moves	3	6
Filch	Moves	1	4
Grease Monkey	Smarts	1	3
Hide	Savvy	1	3

Leadfoot	Moves	1	4
Legwork	Smarts	1	3
Smooth Talk	Savvy	1	3
Sneak	Moves	1	4
Street Smarts	Savvy	1	3
Tail	Savvy	3	5

Gear: Various weapons and cases for them, Gloves, Trenchcoat, Toolkit, Car

Unnamed Troubleshooter

Concept: You're the hub of this operation, but your ambitions are so much greater.

Moxie: 1

Schticks: Troubleshooter: 3

Primary Traits: Brawn 2 Guts 3 Moves 3 Savvy 2 Smarts 2

Secondary Traits: Reflexes 3 Toughness 3 Body 20

Pros: Jack-of-all-Trades (Troubleshooter edge)

Skill	Trait	Rank	Total
Pistol	Moves	2	5
Unarmed	Moves	1	4
Egghead	Smarts	2	4
Filch	Moves	1	4
Haggle	Savvy	2	4
Leadership	Savvy	1	3
Legwork	Smarts	2	4
Lockpicking	Moves	3	6
Paper-pushing	Smarts	1	3
Rattle	Guts	1	4
Sneak	Moves	3	6
Street Smarts	Savvy	3	5

Gear: Stationery, Pistols, Toolkit

Appendix Two: Primary NPCs

Marl Atwood

Concept: An ambitious police detective in TCPD's Criminal Investigations Unit.

Moxie: 1

Schticks: Cop: 1, G-Man: 1

Primary Traits: Brawn 1 Guts 4 Moves 3 Savvy 3 Smarts 2

Secondary Traits: Reflexes 3 Toughness 3 Body 20

Pros: John Q Law (Cop edge), Straight Faced (G-Man edge), Jack-of-all-Trades (15)

Cons: Short Fuse (-5)

Skill	Trait	Rank	Total
Pistol	Moves	1	4
Shotgun	Moves	1	4
Unarmed	Moves	1	4
Acting	Savvy	1	4
Grill	Savvy	1	4
Law	Smarts	2	4
Legwork	Smarts	2	4
Local	Smarts	1	3
Paper-pushing	Smarts	1	3
Search	Smarts	1	3
Tail	Savvy	1	4

Gear: Badge, Flashlight, Handcuffs, Nightstick, Sidearm, Squad Car, Uniform, Dark Glasses, Shotgun, Suit
Roy Tremblay

Concept: A clever and relatively honest inspector in charge of Criminal Investigations in TCPD.

Moxie: 0

Schticks: Cop: 1, G-Man: 1

Primary Traits: Brawn 2 Guts 3 Moves 3 Savvy 2 Smarts 4

Secondary Traits: Reflexes 2 Toughness 3 Body 20

Pros: John Q Law (Cop edge), Boss (G-Man edge), ack-of-all-Trades (15)

Skill	Trait	Rank	Total
Pistol	Moves	1	4
Unarmed	Moves	1	4
Egghead	Smarts	1	5
Law	Smarts	1	5
Leadership	Savvy	1	3
Legwork	Smarts	1	5
Local	Smarts	1	5
Manners	Savvy	1	3
Paper-pushing	Smarts	1	5
Search	Smarts	1	5
Street Smarts	Savvy	1	3
Tail	Savvy	1	3

Gear: Badge, Flashlight, Handcuffs, Firearms, Car, Dark Glasses, Suit

WEREKIN FOR TUNNELS & TROLLS

By Karl Brown

This article presents weretigers, werewolves, and werebears as player character options for the Deluxe Edition of Tunnels & Trolls (DT&T). They are presented as Kindred and as optional Types.

A little history

In the popular 5th edition of Tunnels & Trolls (T&T) shapeshifting werekin were presented as a common PC option right alongside humans, elves, dwarves, fairies, hobbs, and leprechauns. The inclusion of werewolves and other shapeshifters was one of the things that made Tunnels & Trolls different from other fantasy games on the market. Disappointingly, in the latest Deluxe edition of the game werekin are no longer a standard kindred. This article restores Werekin as player characters.

Werekin Kindred

The Elaborations section of the DT&T book adds a lot of non-core kindred including werewolves (DT&T p183, 199-200). This article fleshes out werewolves and adds tigers and bears.

Werekin are humans able to shape shift into one form of normal animal. Wolves, bears, and tigers were the forms detailed in the 5th edition. Werekin are all 'human' never other kin. In human form werekin look totally normal but may combine features within the human range reminiscent of their animal form. For example: A weretiger might be a bronzed athletic redhead, a werewolf may have a rangy build and have thick prematurely grey hair, and a werebear could be tall and powerfully built.

Werekin change only into pure animals never a half-beast form. PC werekin are of breeds that have no special vulnerability to silver, nor any special protection against regular weapons or regeneration. The bite of a werekin is not infectious. There are evil monstrous versions of some werekin that do have adverse reactions to silver and have regeneration (DT&T200), such creatures may not be PCs. Unlike the werekins of 5th edition their clothes and gear conveniently vanish when they change into a beast and magically return when they change back.

Attributes: Werewolf attribute multipliers for wolf forms are given in DT&T (p183). Tigers and bears are added here. Level is determined by the highest attribute in either form.

	STR	CON	DEX*	LK	IQ	WIZ	CHR*	Hght*	Wght
Human-form	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Tiger	3.5	3.5	1	0.67	0.75	1	1	1	2.5
Wolf	2	3	1	0.67	0.75	1	1	1	1.1
Bear	3.5	3.5	1	0.67	0.75	1	1	1.5	4

*In animal form is limited by manual DEX0 for paws. Personal Adds and spell minimums are always calculated from full DEX not limited DEX for manual dexterity. Charisma is x1 or x1.5 if known to be a werekin in either form (and calculating spell effects). Hght for tigers and wolves is actually body length without tail. Remember SPD is always x1.

These adjustments to attributes are calculated once at first level, increases to abilities from experience (or other means) are applied equally to both sets of scores. Where an attribute has two values use the mean average to determine AP needed to advance. For example, Wyldar Vulfgard is created with a human ST of 14 so his wolf form has ST 28 (double initial human ST). Mean ST21. After delving into the Maw of Terror dungeon Wyldar amasses 210 AP enough to raise ST by 1. Wyldar's human ST becomes 15 and his wolf form is ST29 (not ST30, double 15).

The easy way to track the two forms is to use two character sheets.

Shape change: The transformation is fairly swift but still counts as the character's action for the round in combat. In animal form, werekin also have all the abilities and limitations of the form including natural weapons, armour, flight, swimming etc. When changing between forms if wounded the amount of damage taken remains the same. In some instances, returning to human form while wounded could result in death. Cannot cast spells while in animal form.

Weretiger: Bite and claw: in animal form can bite for 6d or claw for 4d. The usual rules for multiple weapon attacks apply. Both are Min. STR 11, Min DEX 3. Speed F: in animal form (DT&T page 185).

Werewolf Bite: in animal form can bite for 4d, Min STR6, Min DEX3. Speed F: in animal form (DT&T page 185). Fur: in animal form provides warmth and 2 hits of armour

Werbear Bite and claw: in animal form can bite for 7d or claw for 5d. The usual rules for multiple weapon attacks apply. A bear with sufficient STR and DEX can attack with a bite and 2 claws but not 4 claws. Both are Min. STR 11, Min DEX 3. Fur: in animal form provides warmth and 5 hits of armour

Werekin Types

Kindred can have their own Types instead of taking one of the core Types. This idea is mentioned in the core book but not developed beyond a Type for leprechauns. Under this optional rule if your kindred is any kind of non-human you kindred is also your Type but these can be as diverse as human Types. By choosing languages, talents, height, weight, age, equipment, and spells you can create all kinds of concepts including weretiger pirates or burglars, werbear beekeepers or rangers, werewolf berserkers or assassins etc.

As a Type werekin are good offensive fighters but poor on defence. One less obvious advantage is how the low required STR and DEX for natural weapons interact with the multiple weapons rules. For multiple attacks use whatever rules options your table uses for attacking with two weapons. However, they lack the armour protection of a properly trained warrior. As compensation they have skills useful outside of combat and can learn spells.

Skills common to all werekin types

Talent: can speak the low tongue of their animal form in either form (Blood Speech for tigers and wolves, Ursian for bears (DT&T page 202)).

Weapon use. Personal Adds and spell minimums are always calculated from full DEX not limited DEX for manual dexterity. In either form +1d damage every even level with melee weapons (including claws and other natural weapons).

Untrained spellcasting: as for Civilian (DT&T page 177).

Flexibility of Type: as for rogue at 7th except to become a wizard the werekin must know at least one spell (DT&T page 17) and loses Untrained spellcasting if they become a Wizard.

Weretiger type skills

Talents: Hunting, keen hearing, and low light vision all of which can be used in either form.

Werewolf type skills

The werewolf is a weaker combatant than the other werekin but is an excellent investigator and tracker.

Talents: Extra talents of hunting and wolf's nose all of which can be used in either form. The latter is used to detect, find, identify, or track by smell.

Talent bonus: +7 where the wolf's nose talent applies in either form.

Werebear type skills

Werebears are the most combat oriented of the werekin.

Talents: Berserker, survival one terrain, and bear's nose all of which can be used in either form. The latter is used to detect, find, identify, or track by smell.

Other werekin

Scanning through various myths from around the world and found a surprising number of shape shifter types. In western mythology we imagine were wolves, bears, and boars most often but there are rarer shape shifters who take the forms of ravens, seals (selkies), swans (swan-may) in occidental myths. In the east there are also 'werekin' including the hengeyokai who have many types including carp, cat, crane, dog, duck, fox, hares, monkey, rat, and sparrow. Looking south we find those who can become evil hyenas, proud elephants, as well as noble lions and leopards. All these types are only those I found in a couple of hours; there are bound to be many more examples. In short, almost any kind of natural animal could be found as a were. I personally limit werekin to vertebrates. You can create kindred and types for these werekin if you want.

For those still playing T&T 5th edition RPG Review issues 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 31, 41, and 45 provides a bestiary and other items for that edition. rules for a great variety of werekin in that edition. In those articles '#' indicates a creature suitable for use as a PC werekin.

Farzon the Red, Weretiger pirate

A newly created weretiger character for Deluxe Tunnels & Trolls. As per the Deluxe rules though newly created his high attributed in tiger form grant him 4th level.

Farzon is an athletic young man from a poor background he owns little more than the clothes on his back but desires the wine and debauchery wealth can bring. So, he signed the articles and joined the crew of the Sea Hag a feared pirate ship. Recently, the ship was sunk and Farzon was washed ashore with little more than his sword. Piracy has not brought the riches he sought. Perhaps plundering ancient tombs is worth a try.

Kindred weretiger. Level 4. Character Type Weretiger. Gender Male. Age 18.

Abilities: Weapon use +2d already added, Shape change 1 action, Untrained spellcasting but does not yet know any spells.

Talents: Claw/Claw/Bite*, Keen Hearing, Low Light Vision, Marine Knowledge.

As a man...

Height 6' 1". Weight 201 lbs. Hair short, red, and greased into spikes. Money 3 gold

STR 13, CON 12, DEX 11, SPD 14, LK 10, IQ 9, WIZ 8, CHA 11 or 16 if known to be a weretiger. Personal Adds +3. WT. Possible 1300 units. WT Carried 245 units. Languages: Trade, Native, Blood Speech. Equipment light shirt worn open roguishly, light trousers, simple pack, hunk of cheese and a ship's biscuit, (total 200 units) pouch containing 3gp (5)

Small Scimitar (Sabre) 37 units, STR8 DEX8 3d+2d+3.

As a tiger...

Length snout to rump 6'1". Weight 502 lbs. Hair short orange fur with black stripes. Money 0.

STR 45, CON 42, DEX 11, SPD 14, LK 7, IQ 7, WIZ 8, CHA 11 or 16 if known to be a weretiger. Personal Adds +35.

WT Possible 4500 units. WT Carried 0 units.

Languages can only speak Blood Speech. Extra Ability. Speed F.

Bite STR11 DEX3 6d+2d+35

Claw STR11 DEX3 4d+2d+35

Claw/Claw/Bite STR33 DEX9 14d+6d+35.

*House rule: every multi-attack combination requires a talent. No more than 3 attacks allowed.



RPGaDAY 2022

With Lev Lafayette, Andrew Daborn, and Jason Durall

From: <https://www.autocratik.com/>

RPGaDAY 2022

Now in its 9th Year, #RPGaDAY hopes to get people talking in a positive way about tabletop roleplaying games. For each day in August, use the prompt to inspire a blog, vlog, or social media post to celebrate everything great about our hobby with the tag #RPGaDAY2022

www.autocratik.com www.castingshadowsblog.com

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1 - Who would you like to introduce to RPGs?

Lev: People who spend their time playing either sportsball or online games. Whilst I really get a desire for physical coordination and athleticism, I find the nasty, competitive culture around sportsball to be toxic. In contrast, the antagonist player in RPGs, the GM, is more of a challenging storyteller where the players, in a more intimate environment, learn the virtues of cooperation. With regard to online games, no matter how well-developed, this will invariably lack the diversity, exploration, and imagination that a group of real humans can generate. I'm a bit of an RPG advocate when it comes to different types of entertainment.

Andrew: I would like to see more of my friends playing. I think of TTRPGs as a fun something half way between watching a movie with friends, with the interactivity of board games. I have friends this will appeal to.

Jason: For that, I'd have to say my daughter Eden, because I have had such a rich and rewarding life through them, and made so many wonderful friends and been offered so many amazing opportunities. I literally owe my current life to my love of RPGs.

2 - What is a great introductory RPG?

Lev: I did consider Fate, as a mechanically-consistent and narrative-orientated game (with Fate points by invoking Aspects), but ultimately I lean towards GURPS 3rd edition, revised, in the right hands. People may think it's detailed, but once one has passing familiarity with the system I can design a character in just a few minutes. Everything on the character sheet is quite descriptive and intuitive; I remember a novice gamers from many years ago declaring it was the first RPG character sheet that they could understand by just looking at it; there was no "arcane language". The mechanics do have a little bit of crunch to them, but they're reality-checked as well. It's a shame the magic system is so dull; for something far more evocative I invariably look towards RuneQuest, especially third edition. A mash-up between the three systems would be pretty awesome.

Andrew: In my experience running introductory games I always fear losing people on rule systems that require much effort to learn, even if I'm taking the brunt of the system mastery. I prefer a simple to learn system with easy to grasp core concept - "What am I supposed to be doing?" Powered by the Apocalypse games were a great gateway into the hobby for folks with their simple core mechanic and a strongly themed character sheet with all you need to know written on it. I'm also a big fan of micro RPGs as intro games. It's hard to get simpler than Lasers and Feelings and most people grasp the tropes of a satirical space opera.

Jason: I am going to have to say Call of Cthulhu (ideally, a modern setting). Horror speaks to everyone, and the rules system is intuitive enough to be largely invisible in play. Everyone can immediately step into the shoes of a normal person, with relatable hopes, dreams, and fears, and the experience of cosmic horror speaks even more than ever to our existence.

3 - When were you first introduced to RPGs?

Lev: I think I've pretty well explored this in previous RPGaDays, but it was when I was thirteen at junior high-school and some people in the grade higher were playing an RPG at the school library at lunchtime. They told me "it is like Dungeons & Dragons", which, if I recall correctly, I had heard about but didn't really know about. Several months later, after having purchased the Moldvay and Cook Dungeons & Dragons Basic and Expert sets and really taking a deep dive into the hobby during school holidays, I discovered (via a borrowed book) that they'd actually been playing RuneQuest.

Andrew: I got into them on my own aged around 9 with the Fighting Fantasy game books. After exhausting my regional libraries of game books I brought Dungeoneer, the Advanced Fighting Fantasy book. Sadly I didn't yet have a group to play it with but I read it avidly. Shortly after getting to high school I discovered the wargames group through my love of Games Workshop and joined in a short but instructive game of Warhammer Fantasy RolePlay 1e. We all died in gruesome traps. Happy days.

Jason: I was a pre-teen living in Kent, Washington, and was hanging with a friend in my neighborhood when we noticed a group of neighbors doing something in their front-yard rock garden involving pieces of paper and books. We went over to ask and learned they were playing D&D (Holmes Basic, for the hardcore reading this), using their rock

garden as the terrain. They invited us to join in. 40-something years later, substituting a rock garden for a beergarden, I am doing much the same thing.

4 - Where would you host a first game?

Lev: Public libraries or other venues managed by local councils in this city have very inexpensive rooms for hire and good kitchen facilities as well, often in interesting and historic buildings. I think that they're good venues, especially for newcomers or for clubs. Whilst there is the tradition of people's homes, that can be a bit daunting for some people and downright awkward if people don't get along for whatever reason and is best left until a group knows that they get along. A neutral and public space provides legitimacy and a sense of security.

Andrew - I haven't played outdoors much. TTRPGs might work well with picnics, as long as there is something hard to write on, a box to roll dice into and very little breeze...

Jason: Ideally, someone's home, with comfortable seating and even some good (but not obtrusive) background music. I'd try not to go for a public place, just to make sure the newcomer isn't feeling self-conscious. Start with a nice meal - a sharing of food - and then segue into gaming.

5 - Why will they like this game?

Lev: As with any social event the people are the primary reason that an occasion is likable. But there are other vectors as well; and I think the location and general environment helps a great deal as well (hence my answer to question 4). The setting, narrative, characters, and theme of an RPG scenario makes the story. A familiar, but slightly exotic setting provides comfort but interest, a narrative which draws people in, characters that the players can identify with, and themes that challenge but emphasise the cooperative side of RPGs will all contribute to a gaming session that brings people and wanting more.

Andrew - Good points. In addition the interactive nature of most RPGs is not like much else we experience outside of 'lets pretend' games and drama classes.

Jason: I'm assuming this refers to the prior entries, where I brought up Call of Cthulhu as my default newcomer-friendly game.

First off, I would match the game to the player, so I would not try to force cosmic horror onto someone who was up for something lighthearted, or if they wanted to kick some monsters in a Tolkienesque setting.

I think the qualities that make Call of Cthulhu one of the biggest games outside of D&D are self-evident:

1. Percentile-based systems are intuitive for new players, as well as for veteran ones. There's no ambiguity in "You have a 50% chance of success."
2. The setting is one that is open to lighthearted scares, weird mystery, or straight-out monster-fighting. It's a buffet... pick what you want and leave the rest.
3. Characters in Call of Cthulhu are normal people doing the right thing when facing situations beyond their ability and perhaps beyond human understanding. This is as catchy a hook as they come.
4. You can run Call of Cthulhu as one-shots where everyone dies in an epic fashion, in a true horror-movie style, or as sequential campaigns where fighting the good fight is possible, and even survivable.
5. It might just be my experience, but horror games generally bring out better roleplaying and less tomfoolery than fantasy, sci-fi, etc. For a newcomer, that can be a blessing to not have to deal with backstabbing, etc.

6. Whomever you are, there is something to find enjoyable in horror gaming, and it's not part of some thinly disguised version of colonialism, you're not usually dealing with unfortunate genre tropes, and in a modern setting, sexism/racism/etc. are less prevalent.

6 - How would you get more people playing RPGs?

Lev: Connections to popular culture have certainly helped; plenty of new people have come in via "Stranger Things" or old-hands have returned. Then there's RPGs based on popular films or even computer games (e.g., "Dune", "Alien", "Skyrim"). These widen the scope of players, but really I'd also like to see better, more intensive playing and players.

Andrew: There is a huge amount of awareness of RPGs nowadays. They are on the cusp of the mainstream culture. Marvel are bringing out a new supers RPG to emulate their hugely successful franchise. I think if the game is pitched right and has enough promotion into the mainstream there could be a huge untapped market for it.

Jason: Note that this is just me spitballing, and is not a reflection on any games I have worked on.

1. Smaller, more accessible games. Lighter rules, cheaper products, low-to-no preparation required. This can only work if they get distribution outside the traditional channels (game stores, online retailers, etc.). Otherwise they're just indie products.
2. Expand the content dramatically outside dungeon fantasy, sci-fi, etc. Pretty much anything that requires a lot of background reading and a deep buy-in for the reader. Humor games, dramas, sports, etc. Things that appeal to a larger and unexplored market.
3. Provide a clear path to conversion (i.e., players should start with the "light" easy-access product, then segue into the more complex/advanced version...).
4. More evangelism and more outreach programs. Difficult in the pandemic world, but it is already working.
5. Media tie-ins that might be loss-leaders, but funnel people to the hobby. Instead of an attempted blockbuster movie that might flop, try a limited streaming series on Netflix or Amazon Prime.

7 - System Sunday: Describe a cool part of a system that you love.

Lev: I'm going to talk about my own game a bit, "Papers & Paychecks", which I have two interesting part of the game system. The first is the use of a meta-game narrativist mechanic that belongs to the player, rather than the character. I think that this a better way to allocate such benefits, which in other games go to the character (e.g., roleplaying bonuses that convert to experience) which doesn't make much sense, really. The other is to use the difference between contested rolls as the base value for an effect, thus making every score in a contested roll important, but also removing the need for specific critical successes or failures.

Jason: Passions and Personality Traits for Pendragon (originally and now RuneQuest, Thieves' World, and now Lords of the Middle Sea). Your character's beliefs, social connections, allegiances, and feelings are quantified and can be used to modify behavior, to inspire one to greater heights, and to guide and influence gameplay.

8 - Who introduced you to RPGs?

Lev: See question 3.

Andrew: Charles, at high school.

Jason: I already answered earlier in this series. Neighbors whose names I have sadly forgotten.

9 - What is the 2nd RPG you bought?

Lev: Moldvay Basic Dungeons & Dragons; that's right I bought Cook Expert Dungeons & Dragons first. Or, if we're talking about a game system, I honestly can't remember. Maybe Traveller, maybe RuneQuest, maybe Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, maybe some of the modular components for Rolemaster (as it was back then), maybe even Swordbearer. It was quite an amazing first year of play, and whilst my memory is good, it's not that good :)

Andrew: An early edition of Tunnels and Trolls I found in a second hand bookshop in Holmfirth as an early teen. It wasn't until I bought my Dungeons and Dragons 3.5e players handbook, several years after while I was at Uni that I started playing regularly.

Jason: Probably 1st edition Stormbringer, which I picked up because I was such a fan of the Elric novels. 41 years later I am still using that original boxed set.

10 - When did/will you start Gamemastering?

Lev: Oh, pretty much as soon as I had my hands on a complete game system. I remember running B2 The Keep on the Borderlands.

Andrew: I think one of the first game I played with 3.5 was one I ran myself for some friends of mine. Something vaguely Neverwinter but homebrew. I think it involved a town at a crossroads. My friends played as witches and rogues.

Jason: Back in 1978 or so when I tried to run D&D for some neighbors, my sister, and my mother. I don't remember much other than a skull-shaped mountain.

The history of our hobby is writ in skull-shaped mountains.

11 - If you could live in a game setting, where would it be?

Lev: "Freemarket" by Luke Crane and Jared Sorensen sounds pretty good: "We are a society of functionally immortal, cybernetically modified, telepathic infovores. You are now one of us." But even that has the challenge of offering plenty of cool stuff but with appropriately a nasty challenge. Think of "Eclipse Phase", for example. "Spelljammer" would be pretty fun for a combination of travel and fantasy in a space opera style. Imagine is this question was reversed, where wouldn't you want to live? Paranoia's Alpha Complex? Anything that uses the Cthulhu mythos? Best Friends?

Andrew: Yeah, not many settings that would be fun to play in would be also fun to live in. Certainly not many of the trad games. Spelljammer would be great for travel and adventure but it has these weird spider-eel things and lots of the brainsuckers - no thanks. I suppose at least Best Friends would include indoor plumbing alongside the relentless online

bullying....

Jason: Does "The Shire" count as a game setting?

12 - Why did you start RPGing?

Lev: Initially it was from witnessing the cooperative intellectual challenge of play in a fantastic setting. Plus, I thought the dice were pretty fascinating. Afterward, there was the sense of exploration of worlds, of building mechanics to represent that environment, of cooperative storytelling.

Andrew: I always loved playing 'Let's pretend' as a kid, either by myself or with others. It just seemed natural to keep looking for that experience as I grew up.

Jason: All of the normal reasons (escapism, etc.), but more importantly, the vicarious ability to create stories collaboratively. At 14 years old I didn't have a film crew at my beck-and-call, and improv theater wasn't a thing in rural Oregon, but RPGs allowed my friends and I to create new stories like those we read about in fantasy, horror, and science fiction.

With games, we could exercise our creative imaginations beyond anything our schooling could provide.

13 - How would you change the way you started RPGing?

Lev: I was quite lucky to quickly fall into a group who were quite experienced gamers and, despite being quite young, understood the enjoyment of actually roleplaying rather than just gaming. Even there however they could be a bit cliquy, and I was never happy how one kid was excluded from participation.

Andrew: When I started getting into Warhammer I got warned off RPGs by a relative, but I excused myself by saying I was wargaming. I think that put me back a few years before I decided to play regularly. I think I would have liked to have found a group to play with earlier while I was still at school.

Jason: If by some miracle I am transported back 40+ years into my younger self, I would make more of an effort to build a gaming community beyond my immediate circle of friends. Rather than just being those kids in the high school library conference room, I'd try to reach out to other kids in our age band, and see who might be willing to give it a try.

14 - Suggestion Sunday: Roll 1d8+1, and tag that many friends and suggest a new RPG to try.

Lev: I'll just make a couple of RPG suggestions for any number of readers to try out that are not so commonly known. For an old-school fantasy-simulationist game with an evocative magic system, I'd suggest *Swordbearer*. For a crunchy SF horror-conspiracy-transhumanist bent, *Eclipse Phase* is hard to beat. Of course, I reiterate that people should play *Papers & Paychecks*.

Andrew: *Backswords and Bucklers*. Also OSR but simplified, and set in the pubs and alleys of fantasy Elizabethan London. Quick, messy fun!

15 - Who would you like to Gamemaster for you?

Lev: From all accounts Greg Stafford was an absolutely excellent GM, alas he is not with us anymore. I reckon Greg Costikyan could provide a rollicking good session as well.

Andrew: Poorweather from the actual play podcast 'Six Feats Under'. She creates a very specific atmosphere of awkward anxiety in her games that is oddly fun to listen to. I'd like to know what it's like to play in.

Jason: Honestly, anyone who's passionate about it.

16 - What would be your perfect game?

Lev: In question 2 I suggested a sort of mash-up between RuneQuest, Fate, and GURPS.

Andrew: I've been running a lot of very crunchy games of late and so my taste is wandering towards something rules lite with an easily picked up concept.

Jason: A new edition of Stormbringer reinvented from the ground up using a stripped-down version of BRP with some of the innovations from RuneQuest, incorporating the newer Elric material, in full color, as the vanguard of a new of Eternal Champion-based setting books.

I would love to see that happen.

17 - Past, Present, or Future? When is your favourite game set?

Lev: Honestly, I don't mind. If I pick some favourite games, GURPS can be anytime, RuneQuest is a bronze-age high-magic setting, Eclipse Phase is in the future.

Andrew: Past is fun as there is so much material to draw from.

Jason: It should come as no surprise that the answer for at least three of my five favorite game settings are in long-forgotten epochs of human history, whether this is after the Horn of Fate destroyed and then rebuilt the world, in the long-forgotten Hyborian Age and the so-called "Thurian Age" before it, or the Third Age of Middle-earth. Otherwise, it would be thousands of years in the future after everything has fallen apart and new feudal ages are upon the Earth.

18 - Where is your favourite place to play?

Lev: Historic buildings with grand tables and temperature control. I really enjoyed the sessions we ran of Call of Cthulhu in the library of the old Kew Asylum, although the local caretaker was a wee strict on getting us to finish at 10pm. But then again, he was like that with everything, it meant that things ran efficiently.

Andrew - I'd say I usually play indoors at home, or someone else's home and this works just fine. Comfortable surroundings are good, but atmospheric places can add flavour too, just as long as they are not distracting.

Jason: Schloss Neuhausen!

19 - Why has your favourite game stayed with you?

Lev: Oh, hands-down, RuneQuest especially the early editions. There was something quite joyous to find books that were written in such an evocative manner, written so clearly, and with density.

Andrew - Nostalgia is a potent drug I guess. Advanced Fighting Fantasy has been a favorite of mine for a long time and I'm eyeing the new AFF derived Troika! game system with interest. AFF is not the perfect system, but when I read its books, and see those illustrations it invokes weird warm fuzzy feelings in me. I'm hoping Troika! does something similar. I don't think my regular gaming group has the same attachment to AFF as I do so it will be interesting to see what they make of it if we play.

Jason: The game is Stormbringer (1st edition) See prior post. Simplicity and intuitiveness of rules. Character creation is almost a game in itself. Wonderful setting, courtesy of Michael Moorcock. Conflicts and challenges in gameplay are resolved quickly. It was my first experience with Basic Roleplaying, a system that now dominates my professional career.

20 - How long do your games last?

Lev: Single sessions or overall campaigns? For the former usually 4-5 hours, for major campaigns a few to several years tends to be average. My Eclipse Phase campaign ran for five years, January 2016 to March 2021, for example. Others I'm quite happy to run over several sessions.

Andrew: My sessions last usually 1.5 to 2 hours by my count. In my current group we usually play long campaigns that can last a year or two sometimes. I'm more than happy to play one offs too though.

Jason: Online games are usually 2-3 hours, sometimes a little longer, and face to face about 3-4 hours. Almost never longer. And that's always relaxed time, with snack/drink/bathroom breaks and some social time.

21 - Setting Sunday: Share an intriguing detail from a game setting you enjoy.

Lev: There is no default setting in Swordbearer (well, there was one scenario pack), but the game system itself does include an very intriguing detail worth mentioning. The game basically has two types of magic, elemental magic and spirit magic. The former includes pure forms of that element that can be captured to use that magic; capture the sunlight of dawn for light spells, for example. Spirit magic, in contrast, is based on the classic humours and sentient beings usually have a couple of of these tucked away in their body. One attunes to these spirit magic humours by sacrificing the being that holds them. In other words, you can sacrifice people and steal part of their personality to power your magic. Cute, eh?

Andrew: Another magic detail - I'm running a Dark Sun adventure currently and have always found the idea of magic being seen as environmentally polluting and culturally abhorrent as interesting. It makes the cost of using magic so very great that only the most powerful or the most desperate use it, setting up plenty of interesting interplays between power and obligation.

Jason: I'm going to dig deep and point at the weird ecology of the world of Adasha in 'Tales of Gargentihir', where entire continents slide across seas of silt and the eternally darkened skies are charged with crackling static electricity that some few mortals can harness and wield... at a terrible cost.

22 - Who is your current character?

Lev: Well, I'm in a few games at the moment so I can give a quick summary of each of them in order of when they were generated. The first is Mithranelar an Sinda Elf Animist for Middle-Earth Role Playing. The second is a Dwarf, Gorm Drakeslayer, for GURPS Dark Sun, and the third is Ernst de Messer for Burning Wheel set in the Thirty Year's War.

Andrew: I'm also playing in the MERP game - getting us ready for the Rings of Power! My character is Ógæfa, an Umli hunter, returning to the North.

Jason: I am not sure I can answer this very well. My gaming currently is:
RQ Campaign (online, unfortunately infrequent) - I am GMing, so no character.
The One Ring Starter Set campaign (in person) - GMing
Lords of the Middle Sea (online, infrequent) - GMing
Dungeon Crawl Classics (in person, semi-weekly) - Playing, but I just got through "the funnel" with three kind-of-disposable characters whose names I forget between sessions.

I am playing in one or two irregular games when times line up, but it's always pregenerated characters (including one floating jeweled sorcerer's skull!) but they're not "mine."

So, essentially, I am a sometimes player without a character.

23 - What situation are they currently in?

Lev: Mithranelar is engaged in the classic MERP scenario Palantir Quest, I'm guessing we're about a third of the way through? Mithranelar also has his own agenda, but you know, spoilers. Gorm is currently part of a merchant and scavenger group looting tombs and having to deal with corrupted NPCs, typical. Whereas Ernst has found himself in the midst of accusations of heresy and worse, which is not terribly surprising given the period, and less surprising given that he follows the Five Articles of Remonstrance.

Andrew: Ógæfa is preparing to travel North towards the lands of the Lossoth in search of one of the palantiri before winter sets in.

Jason: Um, see yesterday's post. The only current "character" I have is two or three DCC characters who just made first level, and I am not sure what the next adventure holds.

24 - When did you start playing this character?

Lev: All three of these characters are only a few months in play.

Andrew: Yes, a few months ago.

Jason: Again, not much to see here. We began a DCC funnel adventure maybe four months ago, but summer schedules and vacations have kept us from playing a lot.

(As a note - If anyone has the ear of the organizer of RPGaDay, having six questions in a row about one's player character when a lot of the participants are solely GMs and have none, is less than optimal.)

25 - Where has the character been?

Lev: Whilst heralding from Lindon, Mithranelar has spent a fair amount of time in the Reunited Kingdom. Gorm really has travelled quite extensively in the mountains and semi-arid regions of Athas, given their profession. Whereas Ernst, also in accord to a professional interest, has travelled mainly along the Rhine, the Maim, and Bohemia.

Andrew: Well, Ógæfa has been travelling with Mithranelar. If I'm right they have ridden from Minas Tirith north to Annuminas and have since travelled further north still through the lands of Rohan and towards Forochel I believe. I don't know the lore of Middle Earth very well...

Jason: Well, the group of four characters that entered the DCC funnel were taking part in some sort of ritual to determine the next ceremonial king. This involved going to some sort of remote location and decoding a magic door and eventually entering a strange underworld with a group of mystic monks. One or two of them died during that struggle. (I can't remember.)

26 - Why does your character do what they do?

Lev: Mithranelar is an elf, they do what they do because they're part of the immortal magical fabric of reality. In this particular context, they have a double-layered task that they have to carry out, which they carry with all the usual melancholy that the kin does. Both Gorm and Ernst have a travelling merchant component to their backstory; Ernst has moved from home perhaps of necessity, given the increasing power of the Counter Remonstrance.

Andrew: Ógæfa fought in the War of the Ring. She believes in the resurgent Gondor Kingdom and believes bringing the Palantir to Aragorn will provide stability to the region. She is a faithful friend and sturdy warrior.

Jason: For the DCC group, it was because they each thought they were the One True Heir to the Throne, despite them being respectively, a tailor, a tomato vendor, an orphan, and a gravedigger.

The orphan died in the first combat. The rest of them carry on because their lives are so miserable that a violent death at the hands of demons or enemy knights is preferable.

27 - How has the character changed?

Lev: Mithranelar hasn't really changed at all, but rather has deepened their commitment to the two-fold quest. Gorm was previously known as Gorm the Artificer but following a successful arena battle with a drake has a new appellation. He is becoming quite famous for his skill with the pick-axe as a martial weapon, which is weird but we'll run with it. Ernst started as a rather cold-blooded and reserved individual but has become increasingly open on his articles of faith now that he is outside of the Netherlands. It probably won't end well for him.

Andrew: Ógæfa originally went on this quest because her friend Dwalin was going and was honoured to follow the king's decree. She has come to realise that this stone is of some power, if it has been hidden so well...

Jason: Leveled up? (Hopefully the RPGaDay people will never, ever do a series of questions aimed specifically about characters, as it rules out the people who mostly/only GM.)

28 - Style Sunday: Roll 1d8+1, tag that many friends with your favourite RPG cover art.

Lev: As per question 14, I'll just pick a couple of examples I really like. The first edition Rolemaster boxed sets (Arms Law/Claw Law, Spell Law, and Rolemaster) by Matthew J. Jorgensen from the early 80s really impressed me. They were sort of surrealist, the characters "stretched", and perspectives slightly askew, but it created a dynamic feeling to them which suited the evocative situations expressed.

From a similar vintage and even style the covers of the Moldvay and Cook Basic and Expert boxed sets for Dungeons & Dragons by Erol Otus were also creative and evocative and were part of a wider story (a shame we never found out what would happen next in the Companion set). I will also add Linda Michaels' stunning cover art on the RuneQuest product Dorastor Land of Doom, and finally Bill Willingham's cover for Lands of Adventure.

Andrew: David Hoskins's cover illustration for Acid Death Fantasy - think the coolest thing you can do on sand followed by the scariest thing you can imagine on sand. Just look it up.

Jason: Okay, I never tag friends for nonsense like this. I tag people when they're in a picture, or when they contributed to something in the photo [Amber, Pendragon (1st), Skyrealms of Jorune (1st), Call of Cthulhu (1st, 2nd), Land of Adventure, Nephilim].

So instead, I'm just going to post what I consider are the five most interesting, greatest RPG covers of all time*. Each of these made me instantly want to buy the game and spend time exploring those worlds.

- Two of these I still play whenever I get the chance.
- One of these I spent years playing exclusively and would love to play more of.
- One of these I would love to see back in print, perhaps with a new system.
- The last was unfortunately a disappointment, as the system was not particularly great and there was barely a setting. I maintain that it still has one of the best RPG covers, though.

* (I automatically disqualify any books I contributed to for this list.)

29 - Who would you like to see take part in #RPGaDAY?

Lev: Other people who are members of the RPG Review Inc association!

Andrew: I am! I don't really know who else does though. Is there somewhere central I can go to find other peoples answers?

Jason: Anyone who plays or runs games, but especially more creators and would-be creators.

30 - What should #RPGaDAY do for its 10th anniversary next year?

Lev: How about get an online form-tool for everyone around the world to contribute and aggregate the results?

Andrew: Yes! Just what I was thinking.

Jason: What should RPGaDay do for its 10th Anniversary next year?

Tin or aluminum is technically the "theme" for 10-year anniversary, so let's look at that as the theme.

Tin is often used in making many types of alloy, and aluminum is a common alloy.

So maybe take the RPG discussion up to a thematic level and start talking about things from the "real world" that strengthen/alloy RPGs, and places where RPGs have clearly become part of the "outside world".

31 - When did you first take part in #RPGaDAY?

Lev: I must have been in 2014, there's a write-up in RPG Review issue 25. I note a similarity in some of the questions.

Andrew: I have contributed once before I think but can't remember the year. Perhaps 2017... Lev?

Jason: Six or seven years ago. I have skipped it a few times since if I was too busy or if the prompts were too abstract.

Next Issue of RPG REVIEW

Issue #56



Freedom!

***There is no specific
subject for this
issue!***

***Submit what you
want!***