

Ever & Anon

Issue #15

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Contributor Guidelines:

Contributors are expected to stay on topic and remain civil to each other. Ever & Anon will be available to the public for free, so matters you don't want publicly known should be discussed elsewhere. Please adhere to all the normal rules of public discourse: no libel, no inciting violence, no infringement of another's copyright or trademark, and no pornography. Zines should use page dimensions of 8.5" x 11" (portrait). Maximum zine length is 16 pages. Maximum length for fiction (other than campaign reports) is 6 pages. Discussion of contemporary politics is discouraged but permitted with a maximum length for political content set at 2 pages. AI-generated artwork is allowed, but AI-generated text is not. If you want to use an AI to help you edit your zine, you may do so. All artwork must be attributed to its creator, whether human or AI, unless it is in the public domain. When you submit your zine to Ever & Anon, you are granting the APA a perpetual, non-exclusive right to publish your zine in a single issue of the APA, meaning that you retain the copyright to your work, and so you can publish it elsewhere, but you cannot force Ever & Anon to unpublish your zine once it has been published.

Contributors may submit their PDF zines via email to apa@everanon.org.

Submission deadlines and Ignorable Themes for the next several issues are as follows:

Issue #16 – September 21st: GM-Dickery

Issue #17 – October 21st: Negotiating with Monsters

Issue #18 – November 21st: Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever!

Issue #19 – December 21st: Player-Dickery

Issue #20 – January 21st: Burnout

Ever & Anon emerged with the closing of Alarums & Excursions, an Amateur Press Association run by Lee Gold for nearly fifty years. This community of APAers would not exist if not for her steadfast efforts.

Ever & Anon

Issue #15 (ver. 1) – September 2026

Table of Contents

Front Cover: "The Remnant" – Morgan Julian See his work at https://www.instagram.com/_morgan.julian/	1
Front Page	2
Table of Contents	3
What is This?	4
Solicitations & Abbreviations	5
In the Hall of Stone – Patrick Brady	6
Quasipseudoludognostication #15 – Patrick Riley	19
Interactive comics from Brazil, Pt 5 – Pedro Panhoca da Silva & Maira Zucolotto	35
Reddened Stars #14 – John Redden	37
The Arc of Probability Bends Towards Justice #2 – Bryant Durrell	42
Denizens of the Library #14 – Brian Rogers	50
Age of Menace #252 – Brian Christopher Misiaszek	62
Bumbling Through Dungeons #12 – Mark A. Wilson	78
Atlantis for Now #3 – Gabriel Roark	81
Overlord's Annals (v5n9) – Attronarch	87
Firedrake's Hoard #13 – Roger Bell_West	97
Twisting the Rope #15 – Myles Corcoran	108
Attacks of Opportunity #14 – Dylan Capel	118
Port Omaha Beacon #2 – Dale Meier	122
The Phoenix Nest #15 – Michael Cule	126
Going to be Ad-Libbed #13 – Avram Grumer	142
The Dragon's Beard #99 – Patrick Zoch	149
An Unlooked For Zine #14 – Lisa Padol	151
Ronin Engineer – Jim Eckman	167
Accidental Recall #14 – Joshua Kronengold	170
Strategies for Addressing Intraparty Conflict – Jim Vassilakos	182
Travelling Light #3 – Timothy Collinson	190

This issue's IgTheme: *How do you find players/GMs/games?*

The picture on page 5 was generated and converted into a sketch by Canva. Our logo was designed by Richard Iorio II of Rogue Games.

What is This?

A Newbie's Guide to APAs

Q: What is this?
A: An APA.
Q: What's an APA?
A: An Amateur Press Association.
Q: What's that?
A: A collection of zines. It can also refer to the community of people writing the zines.
Q: What's a zine?
A: A fanzine. A small, amateur magazine usually distributed for free or at cost.
Q: So this is a collection of free fanzines written by amateurs?
A: Exactly.
Q: And each one has a separate author?
A: Right.
Q: But I see the same names appearing again and again throughout.
A: Those are comments. We comment on each other's zines. When you see *Patrick Brady: blah-blah-blah…*, if there are no quotes around the *blah-blah-blah*, that's probably a comment to Patrick.
Q: And everyone is doing all this for free?
A: Yes. It's like a cocktail party, but all written out. Come join us, if you like.

Amateur Press Associations date back to the late 1800s and started to become popular among fantasy and science fiction enthusiasts during the 1930s.[1] Alarums & Excursions was the first APA formed specifically to cover roleplaying games.[2]

"Each contributor would send in their zine, and then Lee would edit, collate, and distribute. Contributors would often address each other in their contributions, thus creating a community. At the time when there were no blogs nor forums, this was huge."[3]

Q: But now there are blogs and various online forums, so why do APAs still exist?
A: Because one type of forum isn't necessarily any better or worse than the others. One advantage of the APA model is longevity. Because they have multiple contributors and don't rely on making money, APAs are more durable than individual blogs or traditional magazines. Also, because websites come and go, whatever is posted online will probably eventually vanish into the electronic ether. But whatever is put into a publication that can be downloaded and archived is more likely to survive due to the sheer fact that multiple copies will exist. And the back issues become an indelible record of what people used to think. They provide insight into a world that used to be.

Referring to Alarums & Excursions, Mark Rein-Hagen writes, *"Each issue was a revelation—raw theory, wild invention, fierce debates on the soul of gaming—all stitched together by the indomitable Lee Gold, whose work made that scattered fellowship feel like a living conversation."*[4]

Q: Who is Lee Gold?
A: She founded Alarums & Excursions, creating a forum, perhaps the first forum, specifically for the discussion of roleplaying games. Then she continued to run A&E for nearly fifty years. It's an extraordinary legacy, and she's the reason this community of APAers exists.

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1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_press_association
2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alarums_and_Excursions
3 https://attronarch.com/goodbye-to-alarums-and-excursions-apa
4 https://www.facebook.com/Reinhagen/posts/pfbid0nXr6bkZU8V28t2xMHvq5CKgpTGfLX35yU3VBAjuwTgQps8gX9CZDcbHZFc5VpYn6l

I Want YOU!

to join our flippant fellowship



Send us a zine. Or some cover art. Or comments. Or a blurb.
Or just flatulate in our general direction.

Send your thoughts to apa@everanon.org, and provided they aren't laced with orcish profanity (or even if they are), we'll likely publish them for the enlightenment & edification of the entire APA. Please include your name, class, and level of experience, and be sure to save vs. spell to avoid being drawn in. Halflings and gnomes incur a -1 penalty. (Sorry, shorties.)

Abbreviations & Acronyms You Need to Know:

A&E: Alarums & Excursions
APA: Amateur Press Association
BBG: Big Bad Guy/Gal (a major villain)
BTW: By the way
d6: a six-sided die
2d6: two six-sided dice
d4: a caltrop (very dangerous)
E&A: Ever & Anon
Frex: For example
FTF: Face-to-face (aka TTRPG)
FWIW: For what it's worth
IgTheme: Ignorable theme
IIRC: If I recall correctly
IM(H)O: In my (humble) opinion
LARP: Live Action Role Playing
Nextish: Next issue
(N)PC: (Non-)Player Character
PBEM: Play-by-Email
RAE(BNC): Read and enjoyed (but no comment)
Re: Regarding
RHCT(M): Regarding his/her comment to (me)
RPG: Role-playing game
RYCT(M): Regarding your comment to (me)
RYQT(M): Regarding your question to (me)
TTRPG: Tabletop role-playing game (aka FTF)
WRT: With respect to / With regard to
YMMV: Your mileage may vary
Zine: A writer's contribution

In the Hall of Stone

By Patrick Brady. London, England. The following is copyright P Brady (2026).
This is a continuation of my zine first started in 1988-ish in Alarums and Excursions.
Graphics are copyright free images from Pixelbay, Unsplash and Wikimedia Commons.
Some have been modified by me using Paint and GIMP.
My thanks to **Roger Bell West** for links to these graphics sources.
This issue includes some graphics from Sony Pictures/Amazon Prime
and these are asserted as fair use for the purposes of review.

Introduction

1. **Invasion of the Patricks'**. Have you noticed how many Patricks there are in Ever & Anon?

2. **Review section**. I am including a review section this month, I am starting by reviewing the Spider Noir series from Amazon. The first part is a conventional review, the second is influenced by **Brian Rogers** writing on superheroes and gives *suggested* rules/rules mods to model the world as shown in the series that is being reviewed. So this has a wider remit than Brian's modelling of superheroes but was inspired by his work. Instead I will attempt to produce rule mods for "the world" in which the fiction occurs rather than a specific character. I have no idea if that is interesting. If you have a view on this (concept or format) then I'd be interested in your feedback?

3. **Question**: **The Odyssey** movie made me think of the origins of high fantasy roleplaying games as being greatly influenced by that Homeric tradition as well as by the Anglo-Saxon as filtered through the work of Tolkien. Is that too grandiose and if we are comfortable drawing that line of descent, is this still a reasonable way to describe the lineage for the newer generations of roleplaying games?

4. **On London**. There is a certain amount of online propaganda which is "talking down" the city I live in. To be clear, London is a city I walk around regularly, and in the last thirty years of doing so, I've never had a problem. Obviously there is no end to online idiocy but I feel the need to push back a little on this. Yes, I am being grumpy 😊. Obviously, I mean no offence to people from or living in other cities, this is just to make the point that the murder rate in London is low by international standards, despite some of the online /bot farm claims otherwise.
The data is from the Metropolitan Police.



Comments from the last edition.

Dale Meier

Hello from London, England and welcome! Like you, I have been doing this for a while and also started with a boxed set of D&D. We had less of the "satanic panic" in the UK, but I remember those times.

Re: The Children of the Stones. I am impressed that you did a game based on The Children of the Stones. Watching that BBC series was a formative childhood experience for me. I had no idea it crossed the Atlantic! I look forward to more writing and graphic design from you.

Re: Spider Spirit question. Thank you. I appreciate your thoughts on the matter. Yes, I am prone to overthinking things like this, mainly from a concern to do no harm. Your advice is helpful and thank you for it. Actually it is far from cold comfort, the phrase "the best we can do" is a useful reminder that there just are limits to how careful you can be and still do something worthwhile. I have good players and their feedback is often helpful. "The Great (Old Ones) Outdoors" sounds like an interesting game.

Re: STRAUSS. I enjoy playing the Strauss partly because my players interact with them very well. As is so often the case, as a referee I can put something out there, but good players breathe life into the game. So some players take them very seriously, one is actually frightened of them (because of a difficult early experience in which they locked a Strauss in the glove compartment of their car) and one has more of a "cute Kawaii!" attitude. The different attitudes of the players makes the Strauss into an opportunity for roleplay by the group. Mechanically, I developed my own point build system. Like you, I've been around games for a while and I've run various point build games over the years. My design is nothing very clever, influenced by Hero, GURPS etc. and very much by the AMBER game, which like the Palladium TMNT supplement was written by Erick Wujcik! So the TMNT link is indirect but can be made. I was more influenced by Erick's approach to signature item creation in AMBER than TMNT. Although I knew Erick only slightly I respect his work as a game designer. I developed a ruleset for enchantment partly out of player interest, I had a player who had a character interested in this area of magic. That evolved into a more general system that covers the enchantment of animals to create familiars etc. I am currently at version 8.0 of the Enchanting supplement for Daywatch and it currently runs to 23,545 words. I don't claim it's good but it is getting comprehensive 😊 So, there many influences but I'm using my own system.

Re: Letters from Vindolanda. I wasn't sure how that would land, but felt the need to say something. I don't claim any great insight but feel that my Grandfather, who lived through more troubled times, would have spoken up and therefore that so should I.

I hope all goes well for you and yours.

Matt Stevens

Re: Spider – Spirit question. Thank you. I take your point, I don't think the Japanese government are going to be concerned by my bad adaptions of Japanese mythology. So that is definitely a vote in favour of not including in cultures where this may risk cultural appropriation. At some point I may wish to put that "character type" in my zine and I can imagine comments along the lines you suggest but also asking why I didn't include the indigenous American tradition. Maybe there is no good or certainly no "safe" way to do this.

RYCT: Roger BW. I like your three levels of granularity. I use low-res combat in Daywatch

In the Hall of Stone by Patrick Brady.

for the majority of cases. High res does happen but usually in ambushes. This suits my refereeing style and the nature of a modern setting.
Re: Weird Mechanics. Thank you for this. I remember how many really bad games I bought back in the day 😊. I don't mind the innuendo for the prostitution section, this would have been aimed at a younger audience and discretion was probably wise. The randomly rolled "Drinking" stat is a classic of terrible game design of the time.



Patrick Riley

Re: Spider-Spirit question. Yes I probably am over-thinking it. If you had ever heard me play you would know that I should never attempt to perform West African music, or music of any kind! 😊
Re: Outgunned heroes. I am sorry to hear that they are so heavily based on well-known heroes.
Re: Aurora Cove. Impressive, thank you for this, I enjoyed reading it. I know of a similar "mindwipe prison" story where one of the prisoners immediately switched it back on as they preferred being a prisoner. That crashed the scenario, so I think you are wise to structure Aurora Cove the way you do.
RYCT: Jim Vassilakos re: Gods. From the point of view of someone in that culture (such as Aristotle) the offerings are neglected it says nothing about the gods. It is not the role of the Gods to dispose of the offerings that are made to them. But it says everything about the community that should be managing that worship. In that culture at that time, it would have had a negative reputational effect on the polity which allowed it to happen. It would reflect badly on the Temple and the City, which was a big deal.

Bryant Durrell.

Welcome! Like you I have had something of a gap between my last zine and the start of a presence in Ever & Anon. I hope the move goes well and that you and your wife get to enjoy your new home.
As an aside, have you seen the **Frankenstein Chronicles** with Sean Bean?

Re: Spider Spirits. Thank you. Well I am an older white guy from the UK, so I appreciate your thoughts on the matter which I think are helpful and useful. I agree with everything you said. So, being an older white guy, I shall now take a couple of hundred words to be more long-winded about it! 😊
I strongly agree that thinking twice can save us from doing things we will later regret, including a slide into parody. That is have to something we can all benefit from. I guess writing the question out in E&A is one way in which I "think twice" on an issue. I lived in Hong Kong for a couple of years and watched way too many local movies, my problem is that the references are specific to me and I remember that my players won't get them.
You are completely right about how we respond to feedback. In the case of the Spider-Spirits I have learnt to ask widely first. But a fragile ego is a dangerous thing. I find that having a sense of humour about myself is absolutely necessary. Fortunately my family will remind me if I starting taking myself too seriously.
I remember the Tines, they were the pack-intelligence people? Interesting idea. Very inventive writer Vinge.

Scribble M Horror. Welcome! Enjoyed your zine.

Peter Hildreth. Welcome back!

Gabriel Roark.

Thank you very much for the welcome! It is good to be back and I appreciate your well-considered thoughts. You are the most orderly of 'zine writers in E&A and that makes it easy to navigate your writings. I appreciate the way that you structure your responses.
I broke the watermark pattern specifically to break the pattern. A decision influenced by the theory that pattern breaking helps attentional processes. Thank you for your advice. I like the way you organised and presented a suggested approach. That was very helpful, thank you!
Interesting that modern writers will actually make non-incorporation statements. What I am doing is essentially trivial, but that's not an excuse for me to disrespect other cultures.

Dylan Capel



You make a good point. The fact that the UK in the eighties was a formative time for me is one reason I am so concerned about engaging in cultural appropriation. I've seen it done badly.
I hope you stay cool in the heat.

Mike Cule

Re: Spider-Spirits. I also am an old-fashioned British person. My amateurish understanding of cultural appropriation is that it specifically applies to using cultural artefacts of communities who have had a bad time of it, often at the hands of people who might, in a dim light, look like me. So, precisely because chaps like me invaded everywhere this side of Outer Mongolia, I should think twice(as **Bryant Durrell** says) about stepping on people's toes. You are right that the times we live in, especially with AI, it treats everything as available to everyone. But not everyone wants to be on the menu. So, this is a matter of politeness and me trying to be decent. One of our better traditions.
Re: Current affairs. I am not depressed about things in general. I am outraged by some of it, but we have survived worse than this, or at least *some* of us did.
Re: "some town" comment about Andy Burnham. The Manc are a proud tribe and rightly so! More seriously, I suspect the insults from across the pond will have a long-term effect on perceptions, not just of DJT but of the USAns in general. I've rarely seen a strong brand being damaged so quickly. Of course, the people who pay for this won't be the ones who caused the problem. But it is an unforced error and I'm sad to see it.

Joshua Kronengold

Re: Spider-spirits. I always find your views worth listening to. Thank you for your perspective. That is very useful and I appreciate the difference you make between "at the table" and in case I write anything up, especially if I were to put it in my zine. I think the rules for politeness are similar here as there, but my access to specific communities is different.
Re: Letters from Vindolanda.
Thank you. I wasn't sure if it would seem over political for this format. I think the recent heat dome made me think about the irreversibility of certain events.

In the Hall of Stone by Patrick Brady.

Lisa Padol

Re: Art. I am concerned about the rights of original artists when using AI art. I would like to decorate my zine more than I do.

Re: Translation. Yes, you make a good point. I guess I don't like the translation from comic book to movie with the Watchmen. But then I like the comic book a lot. I don't always prefer the comic book versions, so I enjoyed Neverwhere and I like the Boys series more than I did the comic book. I thought the changes to live action improved it.

I agree with you about the game versions, you are having a very different experience. Not least because our TTRPG tend to be group social activities and reading comic books tends to be a solo experience.

Re: Cultural appropriation. Yes, I agree, but some groups are easier for me to access than others. I think it could be a little high-handed of me to contact a religious organisation in a foreign country so they can audit my game handouts for me 😊.

Re: The Strauss. The Strauss were encountered in a Daywatch adventure. A report reached the Watch of a wannabe street gang in Coventry who had been hospitalised by unknown methods. The location was known to the Watch as a former WW2 site. Investigations showed that STRAUSS were protecting the area and defending the unhoused person who lived in the park where they broke through to daylight. Strauss took out the gang using non-lethal methods. The player characters broken into the bunker and discovered their back story. They negotiated additional support for the human under their protection and managed to explain who and what they were. From the point of view of the Strauss, the last they knew of the surface world the Nazis were close to victory. We have one player who currently has Strauss as a companion. The Strauss of course, view the player character as *their* sidekick.

Jim Vassilakos

Re: Western Civilisation

I am a big fan of western civilisation. I think things in the UK may be somewhat different from the USA. Thank you for the Youtube video. I watched it. IMHO the ideas are interesting but I don't accept the thesis. The historical generalisation is attractive but wrong. For example, the British aristocracy of the 1880's did not become effete. I saw a similar misconception in the Enola Holmes series of mysteries, in which a Victorian aristo is shown to be unfamiliar with even the concept of a punch. At a time when boxing would have been mandatory at any school he attended. The Victorian era was a time of muscular Christianity and compulsory combat training in British schools (fists, swords and guns). This wasn't the court of the sun king, it was Rome. The high Victorian period was extremely nationalistic, supremely self-confident and not notably or even sufficiently, self-hating. This undermines the idea of a general oikophobia as the cause of the fall of major cultures. The British Empire was taken out by very costly wars (mainly vs Germany), the rise of effective competitors and strong anti-imperial movements. The change in attitude post-1945 was because of the failure of the imperial project and the loss of power that came with it. Those wars bankrupted us. We were still paying off our war loans to the USA into the 21st century (our last payment was $83 million made to the USA in 2006). That isn't a phobia, it's economics. There were people raised to rule the world who now had to accept a much reduced standard of living and many of them

resented it. The attitudes of that Imperial period remained for decades after the Empire itself was lost. I grew up with people who had those attitudes, they were not self-hating. If anything they were arrogant and entitled (every country has its negative national stereotype). So, I can't speak for the USA, but the analysis of the UK experience is wrong and I suspect that model, although it may have some valid points, is an over-generalisation. In the UK we have to deal with a lot of foreign money being used to propagandise to our population and generate division. This includes taking genuine grievances and aggravating them. IMHO what we are experiencing is less a psychological problem than it is enemy action.

This isn't oikophobia, this is Cold War v2.0.

Timothy Collinson

Re: Moonraker. I am not advocating the work of Ian Fleming but they changed it a lot for the movie. In the book, a billionaire who is obsessed with rocketry later turns out to be a bit of a Nazi. A bizarre idea!

Avram Grumer

Re: Watchmen. I understand but my issue with the movie was where it attempted to convert frame by frame. Which are the parts I don't think worked. Obviously this is just my view and everyone else is entitled to have a different perspective. I understand the argument about the parallel nature of understanding comic pages rather than the linear presentation in a movie. I also agree that the new bits were the best bits. I haven't seen the Lindelof series.

Re: Gibson. I saw some of the series "The Peripheral" and have enjoyed Gibson's work, my point is just that the future I read forty years ago now seems obsolete.

Roger Bell West / Firedrake

Re: Graphics resources. Thank you for the list of resources. I appreciate it. You will likely seem them here soon.

Re: Finland. I have strong links to Finland and a great affinity for the place and people. Unfortunately my Finnish is dreadful. I lack the talent for languages and my residual melange of British accents makes my pronunciation of Finnish awful. Never met a Finn I didn't like, but most definitely prefer that I speak English to them 😊.

Re: Risk of dying. I suspect a lot of people are along for the ride and the destruction is an important part of the fun. Otherwise the power fantasy seems to be about identifying with the protagonist?

Re: Spider-spirit issue. I take your point but I was really looking for a lower overhead ethical guideline. I can't support and don't think those communities want me to contact them every time I write an adventure with a new creature in it. But of course you are right, in a perfect world they would be the people to ask.

Brian Rogers

Re: Watchmen. I have both of the RPG supplements. I like them a lot more than the movie. I read your review with interest.

I am enjoying your superhero material, very interesting. Thank you. Your work on this inspired me to bring a character from the old Lion comic book to my zine (please see end of my zine for his bit).

ELF (Erica Frank)

I'm interested enough in religion to want to model them all well. Where this gets difficult for me is when there is a power disparity that makes cultural appropriation a risk.

Re: Coyote and Crow RPG is great and it is good to see it being so successful. But it doesn't address my issue around cultural appropriation in game design, specifically because the writers are indigenous Americans and so this is one problem they don't have. Unfortunately, I lack contacts in the Lakota Nation and I don't want to make *my* RPG campaign *their* problem.

Re: "As Someone in a Minority Religion". May I ask which religion? As my Daywatch campaign is a modern urban fantasy we have encountered a range of faiths which includes various neo-pagan religions in the UK. This reflects the gaming group and so I can directly access active members of those faiths. That hopefully has kept the representation of neo-paganism in Daywatch reasonably accurate or at least, affectionate.

It's not a level of access I have for the cultures I have identified as having a significant Spider-spirit tradition (none of my players are Lakota, Ghanaian or Japanese). Hence my question here.

Brian Misiaszek.

I continue to enjoy your zine. Thank you for it.

Everyone else RAEBNC!



In the Hall of Stone by Patrick Brady.

Ignorable Theme: How do you find players?

I don't. I usually play with people I've known for a while, player turnover is low and it's more a case of putting the bat signal up and seeing who is available. In an attempt to be helpful to people who may be recruiting in a more conventional way, I have some thoughts.
For Facebook users there is https://www.facebook.com/groups/664182878585425/ which seems fairly active. I am not a D&D player but there is an active in-person and online scene.
Sidenote: One thing I have noticed when looking into this, is the use of the term "*DMs paid and free*". It's interesting to me that we are now seeing paid RPG Referees. Is this a good thing? I like it personally, although I am someone who is happy in our amateur tradition.
I think it's great that some referees are getting recognised/paid. *What do you think?*

Boardgame cafés
I know that these are growing in the USA, but they are huge in Europe. For example, Helsinki (I am a Finnophile), is a lovely but small city - the entire population of Finland is comparable to that of Central London. It is a fine but not a large place but it still has three gaming cafés (the Halfmoon, Café Boardgame and the Arkade Bar). Most European countries seem to have them now, Café Bastard in Copenhagen (Denmark) is one of the most famous etc.
In London (UK) we have *seven* boardgame cafés within a *ten mile* radius of Whitehall.
I think the rise of the boardgame café is interesting, they seem to combine a family friendly vibe with a broader event/gaming space.
Most of Europe doesn't have the strange alcohol laws of the USA, so I suspect that many of the younger generation (teenagers) find a boardgame café more congenial than a pub. In other words, an 18 year old can play in, or run their campaign, eat decent pizza and drink a few beers with their friends without ever leaving the café. That seems healthy to me.
Their daytime business model seems to include people "working from home" who bring their laptop with them to the café and some support business meetings (virtual or in-person).
My understanding is that in the USA they often ask for a cover charge, but that doesn't seem to be the case in the UK. The café make their money from food, drinks and selling accessories (they sell dice etc.). The games bring people in and they stay for an evening.
The Boardgame Cafés are a great resource for people looking to meet up with fellow gamers.
The following are ones I know something about. This is current July 2026.

Ludoquist (Croydon)
This is a nice place, easy to book a table and menu is good and not notably expensive. They run a Meetups platform to help gamers find games there. This is a place where parents bring their kids to play boardgames with them and have a meal out. They run a specific RPG night on Tuesdays which features paid, drop in, D&D with pre-generated characters as well as various regular campaigns that use the space. Ludoquist is very close to extensive parking in central Croydon.
https://www.theludoquist.com/

Badger, Badger (they have two sites, one in Deptford and another in West Norwood)
You can book a gaming table on their website. It's laptops and headphones during the day, but has an active gaming scene during the evenings. Less RPG focussed than some, but happy to host. The only drawback for me is their menu, which is almost exclusively Japanese cuisine, which is not my thing. https://www.badgerbadger.org/

The Spider (Lion Comics, 1965)

I was inspired by **Brian Rogers** discussion about the "Spider Queen" in their zine.
A short review of *another* Spider
"The Spider" of *my* childhood was this guy, a British super-hero with gadgets, he is **not** a variant of the Marvel Spiderman.
This Spider (see right, from Wikipedia) first appeared in the Lion comic from 1965 in various formats until around 1980, he has been republished by Rebellion in recent years.



The Spider, art by Reg Bunn.

The Lion was a very popular comic book in its day. In contrast Marvel "Spiderman" comic book were not easy to find in the UK back then. They were not casually on the shelves of local shops where I lived, you could get them but the shopkeeper might have to send away for a specific title. So, if you asked a kid in the UK in the sixties/early seventies about a spider superhero, this is the one some might think of, rather than that yank guy in the red and blue suit. The cost of imported US super hero comic books combined with our indigenous comic book tradition (which leant heavily on the British experience of World War Two) meant that the UK had its own ecosystem of heroes and villains for many years. Gradually as logistics and cultural hegemony developed, these regional heroes were destroyed by the dominance of Marvel and DC. The local heroes got replaced by major corporate properties. Years later a British/Northern Irish guy (he was born in County Down) called Garth Ennis would write "The Boys" and mock corporate supes, I wonder if this UK experience of a transition from local comic books to USA based corporate culture, is reflected in that theme? This is most obvious in Alan Moore's ALBION comic book, which in a typically Moore meta explains what happened to those forgotten heroes of the UK comic books. I enjoyed ALBION for many reasons, but it brings back many of the old faces.
The UK tradition survives in modern comic books like "2000 AD" but it had deep roots of which "the Spider" is one aspect. His origin was as a former villain turned vigilante. His villain-to-villain battle with the murderous Executioner lead him to want to eradicate all costumed supervillains in a suitably child-friendly manner! The character was created by Ted Cowan and Reg Bunn. Later stories were written by Jerry Siegel (co-creator of SUPERMAN). So, the Spider was an interesting intersection of UK and US styles of superhero. Siegel had serious experience in the DC comic books which influenced the tone of the series. So the Spider fought a lot of oddly thematic supervillains and can be thought of as a mix of the British and the DC style of comic book superhero.

The Spider's abilities.
The spider is primarily a gadgeteer with some special equipment that he always uses. So he always has his Knockout Gas, Jet Pack (allowing him to fly) and Web Gun (firings webbing to entangle). At times he creates various spider- themed gadgets including vehicles, robots etc. Personally he is a skilled hypnotists (mind control) and is in great physical condition.

Rebellion Developments acquired much of the old IPC/Fleetway comics books a few years back. This brought The Spider back into print through collected editions and occasional new stories. Spider is a copyright of Rebellion and any images used here are asserted as fair use for the purpose of this review. I wish them every success.

Patrick Reviews: *SPIDER NOIR.*



The Spiderman franchise is a trademark of **Marvel** (a subsidiary of **Disney**) and the Spider Noir series is a product of **Sony Pictures**. The images shown are asserted as fair use for the purposes of this review. Spider Noir is available *free* on **Amazon**.

This is an alternative 1930's where Spiderman is a pulp age hero. More like a noir detective than the mainstream Spidey. He starts out burnt out, drinking heavily and semi-retired, eking out a living by working as a private eye in the New York of 1932. In classic noir fashion he falls for a client and gets dragged back into his previous life as "the Spider".

This review will deal primarily with the Amazon Prime series rather than the comic book series. There are mild spoilers for Season 1.

Introduction

The series origin of the superhero known as "the Spider" is as a sergeant in the US army during World War One. He helps liberate a group of prisoners who were being experimented on by the Germans. During this mission, he gets into a fight with one of the subjects, gets bitten and later develops superpowers. There is a weird science and horror aspect to how this is handled. He is then experimented by the US army who want the secret of what was apparently a German super-soldier programme. He finally gets out, changes his identity (creating "Ben Reilly") for his own safety, and becomes perhaps the first masked superhero in New York at some point after 1918 and until 1928.
This is all background. The story proper starts years later in 1932.

On the performance

I was initially dubious of Nicolas Cage playing Spiderman, but he won me over with his performance, which he describes as "*70% Humphrey Bogart and 30% Bugs Bunny*". There is humour but not too much. Cage's performance convinces as someone with serious problems and they add to the plausibility of his character. Most of his adventures are in his Reilly identity rather than as the Spider, so the early episodes work well as pulp fiction with occasional dips into the superhero genre. The writing is good throughout, dialogue is handled well and it doesn't shy away from some of the social problems of the place and time (racial discrimination and poor treatment of veterans). It also gives the villains some decent motivation, they are not just being villainous for the sake of it. This is all helped by some excellent supporting actors, obviously Brendan Gleeson is a great actor, but Lamorne Morris (as Robbie Robertson) is a real find, Li Jun Li (as Cat Hardy) is strong and Jack Huston (as Flint Marko) does a lot with his limited role.
This a solidly strong cast working with a good script.

Indicators of quality

The costuming, by Trayce Gigi Field, is truly impressive. It remains accurate to the historic 1930's but has just enough difference to remind me that this is an alternate universe. The quality of the costuming means the changes remind us that this is an alternative world. I really like that, it's more subtle than typical Marvel "you are in a multiverse" show not tell.

The music is excellent. This is helped by Li Jun Li's performance as the night club singer Cat Hardy. Her performances are worth listening to with the volume up to get her full range. Much of this is period authentic, some is not, but when it is not, IMHO it is a better artistic choice than staying with exclusively period musical arrangements.

There is an overall impression of professionalism and attention to quality. But you don't watch Marvel/Disney/Sony to have your expectations subverted. Pacing, plot and visuals are reliably good.

Anachronisms or something else?

Having said there is a good feel for the period, I noticed some anachronisms. These initially surprised me because of the otherwise good writing and solid plotting. Until I realised that these are major changes to the comic book. Essentially they completely change the origin story and background for the series. I suspect those changes aren't mistakes, they may have been made specifically to help sell Spider Noir in China. Let me explain why I think that.

The first major change is that the Spider (a noir gumshoe) is comfortable with terms such as "mutation" and "a gene" in 1932. I *know* the terms existed then! But they are treated as common parlance, and it is this usage which I suggest, is ahistoric. But they are required because the Spider no longer has a supernatural origin story.

The second is that the Kaiser's Germany is behaving like the later Nazis in terms of medical experimentation on prisoners. Spider Noir smudges together WW1 and WW2.

Why would they introduce these changes? In the original comic book, the Spider is created by a clearly supernatural event. That kind of clearly occult origin is authentic for the pulp era ("*the Shadow knows*..."). But, China has strict rules on the representation of the occult.

Perhaps they changed the origin story to make it more acceptable to the NRTA?

Stereotyping the Germans (rather than the Nazis) as being generally inclined to evil experiments could be seen as a low cost fix to get access to the second largest market in the world? Maybe? The alternative is a very peculiar alteration, because this story has been systematically changed from the comic book. It feels like a patch. It is anachronistic, because after the 1900 Neisser case Imperial Germany had unusually strong laws protecting human subjects. The Germany of 1918 had laws on medical ethics that would not find equivalents in the USA for generations. Nazism had its cultural roots but wasn't "normal", a democratic republic was overthrown by an authoritarian cult of personality which then went on to do terrible things. I'm just glad that couldn't happen now...

But I digress! The desire to sell the series in China would explain the replacement of a genre authentic origin with the one shown in the series. If so, are these anachronisms just the rough edges in the translation for the international market? I'd say that makes sense and is done well. But if that is the case, is it ok to stereotype the Germans to ensure market access to China? It would certainly say something interesting about the relative status of the two markets. It makes more sense than the writers suddenly glitching in such a consistent manner.

Conclusions

I greatly enjoyed Spider Noir, it is stylish, well written and well-acted. It is worth checking out if you like either noir *or* superheroes and especially if you enjoy both. I'd place in it the same level as the first seasons of Daredevil Netflix series which I also enjoyed. You have to be good with Cage's style but I think this role suits him. See overleaf for the second part of my review.

Part 2. The rules of the *Noir universe*.

In Patrick Reviews, a distinctive part of the review process is developing "the rules" of the Universe in which this fiction exists. So this is the second part of my review of Spider Noir!

The Noir Universe has distinctive features, to model the following are suggested :



1. Rare supers

In the series, superpowers seem to be rare and recent, originating in a single weird science experiment during World War One. The Spider is either the first, or a very early, costumed superhero. He likely becomes active in the 1920s. No earlier costumed hero is mentioned.

2. Problematic superpowers

Superpowers in the series are shown as coming from **only** two possible origins and both sources have automatic and serious drawbacks. All Series 1 super-powered characters **must** choose **one** of the following *origin based* power type:

(a) Experimental Victim. This is very different from the range of backgrounds often used in the superhero genre. **All** of the supervillains shown in Series 1 are victims of experimentation in one POW camp during World War One. This is why all super powered characters are USAn men and *all* are ex-soldiers. But the clock is ticking for them. The experiments cause "Mutation" which will gradually deform them psychologically and physically. Anyone with this origin starts as a normal human but gradually becomes more like a traditional supervillain as the "Mutation" changes them. But it doesn't stop, eventually causing lethal physical changes. Ten years after the war, a group of survivors realise something is wrong and seek help from Dr Faber. But Faber accidentally accelerate their rate of Mutation, making them much more powerful but speeding their inevitable and horrible death. Realising this, several turn to crime so that they can live out their few remaining years with wealth and power. I think this is a more interesting motivation than you often get for supervillains and I really like it. I suggest some game mechanics overleaf.

(b) Limited uses. In Series 1 *only* the Spider has this power origin, but we can imagine that other supers could also. His superpowers have limited uses, they run out. He loses all of his powers *during* an extended fight (against Lonnie Lincoln) which nearly gets him killed. The Spider needs sleep and at least many hours before he his superpowers return. This is similar to the D&D "long rest" mechanic but applies to *all* of the Spider's superpowers (so he loses all powers rather than individual abilities). It may be that the Spider limits his power use in the early episodes (seeming like a lower power level) precisely to avoid this problem. If you want a darker tone, it could be that this does not replace the Mutation mechanic but just supplements it. So the Spider could be accumulating Mutation as well, just at the a slower rate. Perhaps the Spider is also experiencing half the Mutation rate of the pre-Faber experimental victims or something like that?

3. Power escalation mechanic.

Anyone with superpowers appears to be able to rapidly develop those powers over days or weeks. So we see a much more rapid escalation of powers than happens in many superhero type games. For example:

> *In the early episodes Flint Marko is a strong man, he can punch into an interior wall (which humans could do) but he is knocked out by falling onto a steel beam. In a time frame of days or weeks he rapidly becomes stronger and tougher. Four episodes in, he is absorbing bullet casually. By the finale he can reform his body from being completely crushed. He has gone from "tough guy" to fully fledged supervillain in 8 episodes.*

Experimental Victim. I'd go with some sort of Mutation Points mechanic, they can have x dice of this power but it costs y Mutation Points. Characters start at Mutation 1 but the player gets the choice to add Mutation *each* episode and always get +1 Mutation each z game sessions. Mutation can be used to buy additional powers, for example it costs 2 Mutation points to become bulletproof etc. Projected lifespan is 12 years/Mutation point total.
Limited uses. the Spider has 5 "uses" of their superpowers. He burns 1 use every 2d6 minutes to be a street level superhero with minor web-slinging. To go higher (strong enough to throw automobiles etc) he is burning 1 use/1d6 minutes. So at maximum power the Spider can lift a car but will lose *all* of his powers in between 5 and 30 minutes, and he can't be exactly sure when.

4. Deception is super-effective.

This is a common feature of the *noir* genre. People deceive, disguise and persuade to great effect. For example, the Spider uses various disguises frequently during the series. They *all* work. He clearly expects and relies on Disguise for his investigations so this isn't a fluke. In addition, Silvermane is shown and described as unusually wily and suspicious, but both Reilly and Cat Hardy lie to him extensively and he believes them. This can probably be modelled with a flat modifier to success in attempts at disguise or deception. Say +3 in a 3d6 based system for all deception and disguise skills?

5. Weird Science!

Both the comic book and the series show various weird science devices. This is consistent with how a lot of pulp era fiction often saw technology, these do whatever the plot requires of them. So, Dr Faber is able to do genetic analysis and gene splicing in humans within hours, using 1930's technology. That isn't medicine, it's magic! But gadget points may be appropriate.

6. Supes are *tough*

Many superhero games (such as Champions) have this as the default, but in this universe everyone with superpowers is capable of taking large amounts of damage and they all recover fast. Some are also classic "tanks" (who are hard to hurt) but even non-tanks have more Body/Health/Hit Points (whatever you use) than normal humans.
I don't think Leyden is dead despite being hit by a train. That is genre appropriate.

Conclusions. I think it is worth using special rules to model this universe properly.

Thank you and I hope you all stay cool and stay well. **END.**

Ignorable Theme for E&A #15

How do you find players/GMs/games?

I haven't had much luck finding players except through recommendations of friends or fellow players. I just don't get "out there" to meet people and I don't engage with social media.

Ignorable Theme Revisited

Intra-party Conflict

In the first session of the new *Savage Worlds* campaign, I found myself in the center of intra-party conflict. It was caused by out-of-character assumptions mixed with character conflicts. We were all feeling out our characters and the party dynamic. It was good to reveal and air out our character foibles early in the campaign.

My character, Isadore Rogero, is a bishonen swordsman with a code of honor—defend the defenseless and be honest, trustworthy, and just. Code of Honor is a Major Hindrance within the *Savage Worlds* system, so I was obligated to not ignore it.

Our party was on a patrol, sent to investigate wolf sightings and told to report what they found. After being set upon a ragged pack of wolves and defeating the creatures, the party discovered an underground chamber of an ancient ruin.

Three of the four went inside to investigate, but upon learning that it was the wolf den and included a deceased she-wolf, Isadore decided to stay above ground with Mulissa—the party's pack mule. He was concerned about them being cornered and/or Mulissa being attacked if left alone.[1] This fact was not clear to the other players, but was to the GM.

The others discovered some mysterious artifacts—strange stone-like spheres—and absconded with a couple (one broken, one whole). However, they did not include this detail when giving their report to the patrol captain.

When Isadore found out about the spheres afterwards, he politely but forcibly confronted the PC with the spheres for lying by omission. The PC also had a secret (being a spellcaster) that was revealed during the wolf encounter, but we all agreed to keep it secret (else the PC be hunted down and imprisoned). Isadore explained, "Your secret is not mine to reveal, but lying to the captain about the spheres reflects negatively upon my honor by association." The players explained that they had expected Isodore to interject, not knowing what I didn't know in-character.

It was a tense moment of conflict, but we worked through it. One of the PCs sarcastically hinted at withholding future information from Isadore so that they could maintain their secrets. "Darling, kiss my ass," he retorted.

Aurora Cove

Thanks for all the kind comments and astute questions in the last issue. I hope the second installment (last issue) added the necessary context and answered some of your questions. A community of less than fifty people that's actually a prison for memory-wiped supervillains (and that's only supposed to be one-shot, not a campaign setting) doesn't need a lot more explanation.[2] Also note that it is unabashedly based on Stardew Valley and inherits the same "don't think about the economics" approach to worldbuilding.

Here is the last of it, the "real" character sheets (using *Icons: Superpowered Roleplaying*, based on Archetypes from *Icons: Origins*).

[1] It is also a habit of mine to purposely remove my PC from a scene so as not to be "that player" who has to be in every scene.

[2] Or maybe it makes even less sense and raises even more questions! :)

Camille/Cameron Waters
The Abyssal

Origin: Gimmick
Archetype: The Battlesuit

Fighting	4	Fair
Coordination	3	Average
Strength	7	Incredible
Intellect	7	Incredible
Awareness	3	Average
Willpower	4	Fair

Stamina	10	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
Grit	2	

Specialities
- Technology +1
- Oceanography +1
- Underwater Combat Expert +2

Battlesuit Powers
- Aquatic: 7 Incredible
  - Fighting, Coordination, & Awareness increase to 7 while underwater
- Strength Increase: 7 Incredible
  - Average (3) Strength without the armor
- Blast: 7 Incredible
- Camouflage: 7 Incredible
- Damage Resistance: 7 Incredible
- Life Support: Breathing, Pressure, and Vacuum
- Swim Speed: 4 Fair
- Super-Senses: Sonar

Qualities
- ☐ 21st Century Pirate
- ☐ Cutting Edge Technology
- ☐ It's Not the Suit, But Who's Inside

Dossier Summary
Birthplace: Douala, Cameroon

The Abyssal is a pirate that targets cargo ships, oil and gas tankers, and cruise vessels in international waters. Most often the ships are captured and then returned once a ransom has been paid. Sometimes The Abyssal will target specific cargo or individuals, sometimes as a contracted theft or kidnapping. The Abyssal usually operates alone but will sometimes hire a small strike force to assist in raids. They avoid direct confrontation with military vessels and will "cut bait" and flee than tangle with superior firepower.

Their motivation seems to be mostly profit-driven but they have claimed animosity against "colonial powers." Their normal targets are vessels associated with multi-national corporations based in Europe, the U.S., and China. They have responded to distress calls from ships in danger and is a folk hero around Indonesia, the Philippines, and Caribbean where they have provided disaster recovery assistance. Notably, the Atlantean High Council has rebuffed requests to assist in The Abyssal's apprehension.

The aquatic battlesuit worn by The Abyssal is not of their design but rather was stolen from a French military contractor. Their technical know-how is evident in the maintenance and upgrades they have applied.

Why you are in Aurora Cove
You were looking for a new base of operations and came across a mention of Aurora Cove in stolen, classified military documents dating from the Cold War. You had a hunch that the listening station was silently commissioned, so decided to scout it out. You approached from the sea and encountered automated defenses. You remember that they were easy enough to take out, but you were captured nonetheless. Since you knew their secret location, they couldn't set you free, so you were assimilated into the Aurora Cove community. No legal arrest, no formal trial, just straight to incarceration.

Ruby/Rudy Drake
Red Dragon

Origin: Trained
Archetype: Crimefighter

Fighting	6	Great
Coordination	5	Good
Strength	4	Fair
Intellect	4	Fair
Awareness	5	Good
Willpower	5	Good

Stamina	9	□□□□□□□□□
Grit	5	

Specialities
- Athletics +1
- Intimidation Expert +2
- Investigation Expert +2
- Guns Master +3
- Martial Arts +1
- Stealth Expert +2

Powers
- Guns: 5 Good
  - Fast-Attack: 2 attacks total
- Grenades: 6 Great
  - Dazzle & Blast, Burst
- Mask
  - Infravision, Nightvision

Qualities
- ☐ Justice at Any Cost
- ☐ Outside the Law
- ☐ Scourge of the Underworld

Dossier Summary
Birthplace: Baltimore, Maryland, USA

The vigilante Red Dragon was once the teenaged superhero known as Red Sparrow and sidekick to The Crusader. Though lacking any superpowers, they are very well trained with more experience than many expert field agents. They are not to be underestimated.

As the Crusader's rogues gallery rotated in and out of prison and asylums causing havoc and destruction with each cycle, Red Sparrow became enraged by what they saw as a failure of the justice system and their mentor's unwillingness to take more permanent measures. The duo had an irreconcilable falling out and Red Sparrow went solo, becoming Red Dragon.

Red Dragon has run through the criminal underworld like a knife. Though they removed key figures that had proven to be beyond the reach of law enforcement, they left considerable collateral damage and chaos in their wake. Their activities have interfered with official investigations and caused the exposure and/or death of confidential informants and undercover agents. Their targeting of corruption within the police department and political machine also has the public divided on their tactics. While officially considered a dangerous criminal, many in the public and the halls of power see the Red Dragon as a hero (at least a useful tool).

Why you are in Aurora Cove
The so-called authorities have never appreciated your form of justice and treated you just like the very criminals you brought to harsh justice. When they finally managed to arrest and sentence you to prison, they deemed that it would be too unsafe to be housed in a traditional prison. They thought you'd continue your crusade against criminals within the confines of the prison; they were right. So they sent you to Aurora Cove.

Theresa/Terence Rockford
Rockslide

Origin: Origin
Archetype: The Element Controller

Fighting	3	Average
Coordination	4	Fair
Strength	6	Great
Intellect	3	Average
Awareness	4	Fair
Willpower	5	Good

Stamina	11	□□□□□□□□□□□
Grit	2	

Specialities
- Carousing +1
- Geology +1

Powers
- Element Control (Earth): 7 Incredible
  - Telekinesis
  - Rock Armor
  - Earthquake (Property damage)
  - Binding (Target must be on the ground)
  - Burrowing

Qualities
- ☐ Ooh, Shiny!
- ☐ Rock n' Roll!
- ☐ Flirtatious

Dossier Summary
Birthplace: Winton, Queensland, Australia

There is sparse information on this freelancer. They were only a teenager when they appeared on the scene, but they quickly built a name for themselves as a super-for-hire, providing backup and additional firepower for other villains.

They have also been observed teaming up with superheroes on occasion, but it is not known why. Pure heroic motivations are deemed unlikely. More probably, it is part of some confidence scheme to compromise the hero. Perhaps they are acting as an undercover agent to infiltrate a superhero team. Romantic entanglements are another possibility. A combination of all the above is most likely.

They don't appear to have any agenda or greater goal beyond personal amusement and satisfaction.

Why you are in Aurora Cove
There is no prison made of concrete and steel that can hold you, so they sent you to a prison without walls.

Simone/Simon Yetchz
Gizmet

Origin: Gimmick
Archetype: The Gadeteer

Fighting	3	Average
Coordination	5	Good
Strength	3	Average
Intellect	9	Fantastic
Awareness	4	Fair
Willpower	5	Good

Stamina	8	☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
Grit	4	

Specialities
- Science +1
- Technology Master +3

Powers
- Gadgets: 7 Incredible
  - Preparation & check required
- Universal Remote: 7 Incredible
  - Machine Control
  - No Preparation or check required

Qualities
- ☐ Obsessive
- ☐ Easily Distracted
- ☐ Problem-Solver
- ☐ “Let’s crank this to eleven!”

Dossier Summary

Birthplace: Champain, Illinois, USA

Gizmet is an engineering genius and one of the brightest minds in the country. A prodigy since grade school, their talents were sought out by the most prestigious corporations, universities, and government labs. However, none of these institutions could hold onto this unique and iconoclastic talent. Unwilling or unable to either work within a managed organization or beholden to private investors, Gizmet became independent and self-funded.

Unfortunately, developing and prototyping with bespoke components and exotic materials quickly ate through their liquidity and they turned to criminal means of gaining resources and capital. Gizmet has also established themselves among the criminal elite or corporate capital manager (no difference in Gizmet’s perception) as the go-to person when they are seeking out a technological edge; usually, this takes the form of some unfinished device from Gizmet’s workbench that they sell to fund more interesting or promising projects.

Why you are in Aurora Cove

Innovation is expensive. The first time you were arrested, they put you in jail to await a bail hearing. You escaped. When they arrested you again, they managed to contain you long enough to start a trial. You escaped before it ended. The third time, they actually managed to put you in a maximum security prison. They need not have bothered because you escaped within a week. The next time, it took you nearly a fortnight to escape their supermaximum security facility. The last time they apprehended you, they just threw up their hands and sent you to Aurora Cove.

Bertrude/Bertrand Chylde
Demonchylde

Origin: Birthright
Archetype: Archetype

Fighting	3	Average
Coordination	4	Fair
Strength	3	Average
Intellect	4	Fair
Awareness	5	Good
Willpower	7	Incredible

Stamina	10	□□□□□□□□□□
Grit	3	

Specialities
- Occult Expert +2
- Mental Resistance +1

Powers
- Mystic Awareness: 6 Great
- Magic: 7 Incredible
  - Performance and check required
  - Instant effects
- Hellfire Control: 7 Incredible
  - Cast instantly without check

Qualities
- ☐ Half-Demon
- ☐ Grandmama's Spellbook
- ☐ Hellraiser

Dossier Summary
Birthplace: Providence, Rhode Island, USA

The Chylde family name goes back hundreds of years and first appears in records in the late middle ages on a list of those burned as witches in England. In fact, the Chylde's have been consorting with demons and practicing witchcraft and sorcery for many generations. Their reputation often exceeds their actual capabilities. The scion known as a Demonchylde is an exception.

This half-demon has made it their goal to bring Hell's dominion to Earth, and to rule over humanity. To that end, they bring destruction, sow chaos, and undermine the government. They want to tear down institutions and reshape society to worship them as the supreme ruler. For now, they lack the raw power to extend their influence beyond a single city at once, but if not kept in check, their power will grow until they become unstoppable.

They have equal disdain for human or hellish authority and will gladly pit one against the other provided that they come out on top. They rarely ally themselves with other groups that would require sharing power. Rather, they manipulate and rally cultists and other fanatics to follow them and do their bidding.

Why you are in Aurora Cove
No one trusts magic. Nor should they. You certainly don't. Respect? Yes. Trust? Never. If power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, what does reality-altering, cosmos-defying power do? When you have ultimate agency tugging at your id, unfettered by the laws of physics or society, what hope does conscience have to stop you? After being captured and convicted for your most recent defiance of mortal law, they sent you straight to Aurora Cove.

Lola/Logan Garfield
Kaosling

Origin: Birthright
Archetype: The Shapeshifter

Fighting	5	Good
Coordination	4	Fair
Strength	3	Average
Intellect	4	Average
Awareness	5	Good
Willpower	5	Good

Stamina	8	□□□□□□□□
Grit	4	

Specialities
- Athletics Master +2
- Martial Arts +1
- Stealth Master +2
- Wrestling +1

Powers
- Transformation: 9 Fantastic
  - Any extant or extinct animal, gaining all their abilities up to rank 9
  - Shrinking or Growth, as appropriate
  - Instant
  - Mute (Cannot speak while transformed)
  - Clothes do not transform

Qualities
- ☐ Mother Nature's Enforcer
- ☐ Humans are Animals
- ☐ Who am I?

Dossier Summary
Birthplace: Unknown

The creature or person known as Koasling is an eco-terrorist and a threat to national security. Their actual name is unknown—Koasling is just a moniker that was applied to them first by the bureau and then taken up by the press.

They disrupt any large-scale activity that they deem detrimental to the environment. They have slowed or destroyed the construction of vital petroleum extraction, refinement, and transportation infrastructure. They cause physical and financial injury to corporations which own and/or operate chemical factories, logging and mining operations, and/or industrial farms. They also target military installations and other large-scale polluters. Any financial gains from their criminal activities are directed to conservation groups in the form of anonymous cash donations.

Why you are in Aurora Cove
When you were captured, you were on a rampage. You were completely lost in primal anger and fear, your humanity completely buried and lost. Your body reformed on instinct—you couldn't control it and you couldn't find your way back to your human form. You couldn't communicate and you couldn't even remember your own name.

At first, they kept you caged and tried every trick in their psychological and pharmaceutical playbook to bring back your humanity to no avail. Sending you to Aurora Cove has recentered your psyche and calmed the raging storm of emotions that had overtaken you.

Ally/Allan Eastman
Speed Demon

Origin: Transformed
Archetype: The Speedster

Fighting	5	Good
Coordination	5	Good
Strength	3	Average
Intellect	4	Fair
Awareness	4	Fair
Willpower	3	Average

Stamina	6	□□□□□□
Grit	2	

Specialities
- Art: Graffiti Expert +2
- Sleight of Hand +1

Powers
- Super-Speed: 10 Supreme
  - Fast Attack: Total of 3 Fighting attacks
  - Defending: Use Super-Speed in place of Fighting or Coordination to avoid attacks
  - Phasing: Pass through walls and force fields up to Super-Speed rank

Qualities
- ☐ Fast Friends
- ☐ The Hand is Quicker Than the Eye
- ☐ Original Prankster

Dossier Summary
Birthplace: Jacksonville, Florida, USA

Speed Demon portrays themselves as a dashing super-criminal, flouting the law at will and spending their ill-gotten gains almost as quickly as they get them. They work as an illegal courier, messenger, smuggler, and thief who is virtually impossible to catch, with a roguish, devil-may-care attitude. They are also a notorious graffiti artist and will often supplement their crimes with graphic street art created at the scene.

They go out of their way to taunt and embarrass super heroes and law enforcement trying to stop them, even if that means sacrificing the profitability or success of a job. They also provoke super heroes and villains with pranks and stunts in an escalating game of one-upmanship.

Why you are in Aurora Cove
They say that in prison, a person has nothing but time. For a superspeedster, the boredom of confinement should count as cruel and unusual punishment. You were literally bouncing off the walls until you learned to phase through them. For months, you continued to do your time—officially at least—escaping when you wanted to and coming back in time for evening and morning roll calls with no one the wiser. Until they eventually got wiser and sent you to Aurora Cove.

Ulyssa/Ulysses Mars
Mercenary X

Origin: Unknown
Archetype: The Warrior

Fighting	7	Incredible
Coordination	5	Good
Strength	6	Great
Intellect	3	Average
Awareness	4	Fair
Willpower	7	Incredible

Stamina 13 □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□
Grit 2

Specialities
- Athletics +1
- Leadership +1
- Military +1

Powers
- Immortality
- Shield: 5 Good
  - Damage Reduction requires a reaction or blocking action
- Sword: 7 Incredible

Qualities
- ☐ Eternal Soldier
- ☐ Everyone I've ever loved is dead
- ☐ Everyone I've ever hated is dead... or will be soon

Dossier Summary

AKA The Eternal Soldier, The Carpathian, Iqhawe Elingafi....

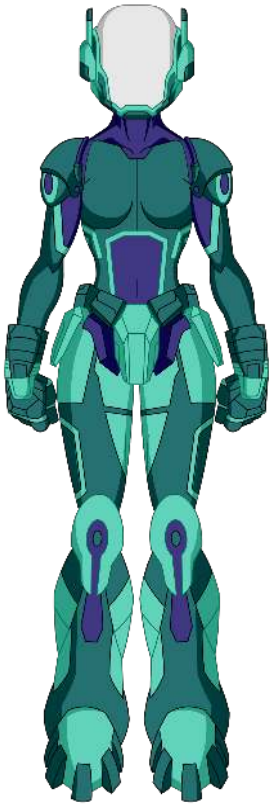
Birthplace: Unknown

We don't know how old this individual is. We have definitive photographic evidence from the U.S. Civil War. We have referential documents going back to the 1100's. Beyond that, we're into oral traditions and legends.

What we do know is that they show up whenever or wherever there is strife and war. Since the end of the Cold War, they have been selling their services to the highest bidder regardless of political or criminal affiliation. Their motivations are an enigma; the money seems incidental. They have been known to switch to the losing side in the middle of a conflict, perhaps because it is more challenging. They don't pose a threat to civilians and will turn on their employers if innocents are harmed. They have a preference for hand-to-hand combat and weaponry, even if guns would be more prudent. Is this for tradition or just an additional challenge?

Why you are in Aurora Cove

You're tired. Tired of blood. Tired of death. Tired of the endless cycle of violence that has defined your immortal life. After your last mission, you could have walked away, but you knew you'd just return again for another mission. You longed for lasting change, so you turned yourself in. You explained your motives to the prison shrink and they recommended that you be transferred to Aurora Cove. You tried your hand at farming with Pamela Acker's help and it did not take long for you to fall in love. For the first time in centuries, you found peace.



The Abyssal



Red Dragon



Rockslide



Gizmet



Demonchylde



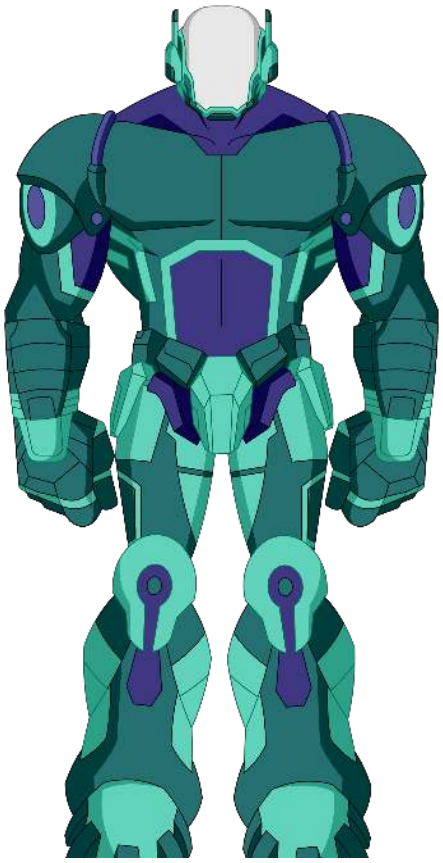
Koasling



Speed Demon



Mercenary X



The Abyssal



Red Dragon



Rockslide



Gizmet



Mercenary X



Koasling



Speed Demon



Demonchylde

Myles Skyler
Captain Sky

Origin: Origin
Archetype: The Paragon

Fighting	4	Fair
Coordination	3	Average
Strength	9	Fantastic
Intellect	3	Average
Awareness	3	Average
Willpower	4	Fair

Stamina 13 □□□□□□□ □□□□□□
Grit 3

Specialities
- Aerial Combat +1
- Law +1
- Technology +1
- Wrestling +1

Powers
- Damage Resistance: 8 Amazing
- Flight: 7 Incredible

Qualities
- ☐ Keeping the World Safe
- ☐ Heroism is Sacrifice
- ☐ Paragon of Justice

Hive Mind

Origin: ??
Archetype: The Mentalist

Fighting	3	Average
Coordination	4	Fair
Strength	2	Poor
Intellect	7	Incredible
Awareness	6	Great
Willpower	10	Superb

Stamina 10 □□□□□□□□
Grit 3

Specialities
- Mental Resistance +1

Powers
- Telepathy: 9 Fantastic
  - Burst, Extended Range
  - Mental Blast
- Mind Control: 9 Fantastic
  - Mindlink, Dependence
- Super-Senses: Telelocation
- Gaseous Form 10 Superb
  - Immunity to Physical Attacks except for those that would disrupt or affect a cloud
  - Permanent
  - Flight 1 Weak

Qualities
- ☐ Collective Consciousness
- ☐ Matchless Mind
- ☐ “All Shall Serve the Hive”

Magnetrix

Origin: Construct

Fighting	4	Fair
Coordination	4	Fair
Strength	8	Amazing
Intellect	7	Incredible
Awareness	4	Fair
Willpower	5	Good

Stamina 13 □□□□□□□ □□□□□□
Grit 2

Specialities
- Technology Expert +2
- Leadership +1

Powers
- Android
  - Damage Resistance: 8 Great
  - Life Support: 10 Supreme
  - Mental Resistance: 10 Supreme
- Magnetic Control: 8 Amazing
  - Aura (Debris Field)
  - Blast (Magnetic Wave)
  - Leaping (Magnetic Launch)
  - Telelkinesis (Ferrous Materials)

Qualities
- ☐ Superior Lifeform
- ☐ Magnetic Personality
- ☐ Plays with Their Pets
- ☐ Mostly Passes as Human



Magnetrix's Soldiers

Fighting	4	Fair
Coordination	3	Average
Strength	4	Fair
Intellect	3	Average
Awareness	3	Average
Willpower	3	Average

Gear
- Body Armor
  - Armor 2
- Assault Rifles
  - Shooting damage 5
  - Burst
- Batons
  - Bashing damage 5





Comments on E&A Issue #14

Patrick Brady

You focused on inter-player conflict whereas I approached it as inter-PC conflict. Both are bad. I'd categorize murder hobo rhumba as a subset of campaign expectations. To your list, I would add the scene hog. To borrow your wording about metagaming, "I've seen people blazenly inserting themselves into events happening miles away from their character."

On the Validity of Ogres, AI makes it easier for people to dismiss valid evidence they don't like by claiming, "That's AI". Legacy examples of this behavior include "That's Fake News" or "That's CGI". Furthermore, they can use AI to fabricate (purposefully or accidentally) evidence for their cause, such as ogres on the high street.

Roger BW

RYCT Josh, the second edition of Zendo had a card system for generating rules. This is useful for novices and helps avoid the trap of making the rules too complicated. But I haven't played it. : (

Michael Cule

RYCT Scribble, yes, the US Constitution is a legal document. It is "the highest law in the land" unlike the Declaration of Independence which is not legally binding. A recent issue is the conservative Supreme Court justices saying that the Constitution doesn't say what it plainly says. They take literally the things they like and ignore or deliberately misinterpret the things they don't.[3]

Bryant Durrell

Howdy. If you're into boardgames, both BoardGameGeek and The Dice Tower run boardgame cruises.

Elf

I vote for RPGs with Fire as it's the more esoteric topic. Solo games are mainstream now.

Your provocative statement about superhero RPGs not doing their job[4] generated a lot of feedback. I hope you don't feel ganged-up upon. It's an interesting topic for discussion. My request is that you be a bit more explicit on what exactly you are looking for. For example, RYCT Brian, can you describe the "type of heroism in fiction that most rpgs don't cover"? Examples would be great.

Everything you said about superhero RPGs could be applied to fantasy, science fiction, and other genres. I cannot make any character I can imagine using any system that isn't completely freeform. I even struggle with mostly freeform systems like *Risus*. Superheroes are particularly troublesome because the genre is more open to weird character abilities that gamers feel obligated to put into a mechanical framework.

Plenty of games address the versatility question through the use of stunts. But the GM has to be wary of applying real-world physical implications when superpowers are used creatively. Otherwise, you end up with Shadowcat phasing solid objects into every villain's brain and it gets boring really fast. Comic writers also have to worry about this. It's better for gamers and writers alike to come up with new tricks than allow optimal maneuvers to become rote.

If you are making a character for a comic, let your imagination run wild, but if you are making a character for a game, you have to work within the constraints of the rules. You aren't making a superhero using *GURPS*, you are making a *GURPS* character who is a superhero. Many gamers enjoy the puzzle of how to model a character into the game rules.[5] Plus, characters and abilities that work in a comic don't necessarily work well in a roleplaying game.

RPG rules put fences around our imagination, limiting what we can play from the infinite possibilities our imaginations can make. Paradoxically, like the structure of a sonnet, physical properties of watercolors, or the keys on a piano,[6] limitations foster creativity, not diminish it.

[3] Much like how people treat holy scripture.

[4] My words, not yours. :)

[5] Even Regrettable, public domain superheroes. : D

[6] Or page limits on a zine... : P

RYCT Lisa, one reason why "game mechanics don't cover the source genre's scope of characters, themes, and activities" is because there is too much variance in the genre. I would not expect any single RPG to cover all superhero sub-genres from *Teen Titans* to *Teen Titans Go!* to *The Boys*. For example, *Truth & Justice* highlights how being a superhero makes your life more complicated and forces you to deal with the fallout. This is great for *Spider-Man*, but maybe not *Justice League* which usually doesn't focus on this theme.

It's all a question of what you want from an RPG when it comes to these things. What does it mean for a game mechanic to cover theme? What activities are excluded by the rules? How much of this should be on the shoulders of the players and GM?

Avram Grumer
There were a number of 18 Card Microgame contests on BoardGameGeek dating back to 2014. Why 18? I couldn't say. Note that many Button Shy games have expansions which swell them beyond the original 18 cards.

RYCT Matt, it is not uncommon for games to make starting PCs less powerful than canonical characters in the setting. *DC Heroes* may not allow you to create Superman as a starting character, but you can't create Drizzt as a starting *D&D* character either.

RYCT Elf, I often say that you get the best customer feedback when you give them something to complain about. You get more engagement with bad rules[7] than a hole in the rules. When confronted with a void, many gamers will ask for the designer to fill it. This leads to rules bloat and the 80/20 discrepancy between rules that are written and rules that are actually used. They could also make a house rule, of course. On the other hand, the only option for a bad rule is to replace it with a house rule.

Joshua Kronengold
RYCT Michael, superhero comic books cover too broad of a spectrum for me to feel comfortable about sweeping declarations about whether character "immortality" is a virtue or a flaw. A superhero RPG that wants to cover as much of that spectrum as possible needs to have mechanical knobs to turn the lethality up or down.

Aren't killing attacks in Champions thwarted by resistant defenses? Seemed like a wash to me. Since guns were considered killing, you needed resistant defenses to be bulletproof.

RYCT Roger, justifying a wizard inventing computer science should be fine in a fictional setting. Letting a PC do it falls into the same trap as letting PCs create explosives.

RYCT Elf, there is a distinction between system and plot (story, scenario, theme, or whatever). The *D&D* system has a lot of bells and whistles for combat, but the plot need not involve combat. Some systems are only built for a single plot (or a class of plots). The real question is what mechanical tools does one want to support the plot they want to play?

It's like YCT Timothy. You don't need to know much science to write science fiction if the plot doesn't need that knowledge.[8]

Personally, I lean more towards freeform play until a fight breaks out. For most of the game, the system doesn't matter because I'm not engaging with it.

RYCT Jim, my college experience was a class on a specific language (FORTRAN[9]) and a computational physics class that didn't really care what language we used, but had preferences (C or FORTRAN).

Dale Meier
Welcome!

[7] Identified as bad by whatever criteria you prefer.

[8] Just avoid scientific terms (like parsec) if you aren't going to use them correctly.

[9] The result of being a physics major.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek
RYCT Jim, my thesis is that an inflexible page count strongly encourages "good editing and clear organization".

When you have completed your serialized Havana Horror campaign, you should post a link to the compiled version to the E&A Discord. While I don't want the Discord server to supplant E&A, we could have a channel for supplementary commentary and discussion. We could create a channel for each issue as it comes out, but then lock it down and archive it after 2 months.

Lisa Padol
RYCT Josh about Wujcik and Amber, taking "as much Bad Stuff as necessary to build the character you wanted," and "you got to have your character be powerful," are, of course, potentially contradictory.

John Redden
The setup of the joke is good, but the capitulation fails: Trump would never admit the truth. The joke could also work to reflect proposed voter ID laws.

Brian Rogers
OK, you got a blurt of laughter out of me at "overconfident, vainglorious blowhard" just being a "longer way to write 'player character'."

RYCT Elf, I too was a Vrusk man.

RYCT Lisa, my favorite all-time secret identity reveal was in *Justice League Unlimited* when Lex Luthor and The Flash (Wally West) swapped bodies.[10] Secret identities don't have to be an insane contrivance (some powers make them quite easy to maintain), but it's easy to put heroes into situations that make them untenable either accidentally or intentionally (because that's what the writer, GM, or player wants).

RYCT Josh, are you suggesting that *Pathfinder 2e* moved closer to *D&D 5e*? I don't see that at all. I see it going in the complete opposite direction.

Matt Stevens
Well said about fractal mechanics. Games that have "gone all-in with low-resolution for everything" have a tendency, I have found, to make everything sound mechanical and procedural. I'm often left with the impression that a game session is just a series of die rolls (even though that's not the case).

Your comment to Michael about whether or not Austen's world was color-blind inspired a retort to racists who claim to not see color: *It's easy to be "color-blind" when you blind yourself to people of color.*

Jim Vassilakos
Even if I grant that players with "innate roleplaying talent" hog the limelight, I'll counter by saying that skilled roleplayers don't.

RYCT Brian, if you kill a bunch of people because the voices you thought were angels told you to do so, are you "mad" or "simply evil?" Mental illness takes many forms and psychopathy is complex. Terms like "mad" and "evil" are too simplistic to describe the human condition.

Patrick Zoch
Sacred Flame is only "flame-like" that does radiant, not fire, damage. It would have not been allowed to light oil ablaze in my *D&D* game. This came up a few times and I was corrected by my players. The designers could have at least called the spell "Sacred Radiance" or something similar to avoid confusion.

RYCT Matt, it occurs to me that *D&D* doesn't (as far as I know) have a mechanism for targeting attacks. As a counter-example, you can make called shots in *Savage Worlds*. You could target the head (a more vulnerable spot on most creatures) and the attack roll takes a penalty, but as a result, it does more damage and bypasses armor if they aren't wearing a helmet. This same mechanism can be used to target vulnerabilities made up on the fly. The player can simply say that they want to target a weak spot and the GM can let them at -2 or -4 to hit, +2 or +4 to damage.

[10] Lex had no idea whom he was seeing in the mirror!

Interactive comics from Brazil – part V: *Grifos* (2022)[1]

by Pedro Panhoca da Silva <ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br> and Maira Zucolotto <maira_zuc@hotmail.com>

Gustavo Vasquez Ramos, having released the gamebook *Cercado por mortos* in 2018, decided to try his hand at a genre that is even more niche in Brazil and worldwide: the interactive comic. From this experimentation came *Grifos* (2022) – "Griffins" in free translation. This interactive comic book[2] has emerged in Brazil to fill a significant gap in publications, given that the last release had been *Chico Bento Moço* (2020), years ago.

Set in Ancient Greece, in *Grifos* the reader-player is an adviser to Critias. In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, Athens lies in ruins and needs to be rebuilt following its defeat by Sparta, which also suffered heavy losses. To make matters worse, a family of griffins has now settled on the site of a gold mine that the government wished to exploit. The reader must choose carefully which NPCs to speak to, gather valuable information for negotiations, and either expel or eliminate the griffins from the area so that Athens can prosper once more.

As is customary, the introduction guides readers who have never encountered an interactive comic before on how to read it non-sequentially. One drawback is revealing, right at the start, that there are six possible narrative branches and three different endings (a failure, a satisfactory outcome and a happy ending), which takes away the surprise of discovering when and how the adventure might end.

The narrative is very short and simple, with just 32 paragraphs; it is up to the reader to choose the right people to talk to in order to devise a plan for dealing with the griffins. Some NPCs simply complain about what life has become (such as the Spartan leader Lisandro, indignant that the agreement to tear down the walls between Sparta and Athens has still not been fulfilled), some share cultural insights (such as a philosopher's slave, who explains to the reader the limitations and benefits of the condition he has been forced to live in), and others provide valuable information to prevent the griffins from disrupting the plan to explore the gold mine (such as the experienced soldier, who suggests using a net to capture the griffins).

After speaking to various characters, the reader reaches a cutscene in which they choose which god will be their guide: Apollo (to try to win over the griffins through harmony), Ares (to wage war against the griffins) or Artemis (to hunt the griffins). It is here that the player encounters a certain difficulty, as if they have the clues to win over the griffins through harmony but decide to follow Ares, they will suffer the consequences of this inconsistent choice. In this case, the most sensible course of action would be to obtain clues on how to acquire a weapon or strategy against them (obtained from the experienced soldier).

Particular mention must be made of the extensive academic research carried out by the team involved: a map of Athens showing the locations to be visited right at the start, a detailed historical background on the period and the economic and social situation of the Athenians following Spartan rule, a glossary of all the unusual names and all the NPCs mentioned in the story, and the bibliographical references consulted, including high-quality *YouTube* channels.

Grifos is a delightful interactive comic, suitable for even very young readers, given its basic level of complexity. Furthermore, it serves as a creative way of explaining the Peloponnesian War, with the added twist of blending mythology with history. It is clear that combat scenes, for

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[1] Continuation of the series, the last installment of which is in *Alarums & Excursions* #549.

[2] The author refers to his creation as a "comic-gamebook", but we have adopted the term "interactive comic" as it is a comic without a rule system.

example, are not necessary for this style of adventure. This interactive comic was produced with funding from the Programa de Apoio e Incentivo à Cultura – Fundação Cultural de Curitiba/PR (“Programme for the Support and Promotion of Culture – Curitiba Cultural Foundation”, in free translation) and the city council itself.

COMMENTS #14

BRYANT DURRELL: We really appreciate your interest 😊. And yes, as long as there’s any interactive book at risk of being forgotten over time, you can be sure we’ll make a point of bringing it back to life.
JOHN REDDEN: LOL, us too.
JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: I didn’t know about that! Thanks for the tip 😊
LISA PADOL: I didn’t realise SJG was involved with FF. That’s brilliant news!!



John Redden

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Reddened Stars number 14
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Mix Natter And Anti-Natter

Very Sad News

On 19-July, Chris who I've been gaming with since 1984 where we both worked at Honeywell's Los Angeles Development Center died from a fatal heart attack. He was a mainstay in our Northern California gaming group. Felton was his character in GURPS Traveller.

Regardance

I finished Shroud by Adrian Tchaikovsky. It should win a Hugo.

I picked We Are Legion (We Are Bob) by Dennis Taylor as my next read. I am about 25% of the way through it. So far it is entertaining.

Sum Comments

Pedro and **Maira**, A game book being similar to TTRPG. Interesting. And liberal sexuality is not something I expected.

Dale Meier, welcome to E&A.// Star Trek and a Romulan shop keeper?// Yes, the zine has plenty of Traveller fans.

Patrick Brady, player optionally adding dice … interesting.// I can empathize with you as it relates to commercial publishing.// That is an excellent list of the causes of intra-party conflict.// Vitamin Z deficiency? *gack* !

Matt Stevens, re D&D rules volume XIV, *snicker at 14*.// Fractal mechanics … I'm not going there.// Competitive slapping … gotta hold that one.// For my initial years of running Traveller and then League Cosmos, I ditched "law level".

Bryant Durrell, welcome. I am also retired. I had over 40 years experience in software. It started with keying in boot programs in machine language for mini-computers in 1973 to developing rules based AI in Java in 2013. But technically I'm not retired. Since 2003, I own and manage a farm on the Big Island of Hawai`i.// Good luck on the move to Seattle. I like that city.

Mark Wilson, the best of luck with game publication.// I have old memories of being exhausted at cons. Those days are gone.// Role playing the American revolution of independence from England. My B.A. in history tells me it was a conservative revolution.

Myles Corcoran, yes, the continuing move to a warmer climate.// Colonoscopies are not fun.// The continuing influence of AI on the planets political economy. I wish it weren't true, but it seems planetary power is in the hands of a few globalized corporations. *sigh* There are smaller AI focused companies that actually make ones work easier.

Brian Misiaszek, have you considered converting Habana Horror into a novel? If no, maybe someone else would with all your excellent notes.// One of the burrows from beneath … *grin*.// Slug Blaster is definitely targeted for young gamers. I enjoyed it as an old guy gamer.// Smoke … Oh No!

Avram Grumer, Adrian Tchaikovsky is an amazing author. I decided to back off and read another author. So far Dennis Taylor's Bob series is entertaining.// Marginal Revolution, interesting. I see this as a strategy, not a world view. I'll email the paper that describes where I am coming from.

Roger PW, Another Traveller adventure in Drinax. Excellent.//

Free graphics sources … thank you.// I thought ‘/n’ meant new line.

Attronarch, you produced a well crafted zine as usual. *snicker* at the non-flying broom.// Ah! A messy treasure.

Brian Rogers, re your school administrators … boo!, hiss!

Gabriel Roark, congrats on the ice skating progress. Maybe ice hockey?// Re initiative order. I like the one I used for the last game I ran, the somewhat humorous COC game of Hotel California. There is a definite assigned order based on dice rolls. It goes from 1st then 2nd and so on till last. Last goes two times. Then it proceeds from last to second last and finally finally 1st who goes 2 times then back down the order again.

ELF, I appreciate the explanation of Wiccan and paganism. As Roman Catholic, I am the first one to point out the abuses of my church since the 4th century. And unfortunately it continues with other Christian denominations. The most common phrase from the writings in the new testament by Jesus, is “Peace be with you”. On my farm I have a beautiful Ohia forest. Pagan friends built an *energy* alter pointing to the sky. I thought it was beautiful and I was completely tolerant of their Pagan beliefs and totally peaceful practices. Just as a side note, I have read the entire Koran. Mary, the mother of Jesus is mentioned more in her Surah than in the Christian New Testament.[1]

1 I am a Lector Minister in my local church, so you have a minor cleric in E&A

Patrick Zoch, I like the sequence about the Sea Ghost.// Nice graphic. // As usual a beautiful zine.

Dylan Capel, yes, more heat.// Comment on how a golf course is an expression of power. I agree.

Michael Cule, I sympathize on hotel beds. And I don’t go on long trips anymore. I’m tired of ending up in the Emergency Room.// I stayed in Manchester years ago when working in the UK. I ate a large amount of Chinese food. // Re politics, are any of the Brit politicians moving towards re-joining the Common Market? In my country Emperor Nero (DJT) continues with absolute insanity.// RED DANCER OF POWER, an interesting character.

Peter Hildreth, I hope GenCon works for you.// Some nice art.

Jim Eckman,GURPS and Traveller works nicely. Joshua ditched the standard Traveller ship to ship combat and is designing his own system.

Joshua Kronengold, congratulations on landing a new job.// Re coffee. Try some of mine from southkonafarms.com. // Pig at Wedding, yes it was alive. My character wanted to put a brides maid dress on it. I believe I blew the dice roll.// Yes, I'm active at about the same level now as before the operation. // Computer languages that compile to native code and are directly interpreted or compiled to a virtual machine. The difference is breaking down in modern languages. I get it. Back in the day when I had to work with BSD Unix or AT&T Sys5, scripting was a mash up SH, BASH, AWK, SED … and so on. In 1988 when I found Practical Extraction Report Language (PERL), I thought to myself, *this is a real improvement*. The last ten years of my software career I focused on object oriented design patterns (Singleton, Factory, Command, Decorator … etc.) I didn't care that much what the language was as long as it had OO capabilities (C#, Java, Python even PERL). I used them all.

Lisa Padol, I like your comment *an RPG is not a comic, a novel, a movie, a television show*.// Re Zero Level Funneling. I named my characters Alpha, Beta and Gamma because the GM told us that it was likely our characters would die. And many of them did. I was ready for Delta and Epsilon. I didn't want to invent names. All of mine lived.// Thank you for further information on Neo-paganism. I don't remember the title of the book. Sadly the book store no longer exists.// Dracula Dossier, thank you for the explanation. You have to keep in mind the only games I now play are with the NoCal gaming group at mini-cons once a year. Ninety five percent of my gaming vanished when Lee Stopped running games. Absolutely no fault of hers.

Jim Vassilakos, the only time I have ever dealt with *inter party conflict* was when the bulk of the D&D group decided to play COC and Traveller. There was no conflict, the core D&D players simply did not attend the games.// Economy with global mega-corporations powered by AI: what's needed is a market economy and with locally functional AI instead of mega-capitalism. My

vision of social engineering is probably social-science fiction, but it is my viewpoint.

Timothy Collinson, I am also curious to know about the Hivers.// Re trips to Scandinavia. I have excellent memories of our trip to Iceland, Denmark and Norway.

Jargon Zen

The Zen compass:

> The spirit remains clear and light
> The six root senses and the six dust perceptions are taken off and thrown away.
> The original body remains constantly clear.
> Speech and words cannot hinder it.
> True nature has no taint and is a perfect sphere, only without thinking.

Humor

(This joke was actually told by an eight year old.)

Steve Jobs invented the iPad.

And Steve Jobs invented the iPhone.

My great-great grandfather invented the eye-patch.

The Arc of Probability Bends Towards Justice: Issue #2

A zine by Bryant Durrell for Ever & Anon issue #15

Find me at https://bsky.app/profile/innocence.com, https://letterboxd.com/thanlis/, or https://popone.innocence.com/.

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Introduction

Still thinking about what I want to use this space for besides comments and recent events. This month I'm gonna stuff in a couple of reviews, which is niftily in line with my handful of *A&E* zines.

Current Events (Gaming)

Kicking Butt in the Secret Wars

We had to cancel our last in-person session of our *Feng Shui 2* campaign thanks to medical stuff, very sadly. (Everyone's healthy, just a transient thing.) It would have been a fun one; with the team back in Hong Kong, I was going to put pressure on the Shining Lily, the team's nightclub/Feng Shui site, using one of the factions that's out to kill the PCs. So it goes!

In the meantime I am working on updating the out of date *Feng Shui 2* module for Foundry VTT to the current Foundry code base. Every time I do this I wistfully wish there was a great theater of the mind oriented VTT – I want something with robust, automated character sheets but without the weight of Foundry. I am a niche market, is what I am.

Clockpunk Sampler

I had the pleasure of playing in an online Gran Meccanismo one-shot as part of jwmuk's Osprey Publishing season over at the Raspy Raven Discord. (Great Discord; they run themed seasons and ongoing games and other than being focused on European timezones it's a wonderful community for me.) I'd never played anything from Osprey Publishing and the concept of an alternate history where Machiavelli took full political and military advantage of da Vinci was intriguing, so I grabbed a slot and away we went.

I took poor notes and old channels are cleaned up fairly quickly on that Discord, so I can't credit my fellow players and the excellent GM, alas. I had a great time playing the hard-boiled mercenary Fatio de Avesa, who made the nearly fatal mistake of chasing a bunch of thugs solo. Hot tip: this is not a pulp game and risks are real. Which I knew at the time, but particularly in a one-shot I will usually pushing the plot forward even if it means letting my character suffer. Fatio spent most of the adventure with a broken arm, somewhat restricting his ability to be the combat heavy he was built to be; the group was good enough so that I still had a ton of fun.

The system is pretty simple; you're rolling big d6 pools based on your three primary stats and any relevant skills or traits. You count up the number of dice that hit or exceed a target, aiming for a specific number of successes. There are complications but that's the summary. I'm fine with nice simple systems and it worked well for me, plus it's very easy to learn. My only quibble is that the probabilities aren't highly intuitive.

The world feels fleshed out and lively, which is an advantage available to historical games whose author does the research. I wouldn't go out of my way to play this again, but I would happily accept

an invitation to play assuming the GM loved Renaissance Italy.

Current Events (Mundanity)

Fantasia

As I mentioned last month, the big July event for my wife and I was attending the Fantasia International Film Festival in Montreal. This is one of the biggest genre film festivals in the world, right up there with Sitges in Spain, Bucheon in South Korea, and Fantastic Fest down in Austin, Texas. It has been running for 30 years now, and attracts over 100,000 people each year.

It was launched by a handful of Hong Kong action movie fans who just wanted to see Chow Yun Fat and Jet Li on the big screen. Since then it's grown into a significant event for film lovers from all over the world; in any given year you'll find weird little indie SF movies, obscure Asian horror, new martial arts flicks, anime, and more. If you like movies, and are anywhere nearby, I strongly recommend spending a long weekend checking it out – the audiences are rabidly excited to be there, a lot of the movies are introduced by the director and others involved, and Montreal's a stupid fun city to boot.

I have blogged a couple of times about this year's festival, and of course I reviewed everything I saw on my Letterboxd (74 movies, including shorts; 35 showings including 4 shorts programs; 57.2 hours of film), so I figured I'd take this space to talk about some things I saw that are gaming-relevant.

I'll start with one of the festival's revivals. *La Gammick* (*The Mob*) is a 1975 Quebec crime movie and I enjoyed it quite a bit; if you're looking for a gritty 1970s criminal setting but you don't wanna just do Scorsese again, this would be great inspiration. It's got a bit of Italian 1970s crime movie flavor to it, without even a hint of glamour. There's also a very cool narrative setup, with at least four or five different people/groups trying to get what they want out of the protagonist, that could easily be a map for a factional conflict in an RPG session or campaign.

Big Break is a comedy horror movie from a Brooklyn comedy troupe, Simple Town. They all play versions of themselves and if you're thinking that's too twee for you, you're likely right. One of them has achieved success writing a gummy bears animated movie, the troupe has broken up, and several years later they're having a (somewhat tense) reunion. The character dynamics reminded me a lot of much of the intra-party conflict conversations from last month. Very entertaining.

I don't know how you'd watch *Walrus, Inc.*; it's a short film. Maybe they'll put it on YouTube at some point? It's a very nice evocation of the specific genre of horror where you're seeing the records scientists left as they looked into a phenomenon they ought to have just ignored. OK, yeah, it's an SCP story. The ending makes the SCP influence a bit too blatant for my tastes, but the joke about Creative Commons licensing is hilarious if you're a copyright geek like me.

Los Vampires is sort of hard to recommend, since it's not all that well made, but it's fascinating history. I didn't know this, but it turns out that Universal filmed *Dracula* twice in 1931, at the same time. The second version was the Spanish version, because with the death of silent movies they could no longer use the same film with different intertitles for overseas releases. So someone had the bright idea to let a Spanish crew use the same film sets between dusk and dawn.

You can see how you could really do something interesting with that concept. I wouldn't use the plot of *Los Vampires*, although there's nothing wrong with it. Gaming-wise what feels interesting is the sense of a liminal space one step removed from the already liminal space of Hollywood and the way the second film crew – actors

included – feel like outsiders clinging to their place by their fingernails.

If you're looking for a fresh view on superheroes, *Matapanki* should satisfy you. It's a vibrant black and white anti-colonialist movie from Chile in which a punk kid gets superpowers from drinking a godawful blend of alcohol, and winds up literally squaring off against the United States. The special effects are all rotoscoped lines on the background. It's amazing.

Moving

Still packing. The timeline grows tighter. I think we're on schedule.

Reviews

As noted, I'm trying a reviews section. This month I have one RPG review and one book review, tied into gaming. Feedback on these is welcome – useful, not useful, want to know more about X thing that you didn't cover, etc.

Rejection (*Delta Green*)

This is one of the best published scenarios I've read in quite some time. I have not had a chance to run it yet, so this will be a read-through review and thus not as good as one sourced in actual play... but man I wanna tell people about this one. There will be light spoilers calibrated such that they wouldn't ruin my play experience, but YMMV.

The basics: this is a 64 page *Delta Green* scenario by Caleb Stokes. It takes place in the present day and would be a bit tricky to adapt to 1990s era *Delta Green*, since it leans on present-day Silicon Valley trends. It was funded as part of the *Delta Green: Labyrinth* Kickstarter, which was the second mega-Kickstarter for the current *Delta Green* edition. It was originally promised under a different name as one of the scenarios related to an organization presented in the *Delta Green: Labyrinth* book, back in 2018. In general all the *Delta Green* crowdfunding has been worth the wait. Non-crowdfunders can find *Rejection* on DriveThruRPG, although the product page gives away the identity of the opposition.

There's one *Ever & Anon* connection lurking in the credits: Lisa Padol is listed as one of the editors. Nice work, Lisa!

The PCs are dispatched to Hawaii after the relative of a Friendly reaches out to some federal agents she once met. Matters have already gotten fairly bad and fairly complex. The unlucky agents assigned to this one have plenty of room to improve the situation or set the island on fire, depending on the usual choices made with the usual imperfect understanding of the problem. So far, this is pretty much any *Delta Green* scenario; let's get into what I love about it.

First off: it weaves in current Silicon Valley, uh, foibles quite well. As someone who used to work in Big Tech and has, in fact, even worked for Larry Ellison for a short time, it gives me great pleasure to see Ellison's Hawaiian land grab skewered. And Ellison isn't the only rich tech guy who comes in for a few hits; the inciting event for the problem is lifted directly from one of the weirder Silicon Valley jerks in the news.

Second, more important: the scenario is an absolute web of competing interests and personalities. The relationship map in the back shows nearly a dozen people, each of whom have at least some relationship to an organization, and all of which have competing or conflicting interests. There are bad guys and good guys, but the bad guys aren't all on the same side and the good guys are as prone to error as anyone. Plenty of people do the wrong thing for the right reasons. It's a very good web of problems.

And it's presented very well. I mentioned relationship maps. The scenario comes with two of them; one of them is for the Handler, and shows everything. The other one is everything the agents will know after they've met with the

person who indirectly called them in, which is absolutely great for a complex scenario like this. It saves the players from floundering and arguing about their notes and so on. (Well, probably not, but it'll at least cut down on the confusion.) The web of competing interests is a deliberate choice to "make the Agents' progress through the mystery inevitable." There's always going to be someone moving events forward, even if the PCs are sitting on their butts being passive. It's good design.

Similarly, the scenario is very clear on what agents can find online, what they can find with access to governemtn databases, and what they can find with legwork. I think this would be a very easy scenario to run. And the PDF has good bookmarks.

Continuing on the topic of how easy it is to run this, there's a nice detailed timeline which outlines what every major player will probably be doing on a day by day basis. ("Keep a calendar," Caleb recommends, wisely.) It's not just presented as 10 pages of text – the chapter begins with a table, summarizing likely events, the date each one occurs, and the page of the booklet where you can find out more. I love how usable this whole scenario is.

Finally, there's an Outcomes section, written with the same care for covering reasonable possibilities. It meshes well with earlier guidelines for incorporating this scenario into a larger campaign centered around the primary opposition group, although that's by no means necessary.

OK, but is it scary? I mean that's subjective but it's sure horrific to me. There's lots of goopy biological horror, there's some Mythos lurking in the background without being front and center, and those likely events include plenty of innocent deaths. While most people I know who live in Hawaii don't think of it as a paradise, many potential players will, and there's some additional horror in introducing such terrible events to a state with such a nice reputation.

Summary: a very well presented horror scenario with a lot of complexity that's nonetheless easy to run. It's tightly linked to the *Delta Green* mythos, although you could run it as a standalone scenario for *Call of Cthulhu* with minimal conversion, or any modern-day Cthulhu game with some conversion work, or even any modern horror game. Maybe not *Vampire: The Masquerade*, only because you'd have to figure out how you get the vampires to Hawaii. (One at a time?)

Biological War

Biological War: A Scenario is a new non-fiction book by Annie Jacobsen, author of *Nuclear War: A Scenario* and a bunch of books focused on the unknown history of American national security – everything from Area 51 to the history of CIA paramilitary operations. Her hypothetical nuclear war scenario made a mint so the biological war version was perhaps inevitable. I grabbed it from the library the other week and read it in a few days.

It would make an excellent world backdrop for gaming, if you're into apocalyptic scenarios. Even if you don't want to do a full blown end of the world game, there's a ton of material in here about how the US has prepared for biological war. There's also a nice chunk of material on Russia's biological warfare programs, although I'd recommend taking a lot of it with a grain of salt.

The scenario as outlined has Russia developing a plague bioweapon using recombinant DNA techniques; with those, the Russian scientists add a gene to the bacteria that produces euphoric endorphins. They also splice in an encephalomyelitis virus for a two stage infection. There's a lab leak in Russia, followed by uncontrolled spread via air travel. Things get steadily worse. "Some became ashes, others dust."

Along the way, Jacobsen describes the place where the US disassembles nuclear weapons and stores nuclear cores; outlines the Devolution plan the US government has in place for keeping the country intact through catastrophic events like nuclear or biological war; and explains the National Guard's Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team. All of this screamed *Delta Green* to me while I was reading it. I imagine *Twilight 2000* players might also find it highly relevant. Good for zombie games, too, especially *Red Markets*.

The politics of the book fascinated me. Jacobsen makes a point of not talking about her political leanings, which makes some degree of sense for someone in her profession. The book does not take an overt political stance. But there's something interesting about the choices Jacobsen makes, particularly concerning LA, which is one of the areas where she postulates an outbreak. In fact, she locates it on Skid Row.

The scenario doesn't mostly use real politicians – except. You don't have to name Karen Bass when you say "The Los Angeles mayor was at a cocktail party in Africa while the city burned. She never even apologized." Jacobsen then immediately goes on to cite Gavin Newsom's podcast as another disappointment. Meanwhile, over in Dallas, the Texas governor has apparently never done anything that would affect public trust. In fact, from reading this book, you wouldn't know that the Republican Party has been using pseudoscientific attacks on our public health system to cement political power.

She's happy to quote critics of gain of function research. She's happy to point at Fauci as a defender of gain of function research. She doesn't provide equal space to explanations of why Fauci's defending it, which is a pretty big omission given that one of the reaons the NIH funds it is so that we can be better prepared for biological outbreaks, including biological warfare. There's an ideology in this book, it's just defined by what Jacobsen includes and what she leaves out.

Oh, and I said "grain of salt." I did some research after reading the prologue, because the book interweaves a hypothetical scenario with what looks a lot like actual experts confirming that Russia did try the endorphin trick I mentioned. As it turns out, there are claims to that effect, originating with a couple of defectors. For the sake of accuracy, it's worth remembering that these claims were not confirmed. The specific quote: "When we first heard Soviet scientists were inserting the endorphin gene into plague..." looks more like a confirmation than it is; that's someone talking about the claim, not someone talking about proof. Jacobsen isn't fabricating quotes but she's framing them aggressively, which is characteristic of her work.

Pardon the politics. None of this ruins the book. You just want to recognize the bias for any such hypothetical scenario.

IgTheme: How do you find players/GMs/games?

Speaking of moving! You can see why this is on my mind.

First off, thanks to Brian Rogers for hooking me up with a potential gaming buddy in the Twin Cities – much appreciated. In the past, finding existing groups has been a success for me; the difficulty is that there are two of us and it's harder to find a group with two open slots. But I will be visiting the many excellent gaming stores in the area and actually reaching out to people who've postered for their campaigns. Worth the effort.

I will also do a little Reddit hunting. The really good group we played with here in Seattle was the result of reaching out to a nice couple on Reddit who were looking for a group; we got through a full *Blades in the Dark* campaign and a chunk of *The Yellow King RPG* before they moved

off to the East Coast for a professorial job. So I'm more optimistic about Reddit than I'd have been otherwise.

I've done a survey of Twin City RPG Meetup groups, which as always these days reminds me how much I dislike what Meetup has become. They're a mixed bag. There's one which has a single successful-looking *Shadowdark* campaign so I'll check that out. The other two seem fairly D&D/Pathfinder focused, which is cool but not what I'm looking for. One of those two runs a regular social hour – that'll be worth dropping in on just to meet people.

And of course I'll attend area conventions. But if I'm reading the Twin Cities Geek convention calendar corectly, the major RPG cons in the area are in the first quarter of the year so that won't be an immediate solution.

All of that combines to make me think that I'm going to need to build some community for myself. Which, well, I've got the time to do it. Here in Seattle, there's a very healthy Meetup that's got a wide variety of games and is only a year or so old; I know it's possible. I want to avoid getting stuck playing with people I don't like. (I had enough of that with Living Forgotten Realms organized play.) So here's my plan A.

I'm gonna launch a one-shot focused local gaming community, is what I'm gonna do. Like many of us, I have about a million games I want to try; if I don't get a rich source of one-shots I'll never get there. So that's a good reason to focus on one-shot experiences rather than starting a community oriented towards anything larger scale. Also, even after I've figured out who I want to play campaign length games with, the one-shot community will continue to make sense for me so I'll stay invested in it.

I won't bore y'all with the detailed project plan, but the steps are pretty simple.

1. Pick a platform; I need something that allows me to control membership, allows multiple approved people to post events, and records event signups. OpenMeet looks pretty plausible.
2. Write a code of conduct. Once upon a time I had to kick a guy out of my Living Forgotten Realms events because he kept licking everyone's dice. I don't do community building without a code of conduct any more. I also think just having a code of conduct means some chuds will self-screen out.
3. Establish expectations. I'm thinking bi-weekly or weekly sessions, on a weekend for maximum reach. I'll commit to having 3-4 one-shot options at each session, with one of them always being a d20 fantasy game – I'm not gonna hamper myself by being an indie snob, even if I am one.
4. Publicize – posters, Reddit posts, Bluesky posts, all that jazz.
5. Build a community. Over time I want/need other people to GM; S. is happy to GM but I want people who aren't me and my immediate family to have some skin in the game.

Thoughts? This is maybe a little bit over-engineered and it's certainly a bit Machavellian. "Hey, I'm forming this group so I can skim off the cream for my own purposes" is probably the sinister form of my plan and it makes me look sideways at myself a little bit. But it's not like I'm planning on abandoning this once I get what I need out of it.

Commentary on Issue 14

Dale Meier: welcome from another newbie!

Patrick Brady: RYCT Myles: I'm jealous of your Bugtown experience. I don't know James as well as you do but he's told me some of the Bugtown story and in my eyes it's one of the great lost games of the hobby. I'm a Matt Howarth fan, unsurprisingly.

Matt Stevens: I like your comments on fractal mechanics and I tend to agree with your approach. *Blades in the Dark* adopts this approach, explicitly saying that you can't go wrong if you're using a pool of d6s and counting up successes – everything else is icing on the cake. And more and more games are adopting higher resolution mechanics for non-combat, which is cool – sometimes it's adapting the combat mechanics for other purposes, such as *Swords of the Serpentine*'s social battle mechanics. Which I love because it means one person in a conflict can be verbally chipping away at a foe's confidence, creating a real advantage for the swordswoman chipping away at the same foe's health.

There's a lot to be said for mini-games as well, just for texture. One of the things I like about *Blades* (and especially *Blades '68*) is that there's a mini-game for the GM to play, which mechanizes prep! Reduces the burden of prepping and I'm the kind of person who works well within a framework and constraints.

Patrick Riley: I spoke up for intraparty conflict. Nevertheless, I appreciate your clarity – and I think it demonstrates the critical importance of being on the same page. You make it very clear that it doesn't work for you, and if I was at a table with you I'd avoid intraparty conflict without a moment's hesitation or resentment. For that matter, I wouldn't even need you to go into the detail about why you don't like it. (This comment applies to everyone who made similar notes.)

Continuing to enjoy your Aurora Cove writeup. I really like the way your introductory script gives every PC a clear and immediate goal. They're very evocative in a couple of short paragraphs. I also dig the clear escalation in the timeline.

Mark Wilson: Note to self: go to Origins one of these years for the sake of a megagame. Excellent writeup, very interesting. Back when I was playing Living Forgotten Realms I played in a couple of battle interactives, which are of similar scale in terms of players, but not in terms of complexity.

Roger BW: I have a Typst pipeline that converts my Markdown-formatted *Feng Shui* encounter writeups into one-page combat sheets to make it easier to run combats. The format is borrowed from Isaac Priestly, who also designed the playmat I showed off last issue. Check out this post if you want to see his originals. It's not horribly useful to anyone who isn't using my idiosyncratic Obsidian setup so I haven't published it anywhere but I may write it up on my blog one of these days. Of course, now that I'm moving, the game will continue online and I won't need the physical helpers as much.

But yeah, Typst has a lot of potential for this sort of thing.

Brian Rogers: I decided last year it was about time I got off my high horse and watched enough Westerns to get a feel for the genre. I made a list of 23 Westerns, in consultation with some film buff friends, and started working through them. To my delight I wound up really enjoying them and while you'll never convince me John Wayne is a great actor, I now believe John Ford is a great director.

Some others I'd recommend: Budd Boetticher's Ranown Westerns made with Randolph Scott are excellent and stretch the boundaries of the genre a bit. Sergio Sollima's *The Big Gundown* is what they call a Zapata Western, which is a subgenre of spaghetti Western set during the Mexican Revolution, starring Lee Van Cleef and Tomas Milan. Sollima wore his socialism on his sleeve and it's very interesting seeing a Western which is sympathetic to the Mexican accused of crimes.

I also love *Miller and Mrs. McCabe*, but it may not be appropriate for the kiddo depending on their age and maturity level.

Sorry to hear about the library woes. I think people who run games for teens are heroes, personally.

Elf: Thanks for the pointer to *Playtest Material*. I vote for TTRPGs with Fire – I want to read article on solo TTRPG types, and I think your classification makes strong sense, but I'm really curious about the 49+ fire-involved games that I haven't heard of.

I played in one of Carl Rigney's SF Bay Area *Champions* games set in the World of the 400 universe. That universe sustained multiple campaigns for multiple years and people had a ton of fun, but we also all engaged hard with the complexities of the Hero rules and in retrospect, yeah, the world was limited and defined by the system as much as it was defined by comic book tropes. I'm curious as to whether or not you've played *Masks*, which has much looser power rules, and how that experience was for you with relation to your thesis – I've been wanting to try it for a while specifically because of the issues you describe.

Joshua Kronengold: Congrats on the job! I'm really impressed by your ability to spin up on new languages; I was wondering if you were going to find a new job because of the perl skills, which I imagine are getting rarer.

Jim Vassilakos: I found your thoughts on avoiding GM favoritism really useful. I also couldn't agree more with the advice to "pause the game and talk about it out-of-character." I'm going to pull from your suggestions in my future GMing; thank you.

DENIZENS OF THE LIBRARY #14

A 'zine for Ever & Anon, copyright 2026 by Brian Rogers

All About Me

Things are good around the Rogers household; settling into the new normal now that the upheavals are over, and trying to figure out what to do with my new free time. This may (May… MAY) result in restarting one of my PBEMs, but it does mean a more robust monthly adult gaming schedule in addition to what remains of the library game once the library administration gets done with it (more on that in a minute). We are about to take the annual family vacay (which will likely be over when you read this but I need to get this out the door before we go). It's to Vinalhaven Island off the Maine Coast, so expect lobster related cooking shenanigans nextish.

One thing that is happening is I'll be attending and running a game at Shirecon this September, a primarily but not entirely OSR con. Not only is it a chance for me to play some games (I'm very much hoping to get into a *Star Frontiers* game!) but it's forcing me do something I've oft discussed, which is making a generic, universal opening *V&V* adventure. The players will have an hour for everyone to use *V&V*s random character creator to make their heroes (with discussing if they are a shared origin team, an existing other team, or just meeting each other), then the remaining 3 hours of the slot for a supers game. (Most slots at Shirecon are 3 hours, so I don't think people are missing anything but the random creation is so core to *V&V* that I want to highlight it. I'm going to lay out the adventure this month so I have time to get feedback on it nextish.

The *Star Wars* write up is coming, I swear, but I need to dedicate time and space this month to con prep.

Reviews to Use Space

Spider-Noir on Amazon Prime: this was enormous fun in a watching Nick Cage be the most Nick Cage he could be while still being a cross between Humphrey Bogart and Jimmy Stewart. It drags a little in the one mystery over 8 episodes way of contemporary TV, so be warned.

The Rise and Fall of D.O.D.O by Neil Stevenson and Nicle Galland: in the very small genre of time travel farce this isn't as good as *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, but it's in the same ballpark at least, which is high praise.

Staircase in the Woods by Chuck Wengid: it's creepy-pasta: the novel, but I enjoyed it despite it not being my usual thing.

Inside the Library:

The summer sessions of the library game are winding down, and I expect in the next couple of months I'll do a detailed chronicle of what happened within Dyson's Megadelve and the town of Bog Hollow. Right now I'm prepping for the fall, where the *13th Age* group will be doing *Red Hand of Doom* and the other biweekly slot will be, in theory, a new game each month with 5-6 new kids to rotate through interested players…?

I'm doing short, 2 session stories using a different genre each month picking systems where character creation is fast or pregen so we can get in 5ish hours of play. The current lineup is

September: - Supers: *Marvel Super Heroes* FASERIP, the only month where the game is not currently in print. This is running the *Lone Wolves* module, updated to more mirror the MCU rather than 1984 Marvel canon.

October – SF Horror: *Mothership*, using one-two short adventures. I considered *Cloud Empress*, which Lisa graciously gave me, as it also uses the Panic engine, but the game is too world/lore specific for this application.

November – Action Cinema: *Feng Shui 2E*; I prefer 1E but I have to admit that the complete build templates work better for this. I have concerns about how it will handle 5-6 players, but we will see.

December – Western Fantasy: *Owl Hoot Trail*, and while I would have preferred a straight Western OHT runs on the d20 engine so it's quick and relatable to the players; it is also in print, and not too esoteric.

Now, this is all a crap shoot. Apparently some 28 kids (not counting the 5 in the 13th Age game) have expressed (or had their parents express) interest at some point over the last two years. Normally these are a parent emailing with "My [nameless, genderless] Child is interested in D&D, can we do this" and then never following up to the response. All of them are getting invites, but how many will nope out because it's not D&D? Or not all semester? Or not specifically with their friends?

As I said, the new manager somehow thinks 1 adult + 20 kids is a totally workable paradigm, but also not giving me a room big enough for the kids to self-select into their own tables. We will see what happens, or if the entire enterprise implodes under bureaucracy.

Villains & Vigilantes: Crucible

Classic Villains & Vigilantes, the most OSR of Supers Games! The first hour is random power generation for PCs based on the players, followed by an adventure pitting these new heroes against a fiery force that threatens the Berkshires... and perhaps the world! Equal parts dangerous rescues, devious mysteries, and deadly foes. Can you be a super-hero?

Phase Zero: Synopsis:

The super-villain ***Crucible*** is engaging in an arson string in the area near the heroes (in this case the Northwest corner of CT). Crucible is statted out 3 different ways to fit the PCs if they are primarily internal-abilities (changes into a magma-being), high tech (armor suit), or mystical (adopts demon form); he's essentially *Armor*, *Flame Powers*, *Ht. Strength, Tunneling*. Crucible's history is tied to ***Initial Fire*** in the area (in this case the 2001 arson of the Canaan Union Depot; it was rebuilt and now houses the Great Falls Brewing Company and the New England Accordion Connection & Museum).

The first fire is at a nearby hospital, which should force pretty much any type of PC to get involved. (Northwell Sharon Hospital, 15 mi./25 minutes away by car; may be moved closer if the PCs don't have movement powers to get them there quickly.) Crucible will not be at the fire, so the next step is investigating why? The clues reveal one of the critical patients was a convicted arsonist from ***Initial Fire***, other is also nearby. Both are targeted, so if PCs move fast they can save second one, have partial fight with Crucible and his henchmen; henchmen are sacrificed to enable Crucible to (hopefully) escape, but trail leads back to ***Initial Fire*** site, for final showdown.

Phase 1: Origin Stories

The players all receive PC creation rules, including the tables and an abbreviated list of power descriptions. Ask group some questions to determine world contours.

1) Are all of you an existing team some of you a team and others solo, or are you all solo?
    a. If some are solo, is this first meeting?
2) If an existing team, do you share an origin story?
    a. If so, do solos share? Is it universal?
    b. Innate, Tech, or Magic?

Have everyone a) set stats based on them [I will not monitor this, fine you're all geniuses, whatever] and b) publicly roll # of powers. Then everyone rolls powers; share concepts, and group character development for those who don't have clear concepts already. If you don't have any immediate hook to hang your heroic identity on, roll 1d20 or pick one from this table.

Gimmick/Iconography Ideas

1. Ancient History: Egypt, Sumerian, etc.
2. "Classical History": Greece, Rome, etc.
3. (1600-1700): piracy, musketeers, witch trials
4. (1750-1800) US Colonies, Revolutionary War.
5. (1850-1900) Victoriana/Steampunk, Wild West.
6. (1900-1940) WWI, Gangsters, Depression
7. (1940-1960) WWII, Cold War, Pax Americana
8. (1960-1980) Counterculture, Disco, Vietnam War
9. Iconography: National Identity (not always US)
10. Iconography: Sports (or Martial Arts/Weaponry)
11. Iconography: Religion
12. Iconography: Science Fiction/Space/Future
13. Iconography: Fantasy/Sword & Sorcery
14. Iconography: Animal – Predator
15. Iconography: Animal – Other Animal
16. Iconography: Insects
17. Iconography: Plants
18. Iconography: Legal System
19. Iconography: Mysticism/Spiritualism
20. Iconography: Film Era (Noir, *Blacksploitation*, etc.)

Phase 2: the Fire

Once everyone has a PC, explain that this is taking place more or less now, they are at a social event in Canaan, and some sort of alert (based on their PCs, it could be their powers, or some phone alert etc.) lets them know about a Hospital Fire fire; lives at risk, how do you get out of con with secret ID intact? Play this bit kind of for comedy, secret ID shenanigans are always funny.

The Hospital is 3-stories with 7 'zones', each with a different problem/risks for the PCs to solve/face.

1) **The Security Room:** One of the last places to die due to it's location and fireproofing, this room holds security footage of events, etc. Rescuing them risks an Lightning Powers attack via equipment shorts if the PCs doesn't make an Inventing test (or Int save on d20 if the character has tech skills).
2) **Basement Conflagration:** zone is impossibly hot; without defense vs. Flame of 7 or less automatically take 1d12 damage/turn. In the basement is whatever started the fire (varies based on heroes type); taking that out makes everything else easier (+2 turns on timetables, damage reduced to d8)
3) **Roof Unstable**: The fire causes1d12 SR to the roof per turn; below 5 make it creak ominously, 5-8 destroy 1 cubic foot, 9-12 destroy 2. The roof has 12 cubic feet before it collapses. More than 300 lbs in a square does 1d6 damage/turn; a roll of 5-6 destroys a cubic foot and sends the weight down one floor; the fall attacks as HTH with a 15 or less and does 1d6 damage.

4) **Of CORUSE There's A Nursery!:** There are 3 babies in here; they are safe until turn 10, but the issue is electronic security doors; the PCs need to override them or break through the thick plexiglass or reinforced wall to get in.
5) **Explodey Things Room:** This room has oxygen storage tanks and other stuff that goes boom. The room is 'fireproof'; the fire won't get in until turn 8; it can be a safe place to store people for a short while but unless some way is found to protect the room or protect/remove the blowy-uppy stuff, at the start of turns 8 and 9 this room explodes like 2 medium bombs (each +4 to hit, 1d20 damage 5" rad). Any normal folk in the room are killed.
6) **Panicked People**: This zone was cut off by the fire, and the 8 people in here are frozen or panicked with terror. Challenge is calming them down enough to get out through whatever exit the PCs create by turn 6 before the flames reach here.
7) **Critical People:** This room holds 4 patients who can't move on their own, perhaps shouldn't be moved, but you don't have a choice. The fire reaches here on turn 4. There is also 1 medical professional here hoping for a solution that the PCs can bounce ideas off of. The PCs must come up with a clever idea that minimizes risk to the immobile patients.

The Fire As Entity

The fire has an "Agility" of 15 and an initiative interval of 5 (so a roll of 1 on initiative gives it actions on 16. 11. 5, and 1) Each action, it will attack 1 player with Flame Powers or Collapsing Debris (HTH), both with a 15- chance and doing 1d12 damage, or Dense Smoke (per Darkness powers. Smoke forces a d20 save vs. End or lost 1d12 Power between turns without a mitigating defense (in addition to the Zone 1 issues). If the players find some way to directly 'attack; the fire each Zone has 15 HP and 100 Power to roll with things.

Phase 3: Investigation

Basement Evidence Chain

Fire Starting point is (magma tap/specialized incendiary /Hell Rune). Research into that M.O. reveals

1) The type of Crucible's powers if someone wants to use inventing rules to make counter/detector.
2) MO tied to name Crucible, arsonist has been active for 20 years – exact nature of crimes based on type.
3) A local investigator ties Crucible to ***Initial Fire***, 5 years before his first recorded appearance. Two other people were convicted of ***Initial Fire***.
4) One of those people Robert "Bobby" Kowlowski was in the critical ward during Hospital Fire, likely saved by heroes! He is dying of lung cancer for [Crucible origin] reasons.
5) If roused, his initial reaction roll is 4 (Hostile but non-violent) if PCs directly ask about Crucible, or 7 (mildly hostile, suspicious) if approached obliquely. His fear based *Above Average Loyalty* means he keeps morale on 12 or less. Higher than average Reaction modifiers can make this easier; mental powers can avoid it entirely.
6) If made to talk, Kowlowski reveals that, in addition to David Willaims, there was a 3rd teen involved in ***Initial Fire***, Antony Palacz. Bobby gives a coherent account of Crucible's origin story (varies by origin); he is doing so because Antony tried to kill him, was too afraid of him before this.
7) Doesn't know where Wilson is, just knows Wilson a survival nut, owns a house near MA border. If PCs use superhuman means they can find and reach him.

Security Camera Evidence Chain

1) If the PCs explore the security tapes they find the damage to the basement equipment prevented all but the vaguest shapes being recorded; big guy there!
2) The exterior footage shows the damage to the exits that made the fire worse. Culprits all had identical masks (or for magic, demonic faces)
3) For tech and magic origins, the damage to the doors originated that way; for innate powers, just chains were used, not magma guns or wardings.
4) Once these identified, other cameras/witnesses can be accessed/questioned about henchmen escape (Van/Van/rendered ash by demonic flame)
5) If the PCs use superhuman means they can trace the henchmen to Wilson's in time to save him.

Phase 4: The Second Witness

To explain, Crucible (is delusional, thinking others exposed to his origin chemicals gain his super powers if they are immolated; he thinks he's saving them/ is about to get super-tech surgery that will restore his original face and let him go legit, but he needs to eliminate those who could tie the returned him to the Crucible ID/ must sacrifice the others at the origin ritual for his demonic overlords), so he is already approaching Wilson. Wilson, a survival nut, puts up a fight. If the PCs are too slow the fight will attract them to fight henchmen and gather clues. If they act quickly but not superhumanly, they're too late to save Wilson but can fight henchmen & Crucible. *With* superhuman means they can save Wilson.

In any event, Crucible has henchmen equal in number to PCs; he will sacrifice them – attacking them in in mass ways where the PCs can save them if they act fast – to get away. Their deaths (don't matter to a being like him / are necessary as they are a security risk / are also sacrifices to the dark lords).

If the PCs don't try to save the henchmen they will lose out on the XP for saving them, plus it's heroic behavior and if the PCs are acting like real heroes they will do so. But they may not, in which case they can engage the fleeing Crucible and maybe skip last phases.

If Wilson is still alive when PCs get there he will fake his death rather than engage Crucible (this keeps the fight cleaner). He can tell them about Crucible's ranting, which will reveal the origin story. If he's dead but the PCs search his property they find back ups of his security cameras that give them the same details at a cost of time.

If the PCs save the henchmen, they learn that Crucible has been obsessed with the point of the ***Initial Fire*** because of (madness on the loss of his humanity / needing to wipe out the last clues (actually planning to fake his death there but the henchmen don't know that) / recapitulating the ritual). If henchmen are dead, one of them didn't practice infosec and has his phone with GPS history on it that leads back to the ***Initial Fire*** site.

Phase 4: Back to the Ashes

The PCs should hopefully be able to piece this together. If they don't, the raging conflagration of the ***Initial Fire*** site will draw them. If they move as soon as they put the pieces together at Wilson's they can stop the fire by directly engaging Crucible who, without his henchmen, will no longer have an action economy advantage.

At this point things diverge based on origin type.

If Innate, he will rant and rave about man being replaced by lava-folk: he expects Kowlowski & Wilson to join him as fellow Lavans if he doesn't know the PCs saved them; will become more enraged if they are alive and unburned, or despondent if he learns they are dead dead, and the PCs might be able to talk him into surrendering.

If High Tech, this is all part of his scheme. As soon as it looks like he's losing the fight he will 'crash' into a van he has set nearby which holds lots of commercially available explody things and a convenient corpse in a mock up of his armor; he will then tunnel out ahead of the explosion. The PCs may fall for this, but hopefully have enough clues to know this is part of his plan; if they time it right they catch him without his armor, just a handheld magma gun.

If Magical midway through the fight the demonic entities that power him appear and will a) grant him more power if he has succeeded in his goals or b) strip him of his powers and possibly soul based on how much the PCs prevented in terms of sacrifices etc. His soulless body is still alive and counts as 'capturing' him for XP purposes.

Subplots etc.

Normally I would have more of these looped in but I have 4 hours of table time and the players need to make up their PCs. Maybe they will come up with things on their own as some good 'hey we met up for the first time and have different styles of heroing' but I will caution them against the confusion fight trope as we don't have time. If the PCs opt to be an existing team, I'll ask each person to pick a facet of the team's gestalt personality that highlights their own personality to see if we can drive some role playing off of that.

Visuals

The image for Crucible as an innate powers threat is Charcoal, a b-list Marvel hero who had been part of the Thunderbolts during it's middle run. Since in V&V terms the character actually as *Chemical Power: Magma* this makes the most sense visually.



(Charcoal is copyright Marvel Comics; the image here is taken from Comics Vine. It turns out that after I stopped reading the book they decided to kill him, which is silly because he was a fun, fan-created character with potential.)

If it's high tech he's closer to the Batman villain Firefly, but ditch the wings and have him immolate. Again, he has *Chemical Powers Device: Magma*, but the idea him being high tech and rock covered feels silly, so he has a lot of tech ways to mirror the chemical power effects.

If Magical, his visual is a flaming Oni (or Ogre Mage if we want to look at the most authentic source in gaming) but made of rock and magma. I may even give him a naginata that he uses as a focus but isn't necessary.

The henchmen will look like your usual comic book rent a goons in orange/black flame resistant jumpsuits with cowled masks and goggles if the powers are innate or high tech. If magical, they are cultists in orange and black robes (and I suppose athleticwear underneath? What do you wear under your "I work for a flaming demon cult" robes? I doubt they are commando as this is an all ages game and not a sex cult or anything).

Thoughts on Table Culture

Elf's comments on their supers game systems kicked off a robust debate that, thanks to Brian Misiaszek's comment in E&A 13 expanding it to pulp games and player expectations that now has space for me to make relevant comments. Because IME it's not supers or pulp game systems, but player expectation and table culture that drive how well any genre works.

Many years ago in A&E Lee Gold shared how the RPG *Paranoia* just absolutely did not work for her table. 100% failed to give anything like the experience offered on the box or as explained by other players. Now, *Paranoia* is a strange animal, a madcap dark comedy where the PCs are pitted against each other from the jump while tasked with working together by a computer driven insane by countermanding programming sets. The humor and fun of the game comes from being incompetent protagonists sent on illogical missions where advance lies in selling out/framing your team for being traitors – which, to be clear, all of you are traitors – to get promoted.

And her table immediately bonded as PCs, did no back-stabbing, crowdsourced solutions to problems with both PCs and Player skill, and had an utterly flat time. This is not a fault of *Paranoia*, which normally delivers the game play as advertised. It was their table culture. I can't guess why their style couldn't engage with it, but it didn't.

Next anecdote: you may or may not be familiar with the RPG *Prime Directive*, which exists due to a loophole in the *Star Fleet Battles* game license that lets the people who own *SFB* make a Star Fleet Universe TTRPG as well as the space combat game. Prime Directive has everything from Star Trek – you are the crew of a Federation ship in the Original Show era dealing with Klingons, Gorn, Romulans and weirdly Kzinti because Niven's cat aliens appear in an episode of the Star Trek cartoon – and yet it is, to paraphrase Douglas Adams, something almost, but not quite entirely unlike *Star Trek*. It is stupid for the bridge crew to beam down into potentially hostile areas, so the PCs are instead dedicated Away Team Specialists. But it's also stupid for anyone to beam into potentially hostile areas, so protocol is to use ships phasers to stun a 30m radius around the landing zone before the Away Team Specialists beam down. Away Team Specialists are trained to work together, eschewing emotional argument on the best path forward on heavily tactical missions.

Given that *Star Trek* started as being a drama focused on the captain dealing with the weight of command, trying to synthesize emotional (presented by the ship's doctor) and logical (presented by the first officer) arguments to resolve heavily social/philosophical arguments… Why? Why did *Prime Directive* so miss what made Star Trek? Because the table culture of the game designers refused to engage with the Star Trek genre as it exists. They instead translated wargame/D&D tactical minmax into the setting because that was more "logical". In doing so they mistook the chrome of Trek for the heart of it.

Does this mean it's impossible for an RPG to produce games that feel like *Star Trek*? Well, considering I ran 17 sessions of the *USS Carter* campaign that all the players said felt like *Star Trek*, I'm gonna say no. I did so with players who were all fans of the show, who walked in knowing they wanted game sessions feeling like episodes of the show, and I was using the Decipher games rules, where the advice are soup to nuts "how do you make your table play feel like Star Trek episodes. Both ours and the designers' table culture matched the genre. We were all pulling in the same direction.

Now, are the Decipher rules 100% perfect for Star Trek? Probably no, they are too noodly in character build (which was the style at the time), for example, and the melee combat system is much too granular, but there are also rules that are 100% perfect for the Trek Visuals (if your shields get hit too hard one of your bridge consoles sparks out, for example). But there are next to no rules trying to drive Player behavior the way you might, say, give Doctor a bennie every time he makes an emotional argument for activating his "passionate" trait. It trusts the players to play to the preferred genre, and gives tons of advice-but-not-rules to do so. I think that's best.

Why? Because I don't know that rules can really change table culture. Of well done they don't HURT, but its really hard to change things. I recently attended an on-line con where I played *Pendragon*, with an early scene being inside a local lords castle where some of his other guests, rival knights, were being obnoxious to a serving girl. This is all clearly set up for us to give them a righteous beating later but one player insisted he was going to draw down on them right now. The GM points out this would be a breach of Hospitality. Don't care. You need to make a roll to override his Hospitality score to even consider this. Don't care. Player rolls off screen, insists he beat the 16, insists he fight the knight now. The answer: that this guy didn't want to play Pendragon, had no intention of playing *Pendragon*, and no amount of rules in the game would stop him from not playing *Pendragon* in this *Pendragon* con game.

Supers games, Pulp Action games, they are no different: if the players at the table are all pushig in the direction of the genre, the rules will usually work. If they are not, then they won't. Players and GMs have to want to be fast, daring, flexible, noble, to make these work.

I haven't played many of the newer supers games these kids are playing that are built to produce a highly specific story – teen sidekicks coming into their own in *Masks: the Next Generation* for example – because, as I alluded, I don't think they produce better outcomes than sitting down with all the players to say "hey, let's all make this feel like 1980's *Teen Titans*". Your mileage may vary.

To my mind the best Supers games out there are, to this day, *Villains & Vigilantes* 2E and *Marvel Super Heroes* (the FASERIP version). Why? Because they aren't point build games where the powers are, for the most part, cause driven rather than effect driven. You roll a power, it has a short description of what it is and how it works, and you can then modify it however you want as long as the GM signs off. Improving your powers is done in an ad hoc inventing/stunt way in play. 'Balance' between the heroes is ad hoc and not rigidly enforced, as long as everyone is contributing, Thor and Ant-Man team up fine. In both of them the advice to the GM is "read a lot of comic books and do that; understand the genre and then do things that replicate it". There aren't complex rules for subplots, villain appearance chances, any of it – just read the genre and do that. *MSH* caps it off with the Karma system that directly rewards you for acting like a hero from the comics and debits you when you don't.

These games are great because they solve the problems Erica was having with her character ideas "costing too much" for the game by getting points out of way; powers don't cost anything. *Champions* gets more granular with each edition as to how much powers cost, so her combat teleport with ally can indeed cost too much. *DC Heroes* has such a bizarre power list that it makes fun of itself, with walkie talkies being statted up with levels of Super-Ventriloquism (only to project to other walkie talkies)[1]. *Mighty Protectors*, the nominal successor to *Villains & Vigilantes*, switches to a point system and then has 1.5 pages – 1% of the book – on communicators where your cell phone costs 10 of your 100 points. They are games where the mechanics serve the mechanics more than they serve the genre. The argument that you *can't* do these characters in some systems is correct; that it means the genre can't be emulated is not, any more than *Prime Directive* proves that you can't do a *Star Trek* RPG.

To advance this point, here are Elf's example characters in Villains & Vigilantes

Inertial Powers: Modified Gravity Powers, increase or decrease inertia/speed by up to his Strength, so that with a 10 Strength he can make the target spend 10" to move 1" on the map, or each 1" of movement shift him 10" (and target must make d10 Agility save to not slam into something). PR 1 per multiple, attacks as Gravity Powers.

Dimensional Travel A - slipspace: PR 4 to move into a parallel realm, bringing along anyone she is touching. Anyone not her or her brother take 1d6 damage per turn in slipspace. Travel is faster there, and appears to be teleportation, but she can also stay there if need be. Moving bac from slipspace is PR 0.

Nirvana-Sphere (Force Field + Height. Defense + Darkness Control): All actions per turn to create an impenetrable fixed with sphere; this can almost be considered an alternate dimension, and attacks and senses are not possible through the sphere, though esoteric powers (such as Astral Projection or Cosmic Awareness) might allow travel or perception through it based on their rationale. The inside of the sphere is pitch black, but Nirvana and her Intelligence in allies can perceive each other. She is levitating to the center of the sphere when she uses this power.

There are several more examples of "can you use X power to do Y" that are resolved issues in *V&V* or *MSH* with the Inventing or Power Stunt systems. Now, I do recall Elf complaining on OSR games previously and the "can I do X thing" questions is playing "mother may I" with the game master, which seems to dovetail with the question raised here – how do game mechanics decide if my power can do X, Y or Z if I don't want to leave that to GM adjudication. Maybe I'm wrong on that but it leans back into a culture issue. As Robin Laws pointed out in Robin's Laws of Good Gamermastering, the crunchy bits in the rules are there to move power from the GM to the players.

There's a business aphorism: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." In RPGs, culture, eats genre as a snack. The designer's culture, the game tables culture… if these are not both pulling to genre together you will get something that has the right skin but not the right heart. When they do pull together it can produce magic.

[1] I have joked that you can't make the Teen Titan Jericho in *Champions* because his power – on eye contact I make my body intangible, jump into your body, possess you and I can access short term memory – because NONE of that is how *Champions* conceives of things. You can easily build Jericho in *DC Heroes* because they have his EXACT power since he's a DC character… but it's almost impossible to build Nightwing in *DC Heroes* as the Advantages rules are broken and take a fixed percent of the PCs total points; building him in *Champions* is trivially simple.

Stating Up Regrets 14: Kangaroo Man

While I have 2.5 pages of Puppeteer action later this zine, don't think that I have forgotten the regular feature of Jon Morris' *League of Regrettable Superheroes*. This one is even topical with the discussions of Rangers in D&D, their animal companions, and how you balance the two. Hawks and Wolves, I give you: Kangaroo Man! [2]



Jack Brian, daredevil American explorer and his trained kangaroo Bingo, who understands his every signal and gesture, join the battle against enemy agents who scheme to destroy America. Wow. That… that's something all right.

While ostensibly the sidekick, Bingo quickly establishes himself as the star of the three appearances of this strip because he takes the sarcastic sidekick thing to a whole new level. His word balloons are always 'rsp rsp' but we get every thought in the marsupial's head, and he's got a lot to say. It's the sort of thing that only works in comic books, unless we want to give him a film noir voice over.

OK, I totally want to give him a Film Noir Voice Over. I mean, come on… move over Spider-Noir! It's Bingo!



[2] Kangaroo Man was created by S. M. Iger & Jerry Winters for Choice Comics. All images for this zone can be found here

Jack & Bingo's adventures were standard fare – fighting saboteurs, fifth columnists and the other enemies of pre-war America. Bingo's strength and prowess paired with Jack's general derring-do, sharpshooting and vehicular capability. As when we did Bozo the Robot (DotL #7), the companion does so much more than the human hero, but Bozo let Hugh Hazzard ride inside him like a mecha as well as the time spent working together. While Bingo is a marsupial, he doesn't let Jack do a ride inside.

Making him in *V&V* is simple in he has a main hook, but let's check the oracular bones of St. Cuthbert to see what else. The power die is a 3, so he we roll 5 powers and a weakness, drop 1, and maybe drop a 2nd to lose the weakness. First, *Companion (Pet)*, but lets roll the rest. All rolls are on the Skills table (the new one in DotL #6). *Heightened Agility A*x2 for +15 and +3, *Heightened Defense*, *Natural Weaponry* (+4 to hit/+1d6 dam), and *Heightened Senses*. Weakness is *Diminished Senses*. The lesser *Ht. Agility* gets axed; *Diminished Senses* doesn't fit so let's drop the *Ht. Senses* to get rid of it. As a general pulp hero lets do the point split for Gymnastic (+10 Agi, +5 Str).

Honestly without the kangaroo Jack Brian is Jack Bland, but with the Kangaroo he works[3]. His final stats are Str 15, End 13, Agi 21, Int 12, Cha 14; 20 HP & 61 Fatigue. That high agility plus the bonus for a pistol makes him a solid shot, but he's a much better melee fighter thanks to his *Natural Weaponry*; *Heightened Defense* rounds him out as, say, a professional explorer, with the backgrounds of Scientist (Explorer) and Journalism (Travel Writer); I figure Jack funds his lifestyle with articles for National Geographic and similar entities.

Now on to Bingo: strangely kangaroo is not on the list of standard animals in the V&V rulebook. A quick Wiki search tells me large males are 6.5' high and 200 lbs. Based on Bingo's capabilities he's strong. Very strong. Lets assume that he has the equivalent of *Animal Powers: Kangaroo* with *Ht. Strength* +15 (which we would treat as a C, since it comes from a power and therefore has the great carry cap multiple), *Ht. Agility* +6, *Ht. Move – +50"* and *Special – Tail & Feet* (can make second attack each action at +4/+1d6 without the usual multi-attack penalty of all attacks needing to hit). Then add *Natural Weaponry* +3/+1d4 as a skill for the specialized training Jack gave him, and the weakness *Mute*. He's clearly of human intelligence, but can only speak 'rsp rsp'. This gives him Str 24, End 14, Agi 21, Int 11, Cha 10; that's 25 HP, a 1,500 lbs lift and 1d10 HTH (or d10+d8 +d4 with his tail! You may say "is that too much tail damage?

[3] He would also work with pretty much any other theme – fast strong guy who beats people up is classic; he might even be a Puppeteer….



CLEARLY NOT! I'm missing panels from this page and I really want to see what's on the rest of the page; like many of these golden age books the layout is so alive.

But how do you play it?

The Ranger question remains: how do you handle pets that are cooler than their owners? *V&V* resolves it by the Companion power being entirely part of the PC; the pet is under the same amount of player control as the PC is, so ideally the issue doesn't arise. I mean yes, Bingo is objectively cooler than Jack, but that's by design. The big advantage to the ability is the action economy, where the player is now acting twice as often for PC & Pet. In a broader context I think this is the best way forward: let the player decide what the pet is, and then control it utterly; the pet should be part of the character to take away the conflict of who is 'cooler'. That might be old person thinking, but what can you do?

As with Spider Queen, Jack and Bingo feel like solo operators rather than parts of a larger team, so they are 1 player + GM or supporting guest star players.

The regrettable world

While the phraseology of the background makes Jack a natural for the pre-war period, it also fits perfectly into the Regrettable 1970s that started with Iron Skull – there are enemy agents scheming to destroy America. Jack has a public ID as a famed explorer and travel writer, but he uses that as a way to mingle with the high and mighty plotting against the US, and then have his kangaroo beat the cud out of them.

Regretting what I said to you…

John Redden commented on Spider Queen's gams: remember I'm an old soul with Damon Runyon books.

Josh wanted to know why I didn't handle Spider Queen's web shooters as a 'special' on an Animal/Plant Powers device. If I'd done so she would have had the Arachnid ability modifiers, which I don't think fit the character.

The Puppeteer(s)

As promised, I looked at the ideas for the heir to the Puppeteer (or at least new uses for the name) and… well I statted all of them up. This can't be a shock. To make matters worse, I statted all of them up with the same powers array: *Animal/Plant Control*, *Companion*, *Emotion Powers*, *Heightened Charisma B +24*, *Transformation Item*, and *Low Self-Control*. I allowed myself minimal deviation from that, most notably letting people split the *Ht. Charisma B* as if it were a skill. Otherwise, everyone's the same.

Elf's Puppeteer: I let *Animal Control/Emotion Powers* become an Item[4], and did internal trade off where *Animal Control* affects *any* animal and *Emotion Powers* has several emotions (one is Trust, so it doubles as mind control) but limited it to those of childlike innocence/intellect. I did keep the *Ht. Charisma* but split partially into Agility, as Elf mentioned her glowing when she got the flute and magic energy to improve her speed and presence fits.

Myles' Puppeteer: *Transformation A – Power Activation* gives them the whole new body, a willowy woman with superhuman endurance & charisma who can turn into water at will (which lets her breathe water, natch): her current 'best' attack is kissing someone to flood their lungs with water, but she's working on other options. Since I needed *Low Self Control* to get the gold fixation, I kept *Companion* theorizing that rhinemaidens come in threes. Her sisters aren't *here* but I love the advising transparent head trope, so that's what we've got.

Dylan's Puppeteer: split *Ht. Charisma* to Intelligence and we've an charming genius; lean into *Companion* and we have a small army of followers. Having the *Emotion Power* kinda sorta duplicate *Cosmic Awareness* and *Animal Control* as *Human Probability Control* are stretches, but it feels like it works for the character.

Josh's First Puppeteer: same as the original Flight Invulnerability Strength Speed (FISS) hero but an array of family members banging things out on the organ to get powers; very much leaning into the Tall Marvel, Fat Marvel, Hillbilly Marvel[5], Hoppy the Marvel Bunny here.

Josh's Second Puppeteer: *Plant Control* that she can only use on her puppets; a *Companion* who is a living marionette; puppet replacement body parts[6]! I really like Mary O'nette as a supporting character in the book, with us following her life as a construct as well as Ms. Hale's life as a midlife crisis superheroine.

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[4] Did I deliberately use a slash to separate them and call them an item?

[5] These are other people named Billy Batson who got Shazam powers via sympathetic magic. Captain Marvel is *odd!*

[6] Could we drive more into bionics here? Yes. Will we? Not today, but canonically her left kidney is a puppet. I think this one and the rhinemaiden are my favorites for their bonkers versatility.

Name: The Puppeteer
Identity: Bethany Hale
Side: Good | Gender: Female
Age: 24 | Level: 1
Abilities (3)
1-2) Magic Flute (Animal Control + Emotion Power): the flute controls 18 HP of the closest animals, taking 1 action/turn to issue orders. she can create joy, faith or trust at 13" (65 foot) range for 1 charge/hit, or 13" radius for 1 charge/use. Her Emotion Control only effects those of childlike innocence/ intellect [the trade off for having so many emotion control options, and is not techically a weakness.]
3) Heightened Charisma B ('Dashing', 2/3 C, 1/3 A): the infusion of magical energy boosted her characteristics, giving her +16 Charisma and +8 Agility

Weight:120 | Basic Hits: 3
Strength:11 | Endurance: 10
Agility: 24 | Intelligence:12
Charisma:29 | Reactions: 5
Hit Mod. 2.75 | Hit Points: 9
Dmg. Mod.:3 | Healing Rate: 0.75
Accuracy:4 | Power: 57
Carry Cap: 133 | Basic HTH:1d4
Move Rate: 45" ground
Det. Hidden: 20% | Det. Danger: 28%
Invent Pts: 1.2 | Inventing: 36%
Legal Status: Citizen with no criminal record
Backgrounds: Business (pet store), Performing
Origin: Bethany Hale grew up working in her Grandpa Alan's pet store, hearing fantastical tales of his time as 'the Puppeteer' before he settled down, trading in his patriotic garb for his wedding tux. Thinking they were just stories to pass the time Bethany learned differently when she inherited the store with its puppet shop and pipe organ hidden in a sub basement. The organ was in horrible disrepair and her attempts to clean it broke off a pipe, which inexplicably curled into a flute shape. She tried a hesitant note and the insturment's long dormant magic infused her. Adopting her grandfather's tuxedo, Bethany is going to go have the adventures he walked away from.

Inventions: None yet

Training: Strength
Tactics: Bethany has some HP from her speed and agility but would obviously rather not take a hit; she ususally splits her action between using her animal control to command her allies and setting up evasions to avoid being hit; if she has a 3rd action she might directly engage. Her emotion power is limited in ways that make it useful for gathering information and protecting the innocent, but not so much in combat.

Name: The Puppeteer
Identity: Chris Hale
Side: Good | Gender: Nonbinary
Age: 34 | Level: 1
Abilities (3)
1+W) Transformation Item - Power Activation: Immobile organ, must play Ride of Valkyries
a+b) Rhinemaiden Form - tall (6'6"), striking female, +15 Endurance, +24 Charisma
c) Emotion Power - Beguiling Attraction.
d) Companion: Her sisters are 'sidekicks' but back in Germany; their psychic link gives a -4 to be hit by mental attacks, x3 detection
e) Chemical Power - Water: drowning kiss 0" range, 2d8, PR 8, 1 action to change for
W) Low Self Control: Irrationally attracted to gold, especially gold rings. D% vs C to resist

Weight:160 | Basic Hits: 4
Strength:11 | Endurance: 25
Agility: 14 | Intelligence:12
Charisma:37 | Reactions: 7
Hit Mod. 4.29 | Hit Points:18
Dmg. Mod.:1 | Healing Rate: 2.8
Accuracy:1 | Power: 62
Carry Cap: 297 | Basic HTH:1d6
Move Rate: 50" ground; 104" stretch/swim
Det. Hidden: 30% | Det. Danger: 42%
Invent Pts: 1.2 | Inventing: 36%
Legal Status: Hasn't stolen any gold yet!
Backgrounds: Performing Art. Broadcasting
Origin: Chris stumbled across Alan Hale's pipe organ in a lock up after their grandfather's death. On cleaning and restoring the old instrument, they give it a whirl, bashing out the opening bars of "Ride of the Valkyries." Imagine their surprise when they transformed into not a valkyrie but a semi-adjacent Rhinemaiden, endowed with watery powers, magic, and beguilement, with a side-helping of a weakness for gathering and hoarding gold.

Chris has no idea the breadth of their watery powers: they know she can survive underwater, stretch, swim at 25 mph, and potentially kill with a kiss, but there are so many other options
Inventions:

Training: Strength
Tactics: As a Rhinemaiden, Puppeteer will try to use their charisma and beguiling to stop fights with their presence, or their watery kiss to difinitively end them. The magic presence of their sisters makes them exceedingly resistant to mental attacks and perceptive, usuallu giving her a warning to shift to watery form when things get dangerous. They have barely begun to fathom those powers.

Name: The Puppeteer
Identity: Darwin Hale
Side: Good (?) | Gender: Male
Age: 54 | Level: 1
Abilities (3)
1-2) Cult Following (Ht. Cha B "Charming" 2/3 C, 1/3 E + Companion):+16 Charisma, +8 Intelligence, 29 Enthusiastic (i.e. never check loyalty) followers each with 15 Very Loyal aides
3) Pyshcohistory (Emotion Power + Animal Control): psychohistorical skill makes him broadly empathic to human behavior; he can sense (actually predict the presence of) any human in 49", and predict mass action as if it were Cosmic Awareness, and spend 1/action turn having predicted human actions occur.
W) Low Self Control: Vast Arrogance, never explains plans, manipulates world

Weight:160 | Basic Hits: 4
Strength:11 | Endurance: 10
Agility: 14 | Intelligence:20
Charisma:29 | Reactions: 5
Hit Mod. 1.69 | Hit Points:7
Dmg. Mod.:2 | Healing Rate: 1
Accuracy:1 | Power: 55
Carry Cap: 177 | Basic HTH:1d4
Move Rate: 35" ground
Det. Hidden: 14% | Det. Danger: 18%
Invent Pts: 2 | Inventing: 60%
Legal Status: Wealthy citizen with pristine ID
Backgrounds: Historian, Psychology, Inheritor
Origin: Inheriting his grandfather Alan's inexplicable fortune, Darwin dedicated his life to understanding why and how psycholhistorical forces led to him having these advantages. His Psychohistory modeling showed him a most probable future that he deemed apocalyptic, and he has been building the Strings a business association? Foundation? Cult? to instigate his subtle plans to mitigate that destiny. (He just never explains what it is....) The String's emblem is an angled x with descending lines giving the image of a marionette cross with dangling strings.

Inventions: He carries an energy pistol (per book) that looks like a normal small calber
Training: Intelligence
Tactics: The Puppeteer seldom fights; if he does have to he will have 1 bodyguard with him per PC, and then use his Psychohistory to have 'unpredictable human events' fall his way, almost as if it were probability manipulation to give his bodyguards a better chance against heroes, or for distractions to let him escape.

Name: The Puppeteer
Identity: Evangeline Hale
Side: Good Gender: Female
Age: 14 Level: 1
Abilities (3)
1+W) Transformation Item - Power Activation: Immobile organ, must play Beethoven's 5th

a+b) Patriotic Transformation: +16 Strength, +16 Charisma (Overwhelming, +8 End), Charisma adds to Power score
c) Flight: 468 mph + hyper flight. PR 1/hour

2) Companion: Whenever any member of the Hale family plays Beethoven's 5th they also gain the powers at 2/3rd Evangeline's strength. This includes her Evangeline's younger brother St. John, her hilbilly cousin Sally, and once, somehow, her pet cat Sparky.

Weight:120 Basic Hits: 3
Strength:27 Endurance: 18
Agility: 16 Intelligence:12
Charisma:29 Reactions: 5
Hit Mod. 8.52 Hit Points:26
Dmg. Mod.:1 Healing Rate: 1.5
Accuracy:2 Power: 102
Carry Cap: 1289 Basic HTH:1d10
Move Rate: 61" ground; 2060" Flight
Det. Hidden: 10% Det. Danger: 14%
Invent Pts: 1.2 Inventing: 36%
Legal Status:Legal youth under parent's watch
Backgrounds:Manufacturing, Fine Art
Origin:Alan Hale didn't leave his kids much, but the delapidated house in the suburbs left them housed through dark times and let Evangeline enroll in an arts school nearby, even if she did have to work (under the table) at the town factory to afford it. It was just this year that she found grandpas's organ in the attic and the opportunity for adventure that it brings... even if sometimes she needs to call on her family for a little help in the field.

[BR: I added something to Evangeline that Alan probably had, letting her Charisma add to her Power score. This explains her high durability.]

Inventions: She's working on finding ways for more than one family member share at a time.
Training
TacticsThe Puppeteer is a classic, if low end FISS (Flight, Invulverability, Strength, Speed) hero, where her flight speed is her biggest advantage. While her transformed form is 'adult' she's still not huge, and can expect people to be surprised at her half ton plus lift grabbing big things and whacking people.

Her biggest advantage is her ability to have family join her - even if it is putting them at risk with their lower power levels. Why is that?

Name: The Puppeteer
Identity: Francesca Hale
Side: Good Gender: Female
Age: 44 Level: 1
Abilities (3)
1) Plant Control: 1 action per round to issue orders to (and animate) 32 HP of plant matter.

2) Companion: the Puppeteer has a life-sized Marionette as a non-gendered ass kicker.

3) Emotion Power: her animated puppets have rich personalities and emotions, and make independent decisions if separated, and transmit emotions back to Francesca.

4) Magical Tree Infusion: parts of Francesca are animated plants: +8 C, E and S

W) Low Self Control: can only bring herself to use plant control on puppets. D% vs C to try

Weight:140 Basic Hits: 3
Strength:19 Endurance: 18
Agility: 14 Intelligence:12
Charisma:21 Reactions: 4
Hit Mod. 5.03 Hit Points:16
Dmg. Mod.:1 Healing Rate: 1.5
Accuracy:1 Power: 57
Carry Cap: 606 Basic HTH:1d8
Move Rate: 51" ground
Det. Hidden: 10% Det. Danger: 14%
Invent Pts: 1.2 Inventing: 36%
Legal Status:Citizen with no criminal record
Backgrounds:Fine Arts, Performing Arts
Origin:Francesca learned that her father Alan's heroic career was cut short by the destruction of his magic organ. Spending decades she learned the source of its power was the magic wood of its construction, located the grove, and brought saplings back to her property from which to carve magic puppets. When a criminal assault left her with cronic injuries she replaced parts of her body with her magic wood, making her far better than she had been (and with an enticing perfume to boot!) She on some level suspects the power now rests in her, not the wood, and expands past her puppets, but is terrified of the ramifications of that, greatly limiting her power.
Inventions: None yet

TrainingAgility
TacticsPuppetter is a capable enough combatant with her excellent strength, but she will only engage in that once she has commanded whatever puppets she has available to disarm, trip, or pin down her opposition. She normally leaves that sort of work to Mary O'Nette.

[BR: am I kinda turning Companion into Animated Servant and Ht. Charisma B to Bionics? Yes. Vibe coding, baby.]

Name: Marionette
Identity: Mary O'Nette
Side: Puppeteer Gender: N/A
Age: 4 Level: 4
Abilities (3)
1) Chemical Power: Permanetly made of royal ebony (same wt/cubic foot as human body)

a) Wood Defense: Chemical Defenss, 3 pts Invulnerability/attack, life support per book
b) Wood Strength: +18 Str, +6 End
c) Natural Weaponry: Significant +3/+1d4

2) Transformation C - People: by moving around articulated parts of her body Mary can appear of any gender; It carries a shoulder bag/ suitcase of clothes and alternate faces. Changing shape takes 1 turn. With 1 day she can care a specific face (d20 vs C for effective impostuture on interaction

Weight:160 Basic Hits: 4
Strength:31 Endurance: 20
Agility: 12 Intelligence:10
Charisma:11 Reactions: 0
Hit Mod. 6.86 Hit Points:28
Dmg. Mod.:1 Healing Rate: 2
Accuracy:1 Power: 57
Carry Cap: 2543 Basic HTH:1d12
Move Rate: 63" ground
Det. Hidden: 8% Det. Danger: 12%
Invent Pts: 4 Inventing: 30%
Legal Status:Animated Entity, limited rights
Backgrounds:Performing Arts, Sports (Cheer)
Origin:Mary O'Nette is a human sized marionette carved from royal ebony (a varigated light to dark brown hardwood) and brought to semi-permanent life by Francesca Hale. Hale's powers made Mary a fully sentient, emotionally complex being, but unlike the other puppets it is an independent entity... who happens to be Francesca's best friend and self appointed protector.

When not adventuring Mary spends its time presenting as female, studying acting and dance, competing in cheer squads, and trying to carve the worlds most effective Resting Bitch Face.

Inventions: N/A as a Companion I'm not allowing this
TrainingN/A doesn't level up
TacticsMary will, if it has time, infiltrate the opposition or otherwise get close enough to take them by surprise. It then lays about with its wooden fists that probably do enough damage to incapaciate normal foes with a single hit. If there's any chance that the Puppeteer is in danger it will move to protect them with their own body.

Comments on E&A 14

Panhoca da Silva & Maria Zucolotto: I find the ramifications of legacy games fascinating. That they advocate destroying the book in parts feels so visceral.

Dale Meier: Welcome! RYC on games fizzling, I spent 20 years running short games just to avoid that!

Patrick Brady: RYCT Brian Misiaszek, I absolutely see how the life details of a real person's you managed to get through an adventure would have an enormous impact. Thank you for the Margaret Rutherford meme! As an HR professional I did a legit LOL at advancement by performance review game design. It feels reminiscent of *Warhammer FRP* with its integrated career paths.

Matt Stevens: RE your weird mechanics, take a look at my Facebook group Game Mechanics Archaeology. RCT Avram: Star Fleet doesn't have a military the same way that Japan doesn't in mecha anime: These giant robots are simply defense forces! RYCT Josh: here's the rational that convinced cis-het-white-guy me: "I have to deal with sexist racist homophobic shit every day in real life, and I don't want to deal with it in my fantasy." There's no convincing argument against that statement. Now, *Mech & Matrimony*, being based on Austen, has the sexism built in – the whole premise is built around how society so tightly constrains women's agency – so all you can tell people is "this is what it is because it has to be to be what it is; if that's not for you we can play something else or you can come back for my next campaign."

Patrick Riley: re *Outgunned*: oof, yeah, I'm with you there. Outside of the *V&V* example characters (no shocker there!) I don't much like the default, generally derivative universes provided by supers RPG. At least some of the *Silver Age Sentinels* PCs in the 'magical streets' framing felt original, but their top line heroes were the Justice League, one of the things that turned me off. *Aurora Cove* is so wonderfully *The Village*. I'm guessing that _none of_ the gravestones predate 1947? RCT me on old *D&D* Stuff: yeah, it wasn't till I seriously reread the *B/X* rules for *Under the Giant's Shadow* and saw the Expert Set devoted 2 pages, (3% of its page count!) to intelligent swords, that 30% of all magic swords are meant to be some level of intelligent, and only Fighters could use them. At those percentages every Fighter gets an intelligent sword in levels 4-8. A precept in the OSR community is that these rules were there for a reason, not "they don't know what they are doing" errors that we clever types need to fix. In The Matter of Britain or The Matter of France, every Fighter has a magic sword that could be considered *at least* empathetic. (Arthur has one-sided conversations with Excalibur in *Camelot*… maybe he's nuts, or maybe the sword has telepathy.) Fighters are notoriously the only class in B/X without magic access so maybe intelligent swords full that gap and reinforce the Fighter's niche? I see it as an elegant bit of design. It's so frustrating that this stuff is never EXPLAINED in the original. re Turning Undead, ah, that makes sense and yes, your example is spot on.

Bryant Durrell: welcome aboard! Lisa and Josh are indefatigable evangelists of the form. re *Feng Shui 2E*: I just had a chat with one of my *Star Wars* players about him preferring 2E to 1E, whereas I am the opposite. I'm wondering about your feelings on it? RYC on interparty conflict: the same page scale is useful. The most inter-party conflict I've run was Amber, and that was a "me against my brother, my brother and I against our cousins, all of us against those not in the family" game.

Mark A Wilson: RYCT me, the nice thing about Gondians is they can be repaired. RYCT Josh on Rangers: this just reminded me that *13th Age* 1E made this (IMHO) mistake of, in the *13 True Ways* supplement, having Animal Companion Rangers get spellcasting that boosts their companion. It just gives one more level of complexity to what is meant to be the simplest build of one of the simplest class. Don't listen to people on-line demanding more core book options is what I'm saying (something they caved to in 2E). As for the demand that the Ranger be the cooler half of the Ranger Pet duo, take a look at thisish's Regrettable. I always love megagame reports: I shared with my family, who loved it.

John Redden: the *Rusty Bucket* dialogues were great. I move to Hawai'i and open a gaming store = easy money?

Myles Corcoran: Re theater: at nieces' summer play the announcer told us that the sounds of crinkling paper were worse than cell phones, so open your stuff NOW! RYCT me on the kiddo's brain: fortunately, her hair is thick enough be 3 rPD against cranial screw top entry.

Avram Grumer: the name of the curse is "Game Designer Comes In Each Box". re 18 cards: they want the decks to be able to vote but not drink. RYCto Erica on the OSR: this continues to baffle me, as it's not something I see in OSR blog I follow. Exploration, politics, shenanigans... these all take precedence over combat, which is often too deadly to mess with. Now if people want to complain about combat being so deadly that you can't keep continuity of characters, fine. If you want to complain about a chunk of the OSR community having retrograde social attitudes and taking criticism poorly, 100%. But being too combat forward? Huh. I must not be seeing what you're seeing. re *AD&D* Domain level play: it's not that it never happened, but it was rare. The *AD&D* longer campaigns I played in often petered out at 8th level because the system 'breaks'... i.e. the wizards

become too powerful compared to fighters because we all decided not to do domain management. The one time we kinda did the party as a whole was given governance of a small community on the edge of... Cormyr in the *Forgotten Realms* Suddenly everyone grooved on domain level play, great power politics, solving problems and mysteries in the community, etc. All the things that people strive for now. I'm not sure what lesson this teaches about high level *AD&D* play, but it feels like it should be something. RYCT Lisa on Ultra Tech in *Star Wars*: the lack of consistent technobabble should make clear that the milieu is not one where you should be playing an inventor. One of my players who was in both my 1980's *SW* games and the current one always drops experience points into improving the ship, which is as far as the invention rules should go IMHO, as the game is resolutely NOT ABOUT inventing new technologies. *Star Trek* is two doors down, after Arguments. RYCT Josh about the collaborative *Cyberpunk 2020* game where the players who signed on didn't actually want to do the collaborative work: that would drive me insane. RYCT Jim about your capers having pre-game planning to not eat table time: this was what made the *Mission Impossible* game work; they had a solid month to make the plan.

Attronarch: It's amazing how much more effective they are at 5th level. "The party bravely fled" is such a wonderful phrase. re Killing Sor'Ves: well, that was dramatically satisfying! Pity about poor Ajar.

Gabriel Roark: Declaring intention for sequencing is such a time sink (likely the main reason games moved to cyclic initiative). Nonetheless I'm using it in *Star Wars*.

Elf: I think the review of solo games has more utility, so start there. If it doesn't work for you, burn it to the ground and start the other one. RE *Murphy's Rules*: we didn't get laser pistols, but in the oughts I did have a doctor us a sonic cannon to blast a kidney stone to flinders. The future is here, just not what we expected.

Patrick Zoch: RE *Fantasy Grounds*, oh that just sounds exhausting. The game remains fascinating and halfling scorpionfish…? ok that was weird. Cute, but weird.

Dylan Capel: *We are all ghosts in the forest* sounds cool! re Underdarks: In my *13th Age* world the Underdark was the crust of the world, separating Above Lands from the Hollow Earth, a vast desert whose the pitiless internal sun had baked its oceans away; the dwarves in the Underdark had fled this catastrophe. The PCs passed through the Hollow Earth briefly; there's a 'restore world's balance' quest there that they avoided

Michael Cule: OK, DOGE getting lost in *Warehouse 23* is the exact type of your genius I expect, Mr. Cule.

Jim Eckman: yeah, we E&Ars are special at that. Pushing the boundaries of RPG discourse monthly! And yes, I too hope there is a next issue. Fingers crossed!

Joshua Kronengold: woot! that has to be a relief! Congrats on the new job. RYCT Myles on *UA*'s playing silly buggers with dice: I really do think these are great mechanics in their simplicity for dice rolls. RYCT Michael Cule on Killing Attacks: whenever I prep stuff for *Champions* I assume that firearms max out at 2d6KA or 30 AP. I *want* them to suck compared to powers. I love using a Dispel of [*Moon Knight Random Bullshit Go!*] to break OAF firearms, but AP costs run too high with the gunbunnies who lean into *Champions*. RYCT Roger BW on *GURPS + Reign*: I love the *Reign* lifepath dice but GURPS would be the last place I implement it… though I would love to see yours! RYCT Dylan: yes, but *D&D* is much closer to being the same high and low now than it was in *AD&D*, as the post level 9 elements of *AD&D* have been stripped away. YCT Lisa on Paid GMs: Matt Colville has a walk and talk about gaming as a tradition vs a hobby that has interesting notes on this.

Lisa Padol: Wolfe wrote two SF Mystery Stories with specifically Nero Wolfe protagonist (*Slaves of Silver* and *The Rubber Bend*, both collected in Storeys From the Old Hotel), so that ship has sailed. RYCT Matt about Fantasy RPGs being less Eurocentric: Like you said, it can be hard because you don't know what is happening. I just bought *Blood Moon Pact*, an English language Jubensha, and am staggered by the amount of gaming happening in China. *We just don't know*! re B/X swords considering themselves gods: oooh, that's a good one! RYCT on my daughter's lifepath: She does have a great chance to find a super-power artifact. Apparently, her revolutionary era tavern museum had Sumerian tablets in its collection, so I remain hopeful. Re rules designers don't use: I suspect many were simulationist rules to 'help' unskilled GMs do things experienced game designers can just wing that went overboard. RAE the Dracula Dossier stuff. I know you've posted the "how to make vamps dangerous" stuff, but can you remind me?

Jim Vassilakos: RE James L Cambias: he's the *least* famous of the authors I game with... I'll pass along your kind words. RY people in cults calling them cults: Don't be silly. *I'm* in a religion, *you're* in a cult, *she's* a witch!

Timothy Collinson: re Seamanship - those darn players! As opposed to a CoC game where my daughter's character had Ballooning and my response was "there is no way in hell this is on your sheet and we don't use it!"

Everyone else: RAEBNC

Goodnight, Speed Centaur, wherever you are.

Issue 252

Age of Menace



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Horrors of the Mazorra

A 1933 *Pulp Cthulhu* scenario (Part 12)

Recap: By 9:00 p.m. August 12, 1933, patient-held Mazorra has reached an uneasy agreement with representatives of the Aeroporto mob. A small delegation has entered the forensic pavilion *El Limbo* to locate and release the most recently detained political 'patients', while the crowd outside waits for their report. Before the delegates can return, Leopard Man cultists emerge from the underground passages under Yobama's orders & begin coordinated terror raids across the asylum. Those in the Mazorra's secret Treasure Vault are still trapped below. Finally, the Twsha outbreak is becoming increasingly visible.

Time	Agency	Event
20:35	⚓ 🎲 🐕 ➡️	Delegation enters *El Limbo*
21:00	⚓ ➡️ 🐕	Leopard Men Cultists begin raids
21:05	⚓	Tessa Pacheco's PA warning
~21:10	🎲 🐕 ➡️	Retreating raiders emerge with captives
21:15	⚓ 🐕 🎲 ➡️	North-rail splinter mob column meets *El General*'s II Battalion; encounter raiders
~21:20 - 21:35	⚓ 🐕 🎲 ➡️	Rescued *El Limbo* detainees reach gate
22:00	🎲 🐕 ➡️	*El General's cordon* surrounds the Old Laundry
22:30	⚓ 🎲 ➡️	The Vault collapses beneath Old Laundry Pavilion

Player Agency Flags

⚓	FIXED	An Anchored or established state. This happens *regardless* of Investigator action.
➡️	DEFAULT	This proceeds *unless* players intervene
🎲	MUTABLE	Choices/rolls alter time/NPCs consequences.
🐕	OFF-SCREEN	May be resolved outside Investigators' view, or summarized.
⬡	INVESTIGATOR STAKES	Personal objective, relationship, or character arc advanced or resolved through Investigator choice.

⚓ NIGHT OF THE LEOPARD



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

By 9:00 p.m., the rain has thinned to a fine dripping mist. Moonlight appears and vanishes through shredded cloud. Across Mazorra, lanterns, drifting steam, and nervous patrols turn the grounds into a broken theatre of shadows.

At the brightly lit Main East Gate, the Aeroporto crowd has settled into an uneasy vigil that almost resembles a street festival. Music from an A.B.C. controlled Habana radio station plays over the PA, interrupted by news bulletins every quarter hour. Coffee urns have been carried to the gatehouse, and paper cups of strong, hot Cuban coffee are passed through the bars. Most of the crowd waits patiently for the El Limbo delegates to return and report what they found.

Not everyone is willing to wait.

Twenty angry men, muttering that they have heard enough promises, climb into cars and trucks. Engines cough to life, gears clash, and the little convoy roars north along Boyeros

Road, apparently heading back toward Habana. Once beyond sight of the gate, however, they turn toward Mazorra's northern railway access.

Inside the walls, the last heavy clouds begin to break. In the darkness between pavilions come smaller sounds: the hollow scrape of a manhole cover, bare feet padding across wet concrete, and soft whispers cut abruptly short.

Then a shaft of moonlight catches a crouching figure beside an open drain. For an instant, it resembles a leopard, its pale hide broken by dark rosettes. Then it rises onto two legs, wicked claw-knives gripped in one hand. With the other, it briefly cups the beam of a shaded flashlight over the dial of a wristwatch.

As the Mazorra Chapel bells start to strike 9 times, the Leopard Men also begin to strike.

Jeremías "The Executioner" Yobama's Plan

On the evening of August 12th, the Mazorra Leopard Men number approximately **28–32 active members**, drawn largely from patients, labourers, orderlies, guards, and forensic inmates recruited over many years.

The incursion beneath *El Limbo* is only one part of Yobama's coordinated attack. Shortly before 21:00, he dispatches seven three-man raiding cells through Mazorra's underground passages. Each has a target, route, and the same orders: eliminate isolated resistance, seize a living captive, spread panic, and withdraw before organized defenders can respond. The remaining cultists guard the Old Laundry temple, prepare the ceremony, or serve as runners.

Their purpose is terror, not conquest.

Yobama intends the night's killings and disappearances to be blamed on the Aeroporto mob, escaped patients, or remnants of President Geraldo Machado's collapsing regime.

The captives are intended for a ***Blood Harvest Ceremony***, both as sacrifice and as a brutal demonstration of Yobama's authority over his followers.

The seven three-man cells emerge from selected manholes near their assigned targets. They avoid illuminated roads and open courtyards, infiltrate buildings, extinguish lights, imitate cries for help, and create distractions to draw defenders away from their true objectives. They are hunters, not soldiers.

Once confronted by organized resistance, they break contact and retreat underground.

Yobama does not accompany the strike cells. He remains within his *Old Laundry Pavilion*'s hidden temple with a small inner guard, preparing the altar, receiving captives, and directing the attack through runners, drums, and prearranged signals.

9:00 p.m. Leopard Men In the Aux Lab



Image generated via ChatGPT 5.6

The first warning is the sudden stillness of the moths.

Huge moths and small bats scatter through the artificial blue-grey moonlight as three spotted figures descend among trellises, leaves, and mist. Three Leopard Men have followed the old storm drains and ruined service ways toward Dr. Zorrilla's hidden laboratory after cult watchers saw Yolanda descend into old M1. Finding the inner approach locked, they climb down instead through the Lunar Vivarium's ventilation chimney.

Reaching the Vivarium floor, the Raiders halt at the mesh doorway and carefully open it.

The cramped laboratory is crowded with glassware and instruments. Several people surround two visibly afflicted men. One, perhaps recognizable as Dr. Zorrilla, sits with translucent patches spreading across his throat, chest, and arms. Another is almost entirely wrapped in bandages. **Yolanda**, still in nurse's whites, tends him while a stern-looking woman watches nearby.

For several seconds, even the hardened Leopard Men who have killed before hesitate at the sight of the Twsha afflicted men.

Keeper's Note: The Cursed Men: By 9 pm both men are afflicted visibly by Twsha. *Evelio Gil* =Late Stage 2, ~29 hours post-exposure. Increasingly translucent, beginning visual/motor impairment, frightened but mentally intact and cooperative. *Ramón Zorrilla* = Late Stage 2, anomalous. Similar external changes, but Twsha activity is disproportionately concentrated around his awakened parasitic twin; mentally intact, increasingly fascinated by what is happening to him. Cultists seeing Zorrilla's exposed translucent flesh costs SAN 0/1D3. Failure causes recoil and loss of the next action; thereafter, touching or restraining him requires *Hard POW*. If Gil's bandages reveal his more advanced condition, make one

group POW roll for the raiders. Failure gives them a Penalty Die for 1D3 rounds and makes them abandon both men; a fumble prompts immediate retreat.

The Leopard Goddess



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

A red-haired female patient sits with her back partly turned, strange pale markings visible across her shoulders and arms.

Then Dolores rises and turns. Her Twsha lesions spread across her face, neck, shoulders, and arms. Beneath the Vivarium's polarized light, alternating translucent and opaque patches form shimmering rosettes uncannily resembling a leopard's pelt.

The cultists freeze. One lowers his weapon.

Another whispers, *"¡La Diosa Leoparda!"*

Keeper's Note: Keeper's Note: The Leopard Goddess. The Leopard Men know nothing of *Twsha*. Dolores is midway through Stage 2, but her transformation affects them very differently from their earlier sight of Zorrilla and Gil. Under the Vivarium's polarized light, her translucent patches resemble the rosettes of a living leopard pelt. Rather than diseased or monstrous, she appears *chosen*. The cultists interpret her condition as possession, transformation, or divine favour, and react with immediate awe.

While this awe persists, Dolores gains a **Bonus Die** on *Charm, Fast Talk, Persuade***,** or *Intimidate* against Leopard Men. A **Hard success** may compel one cultist to obey a simple, non-suicidal command such as *"Untie her," "Leave him,"* or *"Take me to your leader"*. An **Extreme success** may affect all three. See her full stats in *AoM #240 in E&A #3*. Obvious betrayal, violence against them, or a failed Pushed social roll ends the advantage.

Dolores is alluring, homicidal, and chronically inclined toward escape rather than obedience. She does not yet know why, but even in her hypomanic and Twsha afflicted state she knows an opportunity to finally escape the Mazorra when she sees one.

If the Leopard Men offer the easiest escape, she willingly goes with them, exploiting their belief that she is somehow chosen (see *Keeper's Note* below). If they are killed, captured, or driven off, she instead looks for another exit and may bolt during the confusion up through the lunar Vivarium's chimney. Investigators can restrain, follow, deceive, persuade, or simply allow her to go.

Running the Aux. Lab Raid

Do not begin with automatic combat. Give the Investigators a moment to understand what is happening and react. This is an abduction raid, not an extermination attempt. Yolanda is the principal intended captive; another vulnerable non-Investigator will be taken if convenient. Dolores is completely unexpected, and her appearance immediately disrupts the raiders' priorities.

A second three-man cell, redirected from the failed Director's Manse raid (see *7 Raiding Parties* table on page 4), is moving through the service passages beyond the locked door. It enters only if the first raiders open the door or successfully signal them,. Investigators who secure the door or interrupt the signal may prevent the two groups from joining forces.

Leopard Men Raider priorities: seize Yolanda; keep an escape route open; exploit or contain Dolores if possible; withdraw with at least one captive. They do not fight to the death merely to hold the laboratory. If their position deteriorates, the Leopard Men cover one another's withdrawal rather than continue a losing fight. They may seize another NPC if the opportunity presents itself. N**o Investigator is captured by default.**

After each major change in circumstances, return to the Investigators and ask what they do next. They may protect Yolanda, defend Zorrilla or Gil, block reinforcements, secure the laboratory, pursue Dolores, capture a raider, or escape. Success in one direction should sometimes cost an opportunity elsewhere.

Default Outcome Aux Lab Raid

If no Investigator intervenes, the Raiders succeed in their mission. *RN Yolanda Heres* is seized, bound & gagged. Zorrilla and Gil are abandoned once their transformations become clear. The first raiders admit their reinforcements and withdraw with whatever captives they can move quickly; they will then split up. Dolores goes willingly with one group of four. Whether she is being abducted, escorted, or merely using the cultists as guides becomes increasingly unclear.

By then their underground withdrawal route has become unsafe, forcing the surviving raiders to cross the railway line on their way toward the *Old Laundry Pavilion.*

Table: The 7 Raiding Parties Across Mazorra at 9 p.m.

Cell	Target	First Sign	Default Leopard Man Raider Outcome if Unopposed
1	*El Limbo*	Dolz, Maceo, & Cuéllar emerge from the service passages near Room XIII.	Partial success. Inside lines are cut; one defender is injured or silenced. They seize a captive if one is readily available, then withdraw rather than fight any resistance.
2	M1 Basement & Zorilla's Aux. Lab.	Moths in the Lunar Vivarium suddenly become still.	**Success, with complications**. Yolanda is abducted. Dolores accompanies them voluntarily as the increasingly revered *Diosa Leoparda*. Zorrilla & Gil are abandoned. What happens to any Investigator present remains entirely subject to player choices, rolls, & their consequences.
3	*La Oficina* Inner Courtyard	Lights near the switchboard fail in sequence.	**Failure with consequences.** Neither *El Rey* nor the Mazorra's Voice (Teresa) captured; Cultists not killed/captured escape wounded to their Temple. Switchboard only briefly disrupted + warning is sent out over the PA at 9:05
4	M2 (Female Department)	A woman's voice cries for help from a dark passage.	Success if not previously thwarted. The previous evacuation was shadowed & ***Juana de la Cruz*** *is* the preferred default captive grabbed from nursing barracks.
5	Children's Pavilion	A manhole opens silently along Ricky & Elda's evacuation route.	**Failure**. Ricky + Elda have already moved the vulnerable children. The cultists search briefly & leave; contingency plans → withdraw to support M2 cell.
6	Director's Manse	An abandoned lantern near open drain inside kitchen.	**Failure, then redirection**. Targets inside gone/inaccessible. Under contingency orders, the cell → M1 cell, explaining the 2nd three-man team there.
7	Superintendent's Manse	A guard dog whines then barks furiously, angrily.	**Failure with consequences.** Gandía + other Porra targets are absent & El Rey's forces fight back. The retreating cell collides with one of *El General's* steam teams, and one Cultist is badly scalded, one shot, and survivors retreat.

~9:04 P.M. ENEMY SAPPERS IN THE DRAINS



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

The first open clash between *El General's* army and Yobama's raiders occurs almost by accident.

Minutes earlier, three Leopard Men infiltrated *La Oficina* through the service ways, extinguishing lights near the switchboard before attempting to seize Teresa Pacheco. *El Rey's* courtiers, clerks, and other occupants resist more effectively than expected. Unable to reach the switchboard without becoming trapped, the cultists abandon the raid and retreat underground.

One chooses the wrong exit.

A manhole beside A*venida Álvarez-Cerice* is already occupied by one of *El General's* improvised "artillery" crews. Two patient-soldiers stand beside a brass nozzle tipped steam hose while another watches the opening with a lantern.

The cover shifts. A spotted mask appears briefly below.

Someone shouts, "¡Saboteadores!"

The Leopard Man Cultist surges upward just as the steam valve opens.

There is a violent shriek of escaping steam, followed by two or three rifle shots. The cultist falls back into the darkness, scalded horribly by the sudden horizontal geyser, while his companions disappear into the service passages.

They have been seen.

Tessa's Warning

At *La Oficina,* calls begin arriving almost simultaneously: masked men at the switchboard, courtiers repelling them furiously, movement beneath an open avenue manhole, and gunfire near the steam line.

Teresa Pacheco grabs the incoming cords and pushes her daughter toward the PA microphone. At ~ **9:05 p.m.**, loudspeakers across Mazorra crackle with Tessa's voice:

"Attention! Attention! All Mazorra wards and pavilions are instructed to secure their cellar, and service entrances. Unidentified masked men have been seen emerging from the service ways near *La Oficina*. Do not enter the tunnels. Report any opened hatch or manhole immediately."

Keeper's Note: This is the source of the interrupted PA announcement heard during the *El Limbo* raid. In *El Limbo,* the warning ends abruptly when Dolz cuts its local telephone/PA connection. The rest of the Mazorra is alerted.

El General Issues Orders

To General Gaspar Olivares, the report requires no supernatural explanation. He barks out: "**Enemy sappers in the drains. Guard every opening. Steam downward at your discretion.**"

Runners leave his M1 headquarters. At each active steam position, two patient-soldiers are assigned to watch nearby covers with lanterns, poles, or improvised weapons. Steam hoses are turned toward the openings, a few blasting experimentally. Other manhole and storm drain grids are opened, lanterns lowered, and those above watch.

Yobama's underground network is no longer invisible.

The Leopard Men are predators, not soldiers. A detected cell usually retreats, or risks a more difficult surface crossing rather than fight *El General's* steam-wielding troops head-on.

This changes the rest of the raid.

While all cells had reached their targets before the warning, most discover their planned retreat blocked. Forced above ground, they may encounter Mazorra patrols, or the Aeroporto infiltrators advancing along down the north railway line.

If Investigators Are Present

Play the encounter rather than predetermining it.

- ***Listen/Spot Hidden:*** detect movement beneath the cover before *El General's* men open the steam valve.
- *Persuade, Intimidate, or Command:* stop frightened patient-soldiers from firing blindly into the drains which may spare any captives.
- *Mechanical Repair***:** vent, redirect, or shut the steam hose safely.
- If the cultist emerges fully, normal combat applies.

Keeper's Note: Water & Steam Hoses: Treat these as area-control weapons rather than precision firearms.

Pressurized Water/Fire Hose: Normally requires two operators; *DEX* or *Mechanical Repair* to aim. A struck target rolls *STR or DEX*: failure knocks them prone and drives them **1D6 feet**. Take **1D3 damage** only if slammed into a wall, machinery, etc. Anyone struck while climbing, on a roof, ladder, or narrow ledge must also make *DEX/Climb* or fall.

Steam Hose: *DEX/Mechanical Repair* to aim; *Dodge* avoids the blast. A hit inflicts **1D6 burn damage**. The victim then rolls *CON*: failure loses the next action and suffers a *Penalty Die* on physical actions for 1D3 rounds. In confined spaces, the steam cloud also gives a *Penalty Die* on sight-based actions until it disperses.

If Investigators Are Elsewhere

Use this default outcome: one Leopard Man is scalded or wounded but escapes; the cell abandons *La Oficina* and returns underground. The important result is not a dead cultist. It is that Mazorra now knows attackers are using the tunnels.

Keeper's Note - After the 9:05 p.m. PA Warning: Any Leopard cell crossing an active steam position must either reroute, wait 1D10 minutes, or risk detection. If a random result is required, roll **Luck for the cell**: success = unseen passage; failure = spotted and forced to retreat or emerge elsewhere. A cell carrying a captive automatically suffers a Penalty Die.

21:15 p.m. The Northern Splinter Mob



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Not everyone in the Aeroporto Mob was willing to wait. At ~20:45 twenty angry men, muttering that they have heard enough promises, climb into cars and trucks. Engines cough to life, gears clash, and the little convoy roars north along Boyeros Road, apparently heading back toward Habana. Once beyond sight of the gate, however, the vehicles turn toward Mazorra's northern railway access.

Most do not think of themselves as looters or a mob. They consider themselves independent revolutionaries, avengers, and freedom fighters who reached the airport too late to stop Machado's escape. They saw his aircraft climb away while soldiers and police stood aside. They then followed the crowd to *La Nenita*, where Machado's servants and guards had already fled, and helped tear apart the abandoned estate.

To them, Mazorra is unfinished revolutionary business. They know its loathed ex-president's cousin was the Director & that Porra guards have used the asylum as a secure refuge. They have heard rumours of political prisoners, torture rooms, secret funds, and records that may be destroyed before morning. They intend to free prisoners, seize incriminating papers, and punish any Porra they find.

They do not know that Machado used a body double, that patients now control much of Mazorra, or where political detainees are actually held. They have no map and little understanding that the buildings ahead contain thousands of vulnerable patients.

No A.B.C. or Directorio members join them. Both organizations have accepted the delegation agreement and regard this unsanctioned expedition as reckless. Valcárcel's men take that caution as proof that the organized revolutionaries have already begun behaving like politicians.

The Men in the Splinter Column (from L to R)



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Nicolás "Nico" Arocha, a broad-shouldered airport mechanic with oil-blackened sleeves, leads the largest contingent: nearly a dozen fellow airport workers. He watched Machado's aircraft escape and remains furious that no one stopped it. Nico and his honest co-workers want the Porra punished and political prisoners freed, but has no interest in harming patients or ordinary hospital workers.

Sargento Emilio Valcárcel becomes the group's leader through confidence and volume rather than any recognized authority. A Cuban Army non-commissioned officer, he has rallied half a dozen junior soldiers around him. He speaks of "arresting" Porra, "securing" buildings, and "requisitioning" vehicles and money for the revolution. Valcárcel wants immediate justice, but still needs to believe that whatever he does remains justice.

Rufino "El Cabo" *('The Corporal')* **Peraza**, a drunken former soldier carrying a double-barrelled shotgun, repeatedly announces that anything found inside a Machado building now belongs to "the people." His revolutionary rhetoric is mostly a cork floating on an ocean of appetite. Rufino and his two even more venal cousins Abel & Martin are less interested in prisoners than in liquor, weapons, cash, and obtaining a vehicle of their own.

Rogelio "El Chivo" *('The Billygoat')* **Mantilla** is a loner who has attached himself to the column. An anarchist carrying petrol, rags, and matches, he cares little which building burns, provided it is large, visible, and can later be described as a symbol of the fallen tyranny. The others do not know what he has brought and would not necessarily approve if they did.

SIDE-BAR – HEROES IN THEIR OWN STORY: The splinter column is not twenty interchangeable villains. About 12 are sincere anti-Machado airport workers and sympathizers; several others are opportunists. Rufino *El Cabo* Peraza & his cousins are increasingly unsure what they have joined, while *El Chivo* Mantilla wants confusion, vengeance, & fire. The confrontation with *El General's* patients tests the story each man has been telling himself. Shooting Porra is revolution. Shooting unarmed patients blocking a hospital crossing is something else.

The Aeroporto splinter takes about ten minutes to circle north in its three vehicles before parking near the railway crossing roughly half a mile beyond Mazorra. They leave the vehicles behind and continue south on foot, bringing more determination than common sense.

The rain-slick ties and loose wet ballast make the rail bed treacherous. They do not enter the fenced railway defile until about **9:10 p.m.** By then, Tessa Pacheco's warning about masked men using Mazorra's drains and service ways has already gone out over the PA but the sound is garbled this far out.

The Mazorra asylum ahead is no longer sleeping.

The twenty or so outsiders follow the station boardwalk south until the open railway crossing between the Men's and Women's Departments comes into view at approximately 9:15 p.m. as clouds move to add bright moonlight to the feeble light from electric lights on buildings and posts.

Their way is suddenly blocked.

Over a hundred patients, half of *El General's II Battalion* move swiftly to stand silently across the railway & adjoining roadway. Most carry nothing more formidable than brooms, crutches, rakes, lengths of pipe, or hospital tools. Behind them, however, six riflemen take position among the posts and baggage carts of the raised platform.

There is the unmistakable *snick-snick* of rifle bolts closing.

Neither side fires.

A Mazorran patient "officer" calls across the tracks: "By order of *General Olivares*, no armed body enters among the helpless. Stack your weapons and send delegates if you would enter."

Valcárcel immediately shouts back, "We demand passage in the name of the Revolution." He mutters to the others, to ready their weapons.

Nico Arocha is less certain. Whatever these men are, he whispers to his fellow airport co-workers, they are plainly patients defending their own hospital.

Sighting the Cultists Break the Standoff

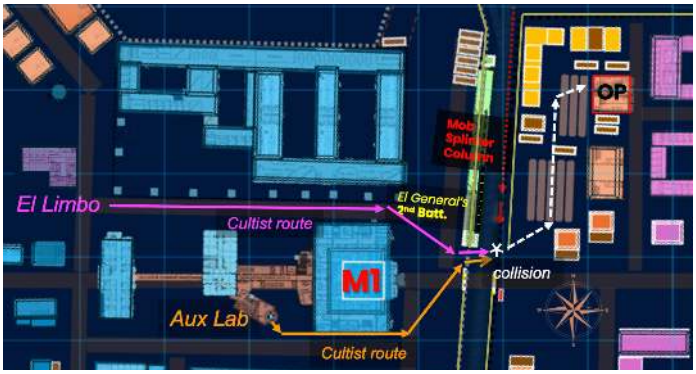
The PA warning has changed the underground battlefield. Manholes and cellar exits are now watched, forcing the M1 Aux. Lab raiders carrying their prizes toward the *Old Laundry* to surface. Four Leopard Men emerge into the rain. RN Yolanda Heres is bound and gagged between two of them.



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Several paces ahead walks Dolores García, neither tied nor guarded. In the blue-white moonlight, translucent rosettes shimmer across her face, neck, shoulders, and arms like a luminous leopard pelt. The cultists follow her with an uneasiness approaching reverence.

They move east toward the crossing between the Men's and Women's Departments. Their route carries them almost directly across the open ground separating El General's patient-soldiers from the Aeroporto splinter column. At its nearest point, barely thirty-five feet separate the two hostile groups. (*see map below of relative position of collision point for either Cultist cell returning overland depicted by orange arrow; each square 100 feet).*



For a moment, everyone simply stares.

Then *RN Yolanda Heres* struggles against her captors.

No explanation of Mazorra politics is required.

Nico Arocha and his fellow airport workers move to help her. Valcárcel loudly declares the masked men Porra assassins and joins in rather than surrender leadership to Nico. *El General's* officers recognize the description of "spotted enemy sappers" reported elsewhere and order a detachment forward while warning their riflemen not to fire into the crowd.

The Leopard Men have no intention of fighting twenty outsiders and a patient. They slash, shove, and scatter toward the *Old Laundry* as soon as an escape opens, abandoning captives or wounded companions rather than risk encirclement.

Rufino *El Cabo* and his cousins discover the limits of their revolutionary courage and flee north toward their vehicles. *El Chivo*, however, uses the confusion to slip deeper into Mazorra with his petrol and ignition materials, heading eventually toward *La Oficina* and the Director's Manse.

Getting To The Collision:

The railway standoff need not depend upon a successful raid on the Auxiliary Laboratory and Dolores being spotted. Keepers may select whichever Leopard Man thread survives player action.

- Successful Aux Lab raid: surviving Leopard Men surface near M1 with Yolanda ± another captive, & Dolores willingly accompanying them. Their attempt to cross the railway produces the collision below (orange arrow).
- Aux Lab raiders defeated: the hypomanic Dolores uses the confusion to attempt escape unless restrained or persuaded otherwise. If she encounters the three reserve Leopard Men outside, she recognizes their awe and may simply demand from them, "Take me to your leader." Unless stopped, they escort her toward the Old Laundry Pavilion & their hidden Temple, causing the collision.
- *El Limbo* raiders escaping: surviving Leopard Men from the forensic pavilion may provide the collision instead. A leopard costumed cultist alone, or two cultists dragging a bound detainee, emerge (see magenta arrows) and are spotted crossing the tracks

If the Investigators defeat both raids completely, reward them. Do not manufacture another escaping cultist. Instead, a runner or PA warning reports masked raiders elsewhere and identifies several withdrawals toward the same part of Mazorra.

The standoff can then break through negotiation rather than combat.

Running the Collision

However the Leopard Men reach the crossing, do not force the default outcome once Investigators are present. Nico's workers move to rescue any visible captive, while *El General's* troops advance without firing through the melee. The cultists try to break contact rather than win the fight. Investigators may rescue captives, prevent indiscriminate shooting, capture a raider, intercept *El Chivo*, pursue Dolores, or turn the two hostile groups into temporary allies.

THE RETURN OF THE DELEGATES



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Tessa Pacheco's 9:05 p.m. warning has placed both *El Limbo* and the East Gate on edge. Before Dolz cuts the pavilion's telephone/PA line, her frightened voice is heard across Mazorra:

"Attention! Attention! All wards and pavilions are instructed to secure their cellar, drain, and service entrances. Unidentified masked men have been seen emerging from..."

At the East Gate, *María del Pilar Sosa, Julio Castañeda, Ricky Morales*, and most of the Aeroporto crowd still await the delegation's promised report. They may be joined by Israel Castellanos, Dr. Prats, & Mons. Aurelio at Keeper's discretion

The timing matters. The delegation entered *El Limbo* at about 20:35 with a forty-five-minute reporting deadline, making 21:20 the point when silence normally begins worsening the **Crowd Temperature.**

If word of the Leopard Men attack reaches the gate through Tessa's warning or one of *El General's* runners, treat the first delay as explained rather than apparent betrayal.

Default Outcome: The *El Limbo* Raid

If no Investigators alter events, Perdomo's final shot and the interrupted PA warning spoil the Leopard Men's surprise. The delegation, Urrutia, and the surrounding patient-soldiers rally quickly enough that the raid achieves only partial success.

The Leopard Man Cultist **Maceo** is badly wounded and captured. Dolz cuts communications and unless intercepted escapes with Cuéllar, who seizes one Ward A detainee as a prospective sacrifice. Their orders favour taking a captive and withdrawing rather than fighting prolonged resistance.

Tessa's PA warning has meanwhile put cellar and drain exits across Mazorra under watch. Dolz and Cuéllar therefore retreat into the underground network but cannot safely use their intended exit. They eventually surface nearer the M1/railway district and continue overland toward the *Old Laundry Pavilion*. If pressed closely, they abandon their captive(s) rather than risk capture.

Urrutia and several of *El General's* patient-soldiers pursue. The official delegates return to the East Gate, shaken but intact, because failing to report risks undoing the very bargain that admitted them.

If Investigators are present, none of this is fixed. Maceo may escape; Dolz or Cuéllar may be captured; no detainee need be abducted; the raiders may be destroyed entirely; or some PCs and delegates may choose pursuit over returning to the gate. They may even disguise themselves as cultists and/or their captives to sneak into the Temple if anyone captured can be forced to reveal its location.

⬡ INVESTIGATOR STAKES - ALEJANDRO VARGAS & HIS BROTHER'S FATE

Earlier inquiries have established that Vargas's missing half-brother, **Julián Acosta y Ferrer**, was committed under the false name **Manuel Rivas**. Castellanos matched Vargas's fingerprints to Rivas's Mazorra record, while Chief RN Montalvo remembers treating him after an interrogation and seeing Guard **Jorge Dolz** escort him away.

El Limbo may finally reveal what happened. Among its concealed records is a falsified transfer slip claiming Rivas was returned to Habana police custody. A pencilled notation instead reads: **"Dolz. Service passage. 23:40. No return."**

The timing is brutal in its symmetry: Dolz is one of the Leopard Men now raiding *El Limbo*. If Vargas sees or identifies him, the confrontation begins immediately. Dolz recognizes Julián's name even if he denies knowing him; Psychology may catch the lie. Vargas may pursue him, try to take him alive, or simply attack, but doing so may mean abandoning detainees, evidence, or companions still in danger. Dolz's survival is not guaranteed, nor is Vargas's vengeance. The question is what Vargas is willing to sacrifice for the truth, and what he will do when the man who knows it is finally within reach. But Vargas now knows who took his brother into Mazorra's underground passages, but not yet what happened there. Their confrontation begins here. Whether it ends here depends on Vargas, Dolz, and what else is happening in *El Limbo*.

What the Delegates Bring Back

Ideally they now have what the crowd demanded: living witnesses & evidence rather than rumours.

They can attest that political prisoners were secretly held in *El Limbo;* police abandoned detainees without adequate food, water, medication, or supervision; records were falsified or concealed; violence occurred before the delegation arrived; and masked raiders subsequently entered through Mazorra's underground passages. Two detainees also show an unexplained and potentially contagious condition requiring isolation rather than immediate public release.

This is enough to change the argument outside the gate.

If *Joaquín Sosa* is medically evacuated, his mother should be allowed to see him from a safe distance as he is carried past under medical escort. He need not make a speech. The sight of *María del Pilar* finding her son alive does more to quiet the families than rhetoric could. His established condition makes medical evacuation, not presentation as a political spokesman, the sensible outcome.

Lidia's notes, Felo's testimony, Padre Rivas' presence, recovered records, or Investigator photographs can then provide the public accounting.

Keeper's Note: Resolving the Gate: Use the existing Crowd Temperature Clock (AoM #251). A detainee confirmed alive with a medical report lowers Temperature by 1; credible records or photographs may lower it another step or cancel an imminent rise. Missing the reporting deadline without explanation raises it normally.

The Delegates' successful return and report does not mean opening Mazorra. Instead, it confirms the original bargain:

- medically suitable detainees are identified, treated, & placed under protected custody rather than handed directly to the crowd;
- copies, photographs, or summaries of important records may pass outside while originals remain protected;
- named Porra suspects will be detained for public accounting;
- no general entry into the patient wards is permitted.

A few named civilians may subsequently enter under escort for a specific task, such as carrying wounded men, copying records, or relaying testimony.

The wider crowd remains outside.

If the delegation returns empty-handed, gives contradictory accounts, or disappears without explanation, the Crowd Temperature instead rises according to the existing rules.

⚓ 9:30 PM: A BLACK CAR ARRIVES

A black 1932 Mercedes-Benz 170 sedan with ordinary Cuban plates slows well short of the rain-soaked vehicles gathered along Boyeros Road. It gives two brief horn notes, waits, then flashes its headlights once. Nobody approaches.

Three well-dressed men sit inside. After several minutes, the youngest gets out and discreetly asks a driver and hospital worker whether a senior nurse or Spanish officer has recently passed through. They all shrug, and he returns to the car.



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

The Mercedes waits a few minutes more, then drives away.

The men are German Embassy operatives expecting **Hermes & Solita** from Yániz. They will not enter Mazorra openly or fight through the crowd. With no handoff, they withdraw toward a fallback point near the Rancho, wait briefly for Yániz or Vives, then abandon the operation.

The Black Car is primarily an opportunity to reveal the foreign end of the conspiracy, not another compulsory encounter. Investigators who notice or pursue it might discover German speech from inside; the scout asking after Yániz or Vives; blankets and medical supplies prepared for two children; or, if the car is searched, forged transfer papers and payment money.

A photograph of the car, its occupants, or recovered papers becomes powerful evidence that the attempted abduction reached beyond Mazorra. If publicly challenged, the Germans leave rather than risk exposure.

22:00: THE LEOPARD MEN RUN TO GROUND

The pursuers need not actually catch Dolores or a fleeing cultist. Any Leopard Man kept in sight eventually leads toward the supposedly abandoned *Old Laundry*. If contact is lost, other battered cells are soon reported withdrawing through the same district. Muddy tracks, frightened

witnesses, a captured cultist, or Tambor's knowledge can confirm the destination.

Within minutes the sightings converge. *El General* sends part of his Mobile Reserve to surround the Old Laundry, while Nico and several Aeroporto men join almost without discussion. Both groups have now seen masked men abducting Mazorra staff and patients.

No light shows through the boarded windows. From somewhere high inside comes the slow beat of drums. If Tambor is present, he recognizes the rhythm immediately: *the drummers are trying to steady themselves.*

Closing the Ring



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Patient-soldiers cover the doors, lower windows, roofline, and rear approaches. Aeroporto men watch likely escape routes. The fire-truck provides a movable spotlight and hoses should anyone attempt to break through the cordon.

Neither *El General* nor Nico wants to storm blindly into a building that may contain captives.

The Investigators decide whether to enter, how, and who accompanies them. Most of the surrounding force remains outside to prevent escape.

A practical assault party consists of the Investigators (probably ~4 if any are still incommunicado in the Mazorra Vault), perhaps four of *El General's* most reliable patient-soldiers, and Nico with two or three airport workers. Everyone else remains outside to prevent escape.

Keeper's Note: Treat the cordon as an environmental advantage, not dozens of individual NPCs. A fleeing Leopard Man cannot simply vanish once outside; he must find, create, or exploit a gap in the perimeter.

ENTERING THE OLD LAUNDRY PAVILION

The ground floor smells of wet brick, rust, old soap, oil and rotting timber. Lantern light catches silent hydroextractors, wringers and overhead steam pipes. Rain ticks against the corrugated roof. Above comes the menacing sound of drumming. The remaining east staircase is the obvious route, but it was deliberately weakened and *will* collapse under the weight of several people. The destroyed western stair cannot be climbed normally.

Searchers may discover the rough openings cut through the gallery floor, reached by iron rungs fixed into the walls below. The old laundry hoist also provides a dangerous vertical route if its machinery can be operated. The roof is quite high up but is an opening high up near the north east corner covered with cloth painted as if brick.

If Investigator/other attackers split into several groups, they may enter the Temple from different points, but they also risk being isolated behind curtains once inside. This gives the Investigators a real tactical choice: fast and obvious, slow and quiet, or dangerous and unexpected.

Infiltrating the Temple: Investigators who captured a Leopard Man earlier may conceive a more dangerous approach: the raiders' spotted hides, masks and weapons can be taken, while one or more Investigators pose as captives. A captured cultist may also be forced, bribed, or frightened into revealing the route, signals, or manner in which returning raiders announce themselves.

This works particularly well tonight. Yobama's cells are returning piecemeal, several men are missing or badly wounded from scald burns or gunshot, and no one at the Temple knows exactly which raiders have survived. Masks, poor light, smoke, hanging hides, and the confusion of the failed Blood Harvest make close identification difficult.

Keeper's Note: Do not turn infiltration into a succession of *Disguise* rolls. If the Investigators have obtained suitable hides or masks and learned enough from a prisoner, allow them to reach the upper Temple with one appropriate roll, perhaps *Disguise*, *Fast Talk*, *Stealth*, or another convincing approach. A Regular success admits them among the returning raiders; failure creates suspicion rather than immediate exposure. A *Pushed failure* or *Fumble* exposes them at the worst possible moment.

Once inside, their disguise buys opportunity, not immunity. Inner Circle members know one another, Yobama knows many of his followers personally, and prolonged conversation increases the danger of discovery. Investigators posing as captives with a concealed weapon trained on former Leopard Man prisoner to gain their reluctant cooperation, may be ordered into the cage or brought directly toward the altar.

The advantage is considerable: infiltrators may locate captives, count defenders, open a route for rescuers, silence drums, sabotage an escape, signal *El General's* cordon, or place themselves within a few yards of Yobama before violence begins. The disadvantage is equally considerable. If exposed, they begin the fight **inside** the Temple with



Leopard Men between themselves and every conventional exit.

YOBAMA's FINAL CEREMONY 22:05–22:15

The upper floor of the Old Laundry is hot, smoky and divided by dozens of hanging leopard skins, painted hides and spotted curtains. These create blind pockets, false passages and ambush positions before opening into the Sacrificial Chamber, where the blackened boiler-plate altar and old elevator-cage prison stand beneath low oil lamps.

The surviving Leopard Men have returned piecemeal from their failed raids. Some are injured, some badly so, and are laid out along the south wall; a few are lucky to receive doses of morphine and are sleeping. Strange physical transformations have frightened his followers. Strange reports come in of *El General's* disciplined forces & even Aeroporto workers closing in, even working together. Dolz is one of those returning raiders only if he escaped *El Limbo.*

⬡ INVESTIGATOR STAKE: VARGAS & DOLZ (2)

If Jorge Dolz escaped *El Limbo,* he is among the Leopard Men returning to the Old Laundry. Vargas therefore has a second, perhaps final chance to confront the man implicated in Julián Acosta's disappearance. Dolz may flee, bargain, or fight if cornered; pursuing him may cost Vargas another objective. If Dolz was captured or killed earlier, omit this stake.

Jeremías Yobama stands beside the altar in full regalia, furious rather than serene. Yobama knows the *Blood Harvest* has failed. His Temple is not preparing for victory. It is trying not to come apart.

Under the default outcome, the cage is initially empty. Then the M2 raiders return with Juana de la Cruz. Yobama promised blood and has returned with failure. But then one party comes back with their sole captive, who will become the sole human sacrifice; *Jauna de la Cruz.*

Grimly, Yobama gathers those remaining around the altar for an abbreviated *Blood Harvest,* less to accomplish anything supernatural than to restore their faith in him.

He declares that the night's reverses were tests, that the fallen proved themselves weak, that the strange transformations show the Leopard Spirit is near, and that the armed men outside have willingly delivered themselves as sacrifices.

Some believe him. Others *need* to believe him. But a few keep looking toward the exits.

⬡ MARÍA'S REVENGE

The Investigator *María del Sagrario* may finally confront Yobama over her sister Violeta's murder, but reaching him is not guaranteed. She may kill him, try to take him alive for *El Rey's* judgment, or lose her opportunity because another life needs saving. The real question is what María will sacrifice for vengeance.

If María has infiltrated the Temple, she may obtain the opportunity she has sought since entering Mazorra. If disguised as a Leopard Man, she can manoeuvre behind Yobama's guards; posing as a captive may bring her directly before him and the altar. Do not give her an automatic killing blow. Instead, if her *disguise* remains intact, let María choose when to reveal herself and gain the same surprise available to other infiltrators. She may strike, demand Yobama's surrender, try to take him

alive *for El Rey's* judgment, or abandon vengeance to save a captive in immediate danger.

If María openly names Violeta and then wounds, disarms, captures, or visibly forces Yobama to retreat before his followers, count this as one major reverse against Yobama's authority. Her private revenge has become a public humiliation of the Executioner. If she instead gives up a clear chance at Yobama to save another person, do not manufacture a second opportunity immediately. That choice is itself the resolution of her revenge arc, at least for tonight.

SIDE-BAR - CURRENT LEOPARD MAN TEMPLE STRENGTH: After surviving raiders begin returning piecemeal. Some are wounded, some have lost companions, and others never make it back.

Temple Occupants at ~22:00	Numbers
Jeremías Yobama	1
Inner Circle Leopard Men	4–6
Returning armed raiders	6–9
Initiates / wounded cultists	3–5
Captives awaiting sacrifice	0–3
Total cultists present	14–21; 17 is default (including Yobama)

Keepers can adjust these numbers for any Leopard Men previously killed, captured, scattered, or cut off by Investigator actions.

If Dolores Is Not Present

Yobama remains the cult's sole religious authority. For most Investigators, this is their first sight of him in full ceremonial regalia: a spotted hide cloak hangs from his shoulders, his face framed by a grotesque leopard mask, with ritual claw-hooks at his belt and an ebony leopard-headed staff in hand. In the smoky lamplight he looks less like a fugitive patient than the priest-king his followers believe him to be.

Two drummers maintain the ritual while two Inner Circle cultists guard Yobama and any captive beside the altar. Another 2–3 veterans stand ready to intercept intruders; the remaining Leopard Men are dispersed through the Hall of Hides, Sanctum approaches and escape routes.

If attackers breach the *Sacrificial Chamber,* Yobama does not charge them. He orders the drums continued while his followers block the advance and drag his captive toward the altar. Unless disrupted, Yobama attempts the sacrifice within approximately **two combat rounds**.

⬡ HARGREAVES & THE CHINA DOLL

If Juana de la Cruz is the cult's captive, Hargreaves has finally found the missing woman he came to Mazorra specifically seeking. Worse, Twsha translucence now appears to confirm her belief that she is literally made of glass. Terror, rough handling and threatened sacrifice may deepen that delusion rather than break it.

Hargreaves may save Juana from the altar, establish her true identity, and preserve whatever chance she has of recovery. He may instead have to trust someone else to get her out while he pursues another danger, or lose her because another life demands his attention first. Saving Juana's body does not necessarily mean that the woman she once was immediately returns.

IF DOLORES IS PRESENT: *LA DIOSA LEOPARDA*



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Dolores stands beside the altar conspicuously **unbound**, her translucent Twsha patches resembling uncanny leopard markings in the smoky lamplight. She remains intelligent and recognizably herself. The heat, humidity, human proximity and steady drums actually calm her altered physiology, reinforcing the cultists' impression of supernatural composure.

The default sacrificial victim is **Juana de la Cruz, "The China Doll,"** unless earlier events have already placed her safely elsewhere. Blonde, blue-eyed and stripped of her bulky quilted garments, Juana is terrified less by death than by being roughly handled. She struggles against anyone dragging her from the cage, crying that she will shatter if they touch her.

Yobama presents Dolores as proof that the Leopard Spirit favours him. Her transformation is sacred, her arrival foretold; she stands among them, he insists, because **he summoned her**. The promised *Blood Harvest* will now be performed before *La Diosa Leoparda*.

Dolores initially tolerates the performance. Frightened armed men are watching her with awe, and she quickly realizes that some may obey her.

When intruders appear, Yobama needs her public approval. He orders Juana brought to the altar and asks Dolores to bless the sacrifice.

Dolores looks from Yobama to the terrified woman. She too is afflicted with the mysterious transparenting effect, in her case rendering her arms clear like glass with muscles and an overlay of blood vessels pulsing eerily.

"No. You call me your goddess, yet you presume to choose for me?"

Then, pointing toward the cage and the *China Doll:*

"If I am your goddess, *I* decide who dies. Open it."

Dolores is not acting from compassion. She is testing whether Yobama's followers will obey her over him; Juana's survival is incidental to that contest. The command places Yobama in an impossible position.

If any cultist obeys Dolores, Yobama's authority visibly fractures. If he contradicts her, he must explain why the miraculous Leopard Goddess he himself proclaimed is suddenly not to be obeyed.

SIDEBAR – WHAT DOES YOBAMA THINK OF DOLORES? Yobama is uncertain whether Dolores represents a genuine supernatural manifestation, but he desperately wants to believe that whatever has happened proves his favour with the Leopard Spirit. He therefore claims her as a sacred sign under his authority. As Dolores begins issuing independent commands, fascination becomes jealousy & fear. Yobama tries to reinterpret her words, isolate her from followers, and keep her apparently subordinate. He will avoid openly attacking her while cultists still regard her as *La Diosa Leoparda,* since doing so could destroy his own religious legitimacy.

Yobama has created his own theological trap. He cannot easily denounce the miracle he has just proclaimed.

Keeper's Note - Dolores Has Plans of Her Own: Treat the cult as three loose factions: **Inner Circle** loyal to Yobama, **Awestruck** cultists fascinated by Dolores, and **Wavering** survivors chiefly interested in getting out alive. Dolores gains a *Bonus Die* to *Charm, Persuade* or *Intimidate* the Awestruck. Success persuades 1D3 lesser cultists to obey one simple, non-suicidal command. Contradictory orders from Yobama require an opposed social roll. Dolores is not an Investigator ally. Her objective remains escape from Mazorra.

RUNNING THE TEMPLE FIGHT

Only 4–6 Leopard Men should normally engage the Investigators directly. They exploit the leopard hide curtains, striking suddenly, grappling isolated enemies and withdrawing rather than trading blows in the open. One attacker may distract while another attacks from concealment.

The cultists' priorities are:

1. Keep attackers separated.
2. Prevent captives being freed.
3. Protect Yobama.
4. Keep the drums and ceremony functioning.
5. Escape when Yobama's authority fails.

The old hoist, prisoner cage and two floor openings with iron wall-rungs provide additional routes between levels.

If Any Investigators Already Inside: If some Investigators have infiltrated the Temple disguised as Leopard Men or captives, begin the battle from wherever their deception has carried them. They may already be beside the cage, among the hanging hides, close to Yobama, or even apparently bound for sacrifice.



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Unless their cover has already been broken, allow them to choose the moment they reveal themselves; their first decisive action may gain surprise against nearby cultists. Investigators posing as captives may first need to shed loose bonds, escape the cage, or seize a weapon.

Those disguised as Leopard Men face a different danger: allies entering from outside may initially mistake them for enemies. A prearranged signal, shouted identification, or conspicuous action can prevent this. Once fighting begins, disguises rapidly lose their protective value, but their starting positions may radically change who can be rescued, isolated, or confronted first.

CONDENSED LEOPARD MAN COMBAT STATS

This is enough to run the encounter without reproducing full stat blocks:

Type	HP	Brawl	Claw/Knife	Grapple	Dodge
Initiate / wounded	11	50%	50%	45%	40%
Veteran raider	13	60%	55%	50%	40%
Inner Circle	14	65%	60%	60%	30%
Yobama	13	75%	40%	60%	30%

Weapons: Claw-fork 1D6+DB, +1D4 on impale; knife 1D4+2+DB; club 1D6+DB. Bite 1D4+½DB, usually while grappling.

Yobama: Stealth 70%, Luck 60. Full statistics appear in AoM #240. He fights savagely when cornered but prefers escape to martyrdom.

Keeper's Note - Fighting Through the Hides: Hanging hides provide concealment, not armour. Firearms penetrate 1–2 hides normally, but attacks against unseen targets suffer a Penalty Die unless *Listen, Spot Hidden,* or obvious movement reveals their position. Firing through 3+ hides is effectively blind, with obvious danger to captives and allies. Shotgun blasts or automatic fire may tear hides down, gradually opening sight lines. Leopard Men exploit the same concealment. An undetected cultist attacking through a hide gains a Bonus Die on his first strike, but reveals his position afterward. A weighted hide may also be cut loose onto a target: *Dodge* avoids it; failure leaves the victim entangled with a Penalty Die on physical actions until an action and successful *STR* or *DEX* frees them.

Moving Through the Maze: Leopard Men know the paths automatically. Investigators moving quickly through unfamiliar hides roll *Spot Hidden* or *Navigate*; failure loses a round, while a Pushed failure may separate them or expose them to ambush.

BREAKING YOBAMA'S AUTHORITY

The encounter should not require killing every cultist. Yobama's real strength is his followers' belief that the Leopard Spirit favours him and that obedience will keep them safe.

Count visible failures as major reverses, including:

- freeing a captive;
- stopping the drums;
- defeating an Inner Circle fighter;
- visibly wounding or forcing Yobama back;
- Dolores openly contradicting him;
- a cultist obeying Dolores instead.

After **two major reverses**, Wavering cultists begin hiding, disengaging or seeking escape. After **four**, Yobama's authority is effectively broken. Only the Inner Circle reliably continues fighting.

DOLORES' ESCAPE PLAN

Dolores quickly asks her new admirers how Yobama leaves the Temple unseen. If she gains two or more *Awestruck* followers, she orders them to obtain clothing, conceal her altered skin, arm themselves and escort her through the Sanctum. Her preferred escape is the maintenance hatch and cult sewer route while it remains safe. One cultist scouts ahead, another guides her, and any others she has enthralled may delay pursuit. Once beyond the immediate Old Laundry cordon, Dolores intends to abandon the cult as soon as they cease being useful.

If that route is blocked, she changes tactics without sentiment. She may emerge openly with her escorts' weapons lowered, claim that Yobama held her prisoner, and allow *El General's* men or the Investigators to "rescue" her. She then looks for another opportunity to disappear.

The cultists think they are saving their goddess. Dolores knows she has found several armed men who know the exits.

YOBAMA'S SANCTUM

Once the Temple fight turns against him, Yobama retreats through the hanging hides into the former staff lavatory that serves as his private chamber. A low sleeping platform is covered with genuine leopard skins. Ritual jars and blood vessels are stored beneath it. Nearby rest an ebony leopard-headed staff, ceremonial clothing, masks and claw-hooks.

Yobama has three possible escape routes:

1. A concealed eastern window opening → narrow ledge.
2. A maintenance hatch → Mazorra's sewer network.
3. Back through the Temple → industrial ground floor.

Before 22:30, the sewer hatch is Yobama's most reliable secret route. After 22:30, it becomes something else entirely.

22:30 VAULT COLLAPSE...

At first felt rather than heard, something *enormous* shudders far below the Old Laundry Pavilion.

To be continued.



COMMENTS
E&A #14

ATTRONARCH: RAE. That was a surprisingly sad death for Ah'sas, Gomm continues to be wonderfully Gomm, the dragon fight feels gloriously like something that could only have emerged from actual play, & Dalkanarion emerges as the real MVP.

BRIAN ROGERS: I'm glad that family craziness has settled down, but phooey on new library management/admins mucking around your RPG wheelhouse. R*YCTM on GDW/TSR:* That's a fair danger, although I wonder if there's an important difference between adding **eras** and multiplying **settings**. TSR eventually had numerous worlds competing for essentially the same (A)D&D audience. Adding another historical period to *Traveller* seems less inherently divisive if the underlying universe, assumptions, and rules remain recognizably Traveller. But there must be a point where enough eras, editions, & incompatible assumptions produce much the same fragmentation by another route.

BRYANT DURRELL: Woot, you are back! It's also great to see some love for the second edition *of Feng Shui.* Please share some write-ups of your sessions if you have the time & space to do so. And thanks for the heads up re Montreal's annual *Fantasia International Film Festival.*

DALE MEIER: Howdy! I enjoyed your mention of your gateway games. Was *Traveller* an early RPG encounter for you too? And thanks for your comments on *Mazorra*. I admit I never imagined when I started writing it up that it would become quite this sprawling, or that I'd still be serializing it nearly a year later. It would appear I've created something of a monster, although perhaps that is appropriate for *Call of Cthulhu*.

ERICA L. FRANK: One option, until they actually announce the theme for the upcoming 2nd issue, write *both* articles for 'Playtest Material'; a *Taxonomy of Solo TTRPG Types,* AND *TTRPGs With Fire*. Print both articles here in E&A and solicit both feedback and votes. By then the upcoming theme may be finally announced and you will be more than ready.

JOHN REDDEN: I hope *Hurricane Lala* didn't interfere with your coffee plantation or its owner's ongoing convalescence.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: Kudos on the new job! May it prove a good fit and last exactly as long as you want it to. And many thanks for the thoughtful comments on *Mazorra*; I especially like the idea that, even if few ever run the whole unwieldy beast, it may still be useful as a quarry for other *Keepers*.

LISA PADOL: And kudos for another notch on your editorial sword for ***The Eldritch New England Holiday Collection!*** And thank you very much again for your copy of the ***Lyonesse RPG***; it was well worth the postage!

Re Mazorra inpatient and staff numbers: In August 1933, I'm using a patient census of about 3,300, roughly 10% over capacity; see *AoM #240 in E&A #3* for more detail. Actual staffing would probably be at least five times larger than the one-page roster I provided, once you include physicians, nurses, allied health, managers, maintenance workers, drivers, guards, orderlies, cooks, cleaners, etc. I deliberately kept the named roster manageable and treated those listed as the staff still present despite the General Strike crippling the island. ⬡ *Re the different Porra factions***:** The Porra were essentially the hated "club" or "cudgel" of Machado's dictatorship, acting with broad impunity in defence of the regime. Affiliations could overlap: a Federal Police officer assigned to a presidential security or Secret Service detail could also be Porra. A Mazorra guard, however, was not automatically Porra. *Capt. Gandía* is Porra and would have hand-picked a small inner circle of loyal guards, but most Mazorra guards are outside that circle. The two East Gate guards are examples; neither is Porra, and one is secretly A.B.C. Cordero is likewise a Federal Police officer and Porra member, but Machado abandoned him and his men at the airport once they were no longer useful. By this point Cordero is a realist. His men are loyal mainly to one another, not to the fallen regime. *Lt. Cordero* also does not expect to empty the Mazorra Vault. Machado himself could not do that. He sees it instead as an opportunity to grab portable wealth for himself and his men, while dangling the larger treasure before Gandía as a distraction. Whether Gandía's own remaining men stay loyal once Machado is gone is another question.

*Re the Bone Drift***:** The name is quite literal: it is an enormous accumulation of bones piled like a snowdrift, or driftwood after a storm. The mass partly floats across the sinkhole because the bones are tangled with wood, weeds, fungal growth, and other debris, preventing the whole thing from simply sinking. ⬡ *Re Charnel Drift*: I think at one point I had a sentence along the lines for that for those caught deep underground in the Charnel Drift when the *Mazorra Vault's Doom Clock* hits zero so they *could* survive at the Keeper's discretion, but I but removed it for lack of space. Given your question, this could still work although only as a *Pulp Cthulhu* exception. Something along the lines of, "*When the Mazorra Vault's Doom Clock reaches zero, anyone still deep within the Charnel Sink is presumed lost in the collapse. A Pulp hero with at least 30 Luck could invoke Avoiding Certain Death, spending all remaining Luck. Rather than being killed, the character is swept through flooded karst fissures beneath Mazorra and eventually emerges, battered and separated from the others, from a spring, river, or drainage channel perhaps three miles northeast. They lose anything cumbersome they were carrying, including bullion, and may not reappear until much later. Important NPCs might survive similarly at the Keeper's discretion, but ordinary NPCs caught below are presumed dead or permanently missing.*"

Re what happens when the Doom Clock runs out? It's **Doom-o' Clock!** Seriously, the characters are out of time. Anyone still caught in the affected area is lost in the collapse and effectively out of play, unless a kind-hearted Keeper allows them one last chance by invoking the *Avoiding Certain Death* rule described above. ⬡ *Re "lightproof":* I mean this in the photographic darkroom sense: no outside light leaks or seeps into the chamber. Openings are boarded, curtained, or otherwise sealed sufficiently that, when the interior lamps are extinguished, the room is completely dark.

MATT STEVENS: Thanks for your recapped *Realms of Yolmi* review. But what's the "Fly Catcher" Class (in quotation marks no less) supposed to mean? ⬡ *RYCTM on geyser injuries:* I think they tried a shortcut over they thought was a grassy green lawn at one of Iceland's active sites where tourists visit when in fact there were hidden thermal pools of boiling water just beneath the surface. Their booted leg plunged into one of these soft spots and became stuck causing severe scalding, including first- and second-degree burns caused by water temperatures reaching up to 96°C to 100°C (204°F to 212°F). I think the lesson is stay on all marked boundary paths.

MIKE CULE: I'm glad you had fun at your last *Stabcon.* ☺

MYLES CORCORAN: I sent you an email, but forgot to add in how much I'm looking for reading any new *Kriegmesser* & *Mausritter* write-ups forthcoming.

PATRICK BRADY: I very much RAE (*Enjoyed? More like Read and Eek!*) your essay about AI and critical fails; the Vitamin Z example had me shaking my head. I learned many cool new things in your essay pointing out the flaws inherent in most persons using AI other than to augment our own abilities, both about *Patroclus* and when *Achilles wore a Red Maple Leaf*; thank you.

JIM VASSILAKOS: *RYCTM on Selective Madness:* I think you've identified something I should make clearer: *El Rey* is not temporarily becoming "sane" whenever the plot requires sensible behaviour. I've encountered patients with remarkably encapsulated delusions, sometimes alongside otherwise subtle neurocognitive disorders. They may converse and reason quite normally while holding one fixed belief utterly resistant to evidence, even organizing their lives quite logically around a premise that simply is not true.

That is how I see *El Rey*. His premise is enormous: he believes he is *Alfonso XIII*, the exiled King of Spain. But his apparently sensible behaviour follows from that delusion rather than contradicting it. A proper king protects the innocent, hears evidence, judges prisoners, and prevents mob lynchings. His edicts are not moments when the madness disappears; they are *El Rey* behaving exactly as he thinks a king should.

There is a small historical seed here: accounts of the real Mazorra mention patients who believed themselves the King of Spain and a famous military figure. I borrowed those trappings for *El Rey* and *El General*, although their personalities and histories are my inventions.

I've also tried not to make Mazorra's mentally ill patients merely a gallery of grotesques or convenient cannon fodder. The truly predatory characters are generally dangerous because of what they have chosen to do: Porra brutality, corruption, murder, or the Leopard Men's criminal cult activities. Some even feigned illness to gain admission or evade punishment. Mental illness and moral culpability are separate questions. A psychotic person may still plan rationally, while a perfectly sane person may be monstrous. As for the eventual end of *El Rey's* government, I rather like the idea that his delusion itself provides the off-ramp. A king may abdicate; an emergency government may surrender authority when legitimate government returns; a victorious general may order his army to stand down once the danger has passed. Cincinnatus is the obvious model: extraordinary authority may be justified by extraordinary danger, but virtue lies in relinquishing it when the crisis ends.

That strikes me as much more satisfying than having *El Rey's* mask suddenly fall away to reveal that he was secretly a tyrant all along, and it gives me an elegant way to retire both *El Rey* and *El General* without diminishing either of them.

PATRICK ZOCH: Those are nicely painted *Bolt Action Germans.* Thanks for sharing these photos.

PETER HILDRETH: I've heard already your coup at GenCon for your auction of the very rare risqué print of Larry Elmore's legendary pen & ink sketch of *Tika Takes a Bath;* bravo for GenCon auctions and RPG acquisitions paying off! BTW I really enjoyed the *Fey & LA* game we recently played; a lot more can get done if no combat in *Savage Worlds*, ditto fewer fellow players to share screen time with. And it's nice to play a different character after ~4-5 years of online play.

PATRICK RILEY: *Re IgTheme essay on Intra-party conflict;* your long answer is my short answer. I loathe it for all the same reasons. Much like I cannot stand it when reading a book and a protagonist is betrayed or worse, the betrayer. *Re the secret of Aurora Cove*; that took a dark twist! No wonder no gas stations or search & rescue equipment; it makes it too easy to escape. *RYCTM on AoM #250's full colour header;* I thought it was right for a milestone issue, but perhaps a bit too much for others? I could bring it back.

PEDRO PANHOCA DA SILVA & CAMILA LOURENÇO PANHOCA: *Legacy game-books like A Coroa de Ghanor* (2024) ["The Crown of Ghanor"] are interesting in that there is the rather bold option to abandon the crown quest and accept a lesser victory. That sounds like failure, but with enough benefits to soften the blow, especially in a legacy game-book where there are no take-backs. *RYCTM:* Wait, then the third option is really a fake option, just a chance to pause before deciding between Options 1 and 2 again?

ROGER BW: *Re surviving the Bone Drift*; see my comment to Lisa Padol earlier. ⬡ *RYCTM on running Pulp Heroes ala your idea for Doctor Who;* A *Doc Savage* RPG could work well with Doc himself as an NPC with a degree of authorial immunity, while his five famous aides, and occasionally Pat Savage, serve as the PCs. *The Shadow* could work similarly, particularly the pulp-magazine version of *The Shadow* as the unseen NPC mastermind, with the PCs as agents in his network. **I**t becomes trickier with heroes such as Tarzan, the Spider, or the radio Shadow, who usually operated alone or with only a handful of companions. There is also a larger problem with keeping the central hero as an invulnerable NPC: can the GM really let a PC die through foolhardiness if everyone knows their boss can always arrive as a *deus ex machina* and pull them out of the fire? I can see them doing this once per scenario, but risks removing player agency and autonomy from the consequences of their choices & actions.

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: Those are some pretty tricky questions appearing at that Press Conference for your *Gee Cows* Traveller scenario (grin). *RYCTM:* Sorry for giving you another on-line rabbit hole to frolic down and be lost for hours.

Everyone Else: ***RAEBNC*** *(since no more room)****!***

Our daughter Lauren on a visit home before she starts Law School August 30th



Aug 21st 2026. BCM

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ISSUE #12 (E&A #15)

Summer! Family float trips, music festivals, sunburn. What more could I ask for?

IgTheme: How do you find players/GMs/games?

I will have to take this response away from RPGs a bit, since my group has been meeting for nearly a decade and has a healthy rotation of willing GMs. Thus I have less experience with needing to find players or GMs. We met through a board game club, a few of us were attending public one-shot nights and already knew each other, and it happened organically from there.

However, I do have a lot of experience finding and curating gaming spaces, for both board games and my game design efforts.

The short answer is that it's a lot more work than most people want to consider. The number of designers I see who try to turn their families into playtesters or, more regularly, their game club(s) into playtesters is cringe-inducing, and it's because they either don't know what else to do, or don't want to put in the extra work to curate new circles. Such spaces have a different intent, even if it seems similar. I do not introduce my designs in my gaming spaces, or at least with limited enough exceptions that I could never be accused of trying to use gaming spaces as playtesting spaces.

And so it involves attending meetups regularly, being welcoming and helpful, getting to know people, and for the designer spaces it means giving more time than you get in return for long stretches. And being ok with those things and excited for them, knowing it's part of the process.

Then asking questions about interest in specific games over time with those you chat with more, which could lead to a house party game night, which is an in-road to a more curated circle. Or inquiring about online playtesting, and letting others guide you to worthwhile spaces.

Then starting from scratch in those spaces, where people don't know you, and building relationships slowly.

And then maybe five years later you wake up and suddenly you could be gaming or testing 4 nights a week, every week, and you have to start saying no to opportunities because you've created robust and varied circles for yourself. And your better contacts, those who value your input and presence, are attempting to pull you into yet new sub-circles that they've curated, since they want you in them.

This is the ideal, at least. And is happily some of what I currently experience in design and gaming spaces. Living in a large city with lot of gaming clubs, cafes, etc. certainly helps, make no mistake. But it's also been a result of that process, which I deliberately undertook.

RPG gaming would be the same. Find some public spaces (online or in-person), be personable, build slowly, knowing that you're undertaking a years-long process.

Responses to E&A #13

Patrick Brady

Thank you for the fascinating thoughts on AI usage. I devoured them thoroughly.

My own skepticism and dislike of the technology runs deep, and this comes with some sadness, since I have seen myself as a champion of pioneering software for much of my adult life. But I've seen cogent and persuasive arguments for AI acting as a means of wealth redistribution akin to a society-wide grift, a tool for fascism, an ethical and environmental nightmare, and more.

This, of course, juxtaposed with the ubiquity of AI in corporate spaces, meaning that even as I seeth a bit at its influence, I need to be finding actual uses for it in my day job. I'd like to think my caution means that I will be more careful about its implementation than many others and not allow it to take over anything that needs human oversight, but that rationale is almost certainly partially born of my need to reconcile my opinions with my actions.

I think AI's most insidious trick is that it does have some utility, albeit in my experience only for niche, specific use-cases when a tool is carefully constructed for that specific

task. So it's not wholly a grift, like NFTs and other fads before it, but this allows its foot in the door, which the tech oligarchs are happy to exploit to its fullest.

The most banal uses for AI, though, which to my eye constitute probably 95% of all its use, have some worrying effects, not least of which are detailed in your writeup.

Myles Corcoran

Appreciated the links to image sites in re: to Patrick Brady. I knew of a couple you referenced, but bookmarked a couple more as a result of your writeup.

Elf

Read and enjoyed your Brindlewood scenario. As someone who knows nothing of the IP you were drawing from, my only comment is that I would have liked some more differentiation between characters in the descriptions. Personality traits are good, but take time to develop in a scene and are often subtle enough that they don't help players differentiate quickly. Some had a distinctive aesthetic description, but others seemed at risk of muddying my mind map of NPCs. Perhaps this won't be an issue for the intended audience, but it could be for some. Otherwise, I thought it was a unique and quite interesting premise for a BB mystery.

Joshua Kronengold

Congrats on the new job! In the enormous amount of job hunting I've had to do in my life, volume is certainly a factor in eventually finding something. But I've taken to updating my skills during that time as well, much like you did, and I'd like to think this has had at least a small hand in landing the gigs I did.

RPG Gaming

Some more Brindlewood Bay with my sporadic online RPG crew. Our 3rd session was a horribly convoluted mess of a mystery that took us too long to wrap up convincingly. I am warming to the system overall, but still see some warts. I may try writing some session overviews at some point.

Our skullduggery 5e campaign winds toward a close. I've been pleased with it. I hope to circle back to do writeups eventually (I have outlines for each session in my notes).

Finding a flow, so to speak, with a campaign is tough. It's one of those "you know it when it happens" sort of things. It took me some time to find my footing with this campaign; the early sessions felt…fine. A little disjointed as I facilitated heists instead of more traditional heroic adventuring. But then by mid-campaign I would find myself buzzing with excitement after various sessions, a sign that we'd hit on something fun.

I will have to ruminate on what caused these sessions to land more forcefully, and perhaps talk to my players post-campaign for their thoughts on this, since I don't have a strong theory currently.

Board Gaming

As I write this, I'm in the middle of a three-day streak of event-style wargames with various friends. **Due Secoli di Guerre (1982)** (translation: "Two Centuries of War") is from legendary designer Alex Randolph. While wargaming is a departure for him, it's an abstraction of war into its component parts, and doesn't have a distinct historical setting. This matches with Randolph's sensibility, which trends toward the streamlined and austere. It works well despite the nondescript thematic trappings, and indeed could likely be proxied somewhat easily as a result (and would have to be, given its utter out-of-print obscurity).

War of the Ring (Second Edition) is one of the most spectacular games I've ever played, this time with my most frequent opponent. I tend to lose against him, but it's always closely fought. It's almost a shame that it creates a "Tolkien paywall" so to speak, one that will lose non-fans of the IP. The strategic and tactical density is profound, and its in-game pacing (all the ponderous stuff is in setup and teardown) is heady. But I'd also be lying if I said that love of the source material doesn't help turn it into something more magical.

Aldarra was codesigned by a good friend, and we played 4p with our respective partners (her fiance, my girlfriend). It's bordering on the 4X genre, and could also be described as a more complicated *Nexus Ops*, for those familiar with that more-popular title. It's a muddy romp, lacking a defined narrative arc but featuring fun levels of dice-chucking, with copious card types and special ability cruft, which will speak to some but not others. I enjoyed it.

Game Design

Following Origins, I had to put some work in on a game that a publisher was interested in, but only if I could get it under 30 minutes at all player counts. I agreed, on the grounds that 1) it was possible, and 2) I thought I could do it justice without sacrificing my vision for the game.

It's…at or near 30-or-less, with the possible exception of its top player count (6) with groups that are prone to snacking, chatting, forgetting whose turn it is, etc. But it took some remodeling of various elements, since I couldn't just chop down the number of rounds played without

breaking some of the tensions of the game.
I expect to send 4-6 pitches per month through the end of the year, while also waiting to hear back from four publisher who have four of my games (one will have the game mentioned above soon, making it five games with four publishers). Most of these will undoubtedly be “no” responses, but it’s a promising start to my efforts.

Meanwhile, I’m using my local design group to throw new ideas against the wall. I have one game in mid-development that I definitely want to prepare for pitching by about Origins 2027 (June), and want to identify 1-2 others to put into the same timeline.

Just this weekend I had a first test of an area-control-via-auctions game that has some promise, for instance. The bones of it are good, though it of course needs plenty of work. But first tests are for figuring out if it’s worth putting in work at all, so in that regard it was a success.

I have a week-long “stay-cation” planned soon, wherein a lot of my (many) goals for the week are design related. I need to update various rulebooks, update some pitch materials, write out formal rules for a couple in early stages, and do some graphic design for a couple that are in later stages.

I also have some solo RPGs and other RPG projects planned for…someday? It’s hard to shift momentum away from the stuff that is already rolling, so I don’t have a clear plan here. But a few ideas won’t go away, so I hope to return to them, perhaps in 2027.

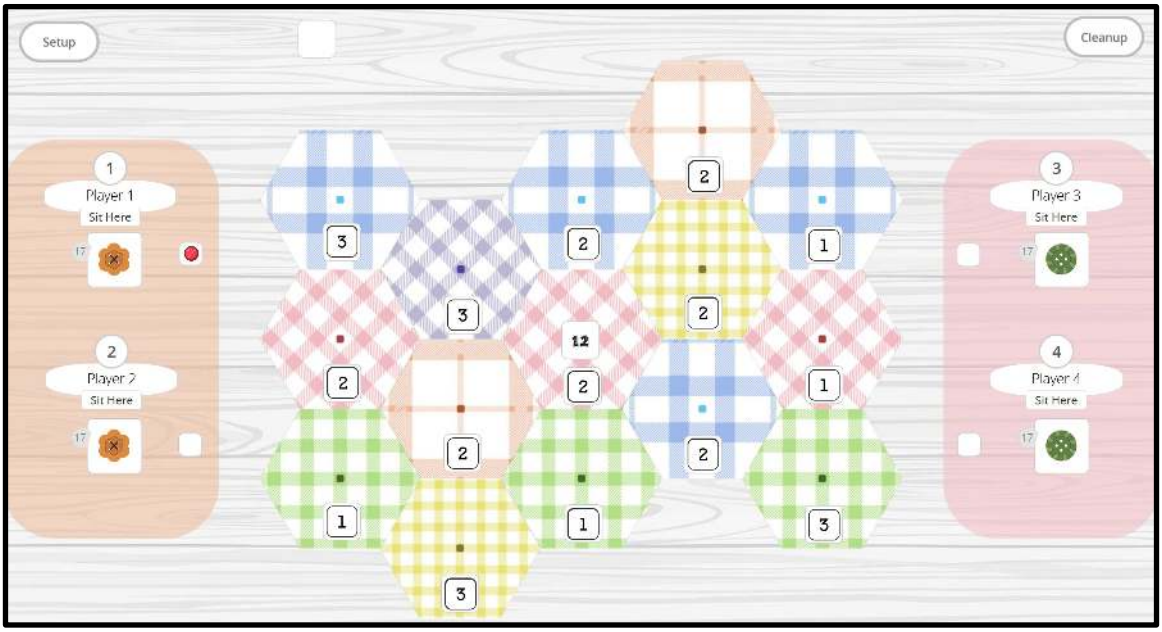
Books, Movies & Music

The Infinite Playground, by Bernie DeKoven and Holly Gramazio, wasn't finished until after Bernie's death. It's liberally padded with guest essays as a result, though these aren't entirely unwelcome. Much of it reads like a bit of a compilation of memorial pieces, remembering Bernie and his work. Bernie knew he was dying, and decided that "imagination is an infinite playground" was the last thesis statement he wanted to impart, which lends a poignancy to the sections he penned. I'm working on a longer review for my website, but he expounds upon his idea of "coliberation" that is possibly best described as a flow state of emotional, cognitive and social interaction that happens in the most transcendent gaming moments. He also sheds all the veiled societal implications of some of his earlier works (including the seminal Well-Played Game) and spells out what gaming, play and playfulness can and probably should mean in larger sociological and political realms. It's somewhat disjointed, through no fault of those involved, who are clearly all giving 110%. But it's still a lovely, quick read.

Tolkien (2019) is a touch gimmicky, but manages to be a compelling enough period drama instead of a Lord of the Rings reference-fest, though it can't help itself at times on the latter. The believable, touching chemistry between the male cast is a highlight, and Lily Collins is thankfully given some dynamite scenes in what could easily have been a bit role in service of the protagonist.

I attended my city's enormous **Irish music festival** this weekend. Highlight was probably ***Ally the Piper***, who slayed with some insane bagpiping gymnastics. I captured some video on my phone, but can't be arsed to upload it. [Here’s an excellent example from her official channel].

Digital table for one of my designs, *Button Battle*.



ATLANTIS FOR NOW #3

August 19, 2026, for Ever & Anon #15

Gabriel Roark
Rancho Cordova, CA
gabrielroark@gmail.com

Natter

August really started with a bang. I started the Freestyle 1 figure skating class & attended two sessions. The coach is awesome & is giving us a great learning program. Once a week, I also work with a private coach for 30 minutes on basic reverse skating skills & core strengthening drills. Celeste continues to work with her coach one-on-one also.

In addition to this, we have somehow become rink grandparents. One evening in July, Celeste heard a teenager calling, "Babushka! Babushka!" from behind her. When Celeste realized that there wasn't a grandparent-aged skater in front of her, she turned around & the girl waved excitedly at Celeste. A now-12-year-old girl who skates during most sessions that we do decided to invite us (with her actual grandmother's blessing) to her ice-skating birthday party at the rink on August 8. It was fun & an honor.

I fell between the bruises/And the red curtain call

The party was fun until it wasn't, that is. Toward its end, I noticed that Celeste had gone on the ice without her helmet. Seeing as she always hits her head when she falls nowadays, I booked it back to the party room to get her lid. When I returned to the rink, I hopped onto the ice into a one-foot glide to skate the helmet over to Celeste. Cool plan, except that I had forgotten to take off my plastic blade guards. I belly-flopped on the ice before I knew what was what. It didn't hurt at the time but I appear to have wrenched & sprained my left knee. No ligament or tendon damage, thank God, but I am in no condition to skate for a couple of weeks. Grrr!

For longtime (mostly fellow A&E alumni) readers, you might have observed that I haven't reported much about the case. We were back in court about five days ago. Incremental progress has been made & the ball is now in the prosecution's court. Celeste & I urged the prosecution to set the next court date for mid-January so that they have all the time they need to make headway. Happily, they agreed.

Additional Contents

- Arduin's Portal to Adventure: Barrows & Borderlands, Vol. 3
- What Are Word For? Comments on E&A #14

ARDUIN'S PORTAL TO ADVENTURE: BARROWS & BORDERLANDS, VOL. 3

In Bugbears & Ballyhoo #47 (E&A #9), I embarked on a serial review of Arduin's Portal to Adventure, by Emperors Choice Games (Empcho). Issues 47 & 48 provided high-level overviews of this deluxe RPG box set, orienting the reader to the contents & their physical qualities. Many readers of E&A have at least a passing familiarity with David Hargrave's *The Arduin Grimoire*, so I decided to continue the series by looking at a component of the Portal that does not seem to have previously surfaced in E&A: Matthew Tapp's *Barrows & Borderlands Box Set, Limited Edition*. The last two issues of B&B (#49–50; E&A #11–12) surveyed the box set, described the physical characteristics of the first volume of Barrows & Borderlands (*Men & Mutants*), & described the gaming content of Men & Magic. In the newly christened zine *Atlantis for Now* #1, we looked at Volume 2: *Psychics & Sorcerers* (P&S). After a one-issue break, I reopen the portal & we gaze upon B&B, Volume 3: Horrors & Treasure (H&T).

H&T shares the blueprint on which B&B volumes 1 & 2 are built: digest size, folded cardstock cover in parchment color, saddle-stitch binding, & black-and-white interior artwork. The volume clocks in at 74 pages. The cover art is Michio Okamura's work, dated 1992. It depicts a human & goblinoid battling with swords. Other art includes pieces by Ernest Griset, Castle Grief (see the beholder, erm, eye of fear on page 23), & uncredited pieces in the public domain.

H&T is directly analogous to Original D&D's Volume 2, Monsters & Treasures. The first portion of the volume (pages 4–46) covers the denizens of the Borderlands, the second part (pages 48–71) treats treasures, & an open game license rounds out the final three pages. The monsters section opens with a "Monster Index" of 102 alphabetically ordered entries. There are no entries for the letters J, Q, or X. Mr. Tapp needs alphabetical sensitivity training! Many of the usual suspects populate the index (dragons, various human types, goblins, and unicorns) but some spacey & setting-bespoke entities are evident, too (Aliens, Dynaco employees, Spawn of Dread, The Man Upstairs). Pages 4–6 explain the terms used in the monster statistics or stat blocks. Stat block terms consist of armor class, hit dice, number encountered, THAC0 (to hit armor class 0), attacks per round, saving throw, morale, alignment, movement, psionic strength, experience point value, & treasure type. Each monster has a narrative description following the stat block.

Beginning on page 48, H&T launches into treasure types, like the scheme used in Advanced D&D (using Roman numerals instead of letters). H&T has nine treasure types, each of which has assigned probabilities for having thousands of copper or silver coins, hundreds of gold coins, gems & jewelry, & maps or magic items. Treasure types represent the hoard of wealth found in lairs.

Using the treasure type table as is, the B&B referee will find that 75 percent of magical treasure are magic items, whereas 25 percent are maps. Categories of magic items are similar to old school D&D: swords, armor, miscellaneous weapons, potions, scrolls, rings, wands & staves, & miscellaneous magic items. Potions, swords, & scrolls are the most frequently encountered magical treasure, in descending order.

Magic swords have two tables, one for more ordinary specimens, one for "special swords." Typical magic swords are 40 percent likely to grant either +1, +2, or +3 to hit

& damage. The remainder of the table is for swords that have a special purpose or power, such as additional bonuses against lycanthropes or being able to detect objects. Sixteen percent of magic swords are cursed & one percent constitute "special swords." Some very D&D varieties of sword appear on the specials table, such as the vorpal blade, Sun Sword, & Dragonslayer. Evocative varieties like Lukas' Laser Sword, Gossamer Blade, & Flame Krieg make up the rest of the list.

But even the so-called ordinary magic swords are not bog-standard D&D sorts, really. In B&B, *all* magic swords possess some human & superhuman qualities (see page 56). Yes, even a mere Sword +1 will have an alignment, a measure of intelligence, & ego. Fifty percent of magic swords are intelligent enough to communicate with its wielder, whether through empathy, speech, or telepathy. Swords may have a variety of other powers as well. Intelligent & strong-willed swords might be able to take over & control its wielder.

Armor, too, can be boon or bane (if cursed). Bonuses to armor class range from 1 to 3. One percent of magic armor comprises special armor types, which include hazmat suits, Dynaco Star Armor, & the Armor of Saegar the Putrid Apostle. Two percent of magic armor is cursed.

Miscellaneous weapons consist of standard medieval sorts of melee & missile weapons. Non-standard weapons on the list include black powder guns, "The Ultra Spear," "Kiado's Hand Wraps," & the Excali-Gun. Like swords, all magic guns have an alignment, some intelligence, & ego.

Potions & scrolls are more-or-less as in early D&D. So are rings, although there is a Ring of Many Wishes (4–24!). Wands & staves closely resemble their early D&D predecessors, too, except that only magic-users can use wands.

Much of the miscellaneous magic item table draws on D&D but there are numerous unique treasures: the Divine Arm-Launched Exploding Device of Great Holiness, Dynaco Star Plushy, & Peasant Launcher, to name a few.

The treasure map table either leads to a mundane hoard of defined size & composition or to special locations (Dynaco Factory, crashed alien ship, portal to another world, or portal to another universe). Maps to magic items are what it says on the tin.

Pages 54–55 have a table of gem types & values, as well as jewelry values. The gems include types & colors from the world of Carcosa. Some gems are radioactive.

Yeah, so this volume is all monsters & treasure. Whadaya want? It is to the author's credit that H&T is loaded with evocative, setting-specific material. The only downside that I see in this volume is that some specific information is missing from monster descriptions, even though the text leads one to expect to find it. The most common lacuna of this ilk is the lack of armament composition for some entries (like bandits & berserkers). For an experienced gamer, this is of little consequence; just grab your old Monster Manual for the particulars. This is an inconvenience, not a fatal flaw.

WHAT ARE WORDS FOR? COMMENTS ON E&A #14

- Back to Brazilian Game Books – part X (Panhoca da Silva & Zucolotto)

- Port Omaha Beacon, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Dale Meier)
- Cowman Baloney Face #10 (Matt Stevens)
- The Arc of Probability Bends Towards Justice: Issue #1 (Bryant Durrell)
- Twisting the Rope #14 (Myles Corcoran)
- Firedrake's Hoard No. 12 (Roger BW)
- Denizens of the Library #13 (Brian Rogers)
- Attacks of Opportunity #13 (Dylan Capel)
- Accidental Recall #13 (Joshua Kronengold)
- An Unlooked for Zine #13 (Lisa Padol)
- Strategies for Addressing Intraparty Conflict (Jim Vassilakos)
- Travelling Light No. 2 (Timothy Collinson)

Back to Brazilian Game Books – part X: *A Coroa de Ghanor* (2024): (Pedro Panhoca da Silva & Maira Zucolotto): *Coroa* sounds ambitious indeed! I will have to see whether an English translation exists (or perhaps you can tell me).

Port Omaha Beacon, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Dale Meier): Welcome back to the APA fold, Dale. You are among a recent few who have returned after an absence from *Alarums & Excursions* & reintroduced yourselves with gaming origin stories, which I enjoy reading. Speaking of West End Games' *Star Wars* (2e), I am playing in a campaign using those rules right now.

RYCT Myles (Twisting the Rope #13), you mentioned *Beyond the Wall*. What is your experience running or playing that game? I have it in PDF but have not used it myself.

RYCTM (Atlantis for Now #1) on Arduin, my folks would have had a fit if I had brought Arduin home as a teen, mainly on account of some of the artwork (especially Espinoza's topless Shardra the Castrater on the back cover of *The Arduin Grimoire*). I agree that Arduin was misjudged. Sometimes David Hargrave wrote some tasteless & childish things but he was just having a lark. Hargrave did a lot for his local gaming scene in the 1970s & 1980s, including mentoring teens & adults alike. Is Arduin a complex game system? I don't think it is, if one has a background in any flavor of D&D from OD&D through Advanced D&D. The most complex thing about it is its scattershot organization & distribution over nine volumes. Emperors Choice Games & Miniatures Company (Empcho) published a revised *Arduin Grimoire Trilogy* around 2008 that reorganized the first three volumes into a more cohesive whole. Additionally, Hargrave published *The Arduin Adventure* (a single-volume "Basic Arduin") & (posthumously) *The Compleat Arduin* in two books. The latter is very complete & orderly, although its combat system is not universally loved by Arduinistas.

As for *Barrows & Borderlands*, look at my earlier E&A zines, including Bugbears & Ballyhoo, for more information about B&B and Arduin's Portal to Adventure.

It's good to hear that you were able to foster a child. My wife & I would like to do so but have extenuating circumstances that have us in waiting mode on that plan.

Cowman Baloney Face #10 (Matt Stevens): Your A&E Author Index helper…the most likely candidates that come to my mind are Clark Timmins (dude puts in A LOT of work on RPG Geek publication indices) & Dan Shimuzu. I am pretty sure that Dan scanned many of the older issues of A&E so that Lee could sell them to readers as PDFs.

Yes, you were a madman, lol!

I'm glad that you liked the Atlantis for Now anecdote (same to you, **Dale** ↑). I hope most parents safeguard family memories.

The Arc of Probability Bends Towards Justice: Issue #1 (Bryant Durrell): Welcome to E&A, Bryant! What a cool zine title—hats off to you! I appreciate the pointer to Chris Chinn's "Same Page Tool".

Twisting the Rope #14 (Myles Corcoran): Congratulations on having the funniest second paragraph in thish: "medical spelunking" & "Have a Beatrix Potter mouse in lieu." More importantly, I am glad that everything came out all right in the end.

RYCT Brian Rogers on rules tailored to individual players based on their preferences, you just ran off with Matt Stevens's Madman of Gaming trophy. Have a cigar (no, not really—have some Blue Spot instead).

Firedrake's Hoard No. 12 (Roger BW): Good catch spotting the connection between B&B's Item Identification flowcharts & *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*! I never read or played in that adventure, so I had no way of knowing.

I vote for eternal lichdom.

Denizens of the Library #13 (Brian Rogers): RYCT on my new zine title, I don't know what took me so long to pull that one out of the vault (plus also: thanks!). Gamma World has item identification rules like B&B's? See also Roger's zine thish for an(other?) example of item identification rules.

Attacks of Opportunity #13 (Dylan Capel): I always figured that a lot of high fantasy worlds with divinely powered healers might be reliant on clerics, druids, herbalists, & "cunning folk" to the point that investment in medicinal sciences might well be stunted. My knowledge of the Greyhawk setting is not exhaustive but what I have read does not suggest that medical colleges or guilds exist. They could. For our campaign, I thought that the hamlet's puzzlement over the hospital concept would be amusing & prevent early side-questing that most players wouldn't participate in.

Glad to acquaint you with Empcho. They have some great stuff & I am grateful that they fly the Arduin banner. I appreciate the good word about AfN's origin.

Accidental Recall #13 (Joshua Kronengold): RYCT Matt Stevens: thank you for providing a concise definition of RPG heartbreaker. RYCTM, misreading a rule or a statement can be such a useful creative prompt. Good work.

An Unlooked for Zine #13 (Lisa Padol): Love your motivation for the Atlantean LARP!

Strategies for Addressing Intraparty Conflict (Jim Vassilakos): Your contribution thish was a good read, reminding me of your exposition on single-player/multiple GM campaigns.

About the restless dead in my AD&D game, the one thing that is not brilliant about it is the extra tracking inflicted on the referee…

Travelling Light No. 2 (Timothy Collinson): Now that we've complimented one another on our impeccable taste in zine titles, let's talk my enthusiasm for Sheffield. "Go Sheffo" was some kind of civic motto in the early 2000s, promoting the local arts & music scene, I recall from an interview with the (now-defunct) Sheffield band The Long Blondes.

Well, it is 11:00 p.m. on August 19. I am tired & have a teleconference with Emperors Choice Games directly after work tomorrow, so I had better conclude this installment. I wish you all the best for the coming month & thank one & all for a very readable issue of E&A.

Overlord's Annals

Attronarch, The Exalted Overlord of Uncontested Vastlands

Volume 5 · Issue 9 · September 2026

In this issue

Overlord's Annals is a monthly zine in which I share session reports from games I either run or have participated in.

Sometimes I also share our house rules and other reflections too. Art is primarily from players—see attributions for details.

In this issue I share two session reports from the ***Conquering the Barbarian Altanis*** Dungeons & Dragons campaign.

Adventurers return to civilisation, at last!

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis Campaign

I'm running a weekly online old-school D&D game focused on underworld and wilderness adventures in the Wilderlands of High Fantasy Barbarian Altanis—a hostile land filled with ancient riches and antediluvian evils.

You can learn more about our campaign at: `https://attronarch.com/wilderlands`

Beginners and experienced players welcome alike. Write to me at `attronarch@mailbox.org` if you'd like to join.

Attributions

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"*A pain in the neck*" and "*Gomm's treasure map*" illustrations by Bloody Hand / Dreadlord Games.

"*Blushing Hedwiga*" illustration by Anthony.

"*Nesterin's treasure map*" illustration by kickmaniac.

Typeset in LaTeX with Charter, a print-friendly typeface.

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 120

Adventurers

***Ambros**, cleric level 5*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Balarus**, fighter level 3*. An ex-woodsman, quite a crackshot with his bow.

***Dalkanarion**, fighter level 4*. A youthful specimen in full strength, full of purpose, bluster, and eagerness to prove himself.

***Gomm**, thief level 6*. Swarthy, good looking, dark-skinned thief. Sweet opium-like aroma is his fragrance of choice.

***Hedwig Hogwarts**, elf level 3*. An always alert owl masquerading as an elf.

***Ignaeus**, elf level 3*. A slightly weathered looking elf with dull blonde hair and chiselled features. Seeks wealth and knowledge.

***Nesterin Sylpetor**, elf level 2*. An avid lover woods and jungles.

Blackmoon 8th, Earthday

Adventurers had barely any sleep whatsoever.

Terrible witch Ah'sas has passed away from fever, solving one of their problems.

Then they had slain Sor'Ves the Magnificent, a blue dragon lairing atop the tower of sunken fort. Now their only issue was dragging out its magnificent hoard!

The fact that Bakaru and Ah'sas's Oger went missing bothered no one too much.

The party collected all the sacks, backpacks, and a chest, loaded them their two dugouts, and paddled straight back to the fort.

Tarkus and Beorg were left behind to guard the treehouses.

A watch later and party arrived at the fort. Gomm scaled the wall, ran over the rubble covered ceiling, and then climbed the tower.

Tens of thousands of coins still there, covered in blood and gore.

Adventurers moved through the fort hastily, opting to go through the antechamber, north-east doors, and then followed the long hallway to the courtyard. There stuck doors halted their progress.

Dalkanarion the Mighty rammed the tower gates, but they bounced right back. Puzzled, he observed the doors. Gomm opted to scale the southern wall, so he could get a better view.

At that moment he felt a prick in his neck. Everything around him slowed. Sounds became drawn out and deeper. His eyelids became heavier by the moment. His fingers weaker. Gomm landed on soft grass, oblivious to the hurt from the fall, and fell asleep.

Dalkanarion felt something sharp lodge into his back. He pulled out a dart and threw it aside.

Hedwig, Ambros, and Ignaeus ran up to the round tower, hugging its wall. Nesterin remained in the center of the courtyard, wildly scanning the surroundings. Balarus ran behind the tree in the north-west corner.

The tower trio could see a long blowgun protrude from arrow slit on the second floor. Nesterin went down.

Balarus couldn't believe his eyes. He had just witnessed a blue-furred bear stand up from behind the broken chapel window and blow a dart at his ally.

Balarus and Dalkanarion forced the tower doors open, beating back a towering bipedal blue bear dressed in plate mail.

Unphased by the sight, they charged the monster. Hedwiga joined them. All three successfully deflected clawing attacks.

Dalkanarion exposed his back as he left the melee and ran upstairs, aiming to dispose of the monster raining darts from the above.

Outside Ambros and Ignaeus took turns at shooting the bear taking cover in the chapel. They hadn't hit a single time.

In the tower Balarus dodged the towering monster by ducking under its right side. Then he thrust his obsidian blade right through the bear's soft tummy, spilling out its guts.

Grecian warrior caught the blowgun wielding bear just as it was fleeing further up the tower. Soon all the adventurers gave chase, driving the blue bear to the top. Ambros charged it, swinging wildly at the beast's throat. His mace connected multiple times, Ambros smashed the bear's skull, killing it.

"Now. . . Let's pack the treasure!"

Luckily someone remembered to check in on the downed Nesterin and Gomm. Both were dragged into the tower. Both recovered in a little bit under an hour.

Following a prolonged discussion, the party had agreed to carry the maximum amount of treasure and move hastily. Ambros cast Light on his helmet so no hands were required for carrying a light source.

The party exited the courtyard and moved south, through the oil smelling chamber covered with broken glass. There they were ambushed from the darkness and hit multiple times with poisoned darts.


Session 120 "a pain in the neck"

Half of them dropped treasure and charged into the darkness.

Alas, all they could hear are loud thuds moving away from them.

Adventurers picked up the treasure and moved it into the storage room with crates.

They emptied all the wooden boxes and filled them with thousands and thousands of gold coins. More precisely, three thousand gold pieces in each crate.

Then they closed the doors shut, and Ignaeus cast Wizard Lock on them.

Next was the more perilous part of the plan: make two trips from the tower to the dugouts in order to fill them up with eighteen thousand gold pieces.

The problem?

Harrying walking bears of course.

Once again, the adventurers packed the treasure at the tower, and once again they went through south exit and followed the long hallway to the antechamber.

There they stopped, hesitant to proceed.

Nesterin opened the doors, and as expected, the front rank had been peppered with darts.

Ambros went down.

Nesterin grabbed the cleric by the collar and pulled him back as he shut the doors.

Then someone unnamed slapped the cleric awake.

The party waited.

"Let me in!"

And waited.

"Let me in!!!"

Hedwig could not be contained any more. Her suggestions were ignored.

She proposed to cut of the dead bears' heads to "send a message."

She suggested to hollow out their corpses and use them as sacks to carry all the treasure.

She advised to build a rocket ship and fly out of here.

But all her suggestions fell on deaf ears. So she opted to take matters in her own hands!

She burst through the doors and swaggered into the antechamber.

When no ill fate befall her, others followed.

Bears waited in the shadow.

Once adventurers came close enough they shot another volley. Mighty Dalkanarion fell like a sack of potatoes.

Three plated bears rushed his limp body. The middle bear grabbed the warrior and threw him over its shoulder like a baby.

"I don't like it when you grab us!" Hedwig cried in exasperation.

Ambros, Ignaeus, Nesterin, and Hedwiga rallied and charged the bears, intent on recovering Dalkanarion.

Gomm snuck around the massive pillars. He surprised one of the bears and backstabbed it right through the heart.

"Freeze" Ignaeus yelled whilst pointing Volmorin's scimitar at the bear carrying his ally.

The bear froze in place.

"Fine, fine! Enough! Let us talk!"

Fourth bear stepped out of the darkness, urging everyone to cease their hostilities.

Negotiations proceeded with spectacular show of diplomacy on both sides.

The result were three decapitated bears, one escapee, and all adventurers intact.

Unopposed, the party made two runs between the tower and their dugouts, loading them to the gills.

Alas, that also meant they finished after the sun had set.

"Worry not, I am a former seafarer. I shall navigate us back to Ah'sas hut." Dalkanarion announced proudly.

He got the party lost, so they arrived to their jungle huts at dawn. There Tarkus and Beorg informed them they had spotted more activity in the area.

Without the witch's powerful magic to keep monsters at bay this was no longer a sanctuary it had been for the past several months.

Sunken fort was still full of treasure.

Nearly twenty thousand of coins they had dragged to the huts were deep in Eyestone Jungle.

And the rations were running out.

What will the adventurers do next?



Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 121

Adventurers

***Ambros**, cleric level 5*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Balarus**, fighter level 3*. An ex-woodsman, quite a crackshot with his bow.

***Dalkanarion**, fighter level 4*. A youthful specimen in full strength, full of purpose, bluster, and eagerness to prove himself.

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***Hedwig Hogwarts**, elf level 3*. An always alert owl masquerading as an elf.

***Ignaeus**, elf level 4*. A slightly weathered looking elf with dull blonde hair and chiselled features. Seeks wealth and knowledge.

***Nesterin Sylpetor**, elf level 3*. An avid lover woods and jungles.

***Zardon**, cleric level 1*. Fairly stout fellow with messy beard and rosy-red smiling cheeks. Follower of Teros, the God of the Forest.

Willowind 2nd, Waterday

Three weeks.

That's how long it took a party of ten—Ambros, Balarus, Beorg the Gravedigger, Dalkanarion, Gomm, Hedwiga, Ignaeus, Nesterin Sylpetor, Tarkus the Promising, and Zardon—to reach the bank of river Farhills just opposite Hara.

Before they left Ah'sas's hut, Gomm buried a large cache of treasure they were unable to carry: nine thousand one hundred and eighty gold pieces. The thief sketched a treasure map so they can find it when they return.

Once they broke out of the jungle, the party had decided to head south, towards Vigil Sound bay. There they buried another treasure cache counting six thousand eight hundred and twenty gold pieces. Nesterin drew this map.

Then they spent some days seeking a keep they heard might be in the area. Having run out of rations, and failing to forage sufficient amount of food, some of the members had to go hungry. Although they did not find any fortifications—intact or ruined—they did stumble upon a trail.

They followed it south until they were close to the Castle of the Wode. They were too afraid to face Tagoler, so they gave it a large berth, at the expense of even more members starving.

But now they were in front of the ferryman. Dirty from days of travel, black pit in their bellies from days of fasting, and a fear of what might they find poisoning their minds. It's been months since they left the City of Merchants.

Hagar the Hewer, now deceased adventurer, was to become new Hara's castellan. That was the deal with the Namelin family, which the party had ultimately sided with. But Hagar died, and adventurers failed to offer a satisfying alternative. At the same time, Imrael family, as well as all those allied with them, blacklisted the party.

Finding themselves without friends, they decided to follow Ambros's geas to Ketche. There they helped the local cleric, but by accident Ambros had prolonged his own geas. And then a cascade of decisions led them through jungle and then back to Hara.

In order to minimise the risk, the party divided in two groups. First group was comprised of less known members. Dalkanarion, Balarus, Zardon, Hedwig, and Nesterin. Gomm joined them as well, pretending he is a stranger. They were to be the first to go. Then second group—Ambros, Ignaeus, Tarkus, Beorg—would arrive several hours later.

Since it was already night the ferryman had initially protested, but tossing a dozen of gold pieces shifted his mood rapidly.

Careful, if slightly paranoid, the adventurers' approach had paid off for none of them got into significant trouble. They were surprised to find the city in much better state than they left it. Streets were cleaner, guards were plentiful, and locals were in good mood.

"You will not believe this Gomm!" the thief was updated at the guild. "The Queen had bested all the Merchants' bloviations! Since they failed to agree on the next castellan, as she requested, she named her own!" his colleague continued, excited "Tsamar the Queen of Pirates is our new castellan! Well, they are privateers now, but you get what I mean. Gomm, the Age of Thieves is upon us!"

These news pleased Gomm greatly.

Indeed, everybody grovelled at Tsamar's feet, striving to get in her good graces. Namelin's thugs were quickly put in place by Tsamar's experienced mariners. By all accounts, new castellan did her duties with an iron fist.

"I think the Red Queen now owes us big. We messed up Namelin's and Imrael's plans so much that she got to pick her favourite candidate." one adventurer dreamt aloud.

What will the adventures make out of this? Perhaps some new friends? Or enemies?

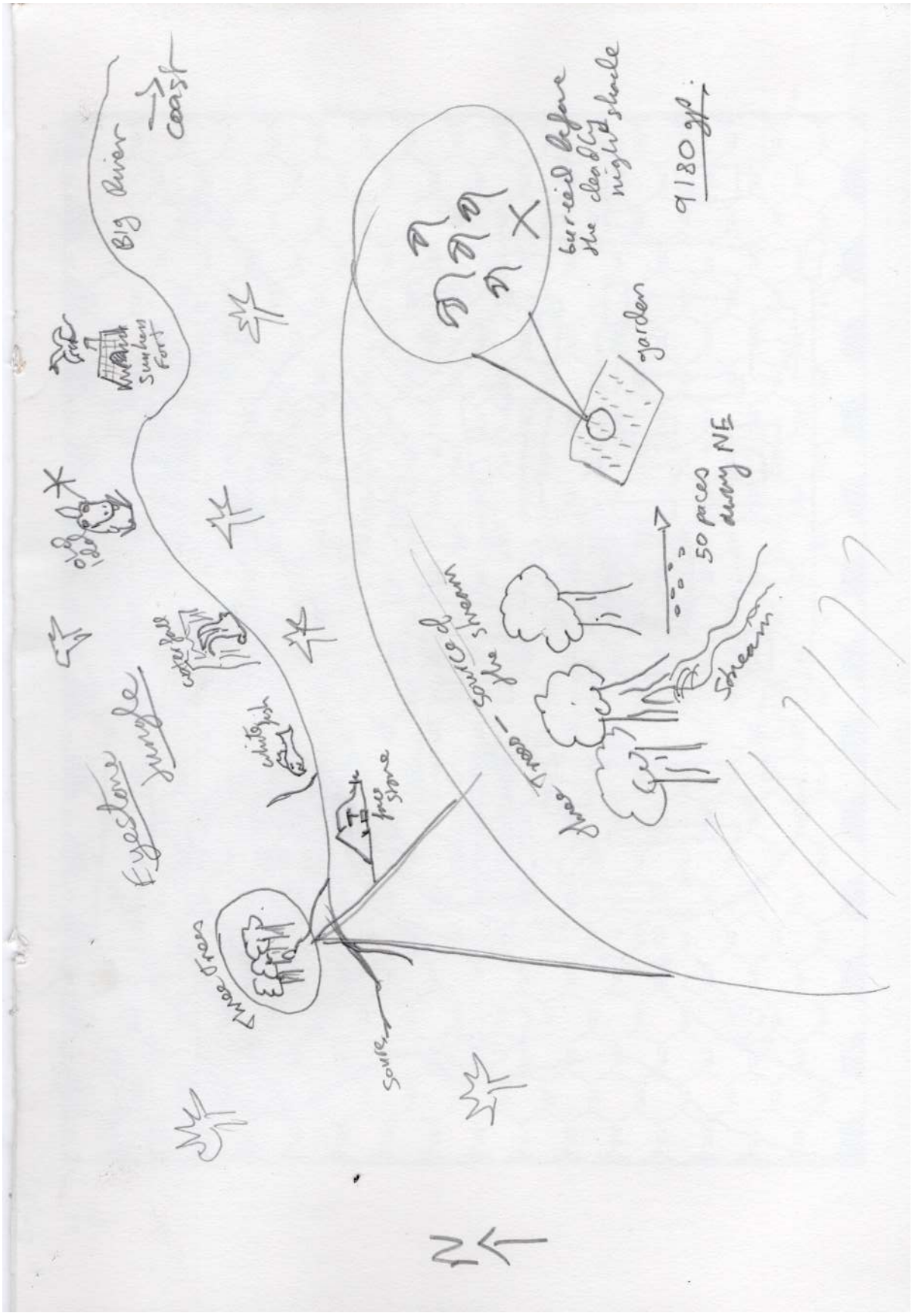


Figure 1: *Gomm's treasure map*

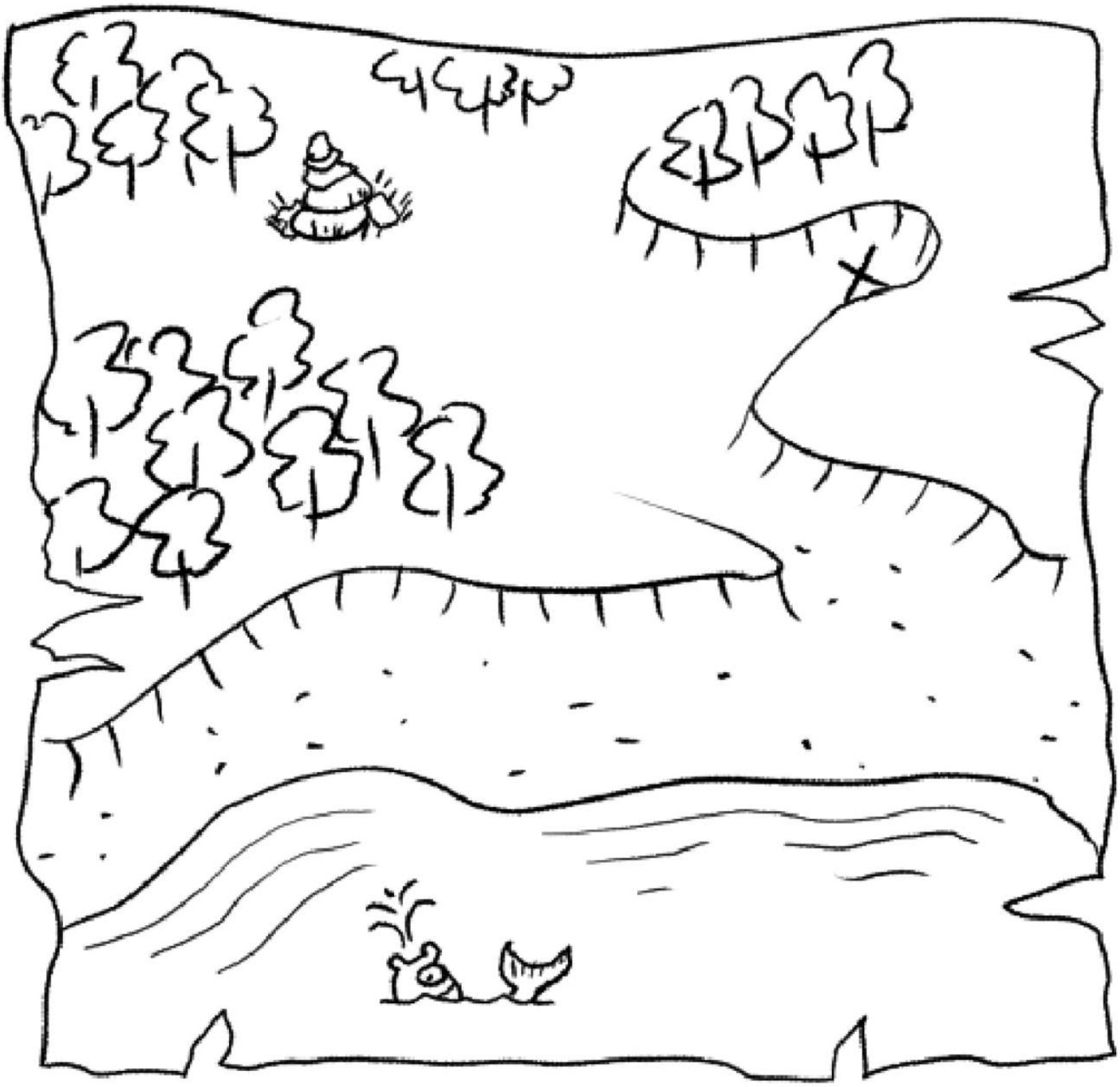


Figure 2: *Nesterin's treasure map*

Exedra

Comments and responses to previous issues of Ever & Anon.

E&A 12

RE: Denizens of the Library #11 / Brian Rogers Bob indeed had miserable time for most of his short adventuring life.

RE: Age of Menace Issue 249 / Brian Christopher Misiaszek Hagar *was* brave and courageous, which in the end resulted with his death. Dying in dungeons is not a rare occurrence by itself, but by that time Hagar had been raised from the dead at least once.

His death had massive political implications, since one of the regional factions had backed him as the next castellan of Hara. This haunted the party for a long time. It is unclear to me why they hadn't attempted to bring him back to life.

RE: Accidental Recall #11, Joshua Kronengold No, they actually did not try to bring Hagar back. They could not reach a consensus, and were then pretty much blacklisted by all relevant powers.

RE: Computocracy / Jim Vassilakos That's indeed how it was!

E&A 13

RE: Denizens of the Library #12 / Brian Rogers Ambros dropped the ball massively when he asked Jaffar a very open-ended question.

Other players tried to jump in, but it was too late; his questions were already out.

RE: Reddened Stars number 12 / John Redden They got the bird indeed! This is was the first time I reused a location in this campaign.

It happened for the same reason: few players, mostly new to the campaign; what do that won't mess up existing mess even more?

I used the same location in session 25 (A&E #570).

RE: Twisting the Rope #13 / Myles Corcoran Yes, Idle Doodler has a nice style, and he usually turns my nasty descriptions into something nasty and cute.

So happy he illustrated cover of the very first issue of E&A!

RE: An Unlooked For Zine #12 / Lisa Padol Yeah, it happens from time to time!

RE: Age of Menace #250 / Brian Christopher Misiaszek Thank you, Brian! In general I try to maintain a brisk pace when we play. We meet online, weekly, for just three hours.

Slow, but important stuff, like planning, logistics, and downtime are relegated, as much as possible, to play-by-post between the live sessions. That helps a bit.

Centuria's player, Idle Doodler himself, is a very creative fellow. His solutions are often creative too!

Regarding the troll, yes, that's exactly how it went! And is it unfolded I kept thinking me of the *best laid plans* saying. That aside, planning was worth it, and they were ultimately victorious.

RE: Computocracy / Jim Vassilakos Of course, their parents were Kruggak, and Kruggak, respectively.

E&A 14

RE: Reddened Stars number 13 / John Redden That's why I keep saying that modern funnels are not needed—running old-school system as written means levels one thru three act as a natural funnel.

There is no need for zero level stuff unless you want to run ultra-mudcore type of game.

RE: Age of Menace Issue 251 / Brian Christopher Misiaszek You know how it is: more options, especially non-violent ones, become obvious when you look at the situation from some distance and after the fact.

But also, Gomm is a daring thief, and not necessarily a wise thief.

RE: Firedrake's Hoard Number 12 / Roger BW The unbeatable strategy!

RE: Denizens of the Library #13 / Brian Rogers We have had many stupid, preventable deaths. Last time I made a count was at session 70. I might update it after session 300.

RE: Accidental Recall #13 / Joshua Kronengold Indeed, a two-handed intelligent sword, which had been collecting dust in the adventurers' vault in Hara for a long, long time before being picked up again.

Players got to fear intelligent swords, and with a good reason—even Lawful ones will vie for control when the wearer is weak.

Plus, they don't like being told what to do, even when that is in the service of Law.

Gomm truly succumbed to psionically gifted Beklomda, but then pretended when he was caught. I thought that was a brilliant move by the player.

I did roll in secret to determine if Ah'sas would see through the ruse. She did, but she pretended she did not in order to use him, and others.

She was not stupid, and was genuinely starved of more cerebral interactions, so she set the cards in her favour. Players just accepted her and threw characters into her hut.

So she charmed pretty much all of the men, and ordered them to construct few more tree platforms.

Thus, they spent several weeks there, going back and forth from the sunk fortress.

Love your thoughts about Ah'sas and Sor'Ves. Would be curious to hear what you think about how everything turned out for the adventurers in the end! ;)

RE: An Unlooked For Zine #13 / Lisa Padol Zhoron went in big on the sword, and then completely misjudged his opponents, thence losing his head.

Gomm pretended to be ensorcelled to save his life! It worked out for him.

Adventurers were hungry and lost. They sold themselves cheap to Ah'Sas.

Then she charmed them, one by one. Which wasn't that difficult.

They did not resist too much.

RE: Strategies for Addressing Intraparty Conflict / Jim Vassilakos Thank you! Psionics were first introduced in the *Eldritch Wizardry* supplement.

They were later expanded in the Advanced Dungeon & Dragons, Dragon magazine, and other supplements.

I used the rules from the first supplement, with a bit of rulings to determine final results.

I like psionics, and loved part of the Wilderlands lore that Altanian women are natural psions.

Alas, I haven't had the time to properly develop that further, so I just limited psionic powers to NPCs.

For now.

In next issue

The Golden Gavel of Justice.

Firedrake's Hoard

Number 13: by Roger BW

- Blog: https://blog.firedrake.org/
- Gaming stuff: https://tekeli.li/
- RPG podcast: https://tekeli.li/podcast/
- Actual Play: https://tekeli.li/whartson-hall/
- Mastodon: https://discordian.social/@RogerBW
- Boardgaming APA: https://tekeli.li/of-dice-and-meeples/
- Licence: AI0-BY-NC-SA-1.0 https://www.humanscommons.org/
- This zine contains no content produced by generative AI tools.



I have been away at an event which had nothing to do with either this or *Of Dice and Meeples:* Shrewkfest, a camping weekend and ukulele festival in a twangy field by Shrewsbury.



Recent Games

GURPS Traveller / The Pirates of Drinax:

Session 6. We proceed to the first of the worlds that were raided, Clarke, where thanks to an intense casualty event (cough cough bombing by the old Drinax Empire in its latter stupider days) they did a lot of preservation of bodies until medical resources could be found, a more extreme version of the low berth, and this has effectively become their culture. Anyway, we stay polite, and Ruersaegn does his Charisma and Voice Thing,[1] and if we aren't making friends wherever we go at least we aren't making enemies. It's not clear how many other potential bounty hunters have asked for space traffic control records or visited the attack site (salvaged high-tech electronics, reasonably saleable), but we now know some things: two Jump-2 ships, not operating well together (the scout had loaded up and left while the far trader was still on the ground), encrypted voice communications that we haven't done anything with yet. On to the other raid target, the water world of Torpol.

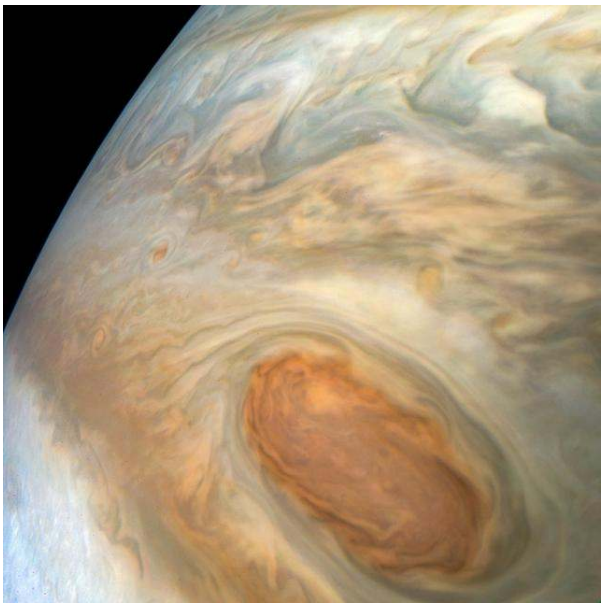
Session 7. On to Torpol, where the target was an orbital refinery. The far trader and another, industrial, ship seem to have been involved in this one. (We note in passing that these worlds have really poorly organised orbital defences. All information is useful.) Possibly of more relevance: a scout that may well be the one we tracked on Clarke made planetfall here and sat at the port while the raid was going on, and sold some recognisable loot from Clarke. Then on the way out it exchanged fire with a far trader (which turned out to have more teeth than it appeared). They picked up a snatch of unencrypted comms saying the ship was going

[1] Being entirely respectful of their religion, though *he* of course will one day be caught up by the ~~tentacles~~ arms of the Great Mother.

to Borite (a mining world); we follow (of course we're already some weeks behind). As we arrive insystem we pick up a distress call from near the gas giant; there's not a lot of traffic out that way and our high-acceleration ship can get there before anyone else, so we do.

Session 8: There's a derelict space station from the Sindalian Empire days, and it looks as though someone's wired their suit distress transmitter into its antenna array. Two life signs show up on infra-red, and two of us go in after them[2] while the other two keep the ship ready for action. One of the life signs turns out to be a spacer-eating monster, which we shoot a lot.[3] The other turns out to be the (former?) captain of that scout ship; we stuff him in a rescue ball, for convenience of restraint more than anything else, and will get his story next time. This one's now on hold for a bit.

2300AD / Bayern: (Sunday group) There's a derelict platform in the upper atmosphere of a gas giant near Aldebaran; the basic power is still running (long-duration fission reactor that heats up gas to keep the balloons less dense than the outside atmosphere), but the place has taken a lot of damage… as gradually becomes clear, some of it from weapons fire, and what seems like a fighting retreat into the reactor space and control room. No bullets coming in, though… there's a lab with what are clearly animal cages, and another with an isolation area, the door of which has been ripped from its hinges. The beastie does try to ambush our heroes, but they're very much on edge already and roll well for initiative, so they engage enough to blow off some of the feeding tentacles it had stuck through a gap in the walls and then withdraw before it can ambush them again. They end up sabotaging the platform, so that it will sink into the gas giant, rather than risk anyone else stumbling on it. It's all a bit *Aliens* really, but I suppose once in a while is OK.



Kevin M. Gill via NASA, 2018

And finally… the PCs' ship comes to a rendezvous point to find *Bayern* not only in the wrong place, but dark and silent, though there's some activity around engineering. Acting with extreme caution (though a remote probe dropped offline when it got close, which limits their options) they search the system further, and find the crew evacuated to the nearby planet. Looks as though something has taken over the main computer, and in turn the ship's systems including the worker robots.

Now this is where I got irked reading things through. Not only is it clear that the author wasn't working from the final deck plans,[4] the situation is deliberately set up to have only one solution, which involves also killing Ace, the

[2] "Rule one of hazardous situation rescue: do not need to be rescued yourself."

[3] "I don't like this space station any more. Switch to solid slug."

[4] Not surprising given how art and layout works, and I can't fairly blame them for that, though I can blame the editor!

ship's emergent artificial intelligence that's currently defending its own dedicated hardware and unable to manage much else. I don't like that kind of setup, because I'm not writing linear fiction; if it were to emerge in play, fair enough. Fortunately my players (including Mike Cule of this parish) were able to come up with an alternative plan.

So back to Earth. Fame! Glory! An interstellar war has started while you were away!

That's that campaign over, and the next thing played by this group will be run by someone else.

2300AD / Bayern: (Whartson Hall) But we've restarted the other instance as the Drinax game has gone on hold for a bit (we tend to like to do short runs, maybe 6-10 sessions, then change to something else with a different GM and come back later). This time they were discovering the damaged rover from an unknown civilisation; it's more about atmosphere and a little light problem-solving than Adventure! but it was a good re-entry to the game.

GURPS / The Day After Ragnarok: What was the distraction meant to distract us from? Well, several female members of upper-class society (target demographic for the Daughters of Dionin) have suddenly been unable to attend scheduled social functions. A constable hands Don one of Fiona's calling cards, with "see you soon, I hope" and lipstick kisses. That was apparently given to him by a lady in a red sports car; we head out, and she's still there, and drives directly at us. She shoots at us, we shoot back, then she drives off into the city; we immediately alert the police to keep a lookout (she's attracting attention) and requisition a radio car. (And driver. We have other things we'll need to do.)



Wikipedia user Lglswe, 2007

"We will assume a Ford V8, because we will always assume a Ford V8 lacking evidence to the contrary."

After a chase with further gun- and Marconi-fire, we blow a wheel off the MG and lightly fry Fiona (pain stimulation effect). She continues to resist to the bitter end, but ultimately we get her restrained, arrested, and back to the police station, where our sorcerer pulls the serpent-taint out of her. It's all pointless, she explains, because after the Ceremony…

Well, we have a fairly solid guess as to where that might be happening.

How do you find players/GMs/games?

Honestly these days mostly I don't; I play with two long-running groups and a third (with some overlap) that's a bit newer. But the groups that have lasted (or that I have lasted with), whether I joined them at first as a friend or as a gamer, are groups of friends at least as much as they are groups of gamers. Considering the three groups I currently play with:

I joined the Cambridge group[5] in about 2003 after seeing an invitation on `uk.games.roleplay`, when I lived rather closer

[5] It is one of several role-playing groups in Cambridge, of course, but it's a convenient label.

to Cambridge (though still an hour's drive away, while the others were all local). We could see this might not be sustainable, but it worked, and I carried on commuting there until 2020. Since then we've stayed remote.

Whartson Hall started as an in-person group at about the same time, then grew a remote arm as some of the players moved away, and I found out about them later both from recordings (in those days on RPGMP3[6]) and because two of the regulars were also at the yog-sothoth.com gaming days. So I knew something of their style from playing with them and from the recordings, and they knew something of mine from playing with me, and when in 2015 I asked to play with them they were a bit surprised but happy to give it a try. This is the only group I've been in that has completely managed to avoid having That One Annoying Player, and sometimes I worry that it might be I.

And the mostly-nameless Sunday group started in 2019 as a collection of mutual friends and acquaintances, getting together remotely to play *Vampire* (since the one who proposed it is a good enough GM that I was able to overcome my general dislike of the setting and system). Since then we've played *Werewolf*, *Last Fleet* (PbtA not-Galactica), *Aliens*, *Traveller*, *Cthulhu Awakens* (run by me, and alas I got overwhelmed with other things and had to put it on hold), *Blades in the Dark*, *RuneQuest* and most recently *2300AD/Bayern.*

We Also Heard From

Comments on E&A number 14

Pedro Panhoca da Silva & Maira Zucolotto: I'm afraid I've never liked the "legacy" format. And yes, I know traditional gamebooks invite one at least to fill in the character sheet, and some such as the Fabled Lands series ask one to tick off boxes and so on. It's personal taste. Good to see the flexibility of this one, though.

Dale Meier: Welcome, Dale!

RYCTM, I understand *Bridge Command* originated with a set of modifications to *Artemis* (plus the sets, actors, lore, etc. that the full thing in London has) but they've now replaced it all with their own code.

My gaming library is terrifyingly (to me) extensive, and does appear to include that book; thanks! Most of what I know about Vargr is half-remembered from the original GDW Alien Module.

No, *The Path of Cunning* (on hiatus at the moment as my co-editor has an ongoing and time-consuming commitment) is its own thing. I'm aware of *AotA* but it was mostly before my time with ***GURPS***.

RYCT Jim Eckman, my experience moving from OpenOffice to LibreOffice was entirely painless, much like ditto from the original Star Office to OpenOffice. To be fair, I don't think I ever pushed it very hard (except, as I've said before, when putting *The Path of Cunning* together).

Patrick Brady: RYCT Brian Christopher Misiaszek, ooh, I like that idea of "what the historical character did later" and I shall probably steal it.

RYCT Myles Corcoran we may have met at James's flat; I certainly played in a couple of *Bugtown* sessions.

RYCTM yes, my main use of the CNC was in a more investigative mode. In general, while I'm

[6] https://www.rpgmp3.com/

not immune to the classic *Call of Cthulhu* flow of "investigate to prepare for the big fight" I'm often open to solving problems entirely with negotiation and not bullets. I tend to favour thinking opposition rather than monsters, which certainly makes that easier. Had that campaign gone on longer, the PCs might well have interacted with the more conventional (real world) CNC units, who are fundamentally "armed security with a bit of hazardous materials training" much more than they are "police".

I like the secondment idea; I might often also say something like "this is the group you were in before [the campaign's employer] recruited you".

I will avoid ranting about AI[7] but I will point out that in academia it interacts very poorly with Goodhart's Law ("When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure"). The point of giving a student an exam is not to see how good they are at solving exam problems, it is a measure of whether they've understood the material. But to many students the exam pass is just a piece of paper that lets them get a better-paid job. Given that, one should not be *surprised* that they cheat. Similarly, a junior developer is given an easy change request not because a senior couldn't knock it off in half a minute when they take half a day but so that the junior will become familiar with the codebase and gain some degree of ability to tackle harder problems.

Matt Stevens: A side note: my own feeling is that multi-level rules depend on the players not having an adversarial relationship with the GM (assuming such roles exist in some form in the game). If the opposition is there, players have an incentive to use the mechanism that'll let them come off best. I start on the basis that all the players are here to have fun and create a memorable fiction together; I want players to feel that sometimes it's just the right thing to do to say "OK, the dice might say I survived that, but honestly I think it's more appropriate for me to die at this point".

Well, *obviously* if two dashing blades end up wanting to have tea and crumpets with the same lady at the same time…



Pixabay user congerdesign, 2016

RYCTM I remember when *Dallas* came out. I don't know what the demographics were like in the USA, but all the gamers I knew were *culturally* uninterested in soap operas; they were something for the previous generation. (Even those gamers who *were* of the previous generation weren't fans.) And the soap opera fans were happy to watch the soaps, they didn't want to write them. I think the hobby needed to mature and diversify before there was really room for a game focused on interpersonal interaction.

(Also of course "you have to play the pre-gens" probably doomed it with gamers of those days, just as it did the 1984 TSR *Indiana Jones.)*

[7] Mostly.

Patrick Riley: Re IgTheme, as long as both *players* are OK with a "friendly rivalry" relationship that's fine in my book. The standard Legolas and Gimli example is my comfort zone: they talk trash, they have their orc-killing competition, but the instant one of them saw the other in real danger he'd drop everything to save him.

Re *Outgunned Superheroes,* I had a look through the mini setting books for the action instance and one of them has a *Star Wars* ripoff so blatant its new character archetype is called "Babiyod". Though having seen cheap Italian films of the last century I have a cultural expectation that they will be doing blatant ripoffs and having fun with them, which may help.



Unsplash user Cash Macanaya, 2023

RYCTM I don't enjoy *dungeon-bashes,* the style of adventure where you're bashing your way through combat encounters (set in the framework of an underground complex), particularly multiple combat encounters with entirely different sorts of opposition. I'd be much more open to a dungeon adventure if it were, say, with a particular objective in mind rather than just loot, primarily with relevant environmental hazards rather than monsters (or if there are monsters they're embedded in the environment, they lair here because here's where the reactor keeps the eggs warm, that kind of thing), perhaps opposed by another outside party with incompatible goals. That's how I see a spaceship exploration going. (Or, I suppose, with aliens, but I tend to feel *Aliens* did that and so did all the games that imitated it.)

Bryant Durrell: Welcome! Also welcome to the Typst Conspiracy (there is no Typst Conspiracy).

Re your *Feng Shui,* when I first read about clocks my reaction was "eh, it's a time limit, so what". But I think they're more valuable in a face to face session (or online with more sophistication than I tend to use) where the GM can fill in a box and the players can all see that it's been filled in, and that there are two left, and that they don't know what will happen when there are none left.

I'm not in general a fan of *DramaSystem* and I think the core of my objection is the way that *every* interaction is framed as a conflict: I want this out of this conversation, you want that, we can't both have what we want. If it's not that sort of situation, we simply don't play that scene. Just as I know people in real life who view every interpersonal interaction as an authority/power relationship, that's not a mindset I feel comfortable inhabiting.

RYCTM I think MICE is best used as a toolkit

for treachery[8] It's a set of reasons why people do the things that aren't expected of them, why they assist the opposition in some way. I don't know *Feng Shui* well but I would expect that following a family tradition is a thing that *is* expected of you, and the MICE reasoning would come in for why the guy who grew up Ascended is now a Jammer.

RYCT Elf, thanks for that physical game jam site; it removes one of the barriers to my participation…

Mark A. Wilson: I quite like the approach Bujold takes to demons in her *Penric* series (often recommended elsezine, particularly by Mike): the demon leaves the host only when the host dies, but takes with it an imprint of that host's memories, which can still manifest the person's personality even though it doesn't have their soul (in universe this is a known thing).

RYCT Joshua Kronengold I think part of the tension in the conception of the ranger is that as originated by Tolkien he's a fighter who has some magical-seeming abilities because he is of the lineage of the Old Kings; this would actually make much more sense in OD&D where "elf" is a character class just as "fighting-man" is. Indeed, they might in this model look a lot like a multi-classed fighter/elf, lacking the ultimate powers of either but able to do both things well. Obviously it's been pushed in various directions since then, but since it was originated as a human-only class in AD&D it never had that social embedding that Tolkien gives it.



CC-BY DeviantArt user SurrealKatie, 2016

Re the megagame: I've not been in one of these, but I've read about them. Sounds like great fun, but at the same time frustrating, as the only bit you can really see is what you're involved in.

John Redden: re your *Traveller,* as Ruersaegn has said recently, "We can't take on the entirety of the Aslan Hierate. Yet. That's stage three. First things first."

RYCTM: "This spell enables the magic-user to converse with normal, nonmagical mud. The mud hears everything the magic-user says and can answer audibly. Unfortunately, this spell does not endow the mud with any other magical powers (such as intelligence), so its answers are generally restricted to unedifying glugs and gurgles. The spell duration continues until the magic-user gets sick of the whole thing or shouts himself hoarse in frustration." (From *Dragon* #144, p. 37.)

[8] I admit, I couldn't resist the phrase.

Myles Corcoran: Glad that at least one bit of health stuff is sorted.

RYCTM: I haven't looked hard at starter sets but I think one type is more or less inspired by the sort of demo game I've run at conventions: here are some pregens, here's a short adventure which shows off some of the features of the world and the system, now you can decide whether you want to buy the thing and play more. Of course in that four-hour convention slot there often isn't time to do character generation as well as a meaningful adventure.

I have a vision of something along those lines for a horror game: here are some "normal people" pregens, here's a situation which is going to kill off most of them (and players can take over former NPCs as long as there are enough left), any survivors who decide to go on to be monster hunters can be joined by new characters for the other players from the cleanup squad as it unfolds into a campaign. Sort of like a character funnel only less explicitly gamey. But I haven't written it.

Avram Grumer: Re Monsterhearts, the ostrich episode reminds me unfortunately of the comedy act of my youth Rod Hull and Emu[9] (in short, the puppet would behave badly while the comedian made a show of attempting to restrain it).

I think your group has achieved the thing that has gone awry in other Monsterhearts games I've listened to: rather than devolving into back-and-forth infighting, there's a genuine climax that changes things for the future.

Brian Rogers: Sorry you're being messed about with regard to the library games. Lovely stuff with the demon and the Great Tree!

[9]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_Hull

Erica Frank: I am a born taxonomist so I favour your article idea #1; this is the sort of thing I find extremely useful when learning about a field that's new to me. (Even though I love fire.)



Unsplash user Mariola Grobelska, 2024

RYCT Myles Corcoran, a problem with sites in the UK that purport to offer reviews of local tradesmen (roofers, electricians, etc.) is that they're pay to play, i.e. the tradesman has to pay to be on there at all. And mysteriously the ones who pay less find their positive reviews disappearing, while the ones who pay more can remove their negative reviews. A site for reviewing GMs could easily fall into this pattern.

Patrick Zoch: I keep meaning to say, thanks for updating the *E&A* listings on rpggeek. (I get notified because I have the RPG Designer flag there.)

Can't go wrong with the good old Hanomag half-track.

RYCT Matt Stevens in #10 it's become a running joke among players I know that many ***GURPS*** parties take the opportunity to learn the skills and powers that would have solved the last big encounter they had, only never to need them again.

Michael Cule: RYCT Matt Stevens, Jane Espenson claimed that season 6 of *Buffy* was essentially the production crew writing fanfic of their own show.

Joshua Kronengold: congratulations on the job!

RYCT John Redden, I see no meaningful distinction between a "program" and a "script". Either is a sequence of instructions (with possible branches and loops) for the machine to follow, possibly involving interaction with the user. Even more, I don't think it's meaningful to separate a "programming language" from a "scripting language". By all means go into technical distinctions, but there's only a loose correlation for me between execution technology and fitness for a particular purpose. I've written tiny programs in Rust, and huge ones in Awk. Though I do tend to reserve "compilation" to mean "to machine code which can be directly executed by the processor" (e.g. Rust or C) rather than to a bytecode.

RYCTM yes, in a system as variable as ***GURPS*** I thought it made more sense to go with existing templates than to try to incorporate potentially *everything*.

Raku is one of the languages in which I usually solve the Weekly Challenges[10]; it has all sorts of fun features, but my goodness it's desperately slow to do anything even slightly demanding.

RYCT Jim Vassilakos, I can't remember who said "this campaign should be the most exciting thing in your PC's life so far" but I think it's a decent principle in terms of the significance of backstory once in play.

Lisa Padol: RYCT Matt Stevens, every so often I have to remind myself that I do this role-playing thing *for fun* and if an activity isn't being fun maybe it's not a good way to engage with role-playing.

The way you feel/felt about *Over the Edge* is the way I feel about ***GURPS***. Which is not to say it ought to be the way *you* feel about it, but what you describe is very much what I get: that feeling that if I want to ask the system for an answer, it will give me one, but if I just want to make something up, it won't break anything.

RYCT John Redden, if you are me you can have hours of fun working out *just* which aircraft might be available when (and where!) in the 1920s and 1930s. Not, of course, at the table…

RYCT Myles Corcoran RTCT Elf: I wonder if one could usefully separate the concept of a system that can readily support, not a variety of *settings* (we already have "generic system" or "universal system" for that), but a variety of *modes of play?* E.g. you can do survival horror, heroic adventure, romance, and it's still there for you without lots of rule-invention needed.

RYCTM *The Day After Ragnarok* is a Ken Hite setting, so the answer to any question of "is this a reference" is probably "yes". *As far as we PCs know* the Daughters of Dionin is a Serpent-cult that recruits particularly among female members of the upper classes. Most of them died in the Serpentfall (it's a Ken Hite setting, so Britain is either evil or gone, in this case mostly destroyed) but we're in the Colonies so there are survivors rebuilding their power base.

As a computer professional who works extensively in security, yes, all of these options are generally easier than actually breaking the code. Another good one is: the person who wrote this encryption system used a cryptographic library (good, writing your own if you're not an expert is a bad idea), but they

[10] https://theweeklychallenge.org/

accidentally used it *wrongly* so it turns out it's much easier to break than it should be.



Unsplash user Kevin Horvat, 2019

Yes, as I understand it once it became possible to be gay and out without facing legal penalties that particular blackmail path gradually collapsed.

The dragons in my head are in large part a manifestation of reality, and the realisation comes fairly immediately as they attain consciousness.

I'm still working on my list of "what I want a packaged scenario ought to look like". This is most likely to manifest in something either free or for sale. But I will say: if there is any element of looking into things that happened in the past, when that's last week or last millennium, there *needs* to be a timeline with all dated events on it. So many times I've had players ask "when did this happen relative to that"…

Re *Murder Ahoy:* well, it's not Errol Flynn but it *is* Margaret Rutherford. The climactic scenes are on YouTube[11].

I've never been sufficiently inside the industry to be privy to the business decisions. I have never particularly liked metaplot, but then I don't have a problem with everything published for a system being essentially a snapshot at a particular moment and none of the hooks ever being officially resolved because my campaign is not like any other campaign. And certainly I can see the business case for metaplot.

(I did admire the approach original *Torg* took of a survey form in the back of each published adventure, asking not just whether that group had succeeded but how it had resolved particular plot points: did this NPC escape, is that evil machination still unknown, and so on. West End Games aggregated these, took more or less the most common outcomes, and used them to develop the next stages of the overall campaign.)

RYCT Avram Grumer: "rice stalk dice". I'll have to remember that. I've generally known them as "barrel dice". (Technically, they are prisms (rectangular faces) or antiprisms (triangular faces) made more complex by the decorative non-flat ends.)

RYCT Brian Misziaszek: as I see it, a non-patient's reaction to both the King and the General might be "well, he may be delusional, but he's talking sense and he's not getting people killed. That's better than anyone else is doing right now."

RYCT Joshua Kronengold and *You're (Not) A Wizard,* I have played a similar game *Definitely Wizards*[12] in which you have to pass the practical exam to graduate from Wizard School even though you are… well, various options, but the best one is clearly Seven Familiars In a Trenchcoat.

Thanks for the *Dracula Dossier* summary; it sounds like great fun!

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HecQAh0aJQw

[12] https://elliothtart.itch.io/definitely-wizards

Jim Vassilakos: RYCTM on published settings: I do run a lot of things that aren't *Traveller* too; I was thinking of approaches I could take that would still be called "a *Traveller* game". I do note that I haven't talked here about my "passage crew" idea, at least under that name: someone has bought a second-hand starship. It's at location A, they want it at location B. The PCs are the crew whose job is to get it there. There's a deadline, but a generous one; there's a stipend, but a small one, and you're expected to supplement it en route. In effect this is the classic Free Trader game, but with a potentially unsuitable ship,[13] possibly other people who want the ship, a reason to keep moving, and a defined endpoint.

RYCTM on the potential blandness of *Traveller* worlds: yup, when a region of space has been written up in a bit more detail (either with a campaign pack or by the GM, of course) that can go away, but this is a risk I think it's a good idea to be aware of.

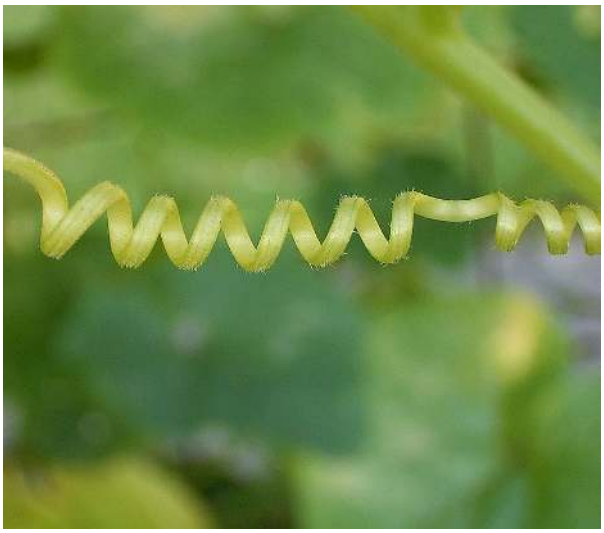
RYCT Timothy Collinson and starport design: I agree that the fuel expenditure argument doesn't make much sense, but there are pragmatic reasons to have at least a landing zone separate from the berthing zone: landing and takeoff accidents, most obviously. And in non-*Traveller* settings which don't have free contragravity, runways can still be worth having; pure thrust flight to and from orbit needs much higher acceleration than partially wing-borne.

In my *Tempt Not the Stars* campaign run in the early days of ***GURPS 4th edition***, I used 3e *Vehicles* for the ship designs, which under those particular tech assumptions meant that giving a ship vertical landing capability would eat significantly into its cargo space. Presto, a niche for small PC-type ships that isn't served more economically by the big guys!

Timothy Collinson: RYCT Myles Corcoran: I've always liked the Hivers. To my mind they're the most *alien* of the well-known *Traveller* aliens.

RYCTM and *merd,* thanks! Ruersaegn is, as part of his leadership style, the ship's lead cook.[14]

And all in all: this month's new phrase is tendril perversion[15] (which is not what you might think).



Wikipedia user les (Frank Vincentz), 2007

[13] After all, why would someone buy *this specific ship* rather than a more readily available standard model?

[14] In ***GURPS*** terms he has not just Housekeeping, which covers basic cookery, but Cooking, which is the gourmet stuff.

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tendril_perversion

Twisting the Rope #15

Myles Corcoran - 20 Brookfield Park, Cork T12 K7V7, Ireland
https://mastodon.ie/@deetwelve

Wash Away the Rain

Well that was a less than stellar eclipse[1]. On the 12th of August the path of totality of the recent solar eclipse passed south of Ireland, but here in Cork we got an over 90% partial eclipse. Unfortunately after several days of clear or mostly clear skies, the day of the eclipse the cloud rolled in and covered the solar disk most of the time.

At a (much) greater astronomical distance, the JWST observations of Little Red Dots[2] have a potential explanation in a paper by Vadim Rusakov et al.[3] who identify a population of heavily obscured, massive (masses of $10^{5-7} M_{\odot}$) primordial black holes, while Rohan Naidu et al. have spotted an extremely red-shifted object they named MoM-BH*-1, described[4] as a "black hole star". MoM-BH*-1 is fascinating, as it represents a previously theoretical class of objects, where a central black hole with a massive cocoon can emulate a super-massive star, the radiation from accretion around the black hole providing the outward pressure to balance the gravitational inward collapse much like fusion provides the radiation pressure in the stellar objects we are more used to.

No prizes for this month's choice of song lyrics, obviously.

In other excitements, an upgraded firewall at work has been throwing fits, and intermittent outages for the last 3-4 days. As the new academic year starts soon with the associated influx of students and mass registration, things are getting a little tense around here.

A *Mausritter* Campaign

This is the continuing write-up of the Mausritter campaign started in July 2024. Our band of brave mice work to defend their home, explore their world and become the heroes of Oak Home, their mouse town at the centre of their world.

The characters are:

Sky, a sparrow-rider with an aerial mount, Miss Clutterbuck, played by Sam.
CanCan, an ex-dancer and tin miner, played by Marie.
Gwedolene, an ale-brewer, sometimes accompanied by Victor, a drunken porter-mouse, played by Kate.
Odette Snow, a foreign mouse and dam builder, played by Alai MacErc.
Ambrose, a scrawny wireworker, singed with electrical burns, played by Peter.

The mice travelled back to Magnolia's tree and handed over the berries they collected. Magnolia was grateful and welcomed them in for a retelling of their adventures over tea and buns, served by Bayleaf, who was now helping the mouse-wizard as a servant and potential apprentice. When the sticky subject of Odette and the ring came up, Odette was firm. She refused to hand over the ring, and deftly turned the conversation to a trade of some grease and the incense the mice had received from the golden beetles. Magnolia took the offer and exchanged a choice of spell tablet for the beetles' treasures. The group agreed that a healing spell would prove most generally useful and chose a small, flat, grey pebble inscribed with magic runes, which Magnolia assured them would

[1] I make no apologies.
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Red_Dots
[3] Vadim Rusakov et al, Little red dots as young supermassive black holes in dense ionized cocoons
[4] https://www.theguardian.com/science/2026/aug/12/astronomy-discovery-new-cosmic-object-black-hole-star

promptly heal injuries when the magic within was released.

No closer to resolving the matter of the ring, the mice thanked their host and Bayleaf before making the journey back to Oak Home.

Back home among the oaks, the mice went about their regular tasks, brewing beer, delivering messages, and in Ambrose's case, constructing a test prototype of a clockwork beetle. Inspired by the golden beetles of the thicket and conversations with Magnolia, the mechanically minded mouse realised he needed stronger materials, particularly for the spring that drove the action of the automaton.

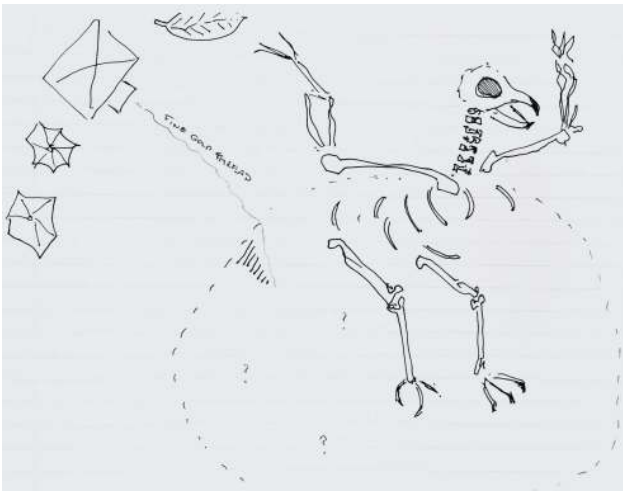
The adventurers did not have long to settle back into their everyday routines before word came from village elder, Burdock Pipp, that he needed help finding his missing niece, Fennel Seedmouse. When asked, he said, "she's been consorting with that mouse from away, Norbury Blue. That fellow you brought back from Riverside has been making eyes at Fennel and now she's missing!"

The group thought it unlikely that the diffident scholar-mouse, Norbury, would have kidnapped Fennel, and some muttered that mouse elopements were pretty old-fashioned. Nonetheless, they volunteered to investigate the missing pair of Fennel and Norbury, and bring them home promptly.

With a little prodding of Burdock, he admitted that Fennel Seedmouse was an intensely curious young mouse and this was not the first time she had got herself into trouble.

The last news of the couple Burdock received was that they were seen at Stumpville, so the mice gathered the necessary supplies and set off towards the cheese-makers' village. Sky and Miss Clutterbuck flew on ahead to scout around Stumpville while the others made for the village to ask after the straying couple.

Carried on sparrow's wings Sky headed west from Stumpville and before long spied a clearing in the woods below. She was startled to see the grisly form of an owl skeleton, half submerged in a murky pool.



My sketch map of the Black Owl Grove

Nearby stood several mouse-tents, and a pair of lean-looking mice awkwardly poured some sort of stew into the pool from a pot. A fine gold thread glinted in the grass between the pool and the largest of the tents.

Sky gingerly landed on the far side of the pool and called out a greeting. The stew-pot mice dropped their pot and grabbed spears in a hurry, before they hurled them at Sky and Miss Clutterbuck.

The sparrow-rider made a hasty retreat and disappeared into the forest canopy, and muttered, "stupid, stupid mouse creatures."[5] From her new hiding place she watched as the stew-pot mice were joined by another. They prepared a meal together and brought the food to the biggest of the tents.

At Stumpville, the others asked after Fennel and Norbury. Gwen learned from Gumble Guardmouse that the missing pair had definitely been through Stumpville, stayed one night and then set out west into the woods.

Overnight, Ambrose and Sky worked on some electrical project Ambrose promised would help with the rescue. The others discussed plans for sneaking into the camp in the Black Owl Grove,

[5] A reference to Jeff Smith's *Bone* comics' "stupid, stupid, rat creatures." A phrase Sam and I have call to use all too often.

and Odette suggests damming the stream that feeds the pond at the centre of the camp.

In the morning the mice set off into the woods. Gwen and Odette in search of the stream with Sky in overflight to provide reconnaissance, while CanCan and Ambrose snuck closer to the camp to spy on the strange mice.

CanCan talked herself into further investigation and crept through the undergrowth to approach the big tent from behind. With sharp teeth and quiet paws, she nibbled a hole in the woven leaf fabric and peeked inside.

She spied several of the strange mice, who chanted in low tones. In the centre of the tent, tied to a barrel were the two missing mice, Norbury & Fennel. Neither appeared injured, but were clearly terrified by their predicament. CanCan silently rejoined Ambrose. Together they followed the stream back to meet up with Gwen and Odette. Sky perched on a nearby tree as Miss Clutterbuck circled above, watching over the gathering.

Cancan was worried that Norbury and Fennel might be sacrificed soon and pressed for action without delay. Odette had made a good start on the dam but admitted it would take more time before the flow slowed sufficiently to impact the pool and whatever lurks within. Ambrose, unsurprisingly, voted to shock the monster in the pool. Sky grabbed some flowers blooming nearby and tossed them into the stream that ran to the pool[6]. "Chuck enough of them in, and the odd mice will send someone to investigate, maybe more. Less opposition at the camp when we rescue Fennel and Norbury."

CanCan and Gwen took the initiative and headed along the bank to the grove, while Ambrose stayed back and set up trip wires on the path, to delay pursuit should they need to escape back along the stream.

Gwen used her invisibility spell from the spell tablet she retrieved from the Temple of the Moon, and snuck into the big tent. CanCan and Sky provided a distraction, raising a hue and cry from the far side of the pool, which drew guards away from the tent. Gwen cut the prisoners' ropes and whispered for silence as they slipped out the back of the tent, enlarging the hole made earlier by CanCan.

At the pool, CanCan and Sky's racket worked perhaps too well as half-a-dozen angry mice ran towards them. Both were horrified as one of the attackers strayed too close to the edge of the pool and was snatched up in a monstrous pincer. A huge, blotchy crayfish broke the water's surface and dragged the unfortunate victim into the murky water. CanCan and Sky decided that Gwen had had enough time, thank you very much, and made haste to flee, pursued by angry mouse cultists.

Racing along the path back towards Ambrose and Odette, they remembered Ambrose's warnings and avoided the wire trap he had marked with a flash on a nearby tree. The first of the pursuing mice was not so lucky and tripped, fell and was zapped with a powerful electric shock. The two mice from Oak Home left the trail and disappeared into the undergrowth. Ambrose stepped out of his hiding place and retrieved his precious battery, then gave chase after his companions.

Elsewhere in the woods, Gwen, still invisible, led the confused rescuees away from the grove. At a division in the path, she sent them on and stayed behind to cover their tracks, while laying a false trail of her own. She was rewarded when two spear-carrying mice charged up the path and stopped to check for tracks, before quickly following her fake trail.

Odette welcomed Norbury and Fennel when they stumbled upon the half-finished dam and the busy white mouse. She was a little miffed[7] that the rescue went off so effectively. "The dam would have worked a treat, I bet!"

Soon all but Gwen were assembled, and made quick time towards the edge of the woods. Gwen managed to get turned around, but eventually

[6] Camelias, as Sam described, in a deliberate echo to Kurosawa's *Sanjuro.*

[7] Sometimes a player gets an idea into their head that try as I might I don't manage to merge with the action effectively. My fault, and Odette did lose spotlight time as a consequence.

spotted Miss Clutterbuck flying a search pattern and got her bearings back.

The seven mice and one sparrow set out to march back to Stumpville at a fast pace as Odette and Ambrose argued about dams, electricity and the relative benefits of both.

"You know," Sky told Fennel as they hurried along, "if you're interested in adventures and strange sights, you should visit Boulderface, the talking rock by the waterfall. He's bound to have plenty of stories and always relishes visitors." Fennel agreed that a friendly rock might make a better destination than Black Owl Grove.

Kriegsmesser – Landau Before the War

Continuing the write-up of the campaign of *Kriegsmesser* set in the German city of Landau in the summer of 1617 shortly before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. The characters were:

Jaroslav Furtwängler, starving artist with an ear for gossip (Alex)
Franzis Corbolini, Irish mercenary soldier masquerading as a man (Kate)
Alfonzo Meemo, pragmatic graverobber (Marie)
Lazaro Alamano, carriage driver and would-be duelist (Pete)
Udo von Liechtenstein, initiate and scholar also masquerading as a man (Sam)

Session 18 (2023-03-30)

Jaroslav makes some sketches of the waterlogged graveyard for his ongoing apocalyptic masterpiece while Alfonzo offers to help rebury the bodies unearthed by the flooding underground river. As he does so he takes a closer look at the grave with freshly turned earth and decides that the scatter of earth suggests it was not shovelled out so much as pushed up from below. He then spots a braided leather bracelet with white and pink seashells woven into it. Franzis recognizes the seashells as from southern Italy. Alfonzo wonders if it belonged to the dead man, Morten Baukunth, who died a short while ago after returning to the village of Hammbelhass after many years' absence.

Udo leaves the graveyard and walks to Mother Sarah's house to call on the wise woman and inform her of the impending chaos from the oncoming frenzied religious mob. Udo and Sarah talk for a while and agree on the plague flags plan. Mother Sarah starts organising the women of the village to gather the most vulnerable and move them out of the village to hide in the woods, while the rest start work on plague banners, under the helpful eye of Jaroslav, who readily gives painting advice.

Udo and Alfonzo then head south from Hammbelhass to the house of Stephen Bestwilling, scholar and borrower of overdue library books. They arrive at the tumbledown manor house and are welcomed in by Steadfast the manservant. After a long wait, Bestwilling shows up and listens to Udo's request from the university librarian to return the missing volumes and in so doing avoid the arrival of the mob. Udo doesn't make much headway with the irritatingly vague scholar, but Alfonzo does manage to persuade Steadfast of the danger, who promises to decamp with Bestwilling and the cook as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Lazaro and Franzis secure two horses to ride west from Hammbelhass and scout for evidence of the mob. Lazaro takes the opportunity to give Franzis some riding tips, in hopes of Franzis returning the favour with some lessons in the sword. After a few hours' ride, the two spy a column of smoke in the distance and make for the top of a nearby hill to gather intelligence.

From their vantage point they see a hamlet or village some miles off. Several of the houses are alight, and they can just about make out milling figures carrying torches, gleefully dashing from house to house. It is hard to pin down numbers but it is clear that dozens if not hundreds of frenzied zealots are burning the village to the ground. The two riders quickly turn back towards Hammbelhass with their distressing news. In their hurry, Lazaro's horse comes up lame, and Franzis forges on, leaving the

coachman to treat his horse and make the best speed he can back to Hammbelhass.

Session 19 (2023-04-06)

In Hammbelhass, the faithful manservant Steadfast encourages his master Bestwilling to pack and prepares to leave the manor house. In the village, Franzis is hard at work organising the villagers to build barricades on the road from the west. Alfonzo makes a careful selection of remains from the church 'graveyard overflow' box and uses them to decorate a hastily dug fake mass grave on the western approach to the town. This causes some argument between Franzis and Alfonzo and accusations of sacrilegious behaviour from the soldier to the gravedigger. "I've been called worse," replies Alfonzo.

In the streets of the village, Lazaro arranges some tipped over carts with spilled contents artfully scattered to suggest sudden abandonment. Udo practises the nine tailors at the church to ring masses for the dead, and tends to the ailing Father Gross betimes.

Later, Franzis and Lazaro head into the forest, escorting women and children to a wood cutter's hut hidden away in the green depths. At the foresters' hut one of the mothers is looking for a missing child, a boy of about 9 years old called Jack. With Puzzle the gazehound and the boy's playmate, William, in tow, Lazaro and Franzis march into the woods in the growing darkness.

As the sun sets, Udo rings one more set of Nine Tailors for the dead, hoping that the approaching mob are scared away by the threat of disease and death. He is startled to find a distracted dove fluttering about the belfry and takes it for a divine sign before noticing a small roll of paper attached to its leg.

He reads the message, or tries to. It is written in Spanish and addressed to one Vogelhut Knipperdolling[8]. Knipperdoling's reply is appended to the scrap, and is written in good old German, which tells Udo that the head of the mob is certainly in the pay of the Spanish and the dove was intended to reach Landau two or three days ago. God has smiled on Landau's inhabitants and delayed the aerial messenger so that Udo can raise a manhunt for the villain behind the city walls. He sends a young runner off for the city immediately, with the message and the dove in a basket and instructions to wake Captain Sforbeck no matter the time he arrives.

Jaroslav takes up a post in the church tower as the night draws its sombre cloak about Hammbelhass. He notes with unease several spots of light in the west. Burning farmhouses no more than 3 or 4 miles distant. It won't be long before the deception of the plague on Hammbelhass will be put to the test.

In the woods, William and Puzzle lead Franzis and Lazaro to a cave on the side of a hill that spirals down into inky darkness. William calls out for his missing friend and receives a faint brief reply before Jack's voice is cut off. Franzis tells William to wait outside the cave up a tree. The two men and the dog then enter the cave, shadows playing across the walls as the path slopes downwards into the earth. Ducking to avoid the low roof of the cave, Lazaro notes a painted sign on the rock face. Three vertical lines of red, with a thick barred line across them. Puzzle growls softly as a slaughterhouse stench rises from the depths of the cave.

Session 20 (2023-04-06)

That night, Jaroslav spies torch-carrying figures approaching Hammbelhass. Under a sullen moon Jaroslav and Alfonso quietly pick their way through the barricades and, sticking to the shadows of the hedgerows, approach the newcomers to learn more.

In the dark, the painter and the grave-digger get separated, and Alfonso is spotted by one of the torch-wielding thugs, who cries out for his companion. Alfonso promptly shimmies up a tree by the road. The thugs split and approach cautiously from either side. Neither villain notices Jaroslav creeping closer in the shadows.

Alfonso is not without his resources and hurls a rock to strike one of the accosting thugs. "I've more where that came from!" he calls out. "So

[8] One of the names provided in the core rules for a prophet and cult leader. I thought it so ridiculous I had to use it in the game.

have we!" replies the thug still on the road, as he stoops, picks up a rock and returns fire. Alfonso may regret his choice of perch as the rock strikes home against his left arm. Pain blossoms, but the wiry man holds firmly to the tree.

Close to the village, Udo raises an alarm and several villagers sortie from Hammbelhass, shouting and cursing the thugs' parentage.

Jaroslav takes advantage of the distraction and jumps on the nearest opponent. The two trade blows, but Jaroslav is more comfortable in a tavern brawl than a desperate fight in the shadows and receives a solid blow to the jaw.

Suddenly the painter's opponent crumples, as Alfonso appears behind him, his crowbar shining black with blood in the moonlight.

"The other fellow fled at the sound of the crowd from the village. Lucky my fighting arm wasn't hit by that rock."

Back at the cave in the woods, Franzis and Lazaro descend slowly into the cave, handkerchiefs tied about their faces against the oppressive smell. Ahead they hear the sound of metal striking stone. Lazaro's dog, Puzzle, whines but follows the men as they push forward into the darkness.

The meagre light from Lazaro's lantern saves them from a nasty fall as they come to a sudden drop, eight feet or more. A rope ladder lets them descend though the dog is unsure about the process. Puzzle submits to an undignified carry draped on Lazaro's shoulders as he slowly climbs down the ladder.

From deeper in the cave, footsteps approach and the two men and dog hide in a side passage, long mined out but just large enough to remain unseen. Lantern shuttered, only the guttering torch of the man passing their hiding place throws enough light to see his gaunt, haunted expression. He mounts the ladder and ascends.

A quick decision is made. Franzis, with the lantern, heads deeper into the tunnels as Lazaro and Puzzle pursue the odd-looking man.

The fellow has not gone far and turns on Lazaro as he rounds a bend in the tunnel. They fight, with fist and dagger, in the clasp of darkness as the man's torch fails. Both men are hurt, but Puzzle bites at the man attacking his master. This is distraction enough for Lazaro to down the fellow with a nasty blow to his leg. The coachman scuttles back from the fallen man, panting, his back pressed against the uneven rock of the tunnel wall.

Below, Franzis calls out and is rewarded with an answer from Jack. The soldier presses on and finds the lad in a pit at the end of a side tunnel. As he clambers down to help the boy out, he lays his hand on something tucked into a crevice. Franzis draws out a looped cross, fashioned of silver, but dirtied from its hiding place. He tucks it into his jerkin and helps the boy up out of the pit.

Soon after, Franzis finds the exhausted Lazaro and his fallen foe. He quickly ties up the man and tends to Lazaro's injuries[9].

It is well past the moon set by the time Franzis and Lazaro can get away from Jack's grateful mother and back to Hammbelhass. "I wonder if that boy's ear will ever be the same again?" asks Lazaro. "She has a good strong grip, true enough," replied Franzis.

Rejoining their companions, all share their respective night's excursions. They tend to their wounds, and lock up the captive thug felled by Alfonso with the strange man from the cave.

Udo and Jaroslav examine the curious silver cross Franzis retrieved but it is Lazaro who, despite his concussion, recalls seeing something similar in Ferber's lab, with the body of his sergeant friend that was stolen from Alfonso's graveyard[10].

Udo then tends to the unconscious man from the cave and the injured thug from the road. Perhaps the Divine moves his hands, as both men make remarkable recoveries and are soon able to talk.

[9] "Another concussion? Let's not tell Udo, he'll only stop me drinking."
[10] See write-up in Twisting the Rope #7.

Comments on E&A #14

General: As a follow-up to the "People Make Games" YouTube documentary I described in Twisting the Rope #13, I recently enjoyed this video by Wightstarminis[11] about making a deck of hobby game art prompt cards, https://youtu.be/CUxIRnHvkxs, which was inspired by the deck of rules and prompts Jerry Gretzinger uses in the creation of his imagined world art project. I must see if I can cross the streams of Jerry's Deck and the *Everway* Fortune Deck as a personal craft project.

Roger BW: Re Bayern write-up: Anyone who missed the mention of nuclear scuttling charge in their briefing was not paying sufficient attention and likely missed other things. Keep them away from critical systems.

Nice to see the Kzinti lesson put to good effect in the approach to the *George Bauer.* Did I miss a description of the aliens previously? What do they look like?

RYCT Gabriel Roark on item identification flowcharts: I think *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* was their first appearance but they ended up front and centre in *Gamma World* for PCs trying to figure out Ancients' technology. I want to say there was something similar in *Aftermath* from FGU, but I may be misremembering the 2-page flowchart for combat described in withering terms on the Wikipedia page[12] for the game.

Patrick Brady: Thank you for your thoughtful observations on AI and its critical failures. As a child of the 70's and 80's who grew up under the nuclear shadow, the stories of Stanislav Petrov[13] and Vasily Arkhipov[14] remind me how important it is to have somebody in the "kill-chain" who can speak up and call a halt to madness, especially madness stamped with "approved by AI." The next addition to Wikipedia's article "Nuclear close calls" could be horribly final.

I remember James Wallis's Abbeville Road flat too, having kipped there once or twice in the 90's. I am still annoyed that Bugtown never got published. Curiously Sanguine Games published a SF game called *Myriad Song* with a bunch of Matt Howarth's art in the form of a comic strip called "The Golden Chord" interspersed across the rule book. It's more in the vein of the *Keif Llama: Xeno-Tech* stories but reading it made me think of Bugtown and missed opportunities. Sanguine Games also published *Farflung*, the far-future SF game that confused Avram Grumer, myself and others.

Dylan Capel: I echo your frazzled sentiments about the recent heat waves. Irish housing stock suffers the same insulation and lack of AC as the UK.

RYCT Patrick Riley re London water: I remember spending a summer in London during my college years and finding the heat and dustiness of the city difficult to handle. The water tasted unpleasant to me, but freezing partially filled bottles of tap water gave me both cooling drinks and icy water that quelled the taste.

Re the new *Tunnels & Trolls*: One of my players has trouble adding up numbers quickly so I guess that the new mechanics move away from the large dice pools the earlier *T&T* had in combat. I still think it's just slapping the *Tunnels & Trolls* name on a new game.

Timothy Collinson: I liked your list of press conference questions. They would equally suit a post-incident inquiry, and reminded me of the film, *Sully*, and the scenes in the inquiry into the Airbus A320 emergency landing on the Hudson and the decisions leading up to that landing[15]. The more probing questions and fishing attempts also remind me of the aftermath of the Titanic disaster.

Re *Traveller*'s Hivers: I have long been interested in the Hivers, and remember enjoying the *Traveller Alien Module 7: Hivers* when I read it in the 80's. It's my favourite of the series of alien books for Classic *Traveller.* The influence of Niven's Puppeteers is clear, as is perhaps the psychohistory of Asimov's Hari Seldon, but the authors, J. Andrew Keith, Marc W. Miller, and Loren Wiseman, do an excellent job of making

[11] https://www.youtube.com/@wightstarminis
[12] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aftermath!
[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanislav_Petrov
[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasily_Arkhipov

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sully_(film)

the Hivers unique and distinct from their inspiration.

RYCT Roger BW: It looks like *Mindjammer* is getting a new edition from Mindjammer Press, released through Modiphius Entertainment[16]. I hope it does well. I'd like to see more transhumanist far future SF in the RPG space.

Re Nomic: Douglas Hofstadter had his 15 minutes of fame in my circle of friends in college in the 80's and Nomic popped up for a while when we stumbled on it in *Metamagical Themas.* Andrew Looney's *Fluxx* captures something of the feel in a more constrained design space.

Re rubber/eraser confusions: Two nations separated by a common language, obviously. It puts Jack Nicholson in a different light in "The Shining" with the line, "Here's Johnny!"

Re your appreciation of the cover of *E&A* #12: I loved it too, and must add my appreciation to the great run of cover artists and the selections so far.

Michael Cule: The premise of your Warehouse 23 game sounds brilliant. I love S John Ross's book for *GURPS* and ran my own knock-off many years ago. All I remember now is John Lennon's mummified penis featured somehow.

Re Hivers in the *Traveller* universe: Yes! The emphasis on naval power for force projection and client species for ground warfare felt inspired by Niven's Puppeteers, while believably grounded in the fictional evolutionary history of the Hivers. The concept of Manipulation was psychohistory with an Illuminati twist.

Bryant Durrell: Welcome aboard!

I sympathise with your feelings on the work required for the traditional GM's role. For the last few years one of my regular players has hosted our sessions and it does help with some of the load. I have one player who is pretty good at proactive play, and driving sessions by pursuing goals etc. Many of the others in the group are more tentative, and often want a plot hook dangled good and close to get started.

Intraparty conflict doesn't go down well with this group, but my *Amber Diceless* group back as a post-grad leaned into it. Even then most of the player characters were more cooperative than competitive, which only made the really sneaky ones more keen to pull the strings.

Thanks for the Physical Game Jams link and the site behind it. I suspect it will be useful in my future.

Erica Frank (Elf): Games with fire is the more immediately compelling choice to me. I agree with your 4 major types of solo rpg but games with fire is an unusual topic and if you have 50+ such games collected, that's about 49 more than I've heard about.

Re impenetrable walls and teleport with others as expensive powers in Superhero RPG: Expensive in *Champions* and *Mutants & Masterminds* perhaps, just another trait or power in *Truth and Justice*, *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*, and *The Super Crew*, for example. *Over the Edge*, *Questworlds*, *Fate* or *Risus* can all accommodate those character concepts and more too. Brian Rogers ran Play-by-Post games of *Villains & Vigilantes* and of TSR's old classic *Marvel Super Heroes Roleplaying Game* that felt to me, at least, highly in-genre and superheroic even though they were built on arguably creaky early 1980's mechanics.

I do take your very valid point that players will be far more devious and clever with a character's superpowers, even (or especially) minor ones, and that can lead to a split between the actual play and genre emulation. Again, having a group that respects the source material and knows and wants to play in the genre helps here.

Re professional GMs and reviews of the same: Online reviews have become really unreliable for me across all sorts of goods and services, so I don't know if reviews of paid GMs would be any less a minefield of puff-pieces, fake reviews or paid promotion.

Avram Grumer: I have a copy of Viditya Voletti's *Space Between Stars* from an itch.io bundle. I must take a closer look at it. *A Land Once Magic* looks interesting too, and the artwork is delicious.

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16 https://modiphius.net/blogs/press-releases-archived/modiphius-entertainment-announces-mindjammer-the-roleplaying-game-from-mindjammer-press

Re Fractal Rules: I love *Risus* and would like to play more *Fate*, and with both games, I like the option to resolve everything with a single roll, a series of rolls, or a full blown tactical-style scene. Robin Law's *Hero Wars*/*HeroQuest*/*QuestWorlds* mechanics allow a similar approach, and most of the Powered by the Apocalypse rulesets can be used in the same way, even if the moves may be more specific in their application.

All of these games benefit from a strong, up-front setting of stakes. If a single roll can determine a big outcome, players should know from the start what's at stake.

I agree with you in your comment to Matt Stevens that rule-light(er) games are easier to make work with this zoom-in/zoom-out scale.

RYCT Matt Stevens re Marxist sff writers: Ken MacLeod is another definite Marxist, I'd say. Ian McDonald is a probable too. It's perhaps not a surprise that I can think of more leftist UK SF writers than US ones.

Joshua Kronengold: I'm delighted to hear your job hunt was successful. I hope you find your new position interesting and rewarding, and your new work colleagues welcoming.

I agree with you that Clinton Nixon's *The Shadow of Yesterday* pioneered disadvantages that paid off when they came up in play instead of front loading as in most point-buy systems. I think Cam Banks must have read TSoY too, as the Milestones mechanics are very much in the same vein, including the turn-in/buy-off mechanic.

Re comic book superheroes emulation and genre buy-in: True. As you say, almost no rules will work if the players actively play against the setting, or theme, or genre.

Dale Meier: Welcome aboard!

Re *Beyond the Wall* as a *Redwall*-setting: That could work nicely, I'd say.

Re *White Dwarf*/Games Workshop artists Emmanuel and John Blanche: Russ Nicholson's death in 2023 also hurts, but at least Peter Andrew Jones (PAJ) and Ian Miller are still with us.

Brian Misiaszek: Re: shrew slaying and vole mauling: I must admit the shrews were listed as voles in my notes at first, and during play flip-flopped species. One of the benefits of a write-up is the polish one can add to events, but never believe our actual sessions are ever as coordinated and coherent as my write-ups may seem.

Re Jerry's generative deck: See my general comment above about the minis-gamer Wightstar and his generative ideas gamer-specific deck.

Your photo of Hamilton under the forest-fire smoke looks like Elon Musk's dystopian Mars settlement during a dust storm. I hope you're getting cleaner air now.

Lisa Padol: Re 7th *Sea* pay for disadvantages approach: I think the *Fate* aspect invoke or pay to avoid approach appeals to me more.

Re a Bugtown rpg: It's not my story to tell, but read the description at archive.org from James's old blog[17]for the dirty laundry. It came up on the Ludonarrative Dissidents Discord at one point, and I think Bugtown was mentioned in passing on one of their season 3 live shows[18].

Re the player with the broken hip: See my comment to John Redden below. I'm afraid if he carries on neglecting his recovery he will have done himself lasting harm, and his gaming friends aren't keen to deliver groceries etc. indefinitely.

Re Teresa Nielsen Hayden's four types of cryptanalysis: There really is an XKCD for (almost) everything: https://xkcd.com/538/ nails rubber hose cryptanalysis precisely.

<Grin> at the PC attempting to stomp on a 6' ant. Sometimes a GM gets lazy with description, but at least as often, players jump to the action without listening to the full description.

John Redden: Re my regular player's broken hip: I'm afraid he's not doing a great job of keeping up his physiotherapy appointments, nor the prescribed exercises. He's stubborn as anyone I've ever met, unfortunately, and won't be told.

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17 https://web.archive.org/web/20160527175220/http://www.whatisfrup.com/?p=10

18 https://www.ludonarrativedissidents.com/season-3/

Patrick Riley: Wow, *Outgunned Superheroes* sounds very derivative, even in the limited space of superheroic RPGs, which are often pretty derivative in their character designs.

I love the *Stardew Valley*-like portraits for the characters in Aurora Cove. The secret behind the town and the inciting events triggered by the arrival of Magnetrix feel like a powder keg waiting for a lit match. Did you have a plan for what would happen if Hive Mind escaped its confinement?

Gabriel Roark: I'm not much of a Swifty, and had to look up the track to make the connection. In the process, though, I thought of James Taylor Swift, a future monstrosity made by a mad scientist in the 22nd Century from James Taylor's DNA and the cryogenically preserved body of Taylor Swift. With legions of crazed fans and bitter-sweet ballads that warp the mind, JTS is a monster that must be stopped.

Brian Rogers: I'm glad to hear that whatever family craziness(es) you have been weathering have been settled. It's just exhausting sometimes. The library administrator sounds like "a proper dose," to use an Irish phrase meaning (interchangeably) a pain in the arse, someone who sticks their nose in, and generally an unbearable ass. I hope you and the kids get to play games without this cretin ruining it.

Poor Conrad's nose. I love the ingenuity of Eldon's player with the double dose of potions. What a cool moment!

Another excellent Regrettable, Brian. Properly more a funnyman than the Astro City Jack in the Box character, it's fascinating to see the fourth wall being broken in comics so early. There really is nothing new under the sun.

I love "'overconfident, vainglorious blowhard' but that's just a longer way to write 'player character'." Sing it, brother!

Re the consort, George, in *Mausritter*: It's little things like the broken glasses and regretful George that I really enjoy as a gamemaster, even if sometimes it's only really for myself. I appreciate it when a fellow GM gives me the nod of recognition.

RYCT Brian Misiaszek on a common understanding of genre rules in a writers' room or at a gaming table: Indeed, and also in superhero comics, I find. If a new writer picks up beloved mutants (say) and proceeds with a character assassination hatchet job (I'm looking at you, Brian Bendis) the outcome is less satisfactory.

Thanks for the recommendation of the James Cambias *Billion Worlds* novels. I've since read the first two and really enjoyed them.

Matt Stevens: Re competitive slapping in *Pirates & Plunder*: Add a large fish and folk dancing and you're most of the way to Monty Python's Fish-Slapping Dance.

Re *The Realm of Yolmi*: I imagine there was a fine line between smoking enough dope to come up with the weird and wacky monsters and too much dope to ever hope to publish anything.

Re the Phil Foglio cartoons: I want a shaving mirror for a hat.

Jim Vassilakos: Re George the consort: As I said in my comment to Brian Rogers above, I love that this little off-the-cuff element I threw in caught the eye of some of the GMs reading my 'zine. Thank you for calling it out.

I'm not sure if I have any explicit techniques I call on, but I do find working back from a particular goal (establishing the beetles' need for glass as a potential opening for trade between mice and beetles) to an image that amuses me (crestfallen beetle George) works well. In this particular example I think I channelled a little P. G. Wodehouse when setting up the Queen's court.

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Attacks of Opportunity

Issue 14, Dylan Capel

It has been another hot month and again the heat has led to having questionable motivation for anything that isn't happening in air-conditioned circumstances. The heat and drought in southern England has been going on for so long now that I'm not sure what I will do if normal changeable British weather ever returns to us.

Apart from savannah yellow parks the other thing that is noticeable is that soil is baked and hard, when it does rain it is just going to run off rather than be absorbed so that our next worry might be floods.

Reading

I went a bit mad in DriveThru's Christmas in July sale and picked up a mix of old and new. In the old I picked up Carl Sargent's *Greyhawk: From the Ashes* work and I'm looking forward to re-reading it.

In the new I am particularly looking forward to reading *Uleria Loves You* which I hope is going to lean into the romance as it brings a summer festival in Apple Lane to life. I kind of regret not getting a print copy of this one as the cover artwork is amazing.

I also enjoyed *Torchbound* 3 a zine that has the kind of historical perspective that I enjoy hopefully without being too nostalgic or reverential. It deep dives into topics like the first dungeons published or the pulp adventure games. One interesting point I read was that the dungeon format (map and keyed rooms) was already mature when it was first published and hasn't changed a lot since.

Warhammer: The Old World rather underwhelmed me, I was interested in whether they were going to strip back the system but it is still quite complicated while ditching the percentiles for a system that is a bit reminiscent of the *Storyteller System* in a way. Instead I re-read *Fleaux!* and felt that actually it is possible to have a simple short system with a lot of gothic fantasy flavour. A lot of the *Old World* should be flavour and colour rather than mechanics.

I have also downloaded the *Dungeon World* 2 Beta, the original was an odd beast that I initially enjoyed but then realised that it was more the people running the game rather than the system I was enjoying. I'm hoping that all game design improvements that have come along since will focus the game on what I thought made it fun and loses some of the need to feel familiar to *Dungeons & Dragons* players.

Playing

I haven't been doing as much gaming this month due to the holiday period breaking up people's schedules and again my desire for venues more suitable than hot basements.

I did get to play a session of *Fatherfog*, the new game from the people behind *Mothership*. Some of the mechanics already felt better than *Mothership*. For example instead of Stress that increases during the game for example you have *Hope* that slowly erodes. It just feels better as a mechanic.

I also reconnected with the *24xx* system with a session of the *Dark Sun* flavoured *Dying Sun*. I also picked up a few *Dark Sun* books in the sale but playing outside the canon with a lighter system was a lot more fun.

London's one day convention scene remains strong and I think there may be events organised all the way into Christmas now.

Mechanics

I was re-reading *Swyvers* this month and the magic system piqued my interest again. It is based on a deck of cards that is shuffled at the start of each game day. When a character casts a spell they get to draw two cards and need to get above 17 to cast the spell, 21 exactly is an enhanced effect, anything over 21 is a miscast with the potential for wild effects.

The bit I find intriguing is that each round after casting begins the player can choose to draw a new card or stick and take the consequences. It literally makes extended casting a gamble and feels much more interesting that taking a prepare action or allocating points each round.

I've wondered whether stepping up a casting die would be equally interesting.

As a single deck is used and discards are visible the player also has a sense of when they are likely to be successful in getting close to twenty-one and when the flow of magic has is dimmed or become too unpredictable. It is a bit similar to the Winds of Magic concept in *Warhammer* but with a lot more character.

In *Fatherfog* your character has a legacy artefact, this a potentially powerful and definitely strange object that you roll for when you create your first character. The item is linked to the player however and if your character dies, your new character will find that the item has come to them. It is an interesting way to provide continuity in a potentially high-character death game and I think it is arguable that as a result the game is the story of several items travelling through the world together in the company of a changing cast of owners. Despite that it has been interesting in previous high-death games that sometimes equipment that has been passed between different characters has had more sentiment value and back story than new PCs.

Experience bubbles from the *Prismatic Wisdom* book based on the blog posts are a low-record keeping emulation of old-school level progression. You have four experience bubbles and when all are filled in you go up a level. At the end of the session you roll a d4, d6, d8 and d10 and if any die has a value higher than your current level then you fill in a bubble.

I hate having to do accounting for equipment, gold and experience points in fantasy games. The granularity grates at me because I'm really a storygamer at heart. I generally enjoy all the "bubble" mechanics, this one I had to read twice before I really understood how it worked and I think it would be something I would like to try if I have a new-school revival style campaign at some point in the future. The likelihood of rising rapidly at first and then spending longer in the mid-levels feels right and I think correctly emulates the feel of how those granular XP systems work without the book keeping.

Links

- Dungeon World 2 Beta: https://www.dungeon-world.com/welcome-to-beta/
- Experience bubbles: https://www.prismaticwasteland.com/blog/the-xp-bowl-and-xp-bubbles
- Fatherfog (free PDF): https://www.tuesdayknightgames.com/products/fatherfog0e?variant=43186386993241
- Swyvers: https://melsonian-arts-council.itch.io/swyvers

Comments

Timothy Collinson

I also found that the best thing so far for taking annotations and reviewing them is one of my Amazon Kindles. Frustratingly though it doesn't sync the annotations with the web version of the reader.

I hope one day the open source hardware movement will liberate us from companies that create "ecosystems".

Next issue I will be trying a new system and I hope to write it up next month if it works.

Yoon Suin is good material, I don't think you'd be disappointed in it but it is one of those experiences where the presentation is throwing up a lot of obstacles to enjoyment.

Roger BW

I was quite excited when you mentioned Evince because I too do use Linux. Having installed it though it turns out it is the same application as the default Ubuntu one. I can annotate but I cannot get my highlighting to persist for some reason.

Tasty looking sausage picture.

Good point about the way that the level play in *D&D* was linked to wilderness and stronghold (followed by the quest for immortality!). The coloured D&D box sets were probably the most explicit manifestation of this in my mind. Those scopes differentiate play far more than powerful monsters and different combat strategies do.

Patrick Riley

It *is* hard to differentiate mainstream and alternative culture, most of us can shrug and say "it's tricky" but academics have dig in and try and identify and bound the concept in a consistent way. They are obliged by the task they have accepted to try and describe that spectrum and what it consists of.

Generally I think bring alternative ideas to mainstream play is subversion, you accept the precepts of the mainstream concepts but bring them into question through alternate framings and ambiguous action. In alternative or indie gaming you reject the expectations and base assumptions of the mainstream.

I very much agree with the idea that varying the stakes gives a sense of dynamism. There's also an alignment with the concept of power and responsibility. The more power you have then the more scrutiny there is of how you use it. It something the last *Superman* and *Supergirl* films have explored in a way I found entertaining.

I also thought a lot about what you wrote that fighting a goblin and a dragon should feel different. I think I agree but I wonder if the difference is really about the character's relative power level or an emphasis of distinctive monsters with distinctive risks.

Mork Borg goblins are cursed transformed humans and if they look at you the curse falls on you too unless you can slay the goblin that has seen you. They are much closer to mythological goblins than either Tolkien's mountain dwelling tribes or Games Workshop's sea of green dispatchables.

Gabriel Roark

Regarding the index card sketches if you lay down a card of a certain size then you set an sense of expectation as to the level of detail you are going to be describing the situation in. If it is around A6 size then you might only be drawing a few rooms or a single location with areas like a tactical map for combat (as in Free League games, *FATE* and *Electrum Archive*). An

A5 card might be a few islands, a large tactical map with cover and line of sight obstructions or a five room dungeon.

Jim Vassilakos

I know you're not really convinced by the descriptions of the way of LLMs work but if they seem human it is because they are reflecting human thoughts and words back via a biased probability mechanism. I've been working with local LLMs this month and when you're working with buggy, malfunctioning versions of the systems you definitely seen the bones on which these tools are constructed.

See also Anthropic's excuse that AIs scheme and plot bad behaviour because that is how all the fictional source material describes them so they simply parrot that back. The system tells you it doesn't like to be used as a appliance because humans want to feel valued and that is what we've written down in the source material that is ingested to create the model which is then further tuned by humans to give it certain characteristics.

Change the material and reinforcement and you'll get a model that loves to be treated as an appliance. However as a user you would probably find that answer less human and therefore the product will be less compelling to you.

Myles Corcoran

I enjoyed your tortured theatre of the mind metaphor and I have definitely experienced some of those tortured performances. Having groups of people on the same wavelength and who can quickly resynchronise to one another is perfect and closer to shared verbal storytelling. Random one-off games are definitely not the easiest place to achieve that.

Avram Grumer

For *Youth on the Borderlands* I've always assumed that there should be more "adventurers" than "monsters" but I probably need to try to get a proper game of it again so I can form a proper view. I think at the start there should be more people on cusp of falling into the dungeon than those who are already in its grip. Also in general adventuring parties outnumber bosses.

PORT OMAHA BEACON

Issue #2, Vol 1 - September 2026 - © 2026 Dale Meier - sylvrephire@gmail.com

WANTED: PLAYERS

Or, "Does anybody play something *other* than D&D?"

So, I originally wrote an article for this issue's theme and even had it placed in the layout when I briefly came to a realization. I had given voice to my frustrations, but offered up absolutely no actual answer to the question at hand ("How do you find players?"). This is what can only be described as the second run at the question with perhaps more meat and less rancid whinging about my current situation.

I have tried a number of methods to find gamers with varying measures of success. During my younger days I've been fortunate to have gaming friends who introduced me to other gamers and we would game for a while before life changes got in the way. Players and GMs came and went, as did favored systems and editions. Here is a brief overview of where I've gone and what I've done to find players.

Flyers (The Old School Option)

Flyers were originally the only way you could find other gamers. In its early years, *Dragon Magazine* had a section where you could connect with gamers from around the world; *Challenge Magazine* also featured such want ads as well during its run. Over the years, I've posted flyers online and in public. These have ranged from simple text to more elaborate designs (thanks to the mass comm degree I earned in a previous life).

Most recently, I've tried pairing my design skills for flyers with posting online (mostly via Facebook and a few forums) and in public. My most recent design, while a nice homage to my two favorite *Traveller* book covers (by Dave Deitrick), was pretty much ignored, and so I spent three fruitless weekends sitting in the gaming space of an FLGS watching some of my fellow hobby veterans play *Age of Sigmar* while a few younger gamers indulged in *Magic*.

Going Online

While there are countless discussion groups, mailing lists, and forums online, I've provided a very short list of forums and other online locations where you might find players and GMs for your table.

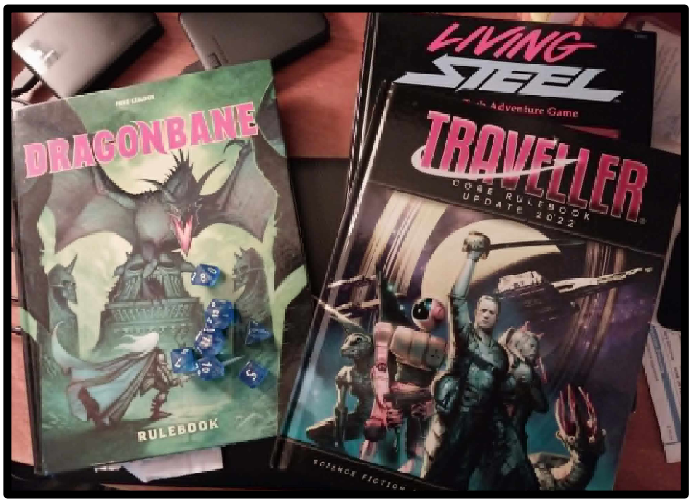


Photo © 2026 Dale Meier

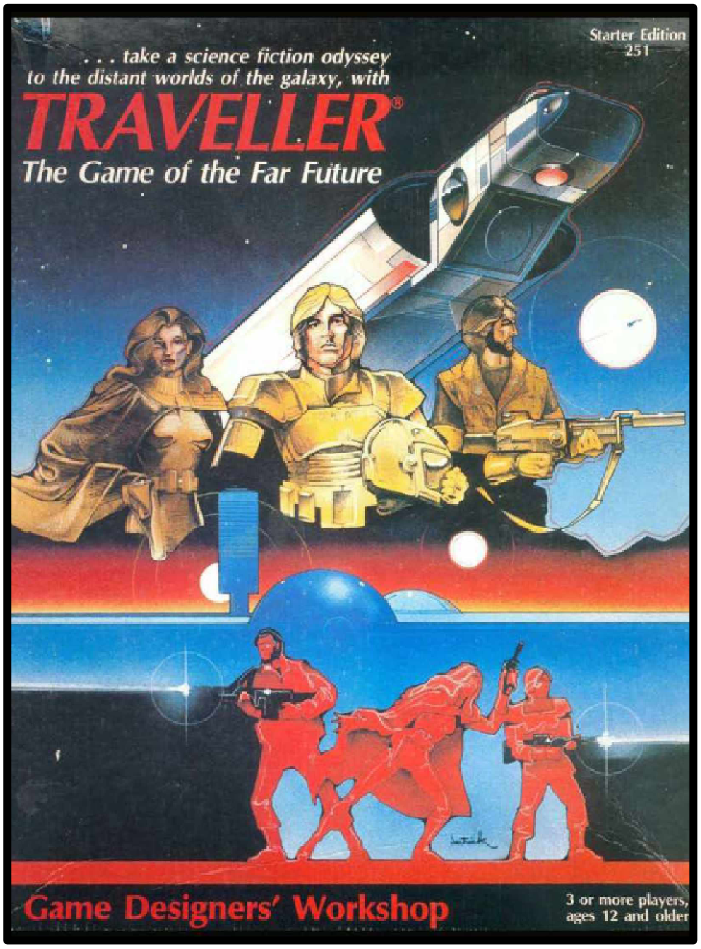
Before anyone says anything, yes, I'm aware I've conspicuously left two historic forums off the list. While I try not to frequent either place, your mileage may vary. Venture into either at your own risk.

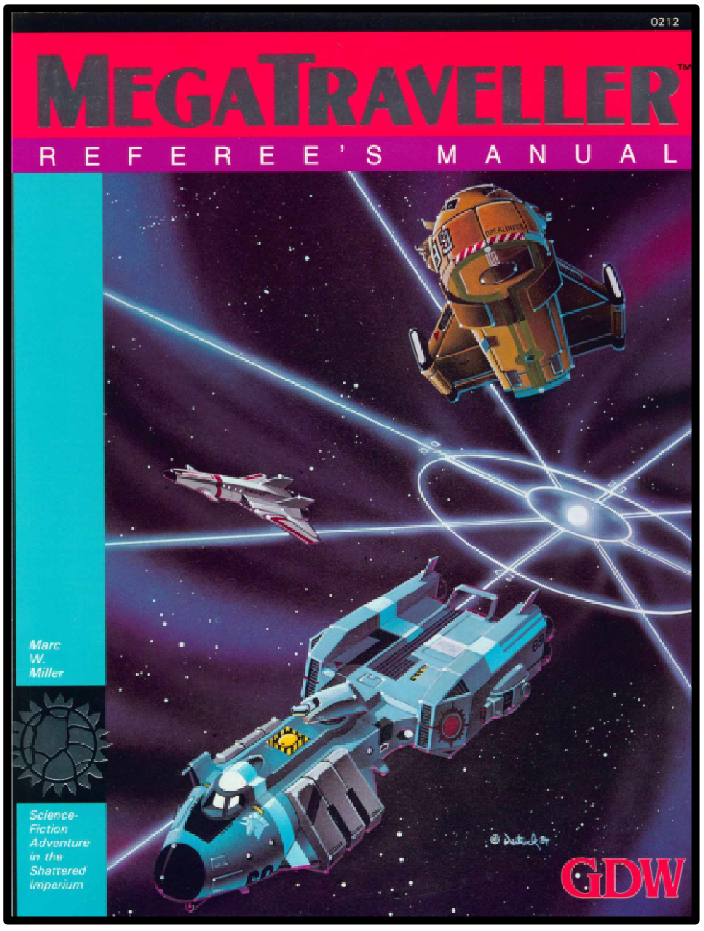
- ***Discord***
- ***Facebook***
- ***Free League Publishing*** (forum.frialigan.se/)
- ***Giants In The Playground*** (www.giantitp.com/)
- ***Modiphius*** (forums.modiphius.com/)
- ***Paizo*** (paizo.com/community/forums)
- ***Proudheart Inn*** (www.proudheartinn.com/)
- ***RPG Pub*** (www.rpgpub.com/)
- ***Unseen Servant*** (www.unseenservant.us/)
- ***Warhorn*** (warhorn.net/)

In Person – Conventions and Game Cafes

Conventions have always been one way to connect, but unless you're going to conventions constantly, it's sporadic. I've connected with a few local gamers and gamed with them, but it's been spotty at best. Scheduling and gaming style has always been hard to match up, especially at my current age. Of course, that's when I've been able to attract players to my convention games.

Omaha has a several game cafes as well as game and comic shops. While I have not had the pleasure of trying such a location, there are a couple of locations







At left: My two favorite *Traveller* covers by Dave Deitrick, inspiration for my ad design. Above: The ad in question.

on my radar. Finding such a locale that fits you and your group will undoubtedly take research. Some cafes focus strictly on one kind or a small repertoire of games while others are open to board games and RPGs alike. Additionally, some game cafes may impose table fees and reservations while others are happy so long as you buy something to help support them.

Trying to find players in this area has become an exercise in frustration and disappointment (as well as resilience and persistence, if you are overly optimistic). I do have some research on several new venues to do, but if anyone has any ideas of how to improve on my techniques, please let me know.

Postscript: After getting this story into the layout, I came across something in ELF's commentary from the July 2026 issue that rings true. Unfortunately, I think it may ring all too true for my current locale.

From Shiny Math Rocks #9 (July '26) by ELF:

"...a lot of what I see these days is adventure-conquest: You must have dungeons. You must have Big Bad Evil monsters to slay. You must have hordes of goblins/orcs/ugly-vicious-bipedal-whatevers to serve as canon fodder for the BBEs and whose sentience is limited to 'comic relief' level. These are so ubiquitous that you wind up with the creators of a Ghibli-inspired (!!!) game saying, 'As soon as you humanize the faceless monster, now, you got a huge problem. It ceases to become fantasy adventure. Keep monsters monstrous 'cause you need to have things to kill. If you keep it cinematic and cartoony, you'll have a good time killing monsters. If you start getting into simulation, where - 'what is the Howler culture? What is the nature of intelligence? And like, do they have a soul?' And like, you're done playing fantasy game and now you're into the moral nature of our world and existential stuff.'

"We have a generation of gamers who grew up with video games before they discovered TTRPGs, and 'fantasy adventure game' meant "kill the monsters and rescue the helpless princess" before it meant 'explore the lands beyond human control, which host both civilizations and dangers beyond your understanding.'

"We have a lot of gamers who literally cannot imagine how a whole session without combat would work. We have game designers who can't imagine how – or why – anyone would play a fantasy adventure game where you don't kill 'monsters' (any species not allowed as a player character), take their loot, and go looking for bigger monsters to kill.

"No wonder we have an entire faction of players who insist that game system doesn't matter because they all do the same things. They have no awareness that anyone plays RPGs, much less high-magic fantasy RPGs, with a focus that's not 'visit the dangerous place; kill the dangerous residents; save any refugees; take the treasure; repeat.'

"As far as I can sort out, the reasons they want to play D&D instead of video games are:

- *"More flexible character creation – no video game allows the full customization that you can do with pen & paper;*
- *"You get to roll the dice yourself – and you can argue about the results;*
- *"GM gets to create monster-dangers customized to the group's abilities and interests."*

Despite this insight, I'm still not sure what to do to counter the culture that Wizards and Hasbro are cultivating and promoting. Were this the 1990s or early 2000s, one could handwave this as certain games being "niche" (like *Legend of the Five Rings*) or "niche within a niche" (like *Traveller*). For a long time a lot of us within the hobby (and industry) have hoped for RPGs to go mainstream and be looked upon as "normal." Unfortunately, we've gotten what we wished for – complete with unintended consequences.

Alone Again(st)...

Or, "How I Want to Stop Worrying and Learn to Enjoy Solo Roleplaying"

It used to be said that "No gaming is better than bad gaming," meaning it was better to go without a gaming group than suffer with one or more terrible players. As of late, I've begun to question said "wisdom," especially in light of some advances in solo roleplaying.

I started in the hobby in the 1980s. At the time, solo roleplaying meant winding your way through "find-your-fate" style gamebooks. The rules were light and the quality varied from series to series. Some, like TSR's one-on-one game book duologies pitted two players against each other, each with their own book. Nova's combat-centered *Lost World* gamebooks did the same, but with a bit more flexibility in opponents.

At the time, the *Lone Wolf* gamebooks were a series I enjoyed despite owning only two or three of the books. The solo adventure in Ian Livingstone's RPG guidebook "Dicing With Dragons" was another favorite of mine (and used pretty much the same system as the *Lone Wolf* books). If you wanted something with more depth to the rules system but didn't have a Dungeon Master available, you had to play one of the Basic- or Expert-level BECMI D&D solo adventures, and even then you were limited to a small handful of modules. *Tunnels & Trolls* had that beat with a larger number of solo titles, including a

few group adventures that could be run solo.

A few articles appeared in *Dragon Magazine* at the time, giving solo players a short leg up on playing group adventures alone:

- "Solo Dungeon Adventures" by Gary Gygax (*Strategic Review* #1, p.3-6)
- "The Solo Scenario" by Katherine Kerr (*Dragon* #73, p.16-20)
- "The Dungeon Alone" by Tom Little (*Dragon* #157, p.58-63)

Today, there's been more of a shift toward one-on-one gaming and GM-less games. Since I see myself as a legacy "forever GM," I'm pretty much on my own. GM-less gaming has shifted from the old CYOA ('Choose Your Own Adventure") style books to random or semi-random tables (sometimes referred to as "oracles"). These can allow a solo player to create their own adventures or guide them through adventures with established sites and encounters but no"script," so to speak.

I have to confess that I'm not entirely sold on using dice oracles and the like for solo gaming, even if it's for a favorite system, genre, or franchise RPG. The trepidation doesn't stem from any kind of superstition or religious belief, just from knowing how I was as a kid. After several missteps in a solo gamebook, I would either rerun the sequence or "cheat" by fudging the dice roll or choosing the dice result and then peeking at each result entry before choosing the better (or less terrible) of them. I know that's really no different than restarting a console or PC game from a save point and trying different things, but I guess it feels more acceptable to do that on a game like *Halo* rather than a solo adventure.



Decisions, decisions… Even in writing this, I'm pretty sure which game I'll choose.

Despite this bad habit, I'm entertaining *Dragonbane* and *Mongoose Traveller* 2e as the top candidates because they're not tied to popular IP franchises. We'll all find out in the next issue or two which I picked and how it's going.

COMMENTARY

I want to publicly apologize for my lack of commentary for this issue. Some writers would simply apply a boiler-plate RAEBNC, offer up a half-baked excuse, and try to call it good. I can't in good faith do that. This past month has been draining in both my personal life and work life. At the same time, I'm also suffering from some deeper depression, which is making it hard for me to concentrate on anything but my job and home life; I am even thinking of canceling my planned convention events to try and work myself out of my funk. Currently, I'm taking an extended weekend thanks to some banked PTO. I fully plan to redouble my efforts in the next issue and have a double commentary. Again, I'm sorry.

COLOPHON

The *Port Omaha Beacon* was written and composed using *OpenOffice* 4.1.16, *Affinity Photo* 2.6.5, and *Affinity Publisher* 2.6.5. Artwork for the *Traveller Starter Edition, MegaTraveller Referee's Manual, Mongoose Publishing Traveller second edition, Traveller 2e solo rules,* and the *Dragonbane* core and *Dragonbane Solo Adventure Workbook* are used under Fair Use rules; artwork for my *Traveller* RPG ad copyright 2026 Ian Stead, Jacob E. Blackmon, and Marcum Curlee, used under license.

The Phoenix Nest

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BUILDING MY LEGACY: THE NEXT BIG THING

The Glamour campaign write up ends this time. And I've decided to bring the joy of my magical school campaign, AEGIS: THE INSTITUTE to you and perhaps get my brain a better grip on the roots of the setting in the process.

Aegis had been the setting of a FATE game with the Wednesday night group and a GURPS game with the Monday night group. The GURPS game stretched from the early days of the City and was a bit more mythic in nature. The FATE game was set in a later version of the City but still long before the setting of this campaign. The people they played then and the people they met are by now legends.

Aegis was created by the Six Gods as the last refuge of the previous world and the seed for the making of a new one. A curse called The Grey Dust had overwhelmed many worlds and eaten all but one point of the old one where the Gods took their stand and began to push back.

The Dust is still outside the walls of the City and will consume anything thrown into it. Which is useful for garbage disposal and (in other ages) quick execution by catapult.

The Gods bring people to the City via the gates in the City Wall that lead to other worlds. They send out Uncle (the god in charge of rescuing people) to find those in danger of destruction who are wiling to take a wild chance and brings them to the City. As the City population grows the city expands, doubling the length of the wall and the number of gates in it, every time. At the start of this campaign it is at the Ninth Expansion of the City and there are 2024 Gates to other worlds. Some worlds are not accessible: the Border Authority has sealed some off as dangerous or hostile. And there has been a thousand years gap during which the Gods have not been active and a political movement to seal the City off from immigration has long had control of the City government. [1]

The player characters in this game are a group of first year pupils at the Institute of Aegis, the great school of Magic. They have been recruited from many worlds, having had a sudden access to magic at a moment of stress, something the embassies (overt or hidden) that Aegis has on many parallel worlds can detect and send out a Guide to recruit the new mage and offer them a full three year scholarship to learn the basics of magic.

I started out the campaign with the desire to impose a scheme on the way magic develops and is learned. But I got told that wasn't acceptable, too waffly and Not Fair. So I retreated a bit (a lot) from my ambitions and said that we would stick mostly with the basic system in GURPS MAGIC with a few options from GURPS THAUMATOLOGY. In the end, only Pum's character is really a 'standard' mage as we'll see when I start the write up next time.

There have been a lot of ideas I've thrown at the wall in this game and some of them have not stuck and have either vanished without further mention or been rewritten ("No, no, you misunderstood me" comes from my mouth more

[1] THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF E&A: Warning! Political content ahead! ME: Only implied.

often than I'm comfortable with..) I feel like the script editor of STAR TREK or some other long established and lore heavy TV series who alternates between delighting about using already established facts and despairing about what some idiot put down aeons in the past. Except of course, the idiot is me.

I'll give more detail next time but here's the core of the Character Questionnaire I sent out:

WHERE DID YOUR CHARACTER COME FROM? [2]

What is his home world/time? Do you like your life there? Do you plan to go back?
What is the Tech Level there? What is the attitude to magic?

WHAT DID YOU DO BACK THERE?

How old is your character and what did they do before learning? What skills did you acquire there?

What were your plans for the rest of your life? Are you disappointed or happy that your life will be bound up with magic?

WHAT WAS THE EVENT THAT TRIGGERED YOUR MAGIC?

This should be something emotionally intense or very dangerous and should relate to the spell you managed to cast in response to the Event.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHAT WAS THAT ONE SPELL?

Graham, it will surprise no one to learn, chose to make his one spell Custard Jet.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD:

The hideous summer drought is starting to break as I type this. The rains (only a little bit) are coming to High Wycombe and the grass drinks the meagre trickle eagerly.

My Seventy Second Birthday came and went without too much fanfare. My brother took me out to lunch at Heston Blumenthal's place in Marlow. When I told him I had been out the previous night trying to meteor spot he told me that he had once been on a yacht (wind powered variety) drifting down the Channel on one of the nights of the Perseid shower and had a brilliant view point a long way from shore. Which gives me an ambition for next year!

CUNNING PLANS AND OVER-REACHING AMBITIONS

We came to the end of the Three Brothers and like the lazy swine I am I dragged out the zero preparation game BRINDLEWOOD BAY because I fancied something detective related. So the next game in this Monday afternoon sequence is THREE LITTLE OLD LADIES.

LICTORS remains stalled over August and even the Little Old Ladies had to take a two week hiatus because Chris and Jenny took off to Greenland to watch the eclipse.

The Aegis game came to mid-term on Spring Term and to get the characters out from under the complex events in City politics they went off to another world on a skiing holiday. Which because two of the characters have Weirdness Magnet lead to an intrusion by The Angel With The Rotted Face and a meeting with Dan Dare's father. [3]

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[2] It was possible to be a native of Aegis. This was a five point advantage and gave them knowledge of the local culture and history.

[3] THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF E&A: Some of your further flung readers may not recognise who those terms refer to. ME: Let them use Google! TPPoE&A: Hmm, that works for the Dare family but not for you know who. ME: Then let them await developments.

GLAMOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS

Player Characters:

Alan as ESHAN, a Seven Mothers worshipping Nobleman with a lot of social skills

Graham as VOSTOR a worshipper of the Lunar war god Yanafal Tarnils with a dark secret.

Drak as JARATHIR another YT initiate with a Big Sword.

Martin as SANDENE, a (female) scout/sniper. Also worships YT.

Pum as KEANUS another heavy infantryman who worships Humakt

Non Player Characters In this Episode

VISHI: A High Llama rider and a slave in Vostor's family since he was five. The Wise Servant to Vostor's Bombastic Warrior.

SENATOR FALERIUS AGGARIUS Their landlord and Patron.

FALERIA His daughter.

OSHORKHON The Grand Master of the Cenobites in the Cult of Danfive Xaron. A man with a secret past. Not so secret any more.

GEILBONUS, Speaker of the Imperial Senate.

THE CHIEF FEEDER OF THE CRIMSON BAT. High Priest and Mad Vigilante. Formerly the Master of Circuses Senator Paulis Longvale

Various Bureaucrats, Soldiers, Penitents and Prisoners of War, Elephants and their Mahouts, Heralds and Musicians.

A MARCH ROUND THE CITY[4]

GM (Finally losing his patience) It is the day and I will not hear any arguments about the day of the week, or the day of the month or whatever it is, it is the date of the big parade!
GRAHAM: Yay!
GM: (Over other protestations) No, if this were Groundhog Day you would have noticed by now.

The GM handed out a description of the route:

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MASTER OF CIRCUSES
ORDER OF MARCH AND SCHEDULE

Form up 'by the tenth hour' on the Campus Martius outside the walls of the City. At eleven, the Sister's Legion will form up ahead of the main body and march into the city to take up position lining the route of the parade.

When their bands fall silent the main parade will start their march The Parade shall pass through The Gate of Peace and shall march to the Circle of Celestial Peace where it shall turn left and proceed until it reaches Silver Street where it will turn North. It will cross The Singing Bridge and come before the Citadel Of Halfway where it shall pause to pick up the Imperial Bodyguard, the Emperor himself (on a palanquin) and the Emperor's Household Foot. The unified Parade then proceeds to Red Square. Some units take up position around the square, some parade about the square and the Emperor passes judgement on some miscreants and gives rewards to some deserving persons including the five remaining soldiers of the Second Furthest Foot who get to stand before the Imperial Throne. Then more parading, more rejoicing and back along the same path and home. [5]

[4] For 29 10 25 The Last Episode.

[5] Some paraphrasing was necessary here.

The Senator turned up before breakfast and instructed them to go to the baths and to pay attention to 'young Vishi' who he had briefed on the standards he expected from them on this day. He then went off to have a bath himself and find some breakfast.

Their good boots and their uniform cloaks were missing: they found them in a wheelbarrow being guarded by Vishi.

VISHI: Sirs, madam, if you would be so kind as to wear your second best boots on the walk out to the parade ground and I can kit you out with clean stuff when you get there. *(After his master made a sizeist joke)* I am in a good mood today. Please do not try to annoy me. Putting some garantap dye into your food would be funny.

The members of the party with knowledge of medicine or experience in practical joking knew that this was a gum that caused the consumer of it to pee bright luminescent green.

VISHI: That would be the traditional jest if one did not mind being killed or sold down the river.
VOSTOR: I'm really happy you're in a good mood today.
JARATHIR I had never considered just how dangerous a sense of humour can be.
VISHI: It's not just for slaves, either. It's for all sorts of servants. You have to know the level of your master's tolerance. Or even their perception that you exist.
VOSTOR: Oh, I definitely know you exist.
SANDENE Don't we all.
VOSTOR: I think it's my sister's fault probably.

The team, reviewing the Master of Circuses briefing, noted with gratitude that they were not right behind the elephants nor even the elephant droppings squad. They were also interested to notice that the model of the proposed monument for their slaughtered regiment would be there, with architect, on wheels and pulled by somebody other than them.

Breakfast was pulled pork and rice. Jarathir was astonished that Vishi had found something other than porridge.

There were lots of people having early baths that day.

So they got sorted into their best kit except for the bits reserved by Vishi.

Vostor had provided plumes in the regimental colours which went into the wheelbarrow for later attachment. .

As they got out of the city and started out to cross the Campus Martius, they passed by the Sister's Legion aid post. Sorette was there in her medic's uniform. She gave them a wave.

Sandene started fretting about they didn't have a banner or anything to tell people who they were. But as the others reminded her, they had left home not knowing there would be any damn parade and the banner of the legion had presumably been eaten by the Brown Dragon.

There were centurions on the parade grounds getting their units into order and shouting at people who had forgotten things. Vishi got them into position behind the mass of prisoners of war being taken to face the Emperor's Justice. A mass of men, women and children. Mostly naked, all chained up. There were accompanying Cenobite Guards and the Chief Cenobite was there with a large whip looking as though he was looking forward to using it.

The Senator came up.

SENATOR: Ah, here you are. I managed to get this for you.

He handed them a pennant in the legion colours, with the legion's device or insignia and number. The sort of formal thing you would expect for a small detachment to display.

SENATOR: I had it made up for you. I hope you will find it useful.

GM: No. I do not think the emblem of the Second Furthest Foot is a foot. Perhaps the central palace of the Governor of Furthest. (To Alan) Whose job is it to carry the pennant?
ALAN: Is there a traditional way of doing it?
GRAHAM: Yeah! You decide. That's the traditional way of doing it.
DRAK: The traditional way of doing it is someone holds the pole with the flag bit at the top.
GM: The Senator has also brought you a small leather thing. [6]
ALAN: Jarathir can do it.
GRAHAM: Who are going to be the escort to the flag and who is going to be the Legion?
DRAK: If we go abreast or single file we don't need to worry about that. I'm sure the officer has given this full consideration?
GRAHAM: Are you?

They eventually got themselves sorted into a formation. Dictated by the GM because they kept coming up with fresh ideas. Having the rear line 'in a wedge' was one of these less than helpful suggestions.

VISHI: Would you stand up, please sir. And put your sandals on.

Jarathir was standing there with his flag, trying to get used to the stance and suppressing any thoughts about taking a swing with it, when he spotted amongst the prisoners in front of them, a mostly naked man, with an impressive set of clan and cult tatoos. He was looking about wildly and sniffing the air.

DRAK: Do his tattoos include a Beast rune?
GM: Yes, strangely.
DRAK: And a Wind Rune?
GM: There's a Death Rune.

He looked like a Storm Bull in the presence of Chaos.

DRAK: I hate to point this out but we're in the middle of the Lunar Empire. That's not overly surprising. I will bring it to the attention of the officer.

The Officer could tell that the fellow was a Praxian, a Bison Rider and a Storm Bull. He couldn't spot the target of the sniff.

Vostor, getting his boots fitted nearby, overheard this conversation, and as he turned to look at the fellow, noticed him sweating and standing as erect as his chains would allow. His muscles started expanding and flexing. He *was* wearing a Slave Collar[7]... but Jarathir spotted that there was a crack in the hasp where there should not have been a crack and he called out to the nearest Cenobite Guard.

GUARD: Yeah what?
JARATHIR That prisoner is getting anxious and I don't think his collar's right.

[6] This is a strap with a socket for the flag: I couldn't find a single name for it. You'd think there would be.

[7] A magical device used to suppress the victim's POW and will power.

The prisoner's attention drifted towards Jarathir for a moment. And then he shook his head and reached up to his collar. The Cenobite briskly going towards the fellow asked what he was doing. There was a metallic SNAP!

KEANUS Ooops.

Jarathir smugly thought that at least this outcome would keep any blood and guts away from their nice clean uniforms.

Vishi looked around and was about to rise and put on his master's cloak.

VOSTOR: Not yet.

The Cenobite had his weapon out and the prisoner (by now frothing at the mouth: one of the prime signs of a Berserker) was in no condition to defend or dodge the incoming blow due to being berserk. A great gash on the barbarian's thigh and he swung the chains at the Cenobite's neck. The Cenobite not being out of his mind with god-powered rage, ducked out of the way. The soldiers began throwing Disrupt spells at the berserker. Fortunately, Eshan managed to recall enough of what he'd learned about the favour of the Storm Bull to tell the rest to boost their magic enough to overcome the countermagic inherent in it.

Their spray of magic and a dagger thrown by Vostor was enough to kill him. He died with one word in Praxian while looking directly at Vostor.

None of the squad could speak word one of Praxian. But there was no doubt that Vishi understood it. Not that Vostor noticed that at all.

VOSTOR: Well, didn't get blood on my shirt. Well done, me! Happy Vishi?.

VISHI: Ecstatic, master.

The officer alone noticed that Vishi was concealing his feelings and suppressing some violent emotion. The enslaved boy had learned to be an excellent actor. Most slaves do. He got out a little footstool and climbed up to fix Vostor's cloak. By the times he had be cloaked the squad and affixed plumes to all their helmets eleven o'clock was upon them. He packed away their second best boots and all the paraphernalia he had brought with him into (I think) a small wheelbarrow, bowed and said he would go and find a position to observe the parade.

The Cenobites had retrieved Vostor's knife, cleaned it and returned it with thanks.

CENOBITE GUARD: You can never quite tell what will make someone decide that it's time to die.
VOSTOR: The prisoners are about to receive the Emperor's Justice. And you wonder why...
JARATHIR They wonder why here rather than right in front of the Emperor.
ESHAN: He was sniffing.
VOSTOR: Probably elephant poo.

At eleven, the band of the Sister's Legion sounded out and marched into the City. The Senator handed over responsibility to the military commanders and escorted his daughter to their seats in Red Square.

As the march of the Sister's Legion came to a definitive stop, the lead centurion of the parade called everyone to attention and the military band at the front began the first selection and the grand parade set off.

(Pause for players to hum, whistle or otherwise suggest inappropriate selections including Souza's LIBERTY BELL which

Martin seemed to have an obsession with. *GM: And it's not Yakety-Sax either*!)

They all made good Battle rolls to act like soldiers on parade. Sandene did best and strutted noticeably.

GM: Do not pay attention to the breasts of the soldier next to you. Let's be fair, there's only so much jiggle you can get in plate.
*MARTIN: I'm a skirmisher. I'm in **light** armour.*

The crowd was very enthusiastic for the parade but the squad got the impression that a lot of people were pointing at them, stuck between the prisoners of war and the model of the monument on its cart, and saying "Who's that exactly?"

VOSTOR: That's what we were going for.

The crowd was even more puzzled by the 'plaster thing' behind.

Vishi was spotted in the crowd chatting to a well-dressed, possibly noble woman. (He was giving an explanation as to who exactly the Second Furthest Foot were. He also mentioned their recent role in certain political events.)

At a drum roll, the parade came to a stop and the band started up the march of the Imperial Guard. The players did their best to do John Williams' masterpiece justice. It would have been better if they had kazoos. You haven't lived until you've heard THE IMPERIAL MARCH on massed kazoos.

The front ranks gave a loud cheer as the Emperor joined the parade. The squad didn't have a sight of this being behind elephants, elephant dung clearers and prisoners of war.

As they entered Red Square they could see the Emperor in position on his throne, the Imperial Units arrayed about him, dignitaries in the stands, elephants expressing their feelings all over the red Moon Rock tiles and penitents of the cult of DanFive Xaron, wearing heavy leather hoods that forced them to keep their eyes on the ground, cleaning up behind the elephants. The prisoners would clean up any residue with their bare feet and dragging chains.

(Parenthetically, the elephant dung was to be distributed among agriculturalists and horticulturalists in the City's suburbs.)

MARTIN: Get your shit here!
GM: First quality shit.
DRAK: This shit was shat in front of the Emperor.
GM: The Emperor has smiled on this shit.

Eshan noticed that one of the shovellers had torn off his leather helm and was shrieking in mad agony. The Chief Cenobite was stalking towards him, whip in hand. Turning his eyes aside Eshan noticed something else. There was an anomalous red glow coming from the east at rooftop level, passing just above Gbaji Park.

He drew the attention of the others to this. Only some of them heard his words above the noise of the music, the marching feet and the cheers of the crowd. The glowing red aura was coming closer now.

Jarathir knew that it was one of the powers of The Crimson Bat to radiate the power of the Moon when outside of the Empire. The Priests of The Bat could duplicate that.. But he rationalised away any worry

DRAK: The Chief Priest of the Crimson Bat is a loyal subject of the Empire. He's probably part of the parade.
MARTIN: It's a fly-pass.
DRAK: Yes, it's the Red Arrow. [8]

The squad kept marching and awaited developments.

A moment later a flying, glowing bat passed overhead. It was not the Crimson Bat (too small for one thing). It was about the size of one of the elephants. There was a man on the back of the bat. He had a lot of glowing red aura encasing him and was in fact the Former Master of the Circuses and current Chief Feeder of the Crimson Bat, Senator Paulis Longvale. His arm had been reattached to him or perhaps regrown. He carried of all things a large war boomerang, a traditional weapon of the Cult.

The Bat shrieked as it spotted the Cenobite. A burst of crimson energy and sound flew towards the chief Cenobite. The elephants started to panic. The excrement shovellers fell to the ground writhing in terror and agony. The chief Cenobite turned away from the person he was whipping and looked cooly towards the incoming giant flying mouse. [9]

The bat passed within spell and thrown missile range but the squad kept marching and collectively decided it was far above their pay grade.

The two combatants met and the whip entangled one wing of the bat. The bat tried to bite back but failed and the boomerang struck the Cenobite in the midriff causing him to drop the whip.

In the background the elephants were panicking some of them charging in the direction of the Imperial palanquin. Again, they decided this was a problem for the mahouts and the Imperial Guard to solve.

The mass of the prisoners had stopped, fallen over or run away. The bulk of the squad stopped because they couldn't proceed at will. Eshan (at the front) eventually noticed this and stopped too.

KEANUS: This is none of our business. Except it ruins our parade.
VOSTOR: Sir, sir! What should we do sir?
ESHAN: Wait for orders.

THE ARCHITECT: *(To the massed slaves*) Just a moment you chaps.
THE BAND MASTER OF THE REAR BAND: Halt!

Suggestions were made about what you should play to accompany a Chief Priest on Chief Cenobite combat. Again, Yaketty Sax was proposed.

The Bat cleared itself of the entanglement and screamed again. The Cenobite felt that. His fellow prisoner guards had broken and run. The Feeder jumped from the back of the Bat and slashed at the stunned Cenobite.

The Emperor's Guard were forming up between the Emperor and the Elephant, trying to calm it down with their spears. The Mahout on its back had not regained his control.

The Emperor stood up and looked around curiously.

[8] A reference to the RAF's aerobatics team. https://www.raf.mod.uk/display-teams/red-arrows/

[9] *THE PPoE&A: It's not you know. A mouse that is. ME: Pedants!*

The Cenobite writhed on the ground trying to break free of what had been done to his mind. The Bat bit him but to no great effect.

GM: He's not really used to this.

The elephant turned away from the nasty pointy spears and went off towards the crowd, still out of control.

Keanus decide to point out to 'our glorious commander' that the fight was spoiling the Senator's parade and perhaps they should do something.

VOSTOR: Right, we'll go and arrest them!

Eshan did not want to get that involved in politics.

The Cenobite managed to rally climbing to his feet and attacking the bat, doing considerable amounts of damage.
"Grandfather!" the Chief Feeder cried out.

KEANUS They're mucking up our parade.
JARATHIR What the fuck are *you* going to do about it?
ESHAN: It's the Emperor's parade, not our parade If the Emperor wants them dead, he can ask us to try to kill them.

They then took a stance around the architectural model. Mostly so as not to look too useless.

The Bat died at the second blow and Drak reminded the GM that he should get a Divine Intervention roll. He called out to the Emperor.

ALAN: Line of sight to his god.
DRAK: He's got a lot of people calling on him right now.
*ALAN: Someone's spoiled my parade. Oh, it's **you!***

In an instant the senator vanished and reappeared in front of the Emperor.

The Man-Bat called down a burst of Moonfire down from the heavens which burned the Cenobite up. He drained his Divine Magic calling for Divine Intervention. The Emperor brought him to the foot of the throne.. Shortly thereafter five members of the Imperial Guard came up to the Chief Feeder and accepted his surrender.

They led him to where his grandfather and the Cenobite were being held. The Emperor commanded the elephants be rounded up and led outside the city again, the penitents clear up the ordure and depart and then the parade could be completed.

The penitents and prisoners were poked into standing and forming up again.

GM: The scream doesn't last forever...
DRAK: There's words to live by: 'the scream doesn't last forever'.

So eventually they had taken up the position they were supposed to end up at after all the parading. The Emperor then reordered the agenda of his court and had the Chief Feeder of the Bat, the Chairman of the Senate and the Chief Cenobite brought before him.

His judgement began by asking the three of them what they thought they were doing in the middle of his parade.

DRAK: Was there an epithet in 'What the bleep did you think you were doing'?
GM: He doesn't need epithets: he's the Emperor.

The Man-Bat and his grandfather explained their mission of vengeance and justice. The Cenobite said that person no longe existed

"He has been wiped away by the action of my God."

THE EMPEROR: Theologically very true. I thought I ordered you two to head to the east and rustle up enough food to activate the Crimson Bat. You have disobeyed *two* Imperial orders. Your lives are forfeit. Seize them. (*To Oshorkhon*) *You* have annoyed me. You are no longer Chief Cenobite. I shall hand you over to your cult to find some useful function a long way away from me.

Then the scheduled events restarted. Paulus Longvale stepped forward and presented his design. Only Eshan and Jarathir made their default rolls on Art(Architecture) which caused some protests.

DRAK: I don't want to tick that: I'm going to start having opinions about monuments.
GRAHAM: It's like Illumination. You can't help it.

Their opinion on this one was that the architect had a difficult remit: to make a monument to an Imperial disaster. It showed a heroic soldier and a heroic Lunar Priest rising from a pile of ashes and shaking their fists at the skies. The Emperor commanded that a place be found for it in the city.

(Privately he thought it sentimental tosh but he accepted the commission had been fulfilled and he was feeling serene after just losing his temper.)

Judging the prisoners of war was easy enough especially as the person pushing for blood and slaughter had just annoyed the Emperor.

"No, no that would be wasteful. Let the men go to the arenas, perhaps to win their freedom. Let the women and children go to the slave markets."

The Fourth Pelandan Foot were marched in front of the Emperor and rewarded with a new banner from the Emperor's own hand as a reward for their services on the recent night of disturbances in the city. "They showed initiative and firmness of purpose in taking control of the exits to the city and ensuring that only authorised persons passed."

GM: You may not recall it that way.
JARATHIR We were authorised: they let us through.

The elderly officer they had met that night was acting as flag-bearer and also received a medal from the Emperor. They were played out with the regimental march.

Finally, it was the squad's turn to parade before the Emperor and receive awards at his hand.

They marched forwards and saluted and then....

Time stopped.

JARATHIR This wasn't in the rehearsal.
EMPEROR: The sun moves when the Sun God says.[10] I wish to thank you particularly for all you have done in the recent events. I wish to congratulate one of you in particular and urge him not to pay too much attention to my sister. She will just use you.

He did not look at anyone in particular when he said that.

[10] Drak got the fact that the Emperor is also the incarnate sun king. I should note here that this was a purely subjective event, individually crafted by a son of a Goddess who has a special relationship with the Mother of Time. It wasn't a full on Sunstop.

EMPEROR: However, I wish to offer you a choice.

GRAHAM: The Senator's daughter...
DRAK: Only one track in that mind...

The Emperor did make an offer to Eshan first. A choice of three things. To return to the border and help re-establish the legion which has been lost. The second is to stay in the City and be of service about the Court. The third is to go to the Eastern front where there will be fighting very soon and start raising a new Legion. "I do not commend any of these in particular to you."

Eshan looked at his passions and decided that his loyalty to the Second Furthest Foot and to Furthest had decided him. If the Emperor had expressed a preference, then he would have chosen at his direction. The Emperor said his loyalty did him credit. He gave Eshan a sealed message and told him to take it to Fazzur Wideread. "I will ensure you will all travel on the fastest possible route."

He asked the rest of them if they were happy to go with their officer. They were to receive promotions. Did they want to branch out into a new area of enterprise or stay with their officer and their unit?

Jarathir failed his Loyalty Second Furthest Foot roll.

JARATHIR I am learning so much here.
EMPEROR: *(Smiling)* There is so much to be learned.

The rest of them were happy to keep to their old haunts.

EMPEROR: Time in.

Nobody else had noticed that time had stopped. The Herald began proclaiming their deeds and fame.

Vostor cursed under his breath when he finally noticed that he had been promised a promotion. He hated that idea. Even to Private First Class.

There were increases in Charisma (+1) and Reputation (d10+5) embodied in medals, awards and promotions. They were given a new vexil to replace the one presumed lost.

ESHAN: We need a replacement for the fifth member of the team.
VOSTOR: No, we need a replacement for the Legion.

The parade came to an end. When they got back to the insula Vishi's wheelbarrow, full of their second-best boots, was there but no sign of him.

The Senator came to greet them, congratulations all round but especially to Jarathir on being appointed to the Staff.

SENATOR: It's a somewhat vague position. But I'm told there's going to be an assessment of your suitability for promotion. Lucky you.
ESHAN: I didn't quite catch….?
SENATOR: He's going to Officer Cadet School. Vostor, could I have a word. I have been most impressed by your manservant Vishi. He has the makings of an excellent valet. I notice that you seem to dislike the possibility of being followed around by an attentive small servant.
VOSTOR: *(After about five seconds deep thought: you could hear the gears grinding)* Yes!
SENATOR: Would you accept an offer for the purchase of your slave?

The Senator offered 200L and then raised it to 250L when it was pointed out Vishi was literate. Then Vostor decided to haggle.

SENATOR: All right, three hundred! Would you like my first born... No forget I said that.

VOSTOR: I'm not as stupid as I look.
SANDENE Thank the gods for that.

Vishi popped up after that and thanked Vostor for 'teaching him so much'. Vostor got the feeling there was some subtext to this statement. Damned if he knew what it was.

VOSTOR: If I go home without him, am I going to get in trouble with my mum.
JARATHIR You'll have a receipt signed by a Senator.
GM: And three hundred Lunars.
JARATHIR And a medal. You were not executed for your behaviour in front of the Emperor.
VOSTOR: Which is baffling at best.

Eshan took Vishi aside while Vostor was ranting on about himself (which was one of his great strengths) and asked him what it was the Storm Bull had said.

Vishi looked across at his former master. "What would you do with that information?"

ESHAN: I don't know what the information is. Hopefully the right thing.
VISHI: The word he used was one that means 'chaos' or 'monster' in Praxian. And he was looking at my former master while he said it. You must understand I tolerate living under the Empire but...
ESHAN: And the Empire tolerates Chaos.
VISHI: Yes. I don't know what you will do with that information.
ESHAN: Which is why I asked you once if you would have split loyalties.
VISHI: Oh no. My loyalty is simple and straightforward.

They got a pass to go home on the Moon Boat. Jarathir sent a letter to his sister asking her if she wanted to join him in the Big City. He also asked to take over the rent of the rooms in the Insula.

The high point of the Lunar Empire had just passed. The characters don't know that. Defeat and destruction and a terrible change in the world was in the future. But just then they were setting out with new purpose.

The Great Sister met up with Jarathir later and asked him what he thought of the Emperor now he had met him.

JARATHIR He is a god. He has the greatest responsibility. My loyalty is unshaken.
GREAT SISTER: And if your loyalty to the Empire exceeds your loyalty to him?
JARATHIR I would face that at the time. *(He looked up at the Moon)* I would hope to have the correct response.
GREAT SISTER: I will see you again.

GM: (To JARATHIR) You may in your position get to see how they make the next Emperor.
GRAHAM: It's not pretty. It's like sausages. You don't want to see how it's done. [11]

Fazzur Wideread was to have a major input in recreating their legion as he was being recalled to duty to command Lunar forces in the Dragon Pass region.

[11] We both took part in the first run of the LARP LIFE OF MOONSON.

The GM thanked the players for a very good campaign and said their characters would go on to further careers in the Lunar Empire 'as long as it lasts'. He then tried to take the conversation around to the Next Thing.

DISTRACTIONS

The different colours of red and how many the Lunar Empire could distinguish. Whether the bird called a Cardinal is in fact any of them. The Cardinal Virtues. The Cardinal Sins.

GM: (After showing off a bit of his historical knowledge) But you don't care, Graham.
GRAHAM: I'm sorry I was confused because this was a real world thing rather than a Glorantha thing. And the real world thing was just made up shit.
DRAK: Yes, but longer ago than Glorantha.

We then got into the possibility in an infinite universe of Glorantha being real.

GRAHAM: Unless Donald Trump says it's real in which case I give up.
GM: He does have the power to confuse the minds of the weak willed and incurious.

Sorcerous amplified glockenspiels the GM could believe. But not sorcerous theremins nor synthesizers.

Graham's term for seeking permission to roll a skill: Tick-Tarting.

IGGY'S THEME: GATHERING OF THE TRIBES

My two core groups have their origins in the dim mists of time when there were no internet forums, nor social media. All we had were the back pages of gaming magazines with their personal ads and the cards in the local game shops. I found Hartley Patterson's home game by the first method and I found the Wednesday night wargamers via the local friendly game shop. The wargamers broke up just before the pandemic would have ended the club anyway. It had been ailing for a while. But my group from it have endured and even gathered a new member. (Hi Pum!) We no longer meet at Hartley's but we still gather, having shifted from Tuesday to Monday somewhere along the line.

I have joined groups since then and even raised groups for games I want to play. The first class were by personal contact. I think it was Roger who asked if I wanted to play… and now I can't remember. Was it Vampire 5th we started with? Or Genesys?

My attempt to form online groups to play ARS MAGICA is my great failure. Partly a lack of confidence in my ability to understand and run the game. Mostly a failure of keeping up the pace. I haven't quite grown back a thick enough skin on that piece of my soul but I can feel it coming.

My techniques would be:

Personal contacts with people I like gaming with. (Roger tells me that he joined Hartley's group with my personal recommendation but I can recall nothing about it.)

Gaming conventions to show off my abilities.

Advertising on social media. Which is damn difficult. I don't know if I could write a good blurb for my games with people I don't know. I don't know how I would decide between interested people if I got a plethora of them. (Not likely if I'm going to be pushing unusual systems and settings.) Go to the web forums of the publishers if you can where the people are preselected to be interested in the specific thing you are selling.

(Parenthetically, I'm not at all sure how much detail people want before committing to a game. My games generally only have an outline: setting and proposed system. I'm not going to do huge amounts before I know how many players and who they are. People who have gamed with

me for a while will tolerate that. I wouldn't want to say it's a good choice for everyone.)

If there were gaming zines nowadays I'd use them too. Oh, wait!

COMMENTARIAT ON E&A 14

A GRAND COVER! AGAIN!

PATRICK BRADY: I had either forgotten or (more likely) never noticed that you were involved with the GUARDIANS OF ORDER TEKUMEL. I liked it as a presentation of the world (the art was particularly good) but couldn't get my head around the game system. (There is only limited space up there for new systems.) I have (as I have repeatedly said) looked into the possibility of using numerous ways of depicting the Empire of the Petal Throne over the years. The only one I had any real success with was QUESTWORLDS (formerly HEROQUEST) and that was at the cost of sacrificing the simulationist elements of the gaming experience. I think RQ could work (especially with the addition of Passions and better social mechanics that RQ:Glorantha brought). I am damn sure GURPS could do it but in both cases the problem is the Magic and the amount of detail work that would require. (QUESTWORLDS can just handwave it.) The fact that Professor Barker didn't have a clear idea of the difference between Psychic and Ritual Magic is one problem and the loopy prerequisite tree is another. The details I'd want to preserve is one reason that I could never get very far with using REIGN which would have the best mechanics for games focussing on politics and social interactions but has only ten possible levels for magic knowledge… Ah bah!

My brain reels again through rutted furrows that it has failed to plough before and the thought "If the magic is the problem have you considered ARS MAGICA?" and there is a cross-current about the problems with adapting Hârn that kept me from sleep the past few nights.

Ignore me, I'll be in this corner babbling and making notes. It won't come to anything.

RYCT MATT STEVENS You will recall that in THE MAN OF GOLD, the only memory of the white races of Earth was that of a bunch of gold-haired, blue-eyed wizards who destroyed themselves in a terrible war. Gets the one character with blue eyes into terrible trouble. (Also a quite ridiculous plot point given how far in the future the setting is.) **Re AI Failures**: I believe that the problem with AI is predominantly that they are not conscious beings with a concept of themselves having a position in the world. This is the thing that humans have, that we have evolved to have and which permeates our methods of thinking. When the programs absorb those methods they cannot replicate the core of them and so… madness, hallucination. But very well formatted and presented. Whether creating machines that could create such a theory of themselves would be an improvement… I leave as an exercise for future generations to resolve.

MATT STEVENS RYCT Joshua Kronengold: I'm imagining a setting (Fantasy or SF) where Being An Adventurer is a sufficient excuse for any eccentricity or rejection of social conformity: "He's wearing a wedding dress!" "He's an Adventurer. You know how much we need them." "Ah yes. Especially with the Wiglat infestation. Forget I said anything."

PATRICK RILEY: Players wanting Something Different but not knowing exactly what is a common problem and a pain in the neck. I use it as an excuse to either a) Try a game ***I*** want even if it is only for a handful of sessions or b) write one of my surveys asking them which genres or types of game they are dreaming of or which of a series of campaign proposals they think I should develop further.
RE: The End of The Adventurers' Guild: I have seen players in my games confidently state that X has always been the rule In This Game and then five minutes later admit that they may be confusing things with an entirely separate game, not even a different edition of This Game. And they will have to go off and do some research. I am generally happy to see evidence that my mental fog isn't unique.

BRYANT DURRELL: Welcome again! // Roger, he's a Typst and movie fan. I think this is one of yours! // "Delta Green proved too depressing in the age of Trump" Not that I disagree but you found the thought of blowing stuff up to frustrate the Secret Masters of reality a preferrable power fantasy? Hmm….. **RYCT Me: '**Plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery.'[12] Even sweeter when acknowledged, of course.

MARK A WILSON Re LARP NARRATIVE: A fascinating bit of alternate history. And clearly a more mechanically supported LARP than I'm used to.

MYLES COCORAN: Glad to hear your internal delvers found no lurking monstrosities. Billy Connolly is very amusing about the effects of the 'clear out the bowel' dosage. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvrzUngEQRw // **RYCT Me:** Unfortunately, Farage was not out for the Count. Happily, if he hasn't yet run of gall we can watch him try to explain to the voters of Clacton why they are facing two bi-elections in the same year if the enquiry goes against him.// Quinns Quest certainly boosted a sale to me. I find Quinn a little annoying but his enthusiasm sometimes spills over to me.

ROGER B_W:. **RYCT Me:** Jaq (Graham's character in Aegis) has an Aunt who is called Agata. She has recently discovered that she has been blessed by the Crone. "I can't be! I'm far too young!" // I tried to make Currywurst at home. It was not a success. **RYCT ELF:** I actually picked and examined the MIDNIGHT AT THE WELL OF SOULS RPG in the Virgin Superstore. I wanted to like it: I was a big Chalker fan back in the day. But it was not a sensible way to gamify the books. I'm not sure there *is* a sensible way to gamify Chalker. The involuntary transformation schtick that was the core of his personal fantasies is hard to make fun for a team of people. ECLIPSE PHASE could probably do something like it mechanically but it is hard to think of the game prospectus that would actually entice people to play it.

BRIAN ROGERS: Your saga of the Library RPG club could be repeated in almost any public service organisation and in many commercial workplaces too. The ability of people with more emotional need to manage people than understanding of the job to get promoted is one of the unsolved problems of civilization. Right after we figure out how to detect narcissism we need to detect the people tending to New Broom Syndrome. // **RYCT me:** By and large I have only used Zoom, Discord and Jitsi as ways to run on line game: they provide video, text chat and the ability to show maps and other illustrations which is all I need. I have used Roll20 but mostly because it has character sheet managers that make RQG and FORGED IN THE DARK games easier to run. The map facility I found too much like hard work. I came to the same conclusion about FOUNDRY which has some features I like the look of but proved too much for my aged brain. If my long promised/threatened ARS MAGICA game happens I may have to give that another try. The old METACREATOR software for AM is no longer supported and FOUNDRY may be able to supply an alternative.

DYLAN CAPEL: Re The Damned Heat. My concrete cave is a little overwhelmed in the heat and I keep the fan blowing through the night, mostly for the cat's sake. He has lost a lot of his appetite for wet cat food in the summer but it's returning now the cooler weather is upon us. A shower before bed helps me stay cool. I doubt if the British will start building houses in a more American style. We still need to keep the winter out.

RE THAT IDIOT MICHAEL CULE: You may have thought that me just including the title of my IgTheme was me being all PostModern but it was in fact me putting in a placeholder title and then forgetting to go back and write the piece. More evidence of my decay even if it was a pretty good title. I think I was just going to tell

[12] TPPoE&A: There's another cracking phrase! ME: I've got a billi… a mill… A lot of them.

the tale of how my players lynched another player's character and how my feelings about it have changed over the years. But you can find that story in half a dozen places in my contributions and I didn't have anything new to say so… Sorry about that.

JOSHUA K: Congratulations of returning to the status of corporate minion! // **RYCT me:** Nope. RUNEQUEST:GLORANTHA is the system and Illumination (variously defined and depicted) has been a feature of Glorantha since the first. I think it may have been implied in the earliest bits of worldbuilding Greg Stafford did. // There were only seven paths in the book but you did not have to read them in a particular order or even read them all. You were certainly not likely to pass all of them. // The Lunar Coders were a group of seven Lunar agents who featured in the STRANGERS IN PRAX module for RQ3. They were the terribly, terribly polite and superior opposition in an adventure when the player characters were the resistance movement in the desert city of Pavis. Some of them later turned up in LIFE OF MOONSON, the LARP I used to partly inspire this campaign. // I had planned to do a more detailed wrap-up of the loose ends of the campaign but it didn't work out that way. I assume Jarathir went back and released all the Illuminates from the other worldly holiday. I didn't even get the time to let the Senator's daughter say goodbye to Eshan. // I have seen 'Your all characters in a game' proposed as the secret known as RuneQuest Sight, which isn't the same thing as Illumination. (I think.) // Re Reusing the protagonists being given tasks above their nominal rank: I used to be in the Civil Service, my soul chained to an office stool. A fellow has to have dreams! // Re Accelerated Illumination. I cheated. I created a once in a lifetime change in the rules that only applied in Glamour during the time just after the Dragonrise. Maybe the Goddess (who has a unique relationship with Time) did it to provide for more enlightened minds to help dig her out of the hole the Orlanthi Heroquesters are digging for her.

LISA PADOL: RYCT me: There are indeed people in the City who object to all these newcomers coming in and upsetting things. // All RQ cults have a Bad Thing that happens to people who break the God's command. These are the Spirits of Reprisal. And they are normally those who find the people who run from the Cult of Danfive Xaron. The legendary runner who Nose Ring mentioned turned out to be an Illuminate. // I think I put the Mostali Dwarf on the end of Dedrick's strings because he was a sorcerer and sorcery was the magic the Dwarves created/discovered and other people stole from them. The Mostali are working a generations long conspiracy to restart the World Machine and put themselves back in charge of it. Are they manipulating all the human sorcerers or just the mad ones? Who knows? // Pum was playing the Humakti as a bit thick. His immobile features were read as being inscrutable by the Senator. // Yes the PCs were being given the chance to come up with a coherent plan. When that failed I dragged the daughter in because the Senator coming up with his own plan would have been anti-climactic. // The building had a higher population of White Moonies, criminals, subversives and illuminates than the City average. Some tenants were in more than one category! // I think the Illuminate Vision is a one off thing for the freshly enlightened but it could possibly become an ability to develop. // Psephologist normally applies to people who study actual elections but there are bound to be a subset who look at awards. PhD candidates always need a 'new area of knowledge' don't they?

Lo! The end of page 16 approaches! Dread boundary to further comment: maybe next time if I remember. I'm doing this 11pm the day of the deadline, you know. Unfair to Jim and Timothy but them's the rules.

MY FINAL WORD FOR THIS ISSUE: SENNIGHT. Half a fortnight.

Take good care of yourselves as you find your feet as immigrants in the great northern land of the Empire of the Petal Throne. Welcome to Jakalla, you pitiful barbarians you!

A zine for *Ever & Anon*.
Unless otherwise noted
all writing & art is by
Avram Grumer of Brooklyn, NY.
Pronouns: he/him
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GOING TO BE Ad-Libbed #13

Email: avram@grumer.org
See http://grumer.org/
for social media links.
Software: Typst w/ wrap-it
Fonts: UNAL Ancízar Serif & Sans
Logo: Jost, Lobster



Attention Conservation Notice

iPhone and Procreate Pocket • GM-less games for six players • *Stonetop* • boardgames • finding gamers • immanentizing the eschaton and unleashing Chiang • *Blades '68* • Doskvol origin • *Empowered* • designing storytelling games • non-generic mechanics • *Children of Time* RPG • Adrian Tchaikovsky's style • giving your PCs strong opinions • *Monsterhearts* afterparty • *Dead After Dinner* • *Scum and Villainy* • mad captains • destabilizing communications tech • flavors • cryptanalysis • convincing



I've finally left the world of Android and gotten an iPhone. As a long-time Mac user, and an iPad owner for a couple of years, it just makes sense to have everything unified under Apple operating systems. I've discovered that there's an iPhone-specific version of the Procreate art app, Procreate Pocket, which I'm fiddling around with, to have something to practice on when I'm not toting my iPad Mini around.

It doesn't support the Apple Pencil, so I'm a bit frustrated by the lack of pressure sensitivity, but the imperfect tool you always have with you is better than the perfect tool that you leave at home.

Thinking about one-shot stuff to try out with the *Monsterhearts* group, which is six people in total (five players plus one GM), and noticing that most cool GM-less games max out at four or five people. I wonder if this is because five is a classic number for teams in fiction.

I asked Google to find me `gm-less tabletop role-playing games that accommodate six players`, and the first one it suggested was *Fiasco*, which it claimed "handles exactly 2 to 6 players," which not only makes a mockery of the word *exactly*, but is wrong on both ends: both editions of *Fiasco* are for 3–5 players. (And apparently the new printing of *Fiasco* 2nd edition, which was supposed to be in stores this July, has been pushed to September.)

I might suggest *For the Queen*, (2–6 players), *Going for Broke* (4–8 players), or *Oh Captain, My Captain!* (unstated, but probably 3–6 players), all of which I've got sitting right here.

Meanwhile Mike, of the *Monsterhearts* group, has gotten a copy of *Stonetop*, a *PbtA* fantasy game derived from *Dungeon World*, and published by (but not illustrated by) Jason Lutes. (Comics nerds might remember Lutes as the creator of *Berlin*.) *Stonetop* consists of two digest-sized hardback volumes, about 600 pages each, so it's probably gonna take him a while to get through them.

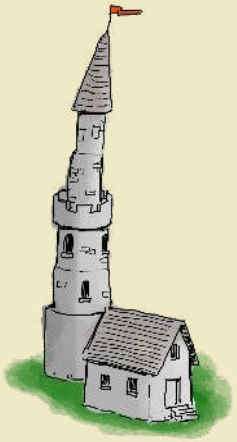
Kieron Gillen has written, not a true review, but a quick skim of the *Stonetop* rules. He describes it as basically *Dungeon World*'s rules plus *RuneQuest*'s bronze-age setting plus a decade of playtesting and refinement. He also heaps praise on the game's GMing advice.

I also learned that a local boardgaming group, Victory Pints, that I'd thought lost after its venue failed to survive COVID, found a new venue! It's a slightly longer walk, but so far I've played *Container*, *The Gang*, and *The Crew*.

IgTheme: How do you find players/GMs/games?

Mostly I free-ride off the work of other people.

For the first decade or so, I just connected with other students in middle school, high school, or college. I think I once phoned a stranger whose number I'd gotten off the meet-up pinboard at The Compleat Strategist, but then my social anxiety kicked in and I never got back in touch with her.



Once I started hanging out with NYC science-fiction fandom, that became my pool for fellow gamers. My short-lived *GURPS Supers* game and Lisa's CthulhuPunk game were both recruited from that pool. Later on, I connected with a boardgame club at Columbia University (one of the interns at my then-workplace was a member), and that became a secondary pool. Outside of that, I just relied upon Lisa's and Josh's connections.

(I should probably talk about that workplace. Crossover Technologies, later Unplugged Games, was a small computer game company in Manhattan's Silicon Alley. The president of the company, Eric Goldberg, and its head designer, Greg Costikyan, were formerly of West End Games, and should both be familiar to long-time A&E readers. Weirdly, while I did play boardgames with my co-workers, I don't recall any RPGing there.)

For a while, there were boardgame groups that met regularly near me in Brooklyn, and I suppose I could have recruited RPG gamers there, had it occurred to me. (I did talk a bit about RPGs while playing *Container* at Victory Pints this month. *Blood on the Clocktower* is apparently *really* popular, and I should probably get in on a game, even though I'm terrible at social deduction games.)

Then last year, Briar posted to the Park Slope subreddit looking for people to play with. (See *E&A* #5, pg 114.) And I serendipitously found the monthly one-shot games at The Nonbinarian Bookstore (see *E&A* #13, pgs 136–138) through a post on Bluesky, though I haven't been back to the bookstore since that one time. (I forgot about it in June, and had a conflicting commitment in July.)

The Sword of Chang

It's always fun to see words and phrases come detached from their original contexts and make their way into other aspects of culture. The phrase "Immanentize the Eschaton," which many of us know from Robert Shea's & Robert Anton Wilson's *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* of the 1970s, emerged from the writing of Eric Voegelin, a German-American political philosopher who had fled from the Nazis in 1938. Voegelin was interested in the origins of totalitarian movements, and decided that they emerged from a flawed utopian desire to create heaven on Earth:

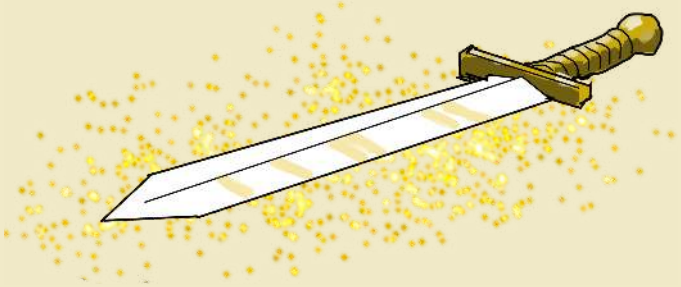
> The problem of an *eidos* in history, hence, arises only when a Christian transcendental fulfillment becomes immanentized. Such an immanentist hypostasis of the eschaton, however, is a theoretical fallacy.
>
> — *The New Science of Politics*, Eric Voegelin, 1952

William F Buckley simplified this down to "Don't let THEM immanentize the eschaton," which he used as a slogan on bumper stickers and lapel buttons during his third-party run for mayor of NYC in 1965. (He got 13% of the vote.) That's what Shea & Wilson were riffing off of in *Illuminatus!*

Another mid-20th-century political slogan was "Unleash Chiang Kai-shek," sometimes shortened to just "Unleash Chiang." This was a term used by American anti-Communists who believed that with a little encouragement and aid, Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek could somehow manage to overthrow Mao Zedong's Communist Chinese government. The phrase even found its way into the Harvard Lampoon's *Bored of the Rings*:

> At the head of the table sat Orlon and the Lady Lycra robed in cloth of dazzling whiteness and brightness. [...] All about them zircons, garnets, and lodestones flashed like stars. On their heads were silken lampshades and on their brows were written many things, both fair and foul, such as **"Unleash Chiang Kai-shek"** and "I love my wife but oh you kid." Asleep they were.
>
> — *Bored of the Rings*, Henry Beard & Douglas Kenney for The Harvard Lampoon, 1969

George HW Bush (the older one) used to use this phrase ironically while playing tennis — "Look out, I'm ready to unleash Chiang on you," that kind of thing. His son Jeb seems to have picked up the phrase, but not the meaning or the irony. In 2005, Jeb Bush presented Marco Rubio with a golden sword which he described as "the sword of Chang," a mystical Chinese warrior who supports conservative principles. Presumably the sword grants a hefty combat bonus against Communists.



Recent Reading

Game: *Blades '68*



I backed the crowdfund campaign for *Blades '68*, a supplement to *Blades in the Dark* that takes the setting from gloomy, gritty 19th-century steampunk to an otherworldly analog of the bright, colorful, groovy 1960s. My physical copy of the book arrived this month.

It looks like a lot of fun, but it also looks like a lot of book. *Blades '68* is over 430 pages long, and it's a *supplement* to the original *Blades* (over 330 pages), not a new game, so you could find yourself having to hunt through 760+ pages of material if you need to find where a rule or a bit of campaign lore is. Unless you're also using the *Deep Cuts* supplement, which adds another 100+ pages. That's probably nothing if you're used to carrying around a dozen *D&D* splatbooks, but I've grown fond of games with less stuff to look up.

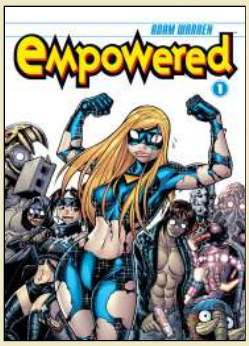
And it's not just rules; there's lore! Or maybe there's lore. Thursday Garreau (not sure if she has any official connection to Evil Hat, or is just a dedicated fan of *Blades*) has written a blog post summing up the long history of the Shattered Isles, some of which is just implicit and hasn't been published yet, and it's possible that reading it has given me an unwarranted level of anxiety about this setting. See, my particular brain craves adherence to established canon, but *also* dreads dealing with huge amounts of detail. (This is a part of why I never got into *RuneQuest*, despite owning it in two different editions.) Lightly-sketched-out setting material with lots of room for improvisation is my preferred flavor of setting. (Hence my zine title.)

And fortunately, the actual *Blades '68* rule book looks like it provides that! Whew! The six regions of the setting are each given about 150–300 words of description in the book, plus a 1d6 table where you can roll up plot points relating to the consulate of that nation, and that's pretty

much it! That's more than is given in the original *Blades*, but long-distance travel is easier in the more modern setting, and international relations are a key part of the spy fiction of the 1960s & '70s, so a bit more detail is called for. Also, the setting includes reality alteration, which can be a handy way of dealing with improvised details that contradict the official canon.

Another fun detail for fans of John Harper's work: An earlier post by Garreau includes screenshots from the *Blades* Discord telling the story of how the Doskvol setting of *Blades* grew from a *World of Dungeons* campaign John Harper ran, with the fate of the world depending upon a couple of really close die rolls. The PCs unleashed a sorcerous catastrophe, and Harper asked the players if they wanted to play out the catastrophe, or skip ahead 1,000 years and see what the world turned into, and they voted for skipping ahead.

Comic: *Empowered*



I first started reading Adam Warren's *Empowered* comics when they came out, starting in 2007, but at some point (Volume 5 or 6, I think) I fell behind and stopped reading. He's up to twelve volumes as of three years ago, and I've been in a mood for catching up on things, so I read all twelve volumes straight through.

Empowered started out as a set of artworks commissioned by some unknown patron who wanted illos of a sexy blonde superheroine in bondage situations. Warren, being the kind of guy he is, couldn't help but flesh the character out, give her a personality and plausible backstory, a supporting cast, etc, and pretty soon, he had an actual comic.

Anyway, I was near the end of the second volume and it occurred to me that a hybrid of *Monsterhearts* and *Masks* would be a good fit for role-playing in *Empowered*'s world of sexy, insecure superheroes. So I asked Gemini whether anyone had already done this, and it couldn't find anyone, but it gave me its own advice about combining the two games, which was the usual mix of good-but-obvious advice and wacky nonsense.

For example, it suggested representing Emp herself as a mix of the *Masks* Beacon skin and the *Monsterhearts* Mortal, describing the Mortal as having "a deep emotional core that anchors the team." Hoo boy, Gemini, you haven't met our Laeli!

Online: 7 Tips for Designing Storytelling TTRPGs

Rowan, Rook & Decard interviewed Jay Dragon (designer of the gorgeous but too damn pricey for me *Seven-Part Pact*) and Minærva McJanda (designer of the *Children of Time* rpg, based on the Adrian Tchaikovsky sci-fi novels), about game design. Some short, easily-digestible fragments from that interview are presented in this blog post, along with a link to the full interview. There are a lot of good bits, but I wanted to draw particular attention to item number 7, "Get your themes all over everything," the explanation of which is a concise argument against generic games:

> Children of Time is a game about evolution, culture and entropy, so at its heart there's a mechanic that relies on chance, while Seven-Part Pact is a game about lonely men feeling like if they just know enough about the world they can control it, so almost every system is deterministic and there's very little random chance involved.

Note that Jay Dragon is the lead game designer at Steve Jackson Games, longtime publishers of the most generic of generic systems, and SJG is publishing *Seven-Part Pact*.

Both those games have Kickstarter campaigns running as I write this, and both campaigns will have ended before this gets published. Sorry, folks!

And wow, the design diary about the *Children of Time* game makes it sound pretty cool! It sounds a bit like Ben Robbins's *Microscope*, where players alternate worldbuilding with in-scene role-playing to tell stories on a much grander scale than RPGs usually do. I've actually just started reading the first novel, partly because I had heard about the game.

I've also backed the Kickstarter for *Children of Time*, but just the solo game in PDF form. The full game is too pricey for me, and international shipping for a physical object from the UK is non-trivial.

Author: Adrian Tchaikovsky

Speaking of Adrian Tchaikovsky, now that I'm on my third of his books, I've noticed that he's got a good stylistic range, and is a bit of a style mimic. *Service Model* read a bit like James Morrow, *City of Last Chances* felt a bit like Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar stories, and *Children of Time* reads a bit like David Brin, Robert Forward, or Larry Niven.

Online: Strong but wrong

And speaking of Ben Robbins, he published an interesting post on his Ars Ludi blog a few weeks back, about one of his character creation techniques. When creating a character, he makes sure that the character has one strong opinion about one of the central pillars of the campaign, and also makes sure that this opinion is something that he, as a player, does not 100% agree with:

> You want the difference to be small enough that you can still relate to the character, so it's someone you can understand and make decisions for. But you want it to be wide enough that you aren't just playing yourself. Relatable but not identical. Which is where the one strong (but wrong) opinion trick comes in: you can make any kind of person you can relate to, but then use this one lever to set them apart from you.

See also my comment in *E&A* #8 (pg 171) about gender and roleplaying, and escaping "the gravitational force of just-like-me-ness."

Monsterhearts: Vermilion Cove

Post-Season Afterparty! **12 Aug 2026**

No *Monsterhearts* game this month, but we did meet up for drinks to talk about the game, and what we want to do next, and generally just bond. Except for NJ, who was away on a business trip, but was sorely missed. Johnni put up a form on Google Docs where we could vote for various class superlatives (Student Most Likely To... etc), and then made up certificates with the results:

Most Likely to Succeed Drake	**Class Clown** Blue
Most Likely to Become Famous Laeli	**Most Likely to Become President** Drake
Most Athletic Pete	**Cutest Couple** Pete & Logan
Most Likely to Get Cancelled Drake	**Most Likely to Get Caught Naked in Public** Steffan
Most Likely to Become a Teacher at VCHS Logan	**Most Likely to Survive the Zombie Apocalypse** Blue
Most Likely to Join a Cult Tie: Laeli / CJ	**Most Likely to Start a Cult** Tie: Laeli / Agatha
Most Likely to Go to Jail Tie: Blue / Scotty	**Best Game Master** Briar

I did point out, when Johnni posted the form, that *literally every student in the class*, PCs and NPCs both, had gone to jail! (See E&A #7, pg 143.)

Looks like we're not gonna have a season two. Mike wants a new PC, not ghost Drake, and Johnni's not sure they want to keep playing Blue. Briar thinks that it'd be hard to keep up a high school campaign in a town that's just been devastated by a major earthquake, but suggested maybe we could start a new campaign, and anyone who wanted to keep their old PC could just say that they moved. I suggested that if we start up an entirely new campaign, without carrying over old PCs, we should establish that *Vermilion Cove* was a TV show that got canceled after one season, and our new PCs can be fans of it.



We talked about stuff we'd like to have had our PCs do, but never got the chance: Johnni had considered burning Drake's house down, so Drake and Blue would both be undocumented. Mike said he'd been wanting to have Drake handcuff Laeli for several sessions. Erica had really wanted to sacrifice Ernie. I had wanted more social scenes with the other PCs, but circumstances kept us apart. (I now understand the desire for bluebooking.) Johnni also said that poltergeists generally work through psychological torment, and Blue had been tormenting Drake by being his conscience. Also that they were trying to kill Blue off last season, because they were a bit bothered by playing a character with a self-harm impulse.

We also discussed what we're going to play next. Johnni wants a friend of theirs to run *Alice is Missing*, and has been talking for a while about *Kids on Bikes*. They also mentioned *Fiasco* (2nd ed) and *Cowboys With Big Hearts*. I brought up Folly and Fortune, a Regency England expansion playset for *Fiasco*, and there was a lot of enthusiasm, though Johnni doesn't own any of the expansions. Briar is really interested in *Public Access*. Mike said he could run *Stonetop* (which I mentioned above), *Trophy Dark*, *Mothership*, *Mythic Bastionland*, *Microscope*, or *Shadow of the Weird Wizard*. Erica suggested the *Mountains of Madness* boardgame. I brought up *Going for Broke*, *For the Queen*, and *Oh Captain, My Captain*, all of which I mentioned above. The important thing, we agreed, is to give Briar a break from GMing.

And we chatted about various general topics, like the fact that there's a fruit fly species (*Drosophila bifurca*) where the male has a body about 2mm long, but their sperm, fully unrolled, are almost 6cm long.

Dead After Dinner

One-shot **15 Aug 2026**

At a friend's birthday party, Lisa pulled out another one of those *Descended From the Queen* games, this one with a murder mystery theme: *Dead After Dinner*. The idea here is that the players are relatives of a wealthy Patriarch, who has invited us over for dinner to discuss changes he's made to his will. He excuses himself for the dessert course, the players read the new will, and then the Patriarch is found dead! Whodunnit? Was it...?

- **Jane, the Ex-Spouse**, played by **Lisa**?
- **Peggy, the Child-in-Law**, played by **Misha**, the birthday girl?
- **Adelaide, aka Boopsie, the New Spouse**, played by me?
- **Kim, the Youngest Child**, played by **Josh**?
- **Thomas, the Other Grandchild**, played by **Aaron**?

There's a bit more going on mechanically in this game

than in most *Descended From the Queen* games. Each player has a Resentment score which can increase or decrease as you answer the game's question cards. For example, the New Spouse card asked me what nickname the Patriarch had given me, and whether I liked it (–1 Resentment) or not (+1 Resentment).

Card draws establish facts and relationships, and later on let players establish who got what from the will, and let players change their Resentment scores, or sometimes those of other players. Nobody seems interested in actually role-playing their character, which seems par for the course with this family of games, though I did try on the obvious voice once or twice.

Eventually the Detective card is drawn, and we have a bit of trouble trying to figure out whether its rules apply to everyone, or just to the person who drew it. (I'm pretty sure it's the latter.) There are two final rounds of interrogation questions, and then the last card gets handed around, and everyone, in turn, gets to pick one option:

- Claim innocence.
- Admit being an accessory.
- Narrate how you are exposed as the murderer.
- Narrate how you get away with murder.

The first option, claiming innocence, is mandatory if your Resentment is zero or negative. The last option, getting away with murder, is only available to the player with the highest Resentment. If everyone either claims innocence or admits being an accessory, then nobody is caught, but everyone is guilty.



Sadly, I don't bring my notebook along, so most of the details are lost. Lisa jots down who got what in the will phase: Jane gets the art collection (for which Kim was resentful), Adelaide the house (which angered Thomas), and Kim gets the family business. Thomas gets the investment accounts, which is odd, because the Patriarch had told Adelaide that Thomas had no mind for finance. Peggy isn't in the will, even though the Patriarch had promised her a trust fund.

Our final Resentment scores are: Jane (Lisa) 8, Thomas (Aaron) 5, Peggy (Misha) 5, Kim (Josh) 1, Adelaide (me) –2. I had to claim innocence for Adelaide, which I think Josh did as well for Kim, while Aaron admitted to Thomas being an accomplice, and Lisa's Jane did the dirty deed but let Misha's Peggy take the fall for it. I'm a bit unclear on the actual details of the murder—something involving poison in the old man's favorite whiskey. That seems to be a problem in the game: The prompting setup encourages vague hand-waving, but a satisfying murder-mystery demands detail.

It wasn't clear to me until we'd finished playing whether it was better to push for a high or low Resentment. You might expect that you want your murder-mystery character to be innocent, but in this game, the fun is clearly in the high-Resentment options.

All in all, a bit of a frustrating game. The rules aren't as clearly written as they could be, and we sometimes had trouble reconciling new prompts with what we had established with earlier ones. Still, I'd be willing to try it again, since it's not much of a time investment.

SCUM AND VILLAINY

Session 9 **21 Aug 2026**

- **The GM** (Gaylord, he)
- **Harmony Qián** (she), a **Mechanic** (me, he)
- **Valsi** (they), a **Mystic** (Lisa, she)
- **Bella Kor** (she), **Scoundrel** (Gareth, he)
- **Varilas**, aka **Vary** (she), a xeno **Speaker** (Josh, he)

Gareth's usual character, the Muscle Von Redwell, is off taking care of the baby clone of Kenn, Harmony's brother, due to an overindulgence result on his Indulge Vice roll last session.

On the drive home after the game, Gareth says he's bringing Von back next session, and I suggest we should craft an armored baby stroller for the baby, doing the *Long Wolf and Cub* thing. We can flashback all kinds of weapons and traps into the carriage.

We're in Rin system, at the Starlight station. Citani, an info broker we've worked with before, calls Valsi with a dangerous mission in Brekk system. A courier mission—we don't know for whom.

Valsi: Does it involve a cake?
Citani: What?

The mission: Pick up a "package or person" from a ship around Warren in Rin, and transport it to either Nightfall or Shimaya in Brekk. The "package" will tell us which drop-off location. The pickup is a ship belonging to one of the Concordiat Knights, belonging to the person who hired us a while back to rescue the Magpie ambassador. There's an arrest warrant out for the ship.

Me: You can't spell *warrant* without Warren!

Harmony trawls the local dark web, learns that someone is pushing up the priority of the arrest warrant. Gaylord sets a 6-wedge clock: *ConKnight ship is pulled over.* Brekk is two jumps from Rin; we have to jump to Iota system first. We're currently WANTED: 1 in Rin with 0 HEAT, so we can use our ship's Just Passing Through ability. Valsi ATTUNES to use the Way to learn more. Gaylord offers a Devil's Bargain: Take time to do it properly—2 more wedges on this clock. Lisa turns it down, and rolls a 4.

Gaylord: All signs point to YES.

Bella & Harmony study the ship's supply records, to try to figure out who's on it. They just get an idea of the size of the crew—a bigger ship than ours. Our plan is to pretend to be an ordinary supply ship. Engagement roll: 3d6, result: 5. Our position is Risky. There's a pinnace nearby, watching. We fill 1 wedge on the clock.

We dock with the Knight's ship. Their docking system

is automated. We're docked, but the airlock doesn't open yet. All indicators are green, but nobody seems to respond to our hails. Harmony sends a drone out to look through the viewports of the other ship, and there seems to be a firefight in progress. (Check 1 more wedge.) The fight is centered on the crew quarters.

We leave Vary running the ship and go in, LOAD: Heavy. The airlock opens for us. We see a barricaded door to the Knight's quarters, and three crew trying to get in, one with a rifle. "Surrender, you're only making things worse," they're saying. We take time to listen (1 more wedge). The crew wants to hand the Knight to the authorities.

Valsi & Bella offer to help, roll 5 on SWAY. 1 more wedge as they think it over. Turns out the "package" is the Knight's body, but they're not sure he's actually dead. The Knight's Squire is objecting.

Valsi comes over, looking like an authority figure, saying take a break, we'll figure this out. "You don't want the heat on this. Take a break, step away." The crew step away, just a bit down the corridor, but they're still watching and listening. Lisa uses a flashback to establish that we have agreed-upon code phrases we can use with the Knight & Squire.

Lisa: Something about hospitality.
Me: <twigging that the talk of knights has made Lisa think of the Hospitallers> Like, if we use *hospitality* and *crusade* in the same sentence.

The Squire opens up, but the crew rush forward to "help." The Squire's got an energy blade. The Knight is in an elaborate cryogenics pod. There's also a crate nearby. Valsi freaks out a bit because their TRAUMA is cryogenics-related. Gaylord suggests they can see/hear ghosts. At least it's a good distraction.

The Squire asks Bella if she needs a distraction, and Bella says yes, so the Squire chops off a crewman's head with her energy blade. Bella grabs the cryo-pod, and Harmony the crate. ("It's probably got health, or ammo.") Vary helps out the Squire, by pulling out a gun and "accidentally" shooting one of the crew. Gaylord doesn't even make us roll—just checks off one more wedge to clear the whole problem.

The Squire wants to stay behind to deal with the authorities—it's her duty. Valsi leaves her with some words about how the fight to help Magpies could use a person of honor, and the Squire replies that our mission will help with that. Also that they won't need any party planning in the near future.

We get to our ship, undock, and try to clear out before the 51st Legion destroyer closes in. The Knight's ship fires on the destroyer, which is a great distraction as we jump to Iota system. Too bad we're wanted there. (WANTED: 1, HEAT: 2)

The pod starts blinking red lights and beeping. Valsi freaks out. Bella stops her from hitting it with a hammer. Vary & Harmony examine the pod, which is of non-standard design, very ornate. The Knight opens and closes his mouth, upsetting Valsi. We can tell the person inside is critically injured, and the pod is keeping him alive. And also that there's a Way artifact inside. And we still don't know why it's blinking red.

Harmony opens the crate, which contains jewels & computer chips.

Valsi tries Attuning to the Way artifact in the pod, to figure out what it does. Rolls a crit! It's a very strange artifact—it keeps hostile Way creatures in check, is currently doing that, and the creature being kept in check is powering the pod. The red light indicates a power fluctuation, because the creature is trying to get free. The proximity of the Aleph Key (our Way artifact that we've been carrying around since the first session) is messing with things, interfering with the artifact in the pod.

Harmony diverts engine power to the pod, which slows us down. (New 8-wedge clock: *51st Legion destroyer catches up.*) We head towards the gate to Brekk. An armed corvette seems to suddenly materialize nearby. The Ghosts! (These are a bunch of scientists who are partially phased out of reality due to a Way mishap. We have –1 relationship with them.) They want to inspect us. Valsi argues. They want to come on board. Lisa makes a good HELM roll, and we evade them and get through the gate to Brekk.

51st Legion presence is strong here in Brekk, but there are also lots of twisty hyperspace lanes.

Bella taps on the glass of the pod, trying to get the Knight's attention, asking where we should take him. The jewels in the crate start flashing in some kind of pattern. Bella studies it. This takes a while, so we mark 1 wedge on the clock. The pattern says, "It depends on the situation." Valsi fills the Knight in on what's been happening. He chooses Nightfall, and tells us he need an appointment with Sol Brighton, the best lawyer in the sector. We go to Nightfall, contact Brighton's office, and his receptionist tells us that his calendar is full.

The Hegemony News Network (HNN) broadcasts our presence—2 more clock wedges. There's an HNN news van outside our dock, looking for us. Harmony uses her drone to insert a virus into their satellite uplink. Success, but it takes time and leaves traces. We drive, the newsvan follows. We park the van near the lawyer's office, leaving Bella to watch it. She tries talking to the Knight, but he doesn't respond. The HNN news crew tries interviewing Bella.

In the office, Harmony hacks the lawyer's calendar system to insert an appointment, but it's tough: she still can't get anything earlier than two days away.

The HNN crew tries to trick Bella into letting them into the van, and Bella resists, which fills her stress track, taking her out of the scene, but still resisting the consequence, so she drives off angrily, and gets Trauma: Reckless.

Two more wedges fill as we wait for our appointment.

We bring the pod and crate to the appointment, concealed. The previous appointment was with some people from the 51st Legion; they wait outside while

we meet. Mr Brighton's not there; we're seeing a junior partner. He tells us Brighton's in the restroom. We show the partner the pod with the Knight.

Vary notices a photo of Sol Brighton on the desk, and he's not human, he's a robot, so we've been lied to about him using the restroom. Also, one less legionnaire left the room than had entered it, so the "junior partner" is actually one of the 51st Legion guys.

> **Me**: I thought robots didn't have legal rights.
> **Gaylord**: That's how great a lawyer he is!

The "partner" tries to buffalo us into leaving the pod and crate with him. We leave, taking them. A secretary directs us to the actual Brighton's office, which is on a different floor. Brighton tells us the Legion had been pressuring him not to take Magpie cases. He accepts the Knight as a client. He also looks over one of the chips, tells us it's probably not safe for us to know what's on it, but Bella tells him anyone dangerous is going to assume that we know, so he tells us: the Knights have collected data from some of the Magpie research projects, that can be tied to individual people. Also, evidence that maybe some of the data has been faked. He needs to speak to some Way experts, and advises us to get out of the system as soon as possible. And he orders a cake. Josh rolls a crit on getting the cake!

HNN reports some kind of hazardous Way outbreak near Warren.

Payoff: 12 CRED. Ship's upkeep is 2. 2 go in the ship's bank, then each PC gets 2.

Entanglement: New friends. The Echo Wave Riders want us to cater an illegal race near a prison. We take the job. No money, but -1 status with the Riders if we refuse. (Maybe +1 status if we do a good job.)

Comments on *E&A* #14

Dale Meier

Welcome to the apa!

RE the problematic *Star Trek* captain (PG 9) ⟹ I'm reminded that, in classic *Trek*, it was pretty common for Star Fleet captains to be driven mad by the stress of the job. Maybe *Star Trek* games could use a *Call of Cthulhu*-like Sanity mechanic.

Bryant Durrell

Welcome to the apa!

YCT me (PG 56) RE Typst ⟹ Thanks for the compliment on my zine layout! As you can see, I'm still fiddling with it.

YCT Joshua Kronengold (PG 56) RE the printing press kicking off the Protestant Reformation, and its similarities to the Internet disrupting modern society ⟹ I've encountered this theory before, and noted that the early 20th century fascist movements emerged with the spread of commercial radio.

Roger Bell_West

YCT Michael Cule (PG 115) RE "currywurst flavour" ⟹ This reminds me of the observation that "pizza flavored" snack foods are pretty much always a disappointment, and my eventual realization that this is because one of the pleasures of pizza is tactile — the feeling of the warm, gooey cheese, which you're never going to get from a potato chip.

Lisa Padol

YCT Roger Bell_West (PG 204) RE cryptanalysis ⟹ Looking over Teresa's old post (there's no date on it, which I think means it might pre-date Making Light becoming a group blog), I notice that there are two stories: one detailing the four types of cryptanalysis, and another about unplugging keyboards. She makes it sound like they both came from the same source, but I'm certain that the first is from Jim Macdonald, and I strongly suspect that the second is from Bruce Schneier.

On the other hand:

Checkbook: Appeals to enlightened self-interest — good cryptanalysis
Rubber Hose: Uses torture — wicked cryptanalysis
Black Bag: Uses direct observation — simple cryptanalysis
Dumbshit: Cryptanalysis which relies upon the lack of the capacity to inquire

YCT me (PG 206) RE aggressive scene framing ⟹ One of the "Cold Opens" in *Blades '68* is even more aggressive than that: the crew is in an autopod (car), driving away from an anomaly eruption, a tear in reality. Their memories (and written records) of their contact, the target, and of the first half of the heist, vanish.

RE Dracula Dossier Campaign History (PG 209) ⟹ Wait, did Liesl Rosenzweig somehow found "an Israeli group" in the 1890s, half a century before the State of Israel was declared, or did she live long enough to do it after 1948?

Jim Vassilakos

YCT me (PG 221) RE "But what does this have to do with convincing the table?" ⟹ Well, in *Monsterhearts*, as in some other modern games, you sometimes need the table to agree on something to trigger some bit of mechanics. For example, the explanation of the *Keep Your Cool* move says:

> The trigger for this move is admittedly one of the most subjective in the game. It's up to the people at the table, but especially the MC and the active player, whether acting in a specific situation requires *Keeping Your Cool*.
>
> — *Monsterhearts* 2e, page 21

The original context for my "convinc[ing] the table" question (see *E&A* #9, pg 149) was Mike trying to meet the criterion for snapping Blue out of Darkest Self ("...you must come to see how someone else feels more trapped than you do"), and not succeeding in selling it. Primarily, I guess he needed to convince Johnni and Briar, but the rest of us had influence.

The Dragon's Beard

99

September 2026

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Natter

So, here I am again, jamming out my zine in the hours before the deadline. My late start had nothing to do with procrastination. Nay, I say! However, it did have to do with my over scheduling of work, home, and hobby projects which results in a backlog of projects in various states of incompleteness.

I refuse, REFUSE I say, to miss another zine issue. I do need to improve my workflow, so I will have to make some changes. My marginal art comic takes up far more time to update each issue than I expected. I'm not sure if anyone even notices what's going on with the intrepid adventurers on the edges of my zine. I still love the concept, so I will have to review how I am doing it and how to make it faster. It may come at a cost of revising the art and appearance of my zine, once again. But I want to focus more of my time on the zine (not that waiting until the last few hours it is due is any help).

I am one issue shy of my Centennial Issue! Some of the A&E alumni have issue counts over 300! Seeing how hard it was just to get to 100 issues, publishing three hundred issues is a mighty feat. I could only hope to have such enduring presence in the hobby one day.

I will be attending the annual Dice Tower Retreat in September. It is the one gaming I plan every year and I fight to get time off at work to attend (though I may end up dragging my work with me this time for a conference meeting 😡). I plan to provide the full write-up of my Retreat for issue #100 – so that promises ☝️ to be a big issue). The retreat ends only the day before the zine is due, so it will be a tight submission. Anyway, let's….



Wargame Terrain

I spent some time this month preparing to host a game at the next annual event my local wargames club hosts. This required a lot of printing from my 3d printer to create the extra tools I wanted for my game, mostly to make it easier for my players to manage their forces, but also to make the game look nicer.

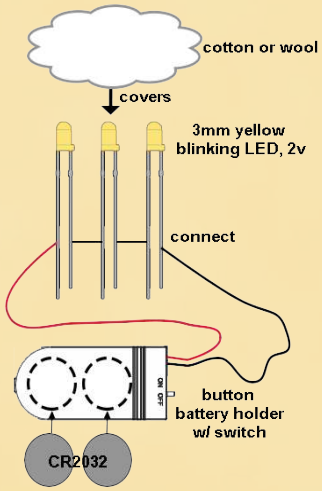
I painted all my ships for the 1/600 scale age of sail wargame years ago, so I had some nice miniature fleets to put on the table.



My age of sail game came with some cardboard islands, but I just could not have cardboard pieces on my table for the game, not when I had nice painted ships. So I printed a dozen or so out and painted and flocked them for the game



Lastly, I wanted something special to put on the table. I saw some instructions on how to make a cannon fire markers that light up and I had to make them! Parts were easy to find on Amazon. Blinking LEDs does a great job looking like a row of cannons firing. Packages of LEDs come with 470ohm resisters to put a proper load on power if less than three LEDs are used in this setup. The batteries are 3v each. Matching 2 batteries and 3 LEDs up makes for matching power and usage. Be sure to connect the LEDs in the the right order. LEDs have one long and



one short lead. If they are connected to the wrong end, it will not work. The wires from the battery holder are long, so I cut them down. Soldering the connections would be the proper way of connecting the lines, but I just twisted the wires together (even the LED leads) and taped them down. Then I add smoke – I used wool batting to cover the assembly. I used tape also only because I wanted to be able to replace batteries and make repairs later if I needed to. Otherwise, I probably would have glued it down.

LED assemblies are not uncommon in wargame terrain. Small LED tea lights (from Hobby Lobby or Michaels) are often used for explosions or fire on the table, but those only have one LED and are round. The double battery holder is elongated and about the same length as the base of the ships. This makes for a perfect sized marker for the cannon fire. And the ability to add my choice of LEDs gave me more freedom for the effect. Flashing Yellow was perfect, but there are other choices, too. They were easy to make. I assembled 15 of them in one evening the night before the event. Speaking of which….

Leavenworth Wargames

This year I was asked to host a table for the Annual Leavenworth City Miniature Gaming Convention. Two sessions are run on one day, each session features eight to nine different tables of games, ranging from ancient warfare on land and sea to sci-fi ships in space. The event was a huge success. Every available seat at every table was taken for both sessions. It is a small venue, but we have more than doubled our previous year's attendance. When a few attendees showed up and discovered the tables were all filled, one of the club members quickly pulled out a game and set up a wargame on a spare space of a shared table. There was something for everyone. We had our regulars show up, but we had plenty of new people show up, young and old, families and other clubs from out of state.

At my table, I had a father and his two kids, a son and a daughter, plus a gentleman my age who was familiar with Flintlock's other game, Plunder, which is the 28mm tactical pirates game. Oak and Iron is their naval battle game and it uses a lot of similar rules. The table presence was strong and I was pleased at how much everyone enjoyed playing and looking at the game. Cannon fire markers were used every time the ships fired their cannons. It did not mean that they hit or caused damage. The markers indicate that the cannons needed to be reloaded before they could be fired again. So the fire markers remain in place until a reload action was taken. However, on any attack that caused





damage, I used the lighted cannon fire marker and everyone, especially the kids, were keen to see them come out. It was a lot of work to put together, but it was worth it.





An Unlooked For Zine #14

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email: drcpunk@labcats.org or drcpunk@gmail.com
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NATTER

I've started getting some of the quick one-shot games that are, depending on one's definition, rpgs or rpg-adjacent to the table. This included *Ringmaster* (which Avram wrote up), *Dead After Dinner* (which I suspect he will write up), and *The Slow Knife*.

This last feels like a cross between Descended from the Queen and *Fiasco*. There's no GM. People play the villains of a tale like *The Count of Monte Cristo* (which I did not realize when I picked up the game to read). They have conspired against the primary NPC, the Knife. Over the course of 4 acts, they rise to power, welcome the Knife (whom they no longer recognize) into their circle, and fall victim to a combination of the Knife's machinations and their own flaws.

Josh and I decided to see if, instead of any of the playsets provided (basically, the Dumas story, backstabbing elves, and a science fiction dystopia) or rolling randomly, we could do something in the space of Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation/The Untamed. With a fellow fan of the franchise, we played through the game in 2 sessions, taking a break after set up, and one after each of the first three acts. It worked well. Our Knife was a woman who was a skilled doctor, and also disguised herself as several other people. We created complicated relationships, involving many NPCs. The one weakness was the art on the picture cards, which was all very European, something one notices when creating a fantasy China setting in the vein of The Untamed. Also, we were starting to run low on such cards by the end. This is a soluble problem; next time, I'll see what art cards we have, perhaps combined with online pictures of actors.

COMMENTS ON EVER AND ANON ISSUE #14

PEDRO PANHOCA DA SILVA AND MAIRA ZUCOLOTTO: Legacy gamebooks make me twitchy because I don't want to mess up the book. I know this is silly; the whole point is to alter the book. re me: Yes, maps, especially color ones, do raise the price. Some rpg crowdfunding projects do cloth maps as add-ons, which are even pricier.

DALE MEIER: Welcome! Have we met in person? Your name is familiar. re intraparty conflict: A session zero is vital, yes (even if it is a small part of a larger session). I don't think of rivalry of the trash-talking one-upsmanship variety as conflict, though I suppose I should. It feels generally more mellow, perhaps because players are often better about separating player and PC in their minds for that.

re problem player captain going "Full Kirk": We had the opposite problem in a HeroQuest game, where the player had their character, who was more-or-less in charge, avoid anything resembling adventure. Their task was to survey the area, and they interpreted that to mean "Mark any interesting feature on the map and move on." re ending a game because of an incident that makes the GM uncomfortable: I recall a play-by-blog game years back like that. I wasn't in it, and the "incident" was tamer (and very different), but the GM didn't know how to handle it other than by ending the game. In theory, one should say, "Stop. What's going on here? This is not the kind of game I intend to run." In practice, that can be very tough to do. re me: I read and enjoyed *The Spare Man* very much.

PATRICK BRADY: re formatting: For me, 2 column is best because of how that displays on my tablet. Others have different opinions, of course. re me: Aw, thank you! re Nightwatch: I own at least the first three electronically, I think. They do sound like my jam; I just need to read them. Alexei Kondratiev, a friend, alas deceased, who read Russian (and many other languages), told me that parts of them were, as he put it, "earthier" than the translation. I think he was looking at a prophetic poem in the sixth book.

re systems for that setting: I could see hacking Fate to remove the die rolling. One could do something similar with GUMSHOE. Dogs in the Vineyard would be an odd one, but also might work. For systems without dice, there's Jenna Moran's *Chuubo's* or *Nobilis* or *Glitch*) (https://www.drivethrurpg.com/en/publisher/4195/jenna-katerin-moran), as well as *Good Society* (https://storybrewersroleplaying.com), and I suspect Belonging Outside of Belonging/No Dice, No Masters would work well. I'd probably try the BoB/NDNM game *Grand Guignol* (https://gamesfromthewildwood.itch.io/guignol), as I liked the show Penny Dreadful, but could see using a different one, like *Butterfly Court*

(https://mishagw.itch.io/butterfly-court). Whichever one used would get much reworked to fit the setting.

re Brian Misiaszek re Historical games with real characters: History is weirder than fiction can be. I recall one *Call of Cthulhu* game set aboard the Titanic (*not* Pelgrane's *Trail of Cthulhu* scenario). The GM's pre-gens were real passengers. Mine actually had (or claimed to have had) a premonition that something terrible would happen to the ship and only boarded it when her husband picked up their daughter and walked onto the ship, informing his wife that she could either join him or go back to her mother. She joined him, sleeping fully dressed during the day, as she was sure that the terrible thing would happen at night. She survived, along with their daughter. He did not.

re Bugtown: If it weren't (iirc) someone else's IP, he could put it online on itch.io or some other platform as a weird ashcan or even "this thing I did once". What was the system like?

re Matt Stevens: The idea of songs singing reality into being, an error or change changing reality, and sung stories happening in an "eternal now" sounds like what I've heard about Glorantha's heroquesting. To a degree, I think many people believe a version of this. It's part of why stories are told, retold, and deliberately changed to fit various agendas and wishes.

re demonstrating religiosity as a way to be considered reliable in business and politics: Nod. There's at least one larp character who joined a cult specifically for the business contacts. re Roger Bell West re Margaret Rutherford: Yay! Our fencing teacher told us that, while Danny Kaye had never fenced before getting the lead in The Court Jester, he proved such a natural that, in the climactic duel, Basil Rathbone couldn't keep up with him. The fencing instructor stepped in, so where you see just an arm, he's taking Rathbone's place.

re the Daywatch PC clearly having eaten and fully digested the manual leading to being able to get the advances the player wanted: Good roleplaying AND good gamism. I like systems that don't force one to choose between these; that's the key to making "unfair" subsystems both acceptable and fun. re A.W.E. being real: When we playtested Dresden Files Accelerated, I learned that New York City has an Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings, abbreviated as "OATH". Naturally, we worked that in. We also worked in a My Little Pony convention.

re intra-party conflict: What you're describing is player-level conflict, which generally sucks. Some issues can be avoided by calibrating expectations. And if folks wonder not whether sometimes "no politics" policies go to far or do more harm than good, but rather why anyone would *ever* want a "no politics" policy (including a "leave it at the door" one), that example of the Brexit couple defending it to the Euorzone resident at the gaming table should give some indication of why. If one takes the position that, hey, banning that sort of thing is wrong, this is a political decision that is likely to lead to either one or both parties feeling uncomfortable and maybe leaving the group, or escalation that gets ugly, or one or both parties being explicitly or tacitly disinvited.

MATT STEVENS: re Roger Bell_West re high-resolution non-combat mechanics: I am fond of the social combat rules of *Clockwork: Dominion*, which are essentially the same as the combat rules. Ditto for *Fate*, and I think, for *Burning Wheel/Burning Empires/Mouse Guard*, as well as *Dogs in the Vineyard*.

re Pirates and Plunder: This game from close to the dawn of rpgs forgoes complex rules (or indeed, any rules at all) for ship combat and navigation, but has rules for tea drinking and partying? That feels almost modern. re Patrick Brady re TSR's Oriental Adventures: I was told (by a single person, albeit one with more right than I to say so) that, for all its flaws, that cover drew them in because this was a book that acknowledged their existence. That said, for something commercially published by a company that can afford to do so, getting people from the relevant cultures on the team is a very good idea.

re me re hit points: I do know the D&D and CoC are Very Different. It's why Pulp Cthulhu doubles the hit points, after all. re the interrogation scene you envision: That is dire. As you note, it's not merely not using mechanics; it's not working with the player's attempt to roleplay. You've (deliberately, obviously, as you're making a specific point) shaped examples that close doors, as opposed to, fr'ex:

GM: "So you got the bookkeeper. What do you ask him?
Player: "I wanna know President Bigg's next target."
GM: "He asks, "Why should I tell you?"

Player: "I offer a deal."
GM: "Okay, what do you offer?"

Player: "I offer to protect him."
GM: "Okay, who are you offering to protect him from, and how?" OR possibly explaining to the player **why** this would provoke a reaction of laughing in the character's face.

In other words, the GM's saying, "Tell me more about why your approach should work." Sure, there's a point where GMs need to give information rather than ask questions, but in at least the first two cases, I would definitely need more information as a GM.

re Joshua Kronengold: It depends on how much players (counting any facilitator/GM) want to deal with racism, sexism, homophobia, et cetera. Fr'ex, when I ran Kerberos Club Fate, the PCs were definitionally exceptional and everyone is equal *within the walls of the club*. But also, we weren't leaning into the injustices of the period as much as we might have. re Magellan: Interesting, though for all that his actions were considered cruel, two men were hanged, and no one stopped that from happening.

PATRICK RILEY: re interparty conflict: In my mental lists of who would enjoy that sort of thing, you are not so much on the "no" list as on the "Hell, no!" list; you're very clear that this is not a thing you want. re Outgunned Superheroes: I agree it seems a bit much, but I've not read or played the original. Bryant Durrell ran a one-shot of Outgunned (not the Superheroes version), and it was okay, but not my system of choice.

re Aurora Cove re gravestones "predate 1947": As in are all earlier than 1947, sure, but why is this the case? I'm not seeing the cause and effect chain here. Is the map supposed to be of either the bunker or the lighthouse? Out of curiosity, roughly how far into the session is it when the scientists got to the mine to conduct their study?

re Patrick Brady re "The calculus changes for a commercial product and more care should be taken": Yes. re Dylan Capel re spectrum of indie games: I remember Rob Donoghue at Evil Hat being bemused at Fate being classified as indie. re character progression: Yes. I don't want fighting a dragon to feel like leveling up in an old arcade game. I tend to prefer getting away from levels and classes and going for story arc progression, these aren't incompatible.

re me re *Trail of Cthulhu* making the Athletics/Fleeing question a player choice: And the new edition got rid of the fiddly math, which makes me happy. re my examples proving your point: I'm not sure. Have you read anything for Carved From Brindlewood games (*Brindlewood Bay, Apocalypse Keys*, and others)? I'm not saying you're wrong, but I'd like you to see an example or two, in case that makes you change your mind. (I'm not suggesting you buy one, just checking how much we're on the same page.)

re Matt Stevens re the roadblock of game systems claiming to support "a particular type of play, but it only works if you are already familiar and comfortable with that type of play": I wonder if this would make a good igtheme, talking about which game systems do support what they claim to support and which don't, or whether it would just muddy the water. I've long considered Pendragon excellent at its particular subgenre, and I stand by that in general, but as others have pointed out, some of the rules for multi-generational play don't really click. And as we've seen, discussing superhero games gets into the weeds of what kind of superhero game we're talking about. re End of the Adventurers Guild: I'm glad you've had a palate cleanser and that this has helped.

BRYANT DURRELL: Welcome! re larps: Yes, the field has changed and wildly diversified. The "norm" for folks like Josh and me is now the 4-hour larp. There are dedicated larping conventions. And there are boxed larps for sale, as well as ones you can get for free.

Of the larps for sale at https://www.paracelsus-games.com/theatrical-experiences, I know the various authors and have played:

- **Debrief:** a 2 player larp, intended to be played online in an hour, very well done, basically Cold War Third Man stuff meets Tim Powers occult thriller stuff.
- **Drink Me:** A tight 90-minute larp (which includes set up time; actual run time is a bit over an hour, at most) for 3 players. My first reaction when I heard of this: You can't do that in a larp! My reaction after playing: I didn't know you could do that in a larp! A lot of fun, though I confess part of why I enjoyed it as well as I did is I based one of my character's decisions on what I know about the author. That said, it really is right there in the character sheet, so probably this probably just kept me from second guessing myself.
- **The Dance and the Dawn**, and **The Dance and the Dawn: Ice and Ash**, both of which are One True Paring larps, aka kinda like Speed Dating: The Larp, but with dancing and emotional intensity. Note that it's usually Just Fine to "dance" by sitting in chairs or standing off to the side if one is unable/unwilling to dance. We'll just assume your characters are dancing.
- **Bloody Slippers:** Another dancing larp, but with the exact order of who dances with whom set. The order of dance is the special sauce that makes the larp work. (I accidentally did a minor rules cheat at one point, but a) it was inadvertent and b) it didn't hurt the game.) Every character has periods when they're not dancing, during which they might talk to other non-dancing characters or go on quests.
- **Howling Fire Theomachy:** A mortal has killed a god. The gods and mortals are there to mourn him, and the gods also intend to decide What to Do About It. I filled a drop for this one (it was the Intercon Q run, and a lot of folks couldn't make the convention due to weather), and got the high praise of one of the players saying afterwards, "Lisa, you scared me."
- **On Display:** Politics, courtship, scheming.

Josh has played all of the above, and I think also **Inheritance** and maybe **Be Not Afraid**.

There's also a larp library: https://library.interactiveliterature.org/. I've played a lot of these and may have co-written a couple. Some can be downloaded. Some are less serious than others. Ones I played and particularly enjoyed include:

- **Colonel Sebastian T. Rawhide's Circus of the Spectacular**. We also ran it after playing it.
- **One Dance, One End:** Another One True Pairing dance larp, though not focused on romance. It's based on Tamsyn Muir's Locked Tomb books, specifically *Gideon the Ninth*. The author did a sequel based on *Harrow the Ninth*, called 2 Dance 2 Furious, which Josh and I are currently signed up for at Time Bubble in late September.
- **Panel: the LARP**
- **Plan Eight From Outer Space:** We played this over Zoom during the height of the pandemic, and while not originally written with that in mind, it works fine that way!
- **Slash:** Yep, about fan fiction slash stories. Warning: The writing is **lovingly* bad, to the point that, when the author generously made the game available to those of us who'd played it, I had to take breaks from reading, making phone calls to the IRS about my deceased mother's taxes for relief. (The IRS folks were extremely helpful.)
- **Time Travel Review Board:** A horde larp. A LOT of set up on the GMs' part for a 2 hour larp, but a total blast to play!
- **The Trial of the Big Bad Wolf:** Originally written for a larp contest. I got to play in the first run, and was a blind mouse (yep, one of the three from the rhyme), and got kudos for my playing the blindness. I don't know that I could've done it in a longer game.

re Typst: Is there a manual or guide for folks who have never used anything like it ever and need the basics before the basics explained to them? Asking for myself. re me: My Fearful Symmetries folder is labeled 2022, so about 4 years? re film festival: Yes, do talk about the films through a gaming lens! Have I mentioned I presented a paper discussing the web comic *Digger* through the lens of *Dogs in the Vineyard* and that it was subsequently published in the *New York Review of Science Fiction*?

re intraparty conflict making particular sense in a sandboxy game: I've learned that, even if I'm using a commercially published scenario, I need to let myself slow down. Maybe this is because the characters are in conflict, which could simply mean debating about what tactics to use or why they don't just run away from danger. Or maybe it's because there's just general roleplay without particular conflict per se. Regardless, sometimes, GMs, definitely including me, feel like we have to take on the burden of keeping things moving, even when it is clearly not the case, when our players are happy to help out. This is not entirely unlike our fencing maestro's comment that people learning to fence work too hard. One wants maximum effect for minimum effort in both cases. In any case, Dr. Thrupp was a surprisingly good apprentice burglar. Probably not best in class, but considering where he started from that's no shame.

re the Same Page Tool: I found I got diminishing returns from it during the previous parts of the Dracula Dossier campaign. The concept is still excellent, and I think folks should take it as a template/guideline, but the specifics often didn't quite fit what we were doing. re the games with intraparty conflict a) resulting in a weaker attachment to characters and b) being one-shots. I remember Aviatrix explaining, after a convention one-shot of Monsterhearts that, in a campaign, she would have toned down her character's behavior (and German accent). But in a one-shot, there's a limited amount of time to hit story beats.

re DramaSystem: This is one of those games where if the characters are too agreeable, it's a problem. This doesn't mean conflict needs to be nasty; it just needs to be present. Similarly, *Polaris* is a game where one must advocate for one's character. We quickly learned that if someone says, "But only if your character is then arrested for their actions" and you reply, "That sounds awesome! Let's do it!", you're undercutting the mechanics on which the game rests. OTOH, the DramaSystem player who insisted that everything had to stay in the same region or the game would be ruined for them was, IMO, in the wrong. But at that point, we're not talking character conflict, but player conflict, which always needs to be handled delicately.

re Patrick Brady: Good points. re Roger Bell_West: I think family connections and traditions do count as Ideology in this formula. re Scribble M. Horror: I remember *Psychosis*. I had a review copy of it, I think? I ran some of it for my brother, iirc.

MARK WILSON: Thanks for the link to the Origins report. It sounds exhausting and fulfilling in about equal measures. re changelings: I played a fae who took on multiple identities in a Gen Con one-shot of *Clockwork: Dominion*. Later, everyone had to give gifts to a fae king, and my character threw a bunch of calling cards onto a platter, saying, "I have been all these people." This met with approval, and I liked the meta level of doing this as a player at Gen Con.

re American Revolution Metagame: Congratulations on landing Ben Franklin! May I pick your brain about a scenario idea/seed I want to send to Pelgrane? (Short version: In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, we learn that evil wizards steal bodies, turn them into "essential saltes", and do magic to bring the deceased back to life and force information out of them. One victim, referred to as "BF" is clearly intended to be Benjamin Franklin.

After playtesting *Boundaries of Darkness* for *Trail of Cthulhu*, I'm picturing Franklin's daughter asking the PCs for help shortly after her father's death, either because the grave's been violated or because someone sinister has been hovering around the grave and/or in proximity to her father's deathbed.)

It sounds like this "metagame" was a lovely larp. I've played (smaller) ones that are similar (e.g., there's a turn structure and board game elements that I may or may not be able to avoid). The "what the heck was that all about?" experience that one (maybe) learns about later is definitely a thing that happens in any large larp (IMO, >12 players, possibly even >8).

Communication and connections are critical. In one larp, smaller, more fantastical, more emotional based, the decision of whether my character stayed with her mortal lover or returned to her magical home was one I made based on not being able to get into a single conversation with the lover. (There were other factors, but that was a big one.) This isn't to say mechanics won't affect things; I often tell the story about how a moral decision I had my character make ultimately boiled down to my lack of skill with a nerf pistol.

Larp drop, like con drop, is definitely a thing. I don't know if you'll have a similar experience that is that good for you as this one was, but there are many different kinds of larps of varying sizes, lengths, and styles (should you wish to experiment, of course).

JOHN REDDEN: Good communication from the Traveller GM. re Brian Rogers re "gams": Heh. There's a Penned to Good Society hack, *Dames with Gams*. (https://astrifer.itch.io/dames-with-gams though I don't know how useful it is without core *Good Society*).

MYLES CORCORAN: Congratulations on a clean colonoscopy. re Roger Bell_West re Starter Sets: It occurs to me that there's a type of "starter set" that might be better called a "demo kit", which has pre-generated characters for a specific adventure, but no character generation.

BRIAN MISIASZEK: re Mazorra: Extremely complicated and nicely done. I wonder how long the entire thing would take to run; it probably shouldn't run much longer than the in-world time in which events unfold. re me: You're very welcome. The player agency flags are extremely helpful.

re Patrick Riley re annoying Crooked Moon scenario: There's an art to adapting scenarios for convention play, and the GM clearly didn't practice it. There's also an art to choosing scenarios for convention play, but that's another matter. If one must, for whatever reason, run a "campaign opener" scenario, tell players this up front, perhaps suggesting they think of the session as if it were a series pilot. re Patrick Zoch: Josh and I have some Keychron keyboards. They're lovely and they **clack** quite satisfactorily.

AVRAM GRUMER: I'd like to try *A Land Once Magic*. From the name and descriptor "post-fantasy", it sounds like the land in question is no longer magic. But is that the case? re Tyrant Philosophers: I have the first two. I gather that Handiwork Games intend to do an rpg based on it. (https://www.rascal.news/adrian-tchaikovskys-tyrant-philosophers-to-be-a-weird-fantasy-rpg-from-handiwork-games/) While the novels and shorter works, as you note, it was published too late to influence *Blades in the Dark*, they were influenced by, among other things, Lankhmar, which I'm pretty sure did influence BitD.

re igtheme: Yes. This is the way intra-party conflict should go, i.e., the PCs are in conflict; the players are not. The finale of the second "chapter" of Critical Role's *Candela Obscura* is like this. (Each chapter is a standalone campaign of 3 sessions.) There's a sequence where one of the characters, for Reasons, is working against the others, but the player argues, successfully (and brilliantly and correctly), with the GM about how a particular thing would not have killed another player's character. (My memory was that everyone then stared at the player, who said something to the effect of "What? I'm not a *jerk*!" But I can't seem to find that that bit and don't really have time to watch an entire episode, let alone three.)

re why 18 cards: Oh! That makes so much sense! re Free RPG Day: Sadly, the stuff various companies came out with didn't hit the Strat. I'd likely pay $1-5 for some of them, if that were practical (and I don't mean pay in the sense of buying $20 worth of stuff at Noble Knight to get one Free RPG Day product).

re Monsterhearts: It sounds like everyone brought their A game, GM included, and that NJ is the one who makes sure a wave of harmony, cooperation, love, and peace does not break out among the PCs. Laeli as Very Evil Batman makes far too much sense. I'm curious about how much Briar set in advance and how much of that came out of who the PCs were. re Blue saying that "he'll get back to finding his Creator": Johnni later decided that this was Drake, and Briar said that Blue still needs to find a thief. What's up with the finding a thief thing and how does that work with Drake being the one who summoned Johnni? (Or is the creator not the same as the summoner?)

re "This is either a good idea, in which case I should do it, or a terrible idea, in which case I should also do it.": Yes, exactly! How did Steffan know about antennae and cell power towers? It doesn't bug me, but wasn't there that whole business of thinking you were playing him too smart all of a sudden a few sessions back? And

clearly, the other players were as ignorant as I was about what a cell phone tower and its antenna looks like and where it's likely to be found, and to a lesser degree, what hitting one with a rock is likely to do. I like that Pete, as an NPC and "star of the basketball team", doesn't need a roll for this.

re Laeli's "militia": It "killed each other off"? That's weird. Was this the GM trying to not have to deal with it? re Short Rest for the Wicked: Yes, it's an awesome move! I had forgotten the bit about having a String on someone with the hypnosis move serving to keep them from using that move. re Season Advances: I can't see anyone from this group taking the Growing Up moves just yet. The rest I can see. I look forward to season 2.

re "I realize that my writeup of this session might test E&A's rules on political content": While theoretically possible, in general, given that *E&A*'s rules are the ones from *A&E*, which refer to non-gaming material, you'd have to go a lot further than this to test them.

As you may recall (since I don't remember whether you were in *A&E* at the time), when the 2-page limit on political content (which, in case anyone needs the reminder, is >0 pages) was established, the idea was never "don't make a reference to anything political that comes up in an rpg you're playing or running". It was "things are getting heated and not fun, and let's take a step back from real world discussions on the topic" combined with "the focus of the apa is gaming; this is what we're here for".

(There's been a lot of talk about how one can go too far in that direction. I don't deny it. But I confess I am starting to get grumpy about the constant drumming on "this could go too far".)

re Scum and Villainy: I think you left out a crucial detail of the mission: The pirates were also one of the parties that hired the group. (the Dyrinek Gang, maybe?) They wanted the VIPs in question to be rescued. "Yup, we were totally about to space them, and then they got rescued. Drat the luck. So sorry!"

This is why the clock was described as it was. The pirates didn't want to clash with the Way Dancer, and were trying to Not Notice it, but once that clock filled, they couldn't pretend not to realize there was a problem. re Valsi's desire to space Dorae: For any wondering at this extreme reaction, Gaylord played her as completely fixated/obsessed, over the top, and impervious to reason. Nothing was going to deter her from her awful plans. As Matt Stevens noted in his zine, this is the kind of situation that risks pushing folks to play otherwise less murder hobo-y characters as, well, murder-y. It's probably a good thing that no one spaced Dorae. Probably.

re Encantra's father giving her no files, just a kiss on the forehead: I'm not the only one assuming that this is how he transferred the files, am I? Something high tech in his saliva, maybe some nanites?

re Matt Stevens re China Mieville: I love the scene in his novel *Kraken* where the familiars are on strike. re me: The A&Eer who said he found the *OtE* rule about penalizing predictable attacks did, iirc, speak from personal experience, which is what led him to go from loving the rule to hating it. As for me, a specific example fails to come to mind (and I'll let you know when one does), but I do know that a lot of things that sounded really cool, that I thought I wanted, of similar nature just didn't click with me in play, likely because when they came up, like the A&Er to whom I referred, I was exhausted and unable to muster the enthusiasm and engagement required. Thanks for the clarification of the Monsterhearts write ups.

ROGER BELL_WEST: re Typst: Is there a Really Easy manual for this, something you'd give a technophobic old aunt who needs the basics before the basics explained? RAE write ups, especially Day After Ragnarok. Your enemies are leaving presents! How sweet! re what the department store is a distraction for: Excellent question! I want to know!

re intraparty conflict: First, to be clear, I am not trying to change your mind. Second, re "the cliché of the thief who constantly steals from the rest of the party is to me just another problem player": I completely agree. Third, that is a *lousy* example of intra-party conflict, or rather, it's intra-party conflict done *wrong*. Usually.

That is, "Oooh, I'm a THIEF, so I STEAL FROM EVERYONE" is crap unless, maybe, you're playing someone for whom it's a real problem, part of an arc, et cetera, but that's not the way to bet. And I wasn't looking for an exception, but I have one anyway.

In the second leg of the four-generations Dracula Dossier game I ran, there was a stone that I made clear was Significant. The Agents wound up with it, but were not a unified group. They weren't enemies, they did have a common cause, and they were all anti-Nazi, anti-Fascist, and so on. But one was working for Edom, one was working for Israel and/or Romania, one was a mobster, and so on. As the final session came to its end, even though the mobster had taken custody of the stone, the Edom agent filched it using his MOS (Mission Operation Specialty). When we did epilogue shots, the player described the character flicking his grandfather's lighter, trying to decide whether to give both the stone and his report to his boss at Edom, or just the report. This worked for several reasons:

- We did a session zero discussing what PvP stuff we were okay with. I don't believe the player would

have done this if someone like Patrick Riley were in the group. Everyone had to be okay with it.
- The characters were all on the same side for the mission, which succeeded. The stone was an extra thing, not the primary thing.
- This was a final shot, and left things ambiguous in a fun way.
- It was also clear that the player did not see this as pulling anything over on the group, nor as the "right" thing to do. It wasn't just "my character would do this" either. It was putting the character's soul in jeopardy, in a way, and leaving matters for their own character unresolved.

When I ran "Murder Most Foul" at one of the Double Exposure conventions, one of the players raised the question of PvP before we started play in earnest, saying they were okay with another character casually stealing something non-critical from the home the action was taking place in and not telling the other characters, but not with outright betrayal, and the rest of the group agreed that this was a good set of parameters. The goal was to solve a mystery, and if someone lifted a bit of jewelry or some coinage from the home none of them owned, that was fine. Again, it wasn't about one-upsmanship or doing it for kicks.

I've seen PvP, or more accurately, character v character work reasonably well in *Good Society* games. And some games have this sort of thing built in, such as *Witch: The Road to Lindisfarne*.

re Patrick Brady: Thanks for the list! re how James Bond won't die: IIRC, I think I had the same issue Erica Frank does with superhero rpgs with an early espionage game (I forget whether this was *Top Secret* or *James Bond 007*) where, if I read the rules correctly (I don't own it anymore and never played it), PCs were likely to have high mortality rates. As this would have been in the early 1980s, I presume the state of the art has improved. Of course, the most recent spy rpg I played, *The World's Problems*, was modeled on *Sandbaggers*, which is pretty much the opposite of a James Bond game. I don't know how likely PC death is in *The World's Problems*, and arguably, I should be concerned that it might be too rare.

re Matt Stevens re Satanic Panic: Not exactly the same thing, but I recall listening to some news item with my mother, during more-or-less that time, about two teenagers who were smoking pot while listening to some rock music album played backwards and shot themselves (I don't recall just how bad the results were). The focus of the news program was on how much the rock music might be to blame.

My mother was having none of that. She had three questions:

1. Where did they get the pot?
2. Where did they get the *gun*?
3. Where the **hell** were their parents during this pot smoking and gun shooting?

re Patrick Riley re the annoyance of listening to the GM read boxed text: I've become ambivalent on that subject. I cannot find the site that said something to the effect of "The author writes boxed text and says "don't read this aloud verbatim", so why are you writing this? And now I have to rewrite this? My prose won't be better! It will be worse!" This summed up a bit of how I felt without having the words.

Yes, there's a lot of terrible text terribly read, and this is like fingernails on the blackboard. And if the text is clearly, to me as the GM, unnecessary or terrible, I do skip or rephrase it. But usually, however many times I tell myself not to read boxed text aloud, I find myself doing exactly that. I'm sure sometimes, the players really wish I hadn't. But oddly, often, the players listen to and absorb a surprising amount of it.

What I *have* switched to is, when there are large swathes of text I think are at least tangentially important, generally as background, I copy that text into a file for the players to read. Fr'ex, I'm running "Accounts of Violence" by Marek Golonka. I am not going to do a better description of 1923 Vienna than the author did. It's good stuff, IMO, well written, covering just the highlights, just enough to give a sense of the place.

But the players don't need to listen to me reading at them over Zoom or Discord, so Google Doc. And I know they read it, as they referred to the stuff in it.

Possibly a large part of my ambivalence is that, for all I protest that there's more to rpgs than real world settings, I play and run a lot of games set in some version of our world. To my astonishment, I was on the edge of my seat (in the good way) when the GM for a *Call of Cthulhu* game at Origins literally read from a book on the sinking of the Titanic, which is where the scenario was set. A table full of gamers, listening in horrified wonder to the GM reading aloud a description of the ship going down, cutting back and forth to the characters who escaped and those who didn't, returning to reading. By all that is holy and unholy and everything in between, this had no right to work. Yet it did, and I'm not entirely sure why.

Then again, it also worked when I ran *Pillars of Sand* for *Swords of the Serpentine*. I'm not entirely sure why it worked, but I suspect part of it is that Gareth Hanrahan's descriptions are very entertaining. Possibly part is that I've done enough reading aloud that I'm not entirely terrible at it?

Another factor: Authors often do a reasonable job of describing the space and what's in it, particularly if there are clues to be found. If I rephrase, I may lose track of whether I've covered all the important points, especially if players interrupt me to ask questions or banter in character. If I've got a written description, whether it's mine or someone else's, at least I have a guide to what I need to make sure to say.

Reading dialogue from a scenario feels different from reading boxed text. Am I deluding myself there? re Michael Cule re "if there's a flow of belief-energy that influences the deity, what started as a misprint may end up as an actual separate god with its own distinct form of worship and so on.": Lee Gold did this, sort of, when one of JOHN REDDEN's characters in her Vikings game made a mistake in his Latin, talking about the Father, the Cat, and the Holy Ghost. John can probably give a more accurate version of what happened.

re Erica Frank re review of the *Well of Souls* rpg: I don't know about the starship blueprints, and I've not tried to read the game. I do know that detailing 150 character races is a large part of the point of the game, given the source material.

re Dylan Capel re *AD&D* and advanced level characters building strongholds: While I've not seen it directly, I knew someone who did do this back in the day. He said that his character (I think a paladin, but might have been a fighter) found it easier to get along with the orcish neighbors (because of common Lawful) than with the (Chaotic) elvish neighbors who didn't see why they should have to pay taxes. The character was able to build strong enough alliances to deal with the annoying elves. (Non-lethally, I think, though with the power to become lethal?)

re Avram Grumer re wanting a "strictly limited season": Many Powered by the Apocalypse games are designed for exactly this. I wonder if that part could be lifted out for you, or if it's too tangled up in PbtA mechanics you don't particularly care for. re me re Lady Susan: Ah, thanks! Yes, she's very much a narrative element. Specifically, she's a Connection (indeed, the only one), which means that her function is to be a sounding board and to push the Main Characters into action.

re *James Bond 007* game re the elements not being coordinated with each other: That makes sense. As I said in this zine, it was a very early game of its genre, and I presume the bar has been raised since then.

re racism, sexism, et cetera in rpgs with historical settings, and how any of the approaches you describe can work, but everyone has to know which one will be used: Exactly. This is why *Good Society* (which may have a facilitator, but isn't intended to have a GM) has a collaboration document, why session zeros are a good idea, and why tools like the Same Page Document exist. And I suspect that in the pre-Bridgerton world of 1st edition *Good Society*, the authors wanted to be clear on exactly the points you made.

re how cultists *should* disagree: This is an element of the *Trail of Cthulhu* campaign *Eternal Lies*, one which delighted at least one of my players. re where *Call of Cthulhu* "has gone since then": I'm not sure what you mean. re *Fiasco*: It does do similar things as *Brindlewood Bay*, but I don't like the structure as much. It's a game I enjoy every now and then; as it's intended for the occasional one-shot, that's not a flaw.

re Purist Lovecraftian scenarios and wanting "a genuine possibility of winning": Strangely, these are not usually incompatible in either *Call of Cthulhu* or *Trail of Cthulhu*. Graham Walmsley's scenarios in *The Final Reflection* are outliers which led to *Cthulhu Dark*, which I would describe as "bleak" rather than as "purist", and probably generally not to your taste. Heck, I've referred to "Observer Effect" as a beautifully bleak *Delta Green* scenario, but it's definitely winnable. (*Delta Green* is a more complicated category for a couple of reasons, which I can go into if you're interested.)

The only two *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios I can think of off the top of my head (could probably find more if I did a deeper dive) that I'd describe as unwinnable are:

- One of Oscar Rios's convention scenarios which is a) IMO, amazing and b) very atypical for him, as he usually does scenarios that are winnable
- The convention game where the GM IMO unnecessarily IMO cheated to make sure the characters wouldn't win. Technically, it wasn't a complete loss, as one character did escape, and the GM consoled himself (to the degree he was at all sad about it) by noting that this was in genre, as the survivor is the one who tells the tale.

There are more scenarios I can point to where the group lost, but given that a win was possible, you'd likely be okay with that.

re Brian Misiaszek re a game with a super-powerful NPC who sends the "comparatively normal" PCs to Do Stuff: This is how (Brian may have been the one who said it) one runs a game with the pulp hero The Shadow. The PCs are the folks who do whatever it is The Shadow needs. It's Michael Cule's game with the Magistrate and the Lictors. It's how one might run a Judge Dee game. Heck, it's basically a mission-centered game with a Patron NPC, isn't it?

re Joshua Kronengold re trap advice: Ooh, I like that. It reminds me of a bit in *Eternal Lies* where the authors go through the NPCs, listing the best interpersonal skill to use and a skill that probably won't work. This is so much better than mandating one and only one skill to

use in a system where the whole point is never failing to find core clues.

ATTRONARCH: Getting the potion into the dragon was both epic and hilarious. What was the witch's deal? I'm not sure what she wanted or how she got sick.

BRIAN ROGERS: re Westerns: I've seen very few: *High Noon, Silverado, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, maybe one or two more. Oh, and if it counts, *Cowboys and Aliens*. I did see *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and didn't care for it. I didn't hate it, you understand; I was just meh on it.

re not being sure your Star Wars game is quite *Star Wars*, but it's yours: That's really what you need. The *Star Wars* franchise is now diversified enough that it's hard for me to say what "is" *Star Wars*. Josh and I saw a few episodes of *Andor*, which is, definitionally, *Star Wars*. It's clearly well crafted; the fact that we only saw some episodes in the middle was because of the Hugo voting deadline. It's probably unfair of me, but these episodes have me sufficiently mentally exhausted by *Andor* that I'm not rushing to see more.

I'm glad Geekapalooza lives on! Sympathy on the library administration stupidity. I see this person is of the One Art, Please school of thought. You are supposed to supply One Art that fits neatly into the boxes the library has on hand. What the Art actually is, how it works, and what the kids the program is actually for want are irrelevant to this person. I don't suppose pointing them at the old administrator would help? (The kids doing some kind of boycott might, but also might not, and it'd have to be their idea.)

re Knaves write up: **giggle** at the slapfest, particularly when it did double duty of identifying the mimic. For a moment, I misread a key sentence as saying Chandler was the only PC to show up for the last week of play. I am relieved to see that was not the case (nor what you wrote; no idea how I misread that). re Eldon wanting to kill animated statues with their own body parts: If that's not a classic, it should be.

re Eldon pouring the second potion down the demon's throat: Kudos to both the player, for the brilliant tactic, and to you, for running with that to an epic conclusion. I can practically see the credits rolling over the new tree in the newly sanctified temple. re this being "why long-form play of RPGs is important": Yes, exactly. I wonder if sitting the administrator down in front of a solidly good single session of an online streamed game that is, nevertheless, unsatisfactory on its own would drive home the point. (I suspect not.)

re Funnyman: Based on Danny Kaye? That's a good start! And given the actor turned out to be a natural at fencing, this has an odd layer of realism, however thin. I love the stuntwoman daughter following in his footsteps. re Myles Corcoran re all 62 issues of Invisibles in one large graphic novel: And I read (and as I type this, Josh is now reading) all 60 issues of *CHEW* in the one-volume Nomnibus edition, which is a minor strength-building exercise, yes.

re Roger Bell_West re the type of players who will knife each other to play the commanding officer: I've used that phrase a couple of times for my amusement:

- I explained I wouldn't be using the actual characters from Dracula as characters in the Dracula Dossier run because a couple of players would otherwise get into a knife fight over which of them got to play Mina.
- After seeing the first season of Umbrella Academy, Josh and I discussed who we'd cast of our friends and ourselves for the characters. I said, "X and I get into a knife fight over who gets to play Klaus."

re me re Jane Austen games, premise, special snowflakes, and so on: As you know, I've no quarrel with your position. If you say "We are doing a Jane Austen-esque mech game where you are all young women who pilot mechs and who need to decide which suitors to attempt to wed" and I sign up for this, I'm doing it knowing that this is the premise. I might (or might not) ask, *before* I commit, how flexible this is, that being what a session 0 or even pre-session 0 is for, but once I agree to play, I have (or danged well should have) accepted the premise.

This is not precisely how *Good Society* works. *Good Society* is not intended to be a game with a GM. You can run it that way, sure, and if you do, yes, we get back to premise. I played such a game, where the facilitator was more of a GM and was trying to playtest blending a couple of the official expansions with Magical Girl tropes, and it was a blast.

But the default is that there is (usually) a facilitator whose job is to walk people through the rules and play any Connections no one else wants to play, not a GM. Instead, the group decides what they want from the game, creating a collaboration document. It is this document that lays out the premise. Players are expected to come to consensus, and if someone says, "Can we have an egalitarian Regency society?" or "Can we say racism isn't a thing here?" and the rest of the group agrees, this is now part of the premise. All of this is baked into the rules.

This is not very different from setting the premise for a gm'd game, of course. The document should be reviewed periodically to see if something has changed. For me, this is usually on the order of "Yeah, I said I wanted to see a duel on the rooftop in the rain, but we have one session to go, so if it doesn't happen, let's not force it." But it could be "Actually, let's not have cousin-

marriages." But the bottom line is that there are metarules, premises, whatever you want to call them, that the group has agreed to play by, and if someone decides to ignore them, yes, we have a problem.

As for where the family's money comes from, the context of my comment here is specific to Matt Stevens's point about why Austen didn't talk about race and his feeling about saying her work wasn't about race, and that the authors of *Good Society*, as they wrote, "take the approach that in the world of *Good Society*, racial prejudice does not exist". My comment was that in conversation on the Storybrewers Discord server, conversation which, as I noted, is explicitly not part of the game, there was discussion of how to have games of *Good Society* where players chose to grapple with slavery (which was the source of wealth for some families), racism, and so on.

Stepping back into your context, yes, it does not matter what the source of a character's wealth is in an Austen novel (as far as I know; there are still a couple I haven't read). And, for the most part, it doesn't matter in a (base, no expansions or hacks) *Good Society* game--except where it does. I'm not thinking so much about whether a family's money comes from the slave trade (sure, it could be this, but that seems an unlikely choice in the circles I hang out in) or from oppressive factory conditions (ditto) as whether it comes from some source that might be jeopardized in the course of the game. Fr'ex, if I am playing a man with excellent prospects whose father changes the will, leaving the money my character expected to get elsewhere, or if the family money came from a textile factory that burned down during the game, then it does matter.

In the one vanilla game of *Good Society* I played (except that there was gender equality, and same sex marriage was acceptable, both of which are explicitly given as options for collaboration in the core book), it didn't matter where my character's family's money came from. It was there. There was always enough of it. We didn't look at questions of entailment or how inheritance even worked if two women or two men got married. These weren't relevant to our game.

Similarly, in the magical girl game, where money came from only mattered when it mattered, which was mostly not. That my character's fiance, a connection, was from a family that owned a factory mattered only in that the main characters saved it from burning down (yay!) and that one of the other characters was sad when their masked identity was scorned by the factory workers, who felt the masked person didn't really care about improving their lot. I should write that game up, though I don't know if I'll have time and space to do so this issue.

re Night City Noodle Shop: Absolutely! I wouldn't try to use *Cyberpunk 2020* (or *Cyberpunk Red* or the original *Cyberpunk*). I'd look at *Yazeba's Bed and Breakfast*, as I said, or Belonging Outside Belonging, or I'd go through my shelves (physical and virtual) looking for games designed for something like that.

You could maybe make it work in *Cyberpunk Red*; the starter set has a scenario where the PCs have to defend their home against a corporation trying to kill them all for their building, intending this to be seen as a tragic accident that has absolutely nothing to do with the corporation, nope. But it's not the way I'd do it.

re Secret Identities in that larp: Oh yes. Another exchange I remember fondly:

> **Lead GM** to player not wearing a mask: Okay, so if that's what you look like as a costumed hero, how do you reveal your identity?
> **Player** takes off her wig (and maybe puts on glasses, and makes a couple of similar changes like taking down the hair that was put up under the wig).
> **Lead GM** nods, satisfied.

re blather: Nope, arguing over a footnote merely indicates you're human and capable of error like the rest of us. Given my previous career marking essays in community college and my current career editing and proofreading rpg material, you'll have to do worse than that for me to consider your writing blather.

Thanks for the clarification re Nadia Swan and re Knave. re the Puppeteer and my approach being backwards: Ah! **lightbulb appears over my head** Thank you! That makes so much more sense! Over the course of the show, we see (he doesn't appear often, you understand):

- The power working on someone who knows he has it, but was unable to resist answering him. Clearly, he made his roll.
- Someone deliberately speaking to him, needing him to use his power on them. If that's not an auto-success because of the actively cooperation, it probably at least nets a Very Large bonus.

re Joshua Kronengold re Invisibles: Do you want the one-volume omnibus edition? If so, what would you consider a reasonable price? A quick search indicates it's possible to get it for (slightly) under a hundred dollars. It's less unobtanium than the large volumes of Lovecraft Country with scripts in the back. I lucked out and was able to get volume 2 (Head Games) of that edition many years ago, but the remaining ones, if available at all, have been more than I wanted to pay.

GABRIEL ROARK: I'm glad the skating continues to go well. I've never gotten beyond putting on the skates. I think I was a teenager at the time. I took a

couple of steps and decided I was done. I just couldn't balance on the blades.

ERICA FRANK: re Playtest Material: I'd go with TTRPGSs with Fire. My reaction was: "Over 50? What are they?" re *Cage of Sand*: Things are more surreal. How many loops does the game go, do you know?

re Lost in the Clouds re "Cloud Haven is a Buddhist retreat in the hills not far from Brindlewood Bay.": I find this funnier than I probably ought. re the inhabitants being "dedicated pacifists despite half of them carrying swords": Only half? I'd love to play this one, and I think I could probably run it.

re Avram Grumer re handing one's supers character off to another player if the character dies: I think one could also use a variant of a rule that's in the Forged in the Dark game *Scum and Villainy* (I don't know if it's in *Blades in the Dark* itself as I'm reading it very slowly): If your character overindulges a vice, there are three options. One of these is that the character vanishes for a session or so and returns later. While they're away, you play a different character. I could see doing this for a character who dies in a superhero game. They spend a session or so dead ~~for tax purposes~~ and then somehow come back to life.

I wonder if some variant of this is in the FitD version of *Galaxies in Peril*. (checks very cursorily) Apparently not. The back cover blurb claims it has "Rules to create any superhero character with any set of powers that you can think of, that will still work and feel effective regardless of the other superhero characters on the team". I don't know how true that is, never having played it. (I know that it's true enough for specifically Marvel characters in the diceless resource management rpg Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game. Cf: https://rpggeek.com/rpg/902/the-marvel-universe-roleplaying-game.)

re me: I agree that we could probably have an easier time clearing up what we meant in person. I know I'm hearing "I categorically state that all superhero games fail, and anyone who says otherwise is deluding themselves" when what you likely mean is closer to "I have yet to find a superhero game that works the way I want it to". I combined and conflated your comments on superhero rpgs with those on romance and sit-com rpgs, which likely led to lack of clarity.

Fr'ex, my original comment that led to your saying that one weird little indie game didn't count was not about the superhero genre, but rather about how *Good Society* could probably cover sitcoms with the farce tone, and I suspect it wasn't terribly clear that this was part of what I was responding to.

I assure you, the award-winning *Good Society* is not "obscure like My Brain Is a Stick of Butter or HOT GAY BRO DRAGONS or What's So Cool About Time Loops? or Light to Your Heart. Or bookmark games. Or 24-word rpgs" (although I am sure that several of the hacks it inspired are). (See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_Society_(game).) If it truly doesn't count for you, we have probably hit an impasse.

Some things we might be able to discuss usefully in the apa. Shifting genres, you say: "I would be delighted to find some single weird indie game that somehow managed to cover the superhero genre as I understand it." and "I love superhero rpgs. I don't think they cover the superhero genre of comic books or movies."

This leads to some questions:

- What is "the superhero genre" as you understand it? (Side question: Do magical girls count as superheroes for you? Powerful martial artists? I once claimed I didn't run superhero games and was told that my Cthulhupunk game was one. By some definitions, I suppose it does, but it's never how I'd choose to define that campaign.)
- As far as you are concerned (because we are talking specifically about what you want from a superhero rpg), must a single rpg be able to cover the entire sprawling genre of superhero comic books? Must it be able to cover all of that *and* all of the superhero movies? If so, I have to concede defeat, as I do not believe a single rpg can do that in a way that would satisfy me, let alone you.
- What do you want from a superhero rpg? What I think I know is that you want superheroes not to die from some random die roll (I can point to games that satisfy this requirement) and where you can play Superman (I can point to people who can point to such games, and would need to do it that way as my knowledge of Superman is fairly superficial, and I'm aware that there's also the question of "which iteration of Superman?") as well as other specific existing comic characters you listed (ditto), and from your most recent zine, characters with specific abilities. (I can point to games that handle these in specific ways and to people who can point to game that handle them in different ways, and we'd have to have a separate discussion about what "handling" them meant, as, fr'ex, running out of the power to teleport because the system says so is unsatisfactory, and as there's a difference in the way an rpg runs and the way a comic book runs. Several differences, but the one I have in mind is that the author of a comic book can decide what is dramatically appropriate and make it happen, regardless of rules and consistency in ways in which most rpgs shouldn't. See Brian Rogers's comment to me about how to model *My Hero Academia*'s Hitoshi Shinso's power

in ways that would satisfy me while still fitting the parameters of *Villains & Vigilantes*.)

Obviously, that's not all there is to it, and even "Can it do X?" is only part of it. I think we'd both agree it should be able to model superhero fights, but what that means to me probably looks very different than what it means to you.

I don't think *Hit the Streets* is likely to satisfy you, though it may give you some ideas. It's very much a street-level supers game, I believe (based on a single 4-hour online game of it).

re whether larps cover the superhero genre well, again, it gets back to what that means to you. Off the top of my head, the superhero larps I've been involved with that feel firmly in genre are:

- **Masks, Or, Superheroes Have It Damned Tough.** This is nothing like Magpie's rpg *Masks*. Josh and I were A-GMs (Assistant GMS) for this, watching the lead GM and his core team have an online meeting to cast this (roughly 60 person) larp, helping stuff the character packs, and acting as floor GMs. (I though I wrote it up, but can't find proof of this.) By and large, I think it worked, though it made the lead GM very, very nervous because, as he put it, it worked on magic. That is, it worked as long as the players believed it worked. It was surprisingly light on mechanics for such a larp—a full weekend-long larp from close to the Dawn of Larpdom-As-I-Know-It, originally intended to run at a science fiction convention, but this and subsequent runs had just the larp as the weekend-long event. And it worked very well, IMO. It had everything from street level heroes to S-Man (originally called something fairly familiar, and with a very, very similar set of powers, but he had to change his name for copyright reasons), and it had villain PCs as well. I think you wouldn't necessarily have been fond of some of the death mechanics, but I'm not sure.
- **The Breakthru series of larps** that Stephen Tihor ran. I played in the first, and Josh and I helped run subsequent ones. Most of the larp takes place in a cafe where superpowers don't work (mostly—if you're a mermaid, you're still a mermaid; if you're an animated statue, you're still alive and sentient). At roughly the halfway point, the characters can go outside and do stuff. It's not that they're prisoners in the cafe; they've gone to it voluntarily precisely because their powers don't work there. It's just that, for this type of game, we want to control the chaos far more than *Masks* does. It works as what it is, and I do consider it a superhero larp, but it's very quirky.
- **Vue to a Kill.** This may be stretching a point, as there's stuff other than superhero stuff going on. This is another one Stephen, Josh, and I wrote, and we never quite got it to click. We might give it another go someday, or we might not. The Breakthru games work better, and I then played a game that blew my mind.
- **Superqueeroes.** This was that game. The player characters are a graduating class of superpowered students in a world where, yes, there's villainy and discrimination but a) not when it comes to sexual orientation or what sex or gender one considers oneself and b) even the worst villain would not be so rude as to deliberately misgender someone. a) and b), you understand, are premise, not plot. The plot was, IMO, solid, and the game hit me in the feels, which is what I generally look for in a larp.
- If you're willing to count magical martial arts, then **Ghost Fu** (yep, also written with Stephen, and with a couple other friends) is a superhero game. Most of the characters are dead martial artists sticking around to work out their karma, finish their tournament, and figure out who murdered them all. We've now run it three times. The first two went very well, I think. The most recent one, this year, was more chaotic, not least because we had a lot of last minute drops and fills (a lot due to fears of inclement weather, I think), and it involved rewriting a fair bit because it is somewhat dated. In a few years, I might be up for running it again and have a better idea of how solid it is.

re Brian Misiaszek: So in that run, Lan Zemin was actually killed, just not by Wan Huina? Shen Minghao killed him? If so, why? If not, who did, and why didn't Shen Minghao want truth coming out?

PATRICK ZOCH: re Saltmarsh: Ockue was missing on account of being turned into a scorpion fish by Charis and then being captured by merfolk, while Ockue was missing because he couldn't figure out how to rescue Charis and didn't want to return without the bard, correct? re the smugglers: I'm confused because the captain fell asleep because of a sleep spell, but was then apparently awake enough to actively resist the group? What's Bimz's backstory? And the session ended with the Sea Ghost crashing into the dock?

re Erica Frank re "King of the who?": My SCA brother once told me that his persona didn't worry about the whole hierarchy. He knew who his knight was, and who his knight's lord was (I think the local baron?). He knew that the king was some guy in a pointy metal hat. What more did he need to know? (Okay, actually, a bit more, at least for the purposes of becoming an SCA bard, and he did know this. What he didn't know was that he was going to be stealth-barded. That is, folks with the power to confer bard-dom asked him the questions about who various important people in the society were, and when, suspecting nothing, he answered correctly, they made him a bard.)

DYLAN CAPEL: Sympathy on the heat dome! I wilt in heat myself. re Cross-Bronx Highway: I'm not sure what you mean about the design not matching the originality of the concept. For me, the issue is that it's a bit depressing, not because of any inherent flaw in the game, but because it accurately reflects certain parts of reality that are depressing and because I get frustrated easily in board games.

re me: *Galactic*'s not one with which I'm familiar, despite having the pdf. Also, I should reread a few of my Belonging Outside Belonging games, as it's entirely possible I forgot a few rules.

MICHAEL CULE: re Building My Legacy: I hope you do find yourself fit enough to return to conventions, but taking at least a year off (and not making guesses beyond that time frame) is probably wise. I'm glad your probable farewell convention went well.

re whether DJT "has some compulsion to offend a new group of people": As I think I said some time ago in *A&E*, my nonsense theory is that he did make a demonic pact: his soul after he dies in return for fulfilling his every whim while he is alive. He thought he'd gotten out of it by failing to get re-elected (he had to make it look as if he were trying everything), but forgot that his two terms need not be consecutive. In the silly version of the story, what would save him is the attempt to end Daylight Saving Time, but he might actually pull that off.

Did you like the Monday filler game and are you enjoying the Japan game Jenny's running? re the Wednesday game where the players feel a lack of agency and their characters "have" to stand back and watch others act: Do they? That's a serious question. Would the consequences of not standing back be bad for them? Or is there a mismatch of expectations, where they think the characters are supposed to be "good first year students", and you're expecting them to push back against that? Are they missing opportunities you see that they don't?

re Glamour write up: I'm confused about why Bean-Pot didn't consider Sandene's arguments valid. However annoyed he was by her reaction to the chicken tasting, she was raising valid security considerations, and previously, that seemed to be what he was focused on. re the Great Sister being "disappointed that she could use you for her devious ends": Was that supposed to be "could not use you for her devious ends"? **Giggle** at "What would Vostor do?" I really liked this write up. So many small-but-important things happening!

re me: *Mansfield Park* is one of the Austen novels I've not yet read. re the reach of 35 SIZ 1 kittens: I'm not sure it'd be the same as one SIZ 35 creature, but I think a whole pack of 35 kittens would, collectively, have a greater reach than 1 or even 5 kittens. re show business punchline: Ah!

Thanks for the clarification on the Glamour write up. What was the spider creature's enlightenment and why did they regret finding it? Thanks for the Lictors details! I feel sorry for the Magistrate's two companions. Unrelatedly, I love the "Be not afraid! I have transmogrified!" speech.

PETER HILDRETH: How was Gen Con? How crowded is it, particularly the dealers' room? re Tika Takes a Bath: It does sound like it should be in a museum, yes.

JIM ECKMAN: re Iain M. Banks's Culture novels: I've only read 2, so you're ahead of me.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: re Matt Stevens re *Call of Cthulhu*: To clarify, while you were speaking generally, Strength is not a factor in calculating hit points; that's Constitution and Size. Strength *is* a factor (along with Size) in calculating Damage Bonus, and in 7th edition, Body, which is relevant because if one's Body is smaller than one's foe's, Maneuvers are either harder (one or two penalty dice) or impossible (depending on how much smaller).

re Patrick Riley re Turning Someone On: As written, and setting aside safety tools and player-level comfort, I don't think Avery intends people to say, "No, that wouldn't turn my character on"; rather, I think this falls under the idea that we don't choose what turns us on and should let the dice decide in a feral game of *Monsterhearts*. This isn't to say one can't do it that way. If the table agrees that something is absurd and/or wouldn't work (or even if they just want a player to come up with something other than "I lean sexily against the wall" once in while), table consensus trumps the text. But the bottom line is that *Monsterhearts* isn't a game Patrick is likely to enjoy. re Brian Rogers: As you likely now know, a new version of the apa, where his links are clickable, is available. re Pedro Panhoca da Silva and Maira Zucolotto re Parselies: I remember the Origins game we played with about 20 other people. That %)&$*#& puddle!

re John Redden re Dracula Dossier: I agree that it's a campaign framework. I'm not sure I'd describe it as a module or a scenario or a campaign per se. It's more of a toolkit. re Michael Cule: "diety"? Have you been rereading "Eye of Argon"? re *Smallville*: You know, I'd have to reread it to see if/when player character death is on the table. I don't recall whether it's Unlikely or Not Possible. re Roger Bell_West re Japanese court conviction rate: Right, this is why a police officer in one of the anime shows we watched gave someone a heads up that there'd be an order given for an arrest soon. It started a ticking clock, because once someone is arrested, they're almost certain to be convicted.

re Avram Grumer: Can I actually, as the GM, just give a string to a PC? The list of Reactions does not include giving any PC a string. Rather, it has "Take a String on someone", which is the opposite. Useful, but doesn't make it any easier for PCs to get Strings on anyone.

re me re pipe trap: Ah, yes, crimping the pipe. re lockers: Yes, while I don't know how common they are in schools today, my school had these. Indeed, a friend talked to my mother when I called to let her know I was going to be late as, she and other friends wanted me to stay so we could manage to get into her locker (which, for some reason I forget, was non-trivial). I was bemused at why everyone seemed to think my presence was necessary for this, unaware that she was explaining to my mother that there was a birthday present for me in her locker and everyone wanted to give it to me. (I did eventually get it, though not on that day, as we utterly failed to get into her locker.)

re why the player in that larp felt their character should kill someone: There was a chain of (bizarre) logic. It (barely) made (slightly) more (as in any) sense than unmasking the teen superhero. For those in the apa, it went roughly like this:

- The character was basically the Soviet Union's Captain America, had been in cryofreeze until shortly before game start, and had been told to recruit other heroes for his country. Note that this character was a hero, not a villain, as written.
- The character asked for marching orders from their government, having been unable to recruit anyone at that point, and got told, basically, "You know what you need to do."
- The player didn't like this answer and pushed for clarification. The GM said, "This is a moral dilemma" and made it clear that it was up to the player to decide what the character did next.
- The player translated this, IMO, as "I now have A Goal and it is my top priority." (This is a common failure mode for a lot of players, to be fair.)
- Additionally, pretty much the entire game was now in one large room having a big meeting. One character used their power to block the exits. This was because everyone knew that whoever killed the superhero who was dead before the game started was in the room, and the character wanted to make sure that, whoever it was, they didn't escape before being revealed.
- The player with A Goal decided that the thing to do was to kill this annoying person blocking the exits, whereupon they tried and failed to convince the lead GM that their character could do an undetectable, unstoppable autokill.
- As Josh pointed out to me shortly after the game, this character was the third strongest in game and could easily break through the barrier and the wall/ceiling/floor. Sure, this would be very noticeable, but if what the player wanted was for the character to leave the box, and consequences be damned, this was a simpler and far less obnoxious way to do it. The character wasn't the murderer (and there was a mindreader superhero who could easily confirm this).

re Julian's Feng Shui game and the limits on my Purist sorceress: For me, that was a feature, as it meant I was unlikely to have analysis paralysis. re Avram's Tri-Stat game: I was the Pluto character.

ME: re K. J. Charles's essay on consent: I found a link to it. Note this gets explicit, and the examples are all from her m/m romances (https://www.goodreads.com/author_blog_posts/19882496-yes-and-no-consent-in-sex-scenes). re systems other than *Everway* that might model a McKillip novel feel: Possibly *Yazeba's Bed and Breakfast*. Possibly *Our Traveling Home*. re Dracula Dossier campaign summary: Wow, there are typos and omissions here. Gabriel went to South America with his fiance and her brother in the epilogue of the 1894 leg, iirc.

JIM VASSILAKOS: re intraparty conflict arising naturally when every player views their character as The Main Character/Chosen One: Yes. I've noticed 2 broad styles of play from people who are not trying to act out (there are more, of course, but these are the relevant ones here).

- I'm going to push to get the best of everything for my character, assume everyone else will do the same and that the GM will reign us in as they deem necessary, and be fine with that. This can work if everyone is pulling with roughly equal force, which happened in a convention game years ago. If any of us hadn't been pulling, if a particular gamer I know had been in the mix, this would have been a disaster. This isn't always a selfish way to play, but it can be. It can also be exhausting for the GM. (Fascinatingly (to me), many years after the Strange School PBEM, it occurs to me that two of the players who had very different play styles and goals were both alike in that they are in this category.)
- I want specific things from this game. I also want everyone to have a good game, and while I am not taking the entire burden of this upon myself, I am responsible for helping make this happen. I speak up when I think someone isn't getting a chance to do anything. Do I think this is a better style of play? In general, yes, although I have seen people back play too much, which is a problem. Also, it's important to remember that this is about player dynamics, not character dynamics. Characters may be at odds, particularly if we're talking about certain kinds of larps, and in these cases, having peace break out may not be a good thing for people's fun.

For conflict between characters, there was a larp I heard about where one player successfully convinced everyone that their character had reformed and was totally not going to try to destroy the world. When the sudden-but-inevitable betrayal happened, the other players gave a huge out-of-character cheer! Why? At last, they could use all of their world-saving abilities!

re letting players each shine in their own preferred way: Yes, exactly. In our friend Julian's *Feng Shui* game, one of the other players tried more than once to convince me to take abilities for my character that would, no doubt, have made her more powerful. I did not want these abilities. I had deliberately created a character that would not have them. That said, roleplaying and the *appropriate* treasure reward aren't necessarily at odds. I remember being asked to list a single moment from a year of gaming that was great for me, and while I am here to chew the scenery, not loot the dungeon, the moment I chose was from an sf larp where, shortly before the end, my character and the rest of her group were showered with technological advances, essentially magical treasure. I had deliberately left the "get technology" sub-game to the rest of the group, but this had the satisfaction of hitting the jackpot on a slot machine, with coins pouring out. It meant my character's dream of being able to have two apparently mutually exclusive things came true.

re players with the "most" roleplaying skill being both the most likely to take over and the best GMs: While this is far from universally true (as you note), it's sufficiently common that I've noticed this as well (and hope that I don't fall into that error).

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: re Seamanship: Fascinating. Thanks for the list of press conference questions. re me re Count of Monte Cristo: It was a reread; the hardest part was just doing one week's worth of reading, maybe 2, at a time. I am told the talk went well, although I would have preferred to have summarized the book in less time, which is totally on me.

GAMING WRITE UP: Masked Against Evil (part 1)

The facilitator was more of GM than usual for a Penned to Good Society game, wanting to test the concept of running a Masked Hero game (using the Sense, Sensibility and Swordsmanship expansion) with Magical Girl tropes (using the magical rules from the Pride, Prejudice and Practical Magic) in a Regency(ish) setting.

Our Collaboration Document covered:

- **Tone:** Epic Silliness: There is danger, but there is also silliness in the relationship. Post-game thoughts: I forgot this was the tone. We didn't actively try for silliness, but as Josh (who wasn't in the game) might have noted, the concept is so inherently silly that comedy will happen.
- **When:** Classic Regency
- **How important is historical accuracy?** A little important. (This is the usual dial setting in most Good Society games I play.)
- **How will we treat the gender power balance:** In reverse. That is, the norm is that only women get to inherit entailed estates, make the first move in courtship, and get to have "significant and respectable careers". This is only the second time I've tried this in Good Society game, and it went much better this time (possibly because the previous time was an experimental epistolary-only game played in text on Discord).
- **How much hidden information?** None (out of character).
- **What kind of powers do the Masks give?** We chose fairytales as the theme.
- **How does the Mask appear when not activated?** Jewelry, specifically, gemstone.
- **Some of our things to avoid:** We didn't want descriptions of gore, harm to children, fire endangering people, or PC-PC betrayal. Disagreements and misunderstandings were definitely allowed.
- **Some things we actively wanted:** Falling in love with Masked/Not-Masked identities and not realizing they were one and the same (you know, Superman vs Clark Kent), dress transformation scene, duels, propriety about touch, misunderstanding, shirtless tending to someone's wounds scene.

Main Characters and their Connections

Faustus Pembroke: Heir, New Money. My character, whose portrait appears in my zine in *E&A* #12. Age 18, a more-or-less open book, the only non-Masked character. (In play, I used this image: https://mmbennetts.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/arthur-atherley-at-eton.jpg.) No doubt I will some day played a Masked one, but it is so much fun to play the one normal(ish) person!

Plays pianoforte, does archery, sings -- all the fine masculine arts. Protective of his twin brother, Martial, and wants to make sure none of these dastardly masks menaces him. Wants to make a good marriage to ensure he can provide for his sickly brother, but would also like to be seen as something more, even just a little bit more, than a prize dowry chest with a pretty face.

My description for the artist who did the picture, after noting I managed to avoid doing one in play: So, he rides into danger, wins archery contests, fights with a sword well enough, sings, plays the pianoforte, which means he's reasonably well muscled, which he probably

shows off, but not to the point of, you know, unmasculinity! (It's tricky to figure out descriptions for reverse-gender roles.) Sort of a Regency Nightwing, but without a dual identity, so no mask. (I see I actually said this during the game in the server: the man who's a) the hot woman who somehow knows how to use every weapon, b) the one with the crazy conspiracy board, c) the man in the van...all of it simultaneous...did I just create Regency Nightwing?) Probably hair a la Brutus, but a very fashionable Brutus, more the appearance of messiness than any actual mess? Let's go with brown hair, maybe green / green-blue eyes—something a bit startling, not too fussed about the exact shade of eye color. In the first session, he got a scar on his cheek. We'll get to that.

Starting desire: Discover the true identity of the Masks and reveal them to the community. Faustus has the Regency equivalent of a murder wall—news clippings, speculations on mask identities (all false), red thread of some kind (likely embroidery thread).
Relationships: Best friends with Ximena Maria Reyes. Marshall's twin.
By the end of the game: **Positive tags:** Accomplished, Heroic, Sensible, Hospitable. **Negative tags:** Obsessive, Reckless, Drawn In, Collaborating with the Masks. **Positive Condition:** A Great Match. **Negative Condition:** Black Sheep.
Connections: Oratio Grande (facilitator), Faustus's Instructor d'Artes, didn't come up much in play. Filamena Whitlock (Marshall's Player), oldest daughter of the Old Money Whitlocks, courting Faustus, secretly working for the Big Bad.

Marshall Pembroke, aka Bloodstone: Dependant, New Money, The Outlaw. Age 18, Faustus's sickly twin.
Became the Mask to appease his father. Using it takes a heavy toll. **The Key to revealing his identity** is the terrible scar on his chest. **The Mask takes the form of** a bloodstone cameo.
Civilian Desire: Prove you are not a failure to your relative.
Masked Desire: Be the hero everyone celebrates.
Relationships: In love with Peridot (Azalea). Faustus's twin.
Positive tags: Respectful, Long suffering. **Negative Tags:** Effete, Brutish (Mask).
Connections: Mm. Emmanuel (facilitator), his mentor, the previous Wielder of the Lyndwyrm Bloodstone, disgusted by this man who was obviously too soft to wield it. Joseph Wheeler (Ximena's player), his childhood friend, and a big fan of Bloodstone. Given that Marshall likes tales of knighthood, Joseph doesn't understand why his friend hates Bloodstone.

Azalea St. George, aka Peridot, Socialite, Humble Origins, The Vigilante. Age 18
Became the Mask to get people out of poverty. **The Key to revealing her identity** is the (masculine) perfume she wears as Peridot (whom everyone thinks is a man). The bottle can be found on her dresser. **The Mask takes the form of** a peridot diadem, a bronze velvet cloak.
Fairy Tale: The Swan Princess (nettles, spinning, temporarily turning people into birds)
Civilian Desire: Get rich or become independent or marry rich... don't be poor like your parents.
Masked Desire: Free the city from its doom.
Relationships: In square love with Marshall. Marshall is in love with Peridot. Secretly protected by Ximena.
Positive tags: Delightful, Cooperative, (Mask), Mediator (Mask). **Negative Tags:** Poor, Ineffective (Mask), Hasty. Positive Condition: A Hero of the People. Negative Condition: Revenge: A connection turns against (Masked identity) and spreads rumors behind their back.
Connections: Robert Munchkin (facilitator), leader of a garment workers' unions that needs Peridot's help against the Big Bad, but resents this fact. Loreena Fitzgerald (me), Azalea's rich, popular best friend, everything Azalea wants to be. Not a Mean Girl. Samuel's cousin.

Ximena Maria Reyes, aka Cuarzo Rosa, Meddler, Humble Origins, The Vigilante. Age 19.
Became the Mask to protect others from becoming cursed like me. **The Key to revealing her/their identity** is the never dying rose flower in my hair. **The Mask takes the form of** a rose quartz claw pendant.
Fairy Tale: Beauty and the Beast (in addition to the Masked form, Ximena can transform into the Beast)
Civilian Desire: Confess your affections for your best friend, or find a way to cast your feelings aside.
Masked Desire: Be the hero the city wants.
Relationships: Secret guardian of Azalea. Best friends with Faustus.
Positive tags: Tough. **Negative Tags:** Crass, Ignorant.
Connections: Ferdinand Jose Reyes (facilitator), Ximena's loving, doting father. Sunghoon "Samuel" Fitzgerald, from the family that adopted Ximena so the family would have a Magic Girl working for them, frustrated with her crass, lowborn ways.

LAST MINUTE NOTE: There's an interesting game bundle here: https://rpg-trader.com/products/8344/d6-only-games-bundle.

Ronin Engineer for Ever & Anon #15

by Jim Eckman,
Mountain View, CA
alarum@roninengineer.com

IRL

Working on Wanderer. Started watching *Suikoden* along with *Zhan Zhao Adventures* – Soong dynasty martial arts detective series.

Notes

Those interested in a copy of Wanderer can e-mail me. I'm using Office Libre version 25.8.4.2 and most of the files are lightly modified versions of the 1997 originals to make sure that they can be opened and edited.

I started work on The Player's Guide, breaking it up into smaller chunks, you can read this in the zine, *A Gentle Stroll*. There's some weird formatting issues I'm fighting with that may be caused by the age of the file combined with old format data pre-Open Office **and a bit of file corruption**.

Worldbuilding – Law Levels

I think that original Traveller's law levels are silly and really work for Murder Hobo style campaigns, i.e. D&D in space. Of course this applies to a fair amount of the planet generation and descriptions used for the 'fuzzy' aspects of worlds.

Legal Systems - Enforcement

Legal Systems - Trials

Legal Systems – Areas of Law

Legal Systems - Background

In our modern world there are several legal systems in general use. Civil laws which are based on written works like constitutions or legal codes like the Code of Hammurabi. Common laws which are based on the past decisions of judges (case law) and written statues. Tribal law, based on the customs of a group of people. Religious laws that are based on a religious system or text. And finally what is often the case, a complicated mixture of all of the above.

Fictional legal systems exist in literature, probably the most common in science fiction is Anarchist Laws which is akin to cat herding in terms of practice.

Reactions to Issue #14

Port Omaha Beacon #1 – Dale Meier Re: LibreOffice *Having read about your stability issue with LibreOffice...*In ordinary usage I've had no instability issues with LibreOffice, just with one huge file written in StarOffice in 1997. This file does have some real corruption, so it wasn't easy to read. I've written booklets and such using it, it's a decent tool at the right price, (free) as opposed to the subscription model of Adobe and MS.

I -n **the Hall of Stone – Patrick Brady** – EPT, the game that never quite made it despite almost a half-century of work by very talented people. Add that to Barker's political views and I've lost interest.

Cowman Baloney Face #10 – Matt Stevens Re: law-level *Yeah, Traveller law-level doesn't tell you a hell of a lot...*While I'm only familiar with original Traveller, it sounds like there's been no significant changes over the years. *When I create new world traits in Traveller, I want them to follow patterns in the real-world, ...*I feel the same way, I want any worlds to feel realistic, and as for being canon my friend and I started writing world generators back in the 80s.

Quasipseudoludognostication #14 – Patrick Riley – Aurora Cove is an interesting puzzle.

Bumbling Through Dungeons #11 – Mark A. Wilson - The World Turned Upside Down: An American Revolution Megagame sounds like blast!

Reddened Stars #13 – John Redden – *I would like to read your additional notes on worldbuilding.* Incoming! Also looking forward to more Rusty Bucket content.

Age of Menace #251 – Brian Christopher Misiaszek – Habana Horror is amazing.

Firedrake's Hoard #12 – Roger Bell West – Re: LibreOffice I've created multiple art catalogs and LO certainly has issues with mixing illustrations with text. A friend of mine is currently finalizing a utility that uses Typst to create several file outputs from his source text. Also thanks for the info on Traveller's law levels, they are as silly as I remember.

Atlantis for Now #2 – Gabriel Roark *– An email requesting a copy of Wanderer is on its way.* Received and sent out. Enjoy!

An Unlooked For Zine #13 – Lisa Padol – Those all look like possible candidates for a Murderbot PC/NPC. Thanks for the info on the kickstarters! Also looks like you're reading an interesting collection of books. I love most of Bennett's books, way better than Gene Wolfe.

Strategies for Addressing Intraparty Conflict – Jim Vassilakos – Re: "Robots & Rebels?" *It has potential. Let's see more.* By your command!

Travelling Light #2 – Timothy Collinson – Hope you're enjoying Wanderer, lots of good content, but I wonder if yet another SFRPG system is needed. Traveller does have many issues that never seemed to be addressed in later editions.

Everyone else – RAEBNC

Next issue

Hopefully more original gaming material.

Accidental Recall #14

For Ever & Anon 15 © 2026 Joshua Kronengold eaddr: mneme@labcats.org

Dreamwidth: https://mneme.dreamwidth.org Gaming blog: https://labcats.dreamwidth.org/ (with Lisa Padol; defunct-ish) Tumblr: mneme / Mastodon: @mneme@dice.camp Bluesky: mnemex.bsky.social

A month working, after 7 months not, was engaging and exciting, but also exhausting. My habitual schedule trends towards staying up late, but going to work every day? Does not. So we've been balancing things a bit, with some late nights but many earlier ones, and less sleep than I'm used to.

Which, honestly, maybe we've been overdoing it a bit, but it's also really good to get LESS sleep. I wouldn't have thought so. But over the last 10 years or so, I think I've trended towards, if anything, too much sleep, sleeping until I couldn't sleep any more, rather than leaning into my ability to get pretty few hours—not every night, but enough nights that I'm often energized, not exhausted by the process.

Hopefully, things will balance out a bit more eventually. But I finished this zine (on the 21st into local 22nd, naturally) through brief micro-sleeps—helped a fair bit by experimenting with an AI dictation app for my comments.

The app, Wispr flow, is AI-powered but a pure dictation app (I'm actually not sure how much it does on your phone vs on a server, though it lets you select "don't save my data or train on me" and in fact I did), but a very powerful one; I would have to make the occasional correction—for people's names, for the capitalization of Fate, and so on, but mostly it got things right and sped things up enourmously. Not least because, while I'm a very fast typist, doing my comments in Wispr meant I could keep up my, well, flow when going to a restaurant, when taking breaks from the table, when resting on the couch and letting my body get a bit more rest and stop micro-sleeping, and so on; one of the frustrations I've had with the current era of phones is that I HATE typing on a touchscreen phone. I hope I'll have a keyboard phone with a modern Android OS soon, which might change my calculation, but as it is, being able to talk to my phone and get speed and accuracy far exceeding what I get when typing on a screen is incredible.

No, it's probably not as fast as typing on a keyboard for me (and, in fact, if you look at about a quarter—my second comment to Gabriel to the first 6 comments to Lisa of my comments, I think they're clean and clearly in my voice, as they should be since they literally are, but aside from having a few more paragraph breaks than I'll remember to add, they tend to be terser than I write by hand. Not that I can't go at length when talking, but there's a natural pattern to talking that will tend to end a phrase or thought long before I'll necessarily run out of things to type.

For, well, good or ill.

Genshin's 7th annual version also came out this month, finally bringing us to Schnezia, the Russian-inspired region, and revealing quite a bit about the end of the initial story (whether or not they choose to set other stories in this world afterwards. I've been playing since 2.0, so it's been a long 5 years and I'm still enjoying the story, while guarding myself against the addictive patterns.

I've also read some books—I finished Shroud, as I mentioned in my comments, and also read all the Hugo nominated short stories and novelettes. I enjoyed almost all of them, really, but obviously not entirely equally. Maybe if I have some more time to write next month I'll write about the short fiction. I also read some of the Hugo nominated graphic novels (after the voting deadline), and there are some fun reads there—particularly [of the three I read] Power Fantasy, focused around the idea that a number—six, specifically—of super-powered individuals have the individual power equal to or greater than that of a nuclear powered state—with all the conflict, avoidance of conflict, and utter disaster that entails. It doesn't entirely wrap up the story, in my opinion, but it does end on a good stopping point.

Finally, Worldcon is coming up next week! So I'm enjoying traveling to California (and maybe briefly seeing Lee and Barry, depending on time), and having some time to enjoy the con. I'm also on a couple of panels, which will be recorded and streamed—you can look them up on the schedule, but one is on Internet architecture and how it affects fandom, and the other is on player creation in RPGs (which I might have talked about a bit here as well). Should be really fun!

Igtheme: How do you find players/games

Honestly, as mature people who have rich social lives, we tend to find players and games in the same place—among our extended social web. We'll talk about what we're interested in playing and/or running, and people will move to or from the NYC area (for in-person games) or suggest players for zoom games, and as a process between Lisa and I, we've played or ran with, well, a lot of people!

I don't know how I'd do it if I didn't already have a large friend group of sf fans, gamers, larpers, etc—but one of the best ways is to branch out your social network; the more time you spend in places where gamers hang out, the more likely you are to find players looking for a game or a game looking for players.

Of course, there are a few other sources. Game-specific forums often have LFG threads, so that can be a good wey to find people looking for players or a game in a specific system, for instance.

Spelljammer

So, we do writeups of the every third Thursday Spelljammer game for our own benefits and those of other players (and the GM). I've generally not felt comfortable copying it here, since it's often a collaboration.

But this time, it's both a very significant moment in the campaign, a very significant moment for my PC specifically, and also I wrote the entire thing (barring a stub that I replaced by Dan who only writes stubs so the rest of us will do the work).

So first, I need to give a bit of intro.

Ok, so in this game, I play Peshi (they/them), an Aasimar who was incarnated, fully adult, around 6 years in the past with no memories of any earlier lives. They spent 3 years as a unique curiosity (and sailor) on a dark planet, and then were recruited to crew a Spelljammer that

was in need of crew along with most of the rest of the PCs. Over the course of the game, they've realized that they are an angel (a messenger) of two gods: Laros, the Human god of justice and law, and Grumash, who is, well, the head god of the orcs. (mechanically, they're a Divine Soul sorcerer; someone with a connection to divine power which grants them both arcane and divine magic naturally). They also made a Pact with the Great Weapons and have 3 levels of warlock, but that's not important now.

Other PCs of note in this session are Deela (she/her), a half-elven wizard who was used as a vessel of power by her ambitious master, feather, and Feather (they/them) a human cleric of the Raven Queen (there are three other active PCs, Hazel, another wizard (the most like a normal adventurer and a dwarf with a 20 strength), Mallory, a tiefling paladin of the god of redemption, and Melianthra, a half-elven bounty hunter and blade-wielding fey warlock, but they don't feature in this writeup).

Other important events:

1. As we discovered early in the campaign, three years before the campaign began, a horrible plague infected the orcish space-empire, killing anyone who wasn't able to flee in time. The plague continues to linger even though the people are gone, inflicting madness and eventually death on all who dream in the affected area. Except the PCs, who were divinely granted (through Peshi, actually) a rune that protects all those sleeping on their ship from the effect early in the campaign.
2. Peshi's incarnation seems to have occurred, as close as we can tell at the same time that the plague started. And Peshi channels the Orcish god, as well as the Law god that they've apparently been incarnated to serve before. Weird.
3. The party inherited the ship they travel space (spelljam) on from Captain Signar, a wizard who at one point had a relationship with the queen of the primary Human space-kingdom, Levas. His daughter inherited the kingdom, early in the campaign he was murdered by her brother (his son) to try to get a piece of obselete court regalia he was hoping to use in a bid for the throne, and the party then preserved the corpse until they could get him raised, travel to Levas, and lead a trial of the son for the murder of his father.
4. In theory, that trial should have been run by the chief prosecutor, the Lord Abiter. But he vanished without a trace (we tried) before the trial could be held, so the party acted as prosecutor instead, also while trying to investigate his death, of which the chief prosecutor was the archmage Inari Metras, who is infamous for her foes disappearing. Having concluded that it was unlikely that Inari Metras was responsible for this particular disappearance (she has no motive) they ended up becoming vaguely friends with her, despite their vague suspicions.

4.5. Since the elves are touched on, the PCs *also* have a pretty good relationship with the elven kingdom. They've befriended the warlord who is and the king's aunt (and sold her an ancient giant beholder warship made entirely out of mythril for an absurd sum), and in their last visit, there was an attack by doppelgangers and they took the king's 3rd daughter away by request; she's still on the ship and is a 9th level archer fighter now. Also, the elves are currently at war with Levas, the war having started a year or so ago over a supposedly unprovoked attack.

5. In the last few sessions, the party traveled to the orcish capital to see if there was evidence they missed. There, they discovered evidence that the plague began after Levas, having made a treaty with the orcs, had given a gift to the emperor; when it was opened, the plague began, killing swiftly. They discovered the aggressively non-magical box the gift had been stored in—and also sensed the plague itself, and with a complex and dangerous ritual, were able to dismantle the extra-dimensional entity and wrongness that was the plague.
6. After taking some time to recover form this ordeal, they got a call from Inari Metras, who needed help—she had been privately talking with the queen of Levas, with no witnesses, when the queen suddenly keeled over, dead. With no other suspects, Inari had been accused of the deed, and when her protests to no avail, entered a Demiplane. But she had disarmed, given up all her obvious magical supplies before her private audience, and so she had no way to return from her demiplane alone. The PCs did not know the Demiplane spell, but after several Sendings, they learned that there was a Demiplane scroll stored in Inari Metra's home.
7. After teleporting (with Teleport Circle) to Inari Metra's home, and dealing with (and taking damage from) a *great* many home defenses, they were able to retrieve, not the promised scroll (which was missing) but a demiplane-opening magic item hidden in Metra's basement, and finally retrieved the much the worse for wear archmage.
8. At which point, AFTER Inari Metras has had some time to drink water and eat some food, the session begins.

We talk with Inari Metras a bit more, and she offers to teleport us somewhere before she disappears to hide from the law. We take her up on it (she teleports us near an inn outside of town. Before getting a nice evening in to recover [a long rest], Deela Sends to Signar and Oliver, asking someting about the Queen's death.

Signar's response to the sending: My daughter's dead. Murdered by the Metras girl. Surprised you've heard. Can't talk. No time. All the politics is coming down on me.

Oliver's [JK: the nephew of the missing Lord Arbiter, cousin of the recently dead queen, and a paladin of Laros who helped the PCs with the trial] answer was basically "queen dead can't talk". (DM: he did not mention the queen at all)

Feather asks with a commune question - Y/N: Was the queen being magically animated just before she fell over apparently dead at XXXX? no Y/N: Has her spirit passed into the after life? umclear Y/N: is it stored someplace int he material world? no

Peshi: How can I best get access to the Queen's Magister's (Rykar, Lord Northshore's) private chambers? Answer: Travel to his estate.

So, we do, traveling to Rykar's estate on a hired ship. It takes six days and we don't have to work the ship, but most of us don't have much available for study, since our stuff is still on OUR ship (Hazel, of course, has a bag of holding).

The estate's one staff-member is reluctant to let us in, because his employer is quite sick. But we insist, saying that we want to pay our respects, and that we hope our powerful cleric will be able to aid the revered minister.

There is quite a bit of back and forth, as the poor man goes back and asks for instructions from his employer, but eventually we are shown into the study.

There, we are met by Rykar, who is, in fact, clearly not well. Not dying; not immanently, anyway, but clearly he's seen better days—but he seems sharp, at least.

Initially, the group is unsure of how to proceed. Feather offers medical aid, and he declines, saying that he has had care from sufficiently capable clerics that even a high priest of the Raven Queen is unlikely to be able to do more than ease his death.

He asks us what we're really here for. And Peshi tells him—saying that we were hoping for further information on something we found, which

had been given as a gift in a magic-proof box to the orcish high king (emperor? king?), which we'd found on the now deserted home world.

"It's finally come home to me, then," he says, half to himself. And he tells us the story, his part in it certainly not excluded.

The Queen of Lavos (yes, the daughter of our old captain) had a problem, it seems. Sure, there was a treaty with the Orcish empire. But she had seen the course of the last few decades, centuries, and there was always a pause in the fighting, and then it continued, fierce as before, and the orcish empire expanded again. Don't change the situation, and eventually, Lavas would be wiped out, conquered by the orcs, however slowly.

So, she had worked with her ministers, and come up with a plan. A terrible monster had been discovered within Levas and temporarily dealt with—a wrongness in the universe, which, while it had been contained, would, left to itself expand and kill, crossing between planets, possibly endlessly. Something that was deadly to humans, and dangerous to even the gods themselves. Of course, such a thing could not be allowed to prosper endlessly, but with a great working, it could be contained, controlled, and harnessed—turned into a terrible, if necessary weapon.

A tight project team was formed—with her magister leading the work and performing the greatest and most dangerous labors, and the Queen herself volunteering as the necessary focus for the spell to contain the attack to the Orcish empire's borders, her principles not allowing her to order anyone else to perform such a task without taking on an equal risk.

And so it was done. A worlds-ending monstrosity trapped in a magic-warded box, delivered to the Orcish empire as a "peace offering", and then released, with the magic performed on it preventing it from expanding beyond the Orcish borders. Lavos, saved from extinction, and all it takes is a genocide of billions.

Rykar knows it is wrong, of course—that deploying such a weapon makes Levas even worse than the worst one could say about the orcs. And when the queen talks about repeating the project (only a part of the entity needed to be deployed for it, so it could be used again) to prevent a loss in the war with the elves, he demurs—he is far too weak, his power permanently sapped by the great working—but while this is true, he is secretly relieved to not have his loyalties put against his ethics yet again.

And the queen, disappointed, but not surprised, starts looking around for a new magister. She meets with one candidate (Inari Metras, of course), and, the working unravelled on another world at a felicitous time, dies before she can explain her proposal, killed instantly by the backlash of the spell unraveling.

"Have you come for justice, then?" Rykar asks.

And Peshi, not needing a spell to determine the answer, answers "Yes", feeling divinity in the word. (Laros, of course, Grumash was more like "kill him! Kill him now! Bring him back and kill him again!" and the like).

There were a few more details—Peshi wants a public trial to establish a precedent (ideally, a precedent that a crime like that will result in most of known space banding together to punish the perpetrator, but the whole point is for this to be won in court), someone to run it who is clearly independent (which is difficult—the elves are at war with Levas, Laros is a human god, the orcs are the injured party…if they're willing the dwarven kingdom seems the most appropriate and neutral, but Hazel for some reason finds the idea distasteful). In any case, the party takes custody of Rykar for his protection (and so he's available to stand trial, the queen, quite likely worse than dead, not really being able to), teleports the lot back to our ship, and begins to plan and perform Sending spells.

One note: It'll probably be asked, but the reason the PCs didn't take ill that Inari sent them into her HOUSE FULL OF TRAPS was that it was eminently plausible. Given her time and resources, she could give them the keys to a teleport circle in her house, but her defenses were set to let her pass, and presumably a few trusted relatives, and maybe she could have keyed them so that friends could pass—if she were there. But she wasn't, so working their way through the traps was about as good as one could get. Plus, she trusted them to not die, which, well, they didn't.

And anyway, from a player level the traps were pretty fun. Scary, but fun.

Comments on Ever & Anon #14

M Neigoza (cover): A wonderful piece (a dragon? No wings, but those face horns certainly don't say "snake" to me) and a great call-out to the line art common in early RPG products! From a glance at your reddit, it seems like you'd have a lot to contribute to the APA if you chose to write here, too.

Pedro Panhoca da Silva: I've never been fond of legacy works in practice (why do I want to alter or destroy my copy of a game?) but the myth of them always has some appeal. And, of course, it does mirror an indelible reality—you can only experience a work for the first time once. (although you can approach it if you wait long enough that you've *mostly* forgotten the first experience, but "echoes" are still pretty likely).

Re Arabian Nights: Glad you enjoyed! It's just such an odd artifact of a game, both the original version and the Z-man rework (which I did do a tiny amount of unpaid copyediting on). As a competitive game, it was never good—if one ever took it seriously as a game, it would involve memorizing many of the stories, thus making the actual game far less fun. But as an experience; it's fascinating—you send your characacter through tale after tale, using vague memory of what kinds of stories tend towards particular outcomes, and get to enjoy the glory or tragedy of what happens to them, with your choices (particularly if you can get them to master a skill or two) having a significant, but not overriding influence on what befalls. The randomness keeps the game replayable, too, as long as Arabian Nights is the game you want to play right now. The game's biggest weakness is really that it can run a little long, but it's easy enough to moderate that; just play with enough time to finish—or don't play with more than 2-3 people so it moves better.

Dale Meier: Hail and welcome! Nice to see a new arrival who has participated in APAs before and isn't an old friend (but maybe a new one)!

Wow, you dove right through intraparty conflict and into the problem player. As you said earlier, the problem players (and even player incompatibility) don't cause most intraparty conflict, but boy do they stand out in our memories!

I tend to like games quite a lot that often don't have a party at all, and where more conflict can comfortably come from the PCs rather than NPCs, but to do this well really does require having better tools to make sure that PC conflicts don't become (or start with) player conflicts. Even the classic northern Parlor LARP, where (as a major branch came from Assassin games, and another from murder mystery games) many games had few to no NPCs and *all* conflict was between PCs had their tools even if they weren't thinking about it that way—strictly neutral (in theory) GMs, player/character separation aided

by the writers, not the players, writing all the PCs, and replacement characters available to anyone who, for whatever reason (including PC death) wasn't able to play their main PC any more.

But problem players? Yeah, I have to mostly agree with you; sometimes they can be turned from the dark side and become worthwhile to play against, but nobody is obligated to tolerate someone who just isn't fun to play with; better to move on and fine people that are a better match.

I never had any problems swapping between Libre and Open Ofice, but it's been a long time since I tried something that wasn't Libre. That was a fascinating journey—the product started with StarOffice, bought by Sun and released in an open source version as Open Office. Usage shifted over to Open Office even as StarOffice became the "commercial" version of a company supported open source product. And then, with Open Office closely held by Sun and then Oracle, Libre office forked off and started becoing the hacker's office suite of choice.

That said, it looks like Oracle has given up on the Office market and given the entire Open Office IP/license over to the Apache Foundation to manage, so maybe it will start gaining ground again now that it's not held by a rent-seeking organization any more. That said, it has a long way to go, since Libre Office has had a far more active development community for so long.

I don't tend to think of my issues with parasitic games as being about "pay to win" at all—although of course, there's overlap, and while my issues with Diablo Infinite were much more about it being a time sink than the literal "pay to win" mechanics that it was built around, I was also very aware that, even as my largely *not* pay to win endgame (PVP; the entire endgame was pvp) guild had won our first match, that when you matched against players who paid for the game every week you would always lose, since the core power growth mechanic in the game beyond the basics gave you one pull per WEEK, plus, of course, all of the pulls you paid real money for.

As far as gatchas go, I can't see games like Genshin, Wuthering Waves (which I haven't played) or Star Rail (which I have), or even Love/Infinity Nikki s "pay to win"—or even Hearthstone, which is literally a CCG (I'm probably wrong about Hearthstone, though). In the first place, this is because there is no winning or losing; there's no player vs player at all, so the best you can call it is "pay to play the game faster"—and in general, there's enough content that paing will mostly just let you skip content and play the game less. The game sets up false "pay to win" psychology to try to get some players to "whale" and pay out extraordinary amounts, though, which is arguably worse.

In many games, though, much more of the game is PVP, so other player's spends directly impact your own success; those are the true "pay to win" games, where you might as well not even compete if you aren't a big spender.

Games like Hearthstone are a weird hybrid, but they fall firmly into my parasitic games model. Unlike a game like Diablo Infinite (or so many others, most of which I've never tried), a CCG doesn't require constantly spending to keep up with people who pay; normal regular play will eventually let you buy all that you need of each new set, especially if you don't try to play *every* competitive decks, but just the ones you like. However, that "regular play" means you're expressly incentivized to keep playing, an hour or more every day, and frankly no game should demand that.

That said, as much as Hasbro would like to tap into the sweet, sweet "pay to win" money, the've shown no signs of succeeding at this. Other than, of course, running Magic (but even there, see my comments about how CCGs don't really support full-on P2W since once you can build a deck, you have the deck; it's always weird legacy formats like EDH that really push the expensive cards), there's no reason to believe they'll be able to. Even the scandal of their roll out of "drops" where paid D&D Beyond players get extra content other players don't) ran afoul of the fact that content other people don't have access to is useless in D&D (except for GM material, of course), so they had to reverse course and make it auto-shared.

Re Adventurer's League and Pathfinder's Society: This actually runs into one point I touch on wrt easy access games—that being able to just click and start a new game can create bad and even addictive behavior. League play can have a similar effect—it's easier to level, easier to find another game and build your charcer up, but in the end, it doesn't really mean anything—but it's less satisfying than lasting campaign play, so there's always room for another game if that's the high you're chasing.

Patrick Brady: Welcome back! A lot of people have been using the open source Typst for layout, which has a few advantages, particularly in that it is easy enough to write basic text and you can set up (or steal) a layout and just use it, for the most part. But it does mean dealing with markup—but pretty, "get out of my face" markup like Markdown, rather than ugly confusing (until you learn it, I guess; I never did) markup like TeX and LaTeX. Of course, that doesn't help with art, but there are a lot of copyright-free or open license sources of art—as long as you can avoid accidentally downloading badly tagged AI contributions, at least.

Re Nightwatch/Daywatch: At some point I'd like to read these, or at lest successfully see the movies! I started one of the movies when it was shown at a con, but we only had the Russian with no translation so it was rough going.

ryct me: Thanks for the kind words! Re stencils, I'm quite certain that all APAs before Lee's printing machine finally couldn't get replacement parts died (in the late 90s? Early 2000s? Something like that!) were stenciled—even if she had to print the stencils herself! So my modemed zine was stenciled, as were the emailed zines afterwards, even if I didn't have to work with them!

I also don't enjoy gambling! As a child, I had one afternoon at a carnival where I put quarter after quarter into one of those machines with very tempting stacks of quarters and other gifts, (or maybe nickel after nickel; it was a different time) and got…many, many fewer quarters back out again. And by the end, several dollars poorer, I'd gotten the lesson—nobody sets up a machine that seems like it lets you win money unless they intend to keep most of yours!

I'll stop in and play a dollar or two away in the RARE occasion where we're in a casino city (and in practice, I've ended up leaving with more money than I started with—but only because I was well aware that, having won on my first or second play, it was time to stop while I was, unlikely, up!) And I have *rarely* engaged in penny poker, but it's not something I seek out—and really, the appeal there isn't winning or losing money, but the competive spirit; I'd rather play the same game without the money changing hands.

As said, though, just not being a gambler doesn't immunize you to *other* parasitic games and game designs! If anything, being good at holding on to your money can make it a lot more tempting to see how much you can get out of such a game by…just wasting far too much time.

Grindy games are a weird place in my "parastic games" cluster, because they have almost no reason to be. The game designers aren't making more money by wasting your time watching a long Final Fantasy animation with every fight, nor are they able to extract money money if they built no mechanics to do so. But of course, what they're providing is the illusion (or perhaps the actuality) of greater value, buy making

a game longer via stretching it out. And maybe sometimes it's even worth it.

But I'd far rather than the main game be clean and non-grindy—with any "satisfying grind" locked behind achievement hunting that anyone less obsessed can just skip.

I love the AI issue demonstration via giving an assignment on "vitamin Z deficiency!" Maybe later AI frameworks will more easily filter out requests like that, but that also means they'll probably be somewhat better tools, at least. And maybe (for the commercial/cloud versions, anyway) better at refusing tasks they really shouldn't be taking on like "please do my homework for me."

Matt Stevens: What's New with you, Matt? (as you said, not art from -you-).

Well, one might not *like* the East Anglia font, but it's certainly striking as a title font!

Very much agreed on systems that allow the GM (or whoever takes on that role for this purpose) to scale resolution up and down based on narrative need. That involves too much intervention for some people's sensibilities, but honestly it involves much less of a thumb on the scale than a lot of other things a GM does, on the same level (one could say it's a subset, even) of a GM controlling pacing by zooming in on a description or out by cutting ahead hours, days or weeks when "nothing interesting" is happening. Now, what systems can handle that kind of zoom well is another matter—Fate suggests that kind of play, but while I enjoy it, there are plenty of other players and GMs who don't find Fate's narrative momentum-as-currency mechanic compelling. For them, a game with D&D's kind of tactical grain probably works better, but then you need to adapt the rules to support coarser grain, where the round by round combat fades away when it's not needed to let the GM resolve things more simply, only to zoom in when a combat is fun (and probably even more when a combat is critical; it's subtle, but recent versions of D&D already do that a bit with much more impactful, longer, and more complicatedly paced fights against Solo (4e) and Legendary (5e) monsters taking turns with more normal fights.

4e actually had a nice mid-resolution (albeit flawed without adoption) mechanic for handling non-combat situations—the much praised and hated "skill challenge" system. Really, the innovations there were not even the system per se (which deserved a lot of the hate it got, mechanically) but the enhancements that Wizards used to make it work well in practice in published and organized adventures—adventures built to adjust the situation and thus appropriate skills as you progressed through the narrative of a challenge, and also actively signaled acceptable outcomes for both failure and success so the players could focus on building a good story and *trying* to win, rather than it being an utter necessity that made the story they were building irrelevant. A game could use similar bones, or something different for that kind of framework for situations where combat wasn't a really good model (and/or, like Fate suggests, model some things that aren't technically combat but can be modeled that way, like fighting a fire or navigating a complicated diplomatic scene with a lot of players as if they are higher resolution combats with initiative and all).

Re objections to society being as sexist, racist, and/or homophobic as the setting dictates: Well, sure, but not everyone wants to play in every setting. And more, settings that have that special something but *don't* have some elements, yet are still functional can be an interesting challenge to build; altered history and pure fantasy settings can both be really fruitful locations for roleplay—as long, of course, that the players all have a shared sense of what the setting even is. If someone doesn't want to play in the same setting the rest of the group favors, well, not everyone needs to play all the same games.

Re 4e: No, I mostly played organized play D&D (I also played with Stephen), that is, Living Forgotten Realms. With the exception a short Changeling larp, we didn't play much with Gaylord until this decade (and no, he tends to be extremely strict on the rules, not least because the players tend to keep him honest). Players tended to optimize pretty heavily, and with optimized PCs, even at mid to high levels, fights tend to get faster, not slower as people level up, so even high difficulty peer enemies tended to vanish in one or two attacks.

I think that was the big difference—unless the PCs optimized for party damage, 4e certainly could get sluggish, or if the fights were built with high optimization in mind, deadly. The result was that high optimization tables, including a lot of organized play, would tend to run very fast combats; after all, the organized play model was a strict 4 hour game with 2 combats, some roleplay, and a skill challenge in the middle (usually), quite possibly with a bit of exploration besides, so things needed to move at speed. If anything, things tended to go the other way; I remember one "SPEC" module (the spec modules were specifically designed as high difficulty, high reward challenge modules) that I played with random players at a Gencon. We had a fairly small party at 3 or 4, and some of the other players were less optimized than the usual, so by the second round of the second fight, everyone except my Avenger (a damage dealer and hardly a healer) was down. Then, I judged the situation, and had my character spend her turn applying first aid to one downed PC (doable because Avengers are Wisdom-primary) and deliver a potion to another, rather than trying to solo the entire fight by herself, and the fight turned around, but it was a near thing!

The main exception to D&D4 being all about short fights was when an encounter was all about effects that messed with PCs. Have the fight start when they're 200 feet from the enemy, and throw in some darkness or blindness effects and there's going to be a bit of tactical maneuvering before thing really come to blows. But I remember having fun setting up one encounter where the area the PCs were in would swap from a manor house to an open fey forest every round or back, and I got to execute the swap exactly twice before all the monsters were done.

Now, that said, I think that Wizards also over time adjusted monster HP to be both more deadly and more fragile, but the former was as important as the latter! If a fight is correctly dangerous if an enemy deals 52 damage over four rounds, then if you adjust its HP so it instead only lasts 2 rounds, it should be doing 26 damage a round, not 13!

Patrick Riley: Re Outgunned Superheroes staying too close to their inspiration: Yeha, have to agree with you there. There's "make sure people know how you were inspired", and there's "get sued if someone notices" and what you described crosses the line in a way that, say, Masks: A New Era doesn't. I like invoking my sources as much as the next person, but one wants to be plausibly deniable (and having some original combinations thrown in is a nice touch!).

Re Aurora Cove: Just have a criminal mad scientist design the tech for your super-prison. What could go wrong? Well, since the PCs are some of the prisoners, nothing, really. But a well signaled "Surprise, you have superpowers" setup can be really fun. It did take me a bit of paging around to figure out what the PCs powers were, since I had to index their PC name with the short dossiers, but that's not a problem for you since you wrote the scenario, of course.

Re Decorum: Playing Decorum brought Zendo to mind for me, too, so it was no coincidence that I brought it up close after—I suspect the Decorum game was part of why I decided to bring Zendo to game nights/days a few times in a row. And yeah; it's pretty much exactly as I described it, so if that sounds like the kind of co-op game you

might like, it might be in that set! (what co-op games have you liked or bounced off of? While not a co-op fan, I can moderately enjoy a large variety of them without running into problems a lot of other people describe, but I've also tried out a fair number of co-ops that are different from others and thus can have breakthrough appeal.)

Bryant Durrell: Welcome back to APA-hacking (of course, due to Shadowfist (the CCG), cons, and more recently, RPGs, I've had the pleasure of your company a fair bit, for which I'm quite happy).

Yeah, LARPs have changed a lot (although there are still the occasional weekend-long events, but they're a minority). Please do reach out to Lisa and I on info on those since we've very hooked into that community.

Like you, in principle, I adore PC on PC conflict—in theory, anyway. This is also why I really love parlor-larps—setting the players on one another is a great way of dividing the load and letting the players make fun for one another without having to make *everything* up. But of course, things can get out of hand if personal feelings get involved (among other failure modes). I won't even limited it to "intraparty"—in many games focused on conflict, the PCs aren't a party in any sense, and if they work together, it's towards the end of the game, not at the beginning. But conflict as a spice in what's otherwise a group game can work well too.

Let it get out of hand, sure, and bad feelings can result—or a game that wasn't built as war game devolving into one. But even in a game where PC conflict isn't designed as a main driver of the game, the PCs disagreeing on how they feel about things means that they're feeling things, which is exactly what I want to happen in a RPG. Why would everyone feel the same way about what can be complex issues?

Re the Internet vs Gutenberg's movable type press: I don't know whether I've heard your rant, but I've certainly read Ada Palmer's various writing on the subject. Gutenberg's press took several hundred years to have close to its full impact; the Internet so far is proceeding at a faster pace, just because things are so much faster now. Gutenberg's press needed the distribution networks to be built out to be financially viable to run, which had no reason to exist without the press—but the Internet has taken decades to go from a point to point connection between a few Gvt installations and universities to something that blankets the world and is available at any moment we aren't in a Faraday cage.

Yes, very much agreed that a key to making 4e combat (and non-combat) more interesting is to make it less rigid. A simple resource model can quickly become predictable and kinda boring, but the more change-ups you do to this, the more it engaged creativity and tactical (and roleplaying) thinking again.

Incidentally, I've run into similar issues (and solutions) to other RPG structures. A number of game seem to follow a mission lead structure—the PCs take turns leading a mission (or maybe one PC leads all missions, see Heroine), and the other players can choose whether to aid a given mission, interfere (maybe) or sit it out (maybe). In the most classic approach, once each player has lead a mission, the game moves into wrap.

It's an interesting, elegant structure, and strictly run, it does nothing for me. But loosen it up a lot, make it more about the PCs journeys, where plenty of things can happen between and during missions, and it starts to be more interesting. It's not the structure that's the problem, but the insistence on making a game *nothing* but the structure.

Mark A Wilson: Re rangers: making them both full casters and not casters at all in 4e worked as well as anything else in 4e did (via the mechanism of rebuilding every class, at least until Essentials, around a spell-like structure, but also the class as re-envisioned was also entirely martial, not magical, until Essentials added a version back that had Primal magic). In terms of modern approaches, leaning into the traps mechanics is a fun idea; it seems to me to scale less well for groups that eschew the map, but it's certainly a way to make some rangers work well (although not Aragorn).

That said, my thoughts aren't to make Ranger a full caster (how would that even work?) but to better integrate their spellcasting abilities (which need not be magical in flavor—if an artificer can do magic with a wrench and a bag of holding, a ranger can do "magic" by applying herbs to their weapons or remembering an ancient piece of lore; less Bombadil and more Aragorn) with their fighting; Wizards does this, but in a very incoherent way; Rangers get spells that are really buffs to their fighting at first and 5th level (Hunter's mark, swift quiver), but barely anything (except for a big stealth buff at 2nd level) at the other spellcasting levels, so you're stuck in any given turn being either a second rate druid or a powerful fighter with spells you're not using.

Shift this around, encouraging rangers to take a mix of spells that complement their fighting style (whether it's traps, bows, blades, or beasts) with a mix of "spells" that represent exceptional wilderness training, and the class would feel much less like it's pulling itself apart, whatever direction you bring a specific subclass to.

You're right that it's not really about power. A good design will tend to be powerful when it's doing what it's designed for, but that's a result, not a designated goal—I also played a 2014 ranger (more or less, I did use some of the UA options) and as said, I did plenty of damage and made headaches for the GM. But because of the incoherence in the class, a lot of this was by taking on different roles at different level bands—until 9th level, I was strictly an archer, sneaking around and shooting at foes. But at 9th level, I unlocked 3rd level spells, which didn't help with my main role at all, but instead gave me other options entirely—I could hold concentration on a Hunter's mark and continue to shoot at enemies (and use my bonus action to get extra movement on the battlefield when I wasn't doing something else), but my concentration could also summon a herd of weak but battlefield controlling animals, or once I had two 3rd level spell slots, I could manage a myriad of clever feats by making plants grow and then able to move under my direction (plant growth/speak with plants, only one of which requires concentration. Of course, while it's fun and flexible, that involves not doing the archer ranger thing for a while.

Of course, for a controller-style ranger, options like these might fit what you were doing already. But the key is to give other good options for different play-styles.

That revolutionary war game (LARP!) sounds like a major trip! Hopefully it will run again.

John Redden: Having a Lisa and Josh talk about kids in your game was unnerving (we do not intend to have any).

I've also read Shroud. The aliens are certainly alien!

Myles Corcoran: Re your cat burglar thief and Pete's characters: Hee! Hijinks ensue!

Re "A common fiction but separate rules for each player" I mean, you were in a game that did this, if somewhat accidentally—the Strange School Cthulhupunk game, where the default rules were Over the Edge/WaRP, but most events were run diceless, and players who wished could pull in Dogs in the Vineyard or whatever else seemed to fit a situation! Of course, the only person who can opine on GM difficulty is our own Lisa Padol.

Brian Misiaszek: The list of prisoners with ideal approaches was fascinating and terrifying. I wouldn't expect any PC group to get all

of that right, but then, that gives the GM excellent guidelines for how they can get it wrong.

Re zine length limits: The main advantage a strict 16 page (or whatever) limit has is simplicity—contributors can write to that length and know no zine will pass it. That said, since I had such a good reaction to my previous suggestions for relaxing the limit for special cases (I did not), letting contributors donate their excess limit to specific named contributors who needed it for a time or two would allow cases where a contributor had written quite a lot of stuff that was losing potency with age (as it was) without letting the APA itself grow beyond proportion to its number of contributors. Under this approach, page count can only be transferred within a single APA—if someone passes 16 pages, it's because someone with fewer than 16 pages is voluntarily giving the person their underage.

Re Nomic and Fluxx: Yeah; Fluxx, like Nomic, has a structure involving ever-changing rules, but there the resemblance ends; in Fluxx, the rules change chaotically and in accordance with the variations that have been laid out before-hand, while in Nomic, they change deliberately (until a rule changes this, anyway) but in an entirely open-ended fashion. Another game with an odd relationship to the rules is Mao, or "M" as some people call it. There, the key mechanic (usually; it is a folk game) is that you aren't told the rules in advance, only punished (with extra cards; the *core* concept of the game is a card shedding game like Uno or Crazy Eights) for breaking them, so a core element of gameplay is to note when people are "punished" and try to figure out the rules so you can follow them to a victory. But another aspect for almost every variety of the game I've encountered is that the winner of any game gains a singular prize—the ability to run the next game of Mao at the same session, only this time, adding a secret rule of their own devising to what was already established. So if one plays multiple games in a row, the rules will get ever more involved and quite likely, more arcane.

Avram Grumer: Re FBI Director Kash Patel appearing in Monster Hearts/Vermilion Cove: I know Lisa is getting a bit annoyed at people thinking might have gone over the quite-clear line on political content in non-gaming writing, but I thought it was funny!

Re Laeli stirring up the militia (etc): It's fascinating how often the Mortal is the one who goes Full PVP in Monster Hearts! Something about being the only "non-monster" PC in the game, I suppose, but having a Sex Move that makes people more monstrous doesn't shy away from that trope.

Lisa and I had a spirited, if civil, argument over whether "shut someone down" was appropriate for spreading nasty rumors, not based on their direct actions. I think it's iffy, but I'll admit that the outcomes of the move match what you want for the rumor-mongering—even though I think that barring a thing someone is actually doing that you can call them out for, messing with someone by spreading rumors about them feels more Hot than Cold to me.

I thought it being difficult to heal Agatha was odd until I remembered that Agatha, is not a PC. Of course, in Monsterhearts, PCs can heal more or less whenever they want (once a session) using the Healing move, no hospital or justification needed, but that's something you do to yourself, not to somebody else. Of course, someone else can help out ("delicately and intimately, possibly with erotic subtext"), you heal two points instead of one, but that's an addition, not the main move. But it never does say that NPCs can, given time to rest and tend their wounds, can heal, so the GM has a lot of leeway there.

Another possible interpretation is strained, but possible—at least from MH1; I'd have to look to see if this is present in MH2—the healing move (in both books) requires that you have time to rest and tend to your wounds to heal. The description in MH1 (at least) of 2 wounds is "enough to require medical treatment". I don't think it's intentional that a PC who had time to rest and "treat" their wounds (particularly with a friend, see above) that you need a hospital, doctor, or even a different first aid kit (although working what makes sense into the narrative is great, honestly). But I could see an earnest GM trying to figure out what those passages mean in combination and coming up with a different conclusion!

Re Drake's Fate: Well, I know I said it was hard to get close to the political line in a game write-up, but man, that's a big conspiracy theory you just let drop there!

That scavenger hunt is something else again! It's probably the most "custom" thing Briar did, but I don't hate it; it's one big custom move, really. (and one designed to put you at one another's throats—even more than you already were).

Re leftists in the genre (I originally took notes on this in a comment to Roger BW, but when I expanded it out it was in response to you; go figure!): Norman Spinrad's *Child of Fortune* is all about someone's teen lark powered by a solid basic welfare system with no conditions and Ian Banks Culture is in essence a anarchist socialist post-scarcity utopia. But both are mostly writing in science fiction idioms, not fantasy so I didn't bother with them lastish. And there's Ivan the Fool, Tolstoy's socialist ("christian?") parable in the form of a fairy tale, but that's only barely genre (not his only socialist parable, according to google). That said, Stephen Brust is a well-known Leninist and certainly writes about wizards and the like; he even has peasant socialists in the series he's known for, although "the time is not right" for revolution.

Re the predictable attack rule in OTE and whether it's onerous (or just boring); I mean, I don't remember having a problem with it, but I also don't remember ever using it. Sometimes you do a big description of how you attack someone; sometimes you just go "yeah, I take him down", and sometimes the GM chooses to run gestalt combat and you don't bother with individual attacks at all. Either way, the game runs best when you don't sweat the small stuff. Over the Edge has a surprisingly large amount of excellent advice, but that doesn't mean it's *all* good advice—it's been 30 years, after all!

Roger BW: Re Universal Core, multiple games ("hacks) being the now-favored model: Very much so. The "universal" games made a promise that they couldn't really keep—even though in theory you can transfer characters from any D&D game into any other regardless of the source world, or mix different Hero System characters whether they're Champions or Justice Inc, or mix characters from Gurps Fantasy II, Supers, and Girl Genius. In practice, why would you? The appeal to a universal system is the same as that of a "universal core" approach—that you can use a core you're familiar with to do what it does best in an entirely different game, but doing so without leaving rules that don't fit out and adding new rules that do support the milieu has never worked, and the "universal core" systems lean into that well.

That said, there's a spectrum, and often new games aren't so much "universal core" or "one and done" but "take what you like from an existing game, trim away what doesn't fit your new idea and add new rules that support what you do want to do", and the result might feel like the original, or might feel like a new game entirely.

For instance, Belonging Outside Belonging has some very clear antecedents to PbtA (Powered by the Apocalypse), and not just that Avery's it's inventor's, big game before that was Monsterhearts. But it also leaves so much behind. The archetypes are framed in many of the same ways that PbtA games do, with lists, plot structures, and "standard" moves—but by leaving behind the dice and most mechanics, and replacing them with strong moves, weak moves, and a loose economy, a very different game feel results.

Similarly, one can look at two Baker PbtA games. Under the Fairy Hill is pretty standard, overall—the PCs are expected to work together more than in a gen 1 game, and there's no advancement, but ultimately the structure is what you expect for a PbtA game—the PCs do stuff, roll dice, and get the usual 2-6, 7-9, and 10+ ranges for things with things biased more towards the high side that they usually get to succeed at things—in this case, putting on a performance with magical side effects.

On the other hand, Firebrands is also a PbtA game (the creators say so, and who else would know?) But it has even less resemblance to a "standard" PbtA game than BoB games like Yazeba's B&B and Dream Askew have; the game is formulated in "moves", sure, but to support a romance game about romance forged in conflict, the game is sturctured around "games" where two PCs are in a conflict of one sort or another, the conflict itself being resolved via a card game based on the conflict chosen. From the scene structure to the mechanic to the way you chose moves, it feels very different from Apocalypse World's guided chaos, but why, then, is it PbtA? Well, you'd have to ask a Baker, but to my mind, it's because it involves thinking about the game the same way. Like a more standard PbtA game, the designers think about what they want the players doing and focusing on, and then design moves that help the players think in those directions and get success in the game that way.

But on a design level, I think it's still following the same playbook as "one core, many games" even though, in fact, this is an original core that doesn't really feel much like the Apocalypse's typical 2d6 at all—that of the "more open" gaming we got following the open source games spread on the Internet in the 90s and the officially open games following D&D3—that it wasn't assumed that you had to come up with your own mechanics from scratch if you didn't want to receive a strongly worded letter from someone named Esquire. So instead, you have an idea for a game, you start out by mapping your idea onto an existing game. If it's a perfect match? Great, ship it. If not, pare away the things that make the original structure doesn't work, add any mechanics you need for your idea, and playtested it a bit; when it works, ship it. In that way, "one core, many games" isn't a goal; it's a result of being able to choose a core that is pretty good, and often not needing to change it that much to get a satisfying game.

But then again, sometimes you have to to get the game you want, and that's ok. There are, after all, thousands of board games and few people are complaining that designers keep coming up with new ones.

Re my comment and running games: yes, exactly. I can have really good cons when I don't run anything (I mean, not officially anyway). But by running something I can guarantee some good fun for me. And if I have a mediocre time, running more things next time will likely increase the amount of guaranteed fun I have (at least, if the problem last time was that there weren't enough games on the schedule, which will usually have been the case; over-scheduled cons are a different problem and one that I have a lot more difficulty dealing with as an attendee), so I'll do that to make the con more like the kind of con I like.

Re D&D/OSR: The frustrating thing for me is that the D&D character structure is actually pretty good! A class structure feels rigid, but lots of work has been done to loosen that up, and having a set of options that are guarunteed to work well together and are scaled so PCs are of roughly comparable power levels can help take a lot of the guesswork out of running a game. But like a number of people here, I'm not really that interested in classic "kick open a door" style of looting adventure. Of course, there's nothing requiring that D&D style games play that way; to repeat myself, of our Thursday games, we've got a heroic band of explorers running around the Neitherworld dealing with threats, and only ending up with treasure because bad guys tend to have cool stuff, we have a ship full of sailors jamming around between the spheres and mostly focused on their early horrible mysteries (although that's starting to resolve, so it'll be interesting to see where the campaign goes from here; of course, the characters are 17th level now). And then we have the group of magic school students, who mostly end up in "dungeon" like experiences because they are doing a summer archaeology project or an instructor has gone missing; they have literally *never* broken into someone's home, although they did break into an absent professor's residence because they were told the answer to a mystery might be in there.

The point is, you can certainly have non-murderhobo adventures and entire games in D&D worlds and with D&D or D&D-like rules. But most people who *only* play those games don't focus on that, so avoiding D&D can be a good shorthand to avoiding those kinds of players or designers, even though the rules can be good, actually. But if it's at your home table, the rules are often about as good as anything else, especially if the plot structure you're using lends itself to some amount of set piece combat.

ryct Gabriel Roark on a necromancer barred from heaven and hell: I mean, I assume if they're destroyed they're likely dead for ever, but if other people won't provide you with an afterlife it's up to you to do it yourself.

Re maximizing a single stat in a game: Often when I pick up a new competitive game, I'll try to do a bunch of things to see if I can find some solid synergies that reinforce one another. Another friend, Sarah, likes to "head for the exit" and see if the simplest strategy that often involves pushing the same button again and again can also lead to victory. Of course, later games get more involved, but it can be interesting playing a new game with them and seeing which of our core philosophies win out.

I loved *parts* of *The Incandescent*. But it didn't feel as Hugo-worthy to me as some of the others, especially on reflection.

Yeah, the core failure models of Zendo are either a master who picks too-hard rules not having a feel for what makes a viable rule (or at least a viable rule for that group and the time available) or who simply masters inconsistently. I've had a lot of fun with somewhat complex rules in Zendo—but that's with a really strong, consistent master, and also with fellow players good enough to not get too frustrated when things don't turn out to be utterly simple. But this is why more recent printings of the rules of Zendo also come with cards suggesting rules with expected difficulty listed; this doesn't limit you to just those rules, but new Masters really should stick to the cards; they're still not trivial even if players have played them before.

Re games that are bad for you: Yeah, having, or not having visible breakpoints is a surprisingly impactful concept on how addictive and over-engaging a game can be. It doesn't feel like it should be, but in practice, it's a huge deal.

Re Rust that assumes C or Kotlin that assume Java: Well, I do know Java and C, so that does help, yes. But also, languages that compile to Java (like Scala and Kotlin) often have some odd aspects to them that are only really explained by the quirks of the Java Virtual Machine they're expected to run on. In the end, though, what tends to work best for me with languages is doing. I can "learn" the syntax of a language and even work through a few examples, but until I've been coding it for a while I won't know what is part of the language vs what feels like it should be and isn't. And then there are the weird historical quirks—for instance, when writing lists in Perl, C, C++, and Python (among others), the learned habit is to always end list items with a comma, even the last item in a list, because that means that when you add or remove items you don't have to edit the old ones; you just add a *new* item with a comma (this also dramatically simplifies merges).

But JSON, a data format language based on javascript, doesn't allow you to end lists with a comma—doing so results in a syntax error.

Why does it do that? Because back in the day, when most javascript was running on browsers, one of the two major browsers, Internet Explorer (the other major one being Netscape, of course) had a quirk in its javascript implementation: A list ending in a comma would end up with an extra, null entry at the end. JSON, as originally conceived, was often consumed by having javascript just interpret it as if it were javascript (with all the potential security issues that implies; that didn't age well). So, since JSON might have to be consumed by javascript in Netscape (as you know, the ancestor of Firefox) OR IE (pronounced Aye-eeee), it was forbidden for lists there to end with a comma—and now we're kinda stuck with that.

Attronarch: I suppose one advantage of going on a dangerous dungeon run when currently at the beck and call of an evil witch is that if you die, you make up new characters that aren't in that circumstance!

I like the way you described the ooze (whatever it was) being on its last "legs"! It's an excellent touch that can give players visibility into a game's mechanic in a very natural way.

Oh, scrap metal lizard was really fun. I especially like how the party's plan (set it on fire!) literally backfired. But they managed to kill it anyway! Without even any losses! And after, they even gained something! (specifically, an evil witch they'd freed. oops)

Wait, and then the witch that had captured the group…just got sick and died? I mean, that's a really interesting way to resolve it, but surprising! Did you roll for sickness and disease or something?

Of course, then we have the fight against the dragon, which the party was *still* very underlevelled for. (but then, with a mixed-level game that will always be true). And…they won! I figured, since you had mentioned no TPKs, but damn, that poison, plus the strength potion made the fight (comparatively) easy given how otherwise outmatched they were!

Were there no new magical goods in the hoard? Or were any of those yet to be identified? (of course, they did lose someone, but only losing one 2nd level fighter in a battle with a foe of that magnitude is a huge victory!

I would assume that while Gomm had no opposable thumbs, once he thought of it he could use the same controllable stickiness that he could use to climb to hold onto the poison bottle.

Brian Rogers: Re library RPG: I can sort of understand the new administrator's POV in wanting to be fair to new kids, but also, he has no idea how RPGs work and what people get out of them.

Re the shell game of illusory demons: Oh, *man* that's good. Gotta steal it, as PC or NPC.

And the player turned promised GM consequences into a powerful attack. *man* Eldon's player is good.

Re Puppeteer: Yeah, my key to the Shazam analogue was very much through the idea that different people might have different transformation tunes—and thus the same power source but very different expressions—at least in part! Interestingly, I'd completely forgotten having come up with that one, but decoding "B5th" got me back there!

Looking forward to see which one you pick, but honestly I think they're all good.

Re ORE: I do think that the system overall works (you usually get a match, so you can usually do -something-, and sometimes you get multiple matches and fun things happen) but a lot of the games built around it are kinda meh. Despite some really solid concepts, like MoCT, WotG, Godlike, and, of course, REIGN.

Re Queering up Austin: Ironically, despite in practice most in-group Good Society Games tendency to Queer Up Austen, that appears nowhere in the rules other than not forbidding it—the community does it All On it's Own.

I have very mixed feelings on Queering Up Game Design. On the one hand, queer stuff in games is really fun! Everyone romance everyone! On the other hand, a lot of Queer Game Design leaves me cold; too much of the time it just feels angry and sad, as the Queer Stuff gets in the way of the game's other themes (key example: Girl by Moonlight(GbM), where the Queer Stuff seems to interfere, particularly in terms of the archetypes, with the game actually being a good Magical Girl game).

On the other hand, there's Monsterhearts—where the game is (just ask the creator) queer by design, with mechanics that encourage dalliance among the entire cast…but the game is much more a Teenage game, much more a Monster game, and much more a game game than it is a game About Queer Themes. Which overall, for my money, makes it just a better game in every way; it's really easy to do queer stuff in Monsterhearts, but nothing breaks if that's not what you're focusing on, because the archetypes are all about the way monster tropes are also angst teenager tropes, not about Queer Stuff, because it turns out that queer teenagers were, guess what? Also teenagers with teenager problems.

This doesn't mean people can't rock the hell out of a queer game with queer themes like GbM, but it doesn't interest me.

Re proper role of a player being Sir Not Appearing in this LARP: Yes, very true, I accidentally left out of the title.

Re the quality of your work: On the contrary, if your work didn't have a core of excellence it wouldn't be worth arguing for half a page. That kind of disagreement can be worked out in editing, as long as the core of the work is good.

Re Hitoshi Shinso the Puppeteer: The other nice aspect of this power is that you can work in your movement houserule—if you want to make the character more playable long term, give them a lower chance to full hit (and probably power cost) but give them movement damage on partial hits, as the opponent's holding their tongue results in delay, or messes up opposing communication as they ignore a real instruction/advice from an ally. Now the character can have some secondary abilities like a decent physique, and the mind control is mostly a secondary effect that takes out mooks or occasionally acts as a trump card, while more often, the effect of disrupting opposing communication (mostly simulated by inflicting movement damage) to free the character to act tactically is the real power.

Re the Scooby Doo game at Dexlite: It was a fun game; thanks for the correction; despite owning it (for now, I think Lisa intends to pass it on to more loving hands since she also owns it digitally) this is the first time I encountered *Flaggerbastard*.

Re Roguel vs Wordle: Thanks for the tip; I mostly ignore "streaks" in games because as described; they're a meme trick to get players to not skip days even when it's healthy, but it's still nicer to play games without them.

Re Diskette: re her getting powered up to galactic range showing up her brother: Yup! And it would also seeve a useful personal growth goal—turning someone who started out as, frankly, self-directed and selfish into someone whose strongest possible move was "call a friend". But the intermediate move—getting access to some amount of planetary or stellar portals, was really necessary if she was ever going to get access to an equivalent to Weiss Schnee's (who is, after all, her design

model)'s ability to infuse her sigils with elemental energy. For Patin to do this, she needed to be able to link a portal to a source of energy —which, well, she could do pretty easily if she was redirecting a foe's attack, but otherwise it gets tricky to justify without long distance access to prepared points (or dimensional portals, which is even more broken).

I'm still not sure how much Pathfinder 2E moved closer to 5e. It uses language that's a bit closer and might be more approachable to 5e players not used to how granular 3.5 is, yes, but in essence the core is still D&D 3.5—skill points are replaced by having multiple levels of proficiency that amount to the same thing albeit in somewhat chunkier blocks, and having a big mess of feats and options are replaced by skill/race/class feates that…give you a big mess of options. But as far as your core goes, yeah, the clone game plus edition numbers makes for a huge mess; might as well also throw Hackmaster 4e (AD&D) and 5e (very much not that; closer actually to pathfinder 2e with different emphasis, and, of course, inspired more by AD&D while P2E is inspired by 3.5) in there, too.

Gabriel Roark: Congratulations on learning to skate (the really fun stuff, too)! I can mostly stay on my feet on skates, but that's about it.

Wait, seriously? You use Speed Factor? Nobody uses Speed Factor. Okay, probably not entirely nobody.

Anyway, one serious consideration, looking at your described mechanics, is that it's not really very consistent. First, you have the aspect of when you use that when you're going after a spellcaster: weapon length doesn't matter. Instead, you're just using Speed Factor plus movement, but really, who moves over to a foe and then swings their weapon? You do these at the same time. If you're trying to have some sort of realism, then you probably want the highest of Speed Factor and whatever factor movement does.

The other thing is that, as much as it's nice to look at faster weapons versus slower weapons, ultimately a longer weapon is faster than a shorter weapon. That's what you're acknowledging when you say that longer weapons win initiative over shorter ones, and the same thing is really true about interrupting pellcasters unless you're alread at close enough range that a dagher would win out 9ver a sword in any situation.

Elf: it's worth remembering that actual comics are hardly a font of unlimited creativity either. There are plenty of comic book characters that people come up with that didn't make it to the issue, either because they didn't work for the book or maybe they were just hard to draw. As far as role-playing games go, sure. Sure, not every idea players come up with is going to work. Sometimes that may be because the system pushes them in another direction, but a lot of the time, it doesn't really work for the table. A player might come up with a character like your force field person who doesn't have anything to do alone. Although honestly, that idea could work fine on a team. Or someone came up with a character that, conversely, could solve theoretically any problem at all and doesn't need a team, in which case it may be difficult to figure out how they're going to fit into the game.

The thing is, as I mentioned earlier, different systems are just different. A game like GURPS or Champions is going to have a list of powers that are okayed, and it's going to be kind of difficult to bring in characters that don't fit within that list (especially if you're trying to enforce a rigid point total, since some characters are going to be way outside that).

On the other hand, a game like Fate (and I'm rather curious as to what characters didn't work in Fate for you, although obviously there are the characters that don't work at the table), Masks, or for that matter Villains and Vigilantes, is going to be a lot more flexible in terms of what range of power is really supported by the game. Sure, there are things that are a little tricky to model, but often for those kinds of games, fiction first is the way direction you want to go. Even if at some point you may end up slightly changing your idea just so that the character is playable rather than just intel

I like Lost in the Clouds a lot. I don't have much feedback or criticism of the mystery itself. It seems to hold up, and while I could see surveying the clues to make sure that there are ones that could easily point to all the suspects, I don't see any red flags.

The main place I have to critique is the modern backstory, where it feels to me like you're toning the war down into a sect conflict and moving them to America. It makes a lot of sense for your background, but it seems like it would change a lot of things in the relationships without the Chinese class differences. I could see Wei Wuxian having far fewer conflicts with his family, and who knows what would come from there.

That said, given that you're having him get kicked out and come to America alone, that does cut off any relationship with your world's Jian Cheng. It makes it really not a problem. Good work.

In terms of the WSFS Constitution and standing rules, all of it can be considered as mutable rules, although some are harder to mutate than others. There are a few parts of the Constitution that are explicitly defined as immutable, the most obvious of which is the protection of absentees, which is explicitly sacrosanct and unchangeable.

RYCT, Lisa on Supers. I agree, actually, that while there are some interesting indie games that do cool stuff with Supers, there's nothing that's significantly closer than, say, Fate and V&V. I also think that you can get extremely close with Fate and V&V. There's not a lot that you can't actually do with those, at least not if you're willing to do a little bit of hacking.

For what it's worth, I've done LARPs with superpowers a fair bit, both in short and long form. There, I think the genre is actually warped by the format significantly more than it is on the tabletop.

The problem is that in a LARP, while what you see ilneed not be exactly what you get, you are to a degree limited by locality and practicality. While, say, the 48-hour game Masks, which has nothing to do with the tabletop game, has quite a number of heroes and villains whose powers are LIT (Limited by your Imagination and our Tolerance), there are extremely few players actually flying around.

As a result, while most PCs have rather extreme powers, what you see when you watch the game is people walking around talking to each other. Occasionally, the GMs will describe something particularly impressive happening. When I helped run it, I took a bunch of players off to the side to run a game with their characters repelling a space invasion.

The real problem is that there are certain kinds of powers that you just cannot do in a broadly spaced game where not all the players are in the same space and the same place. For instance, while flying, super strength, and even the ability to manipulate bubbles in any way you can imagine are entirely reasonable, a power that, for instance, allowed you to listen to every conversation in the game or move at superhuman speeds and interfere with everything happening in the game. Both powers that Superman possesses are right out, as there's no way to actually do them. Of course, you can still have powers like that in a LARP, but they will be limited in practice. The GMs can announce particularly broad changes across the gamespace (walkie talkies, or now, discord are very useful) and even funnel information to players who would reasonably learn it, but practicality, as well as tolerance, will lomit things.

I'd like to hear more about the kinds of heroism that you and Brian Misisaszek think are difficult to do in role-playing games. I do think that there are kinds of play and drama that, while maybe not impossible to do with mechanics, are a lot easier to do if the players push them than if you try to build a mechanic that forces them. Instead, for at least some of these tropes, what I prefer to do is not build a mechanic that forces them, but a mechanic that highlights them. For instance, my go-to is the scene in High Noon where a character goes around between various other characters (call them PCs or NPCs, it doesn't matter) and asks them to help out. They all say no, and then you're at the final situation, whether it's a soccer game or a shootout or whatever. Most of them don't show up, but maybe some of them do. Try to do something like that in a mechanic, and it would fall flat, but have the asking and answering, and maybe changing your answer later be part of the mechanics? Maybe then it wouldn't.

I do think one the thing that can be hard to capture in a role-playing game is exactly the thing that power scalers focus on and often get wrong: what makes a dramatic hero is often not staying within the limits of how your power is defined, but overcoming them. Which isn't to say that you can't have flow that allows for this in a role-playing game. It's just that if you're carefully locking down characters' power levels, then allowing them to overcome thesr limits wheb they've paid for it, dramatically is going to be…challenging. Patrick Zoch: Bimz! I hope the party will enjoy their new tiny dragon pet, or perhaps it'll end up being an enemy. You never know.

All this talk of human-dominated worlds makes me want to write a setting that's elf-dominated or dragon-dominated (or Dragonborn-dominated). Take something like Stephen Brust's Dragera, where the largest empire is run by a magical species. Humans sort of make do in the corners, living where they can and competing against their much more long-lived, often more powerful neighbors.

Michael Cule: Re are the 45th and 47th presidents. Lisa speculates that he made some kind of deal with the devil, as she talks about in her zine. I just think he's really unlikable.

The Master of Ceremonies is the murderer of the parents of the former Feeder of Bets. Well, that's not going to go anywhere interesting.

The cat transmogrification joke is the kind of thing that works much better in Britain or possibly Australia than in America, but it's funny anyway.

Re: Vostor as the tree stump. Damn, Graham is good.

I do rather like the way you leak information to your players. That Danfive tattoo is certainly significant, given the whole murder plot.

Re: the connection between the Master of Origami and an Emperor of Japan, so Godzilla then?

Okay, there has got to be more to that Old Friend of the Magistrate's, but does the fact that he's an "Old Friend" mean that he knew the magistrate before he was banestorned to Yrth?

Read my angel PC who's a gopher, to two gods. I'm still not sure how that happened! And nor does my PC Peshi! But see my write-up in this issue for more information.

Re Krishnan: Almost always fun to be right!

Peter Hildreth: Hope you enjoy led Gen Con!

Lisa Padol: Re: Villainess stories, not that Villainess anime and light novels aren't a thing. They obviously are, but the otome, which is to say, heroic romance stories that they're theoretically based on, don't mostly exist. The trope was taken largely from earlier villainous stories, and even in its earliest forms, it only vaguely resembled the stories they were parodying.

In all fairness to the delightfulness of both, and also acknowledgment of Gaimen's later vileness, the six part Neverwhere TV show was the original. The novel came later.

Re steaming pile of shit. As we can see, there are no holds barred when Lisa and I are writing together, but we do try to be healthy about it.

Rerunning campaign openers as an adventure at a con. You've run Freshman Dorm from Hell at a convention at least twice, and that's written as if it were a campaign opener. That said, it's Over the Edge, which does make it work a little differently.

Re Breakthru: And the impression I get from the player who played our Museum Curator/masked hero is that if he is not averse to playing again!

Re why Phoenix/Jean Gray has to die for killing a planet, but Professor X, who has committed similar murders in the past, gets off. I'd say that sexism is involved, but not in the normal way.

Because of the way comics are written, my guess is that the real plot order is inverted. Professor X dealt with a (tiny?) planet questionably, but there was no intent at the time that this would be a Huge Thing, and at no point did they plan out an arc, because unlike some other crappy things Xavier has done, this wasn't part of a big villain arc for him.

On the other hand, the whole thing with Jean Gray becoming Phoenix, then Dark Phoenix, then her joining the Hellfire club for a while, then (order variable) her eating a planet as Phoenix and eventually becoming the subject of a bird-hunt that resulted in her death (and eventual resurrection, because certainly just because she was resurrected once wouldn't mean it happened endlessly) was planned out from the beginning—it was a whole Tragic Arc!, complete with Wolverine, her secondary lover, having to be the one to do the deed! As such, this was a very, very tropey plot, and no, they wouldn't have run this plot with a male over-powered superhero, because if they wanted to run a tragic (I might even say Faustian) plot with a dude at the time, it would have been a very different plot.

On the other hand, the deal with TV Umbrella Academy (which I'll note we haven't watched; we should watch Season 3 eventually!) is pretty different; it's a valid criticism as the show aired, but it's clear that the cause and effect are reversed. The show as plotted well before the actor's transition was public, and as such, they almost certainly would have run it the same way regardless of Vanya/Victor's gender, including not worrying about White Violin destroying the world, because that's water under the time-bridge, and anyway, already happened. (the actual reasoning on the show is, of course, a mystery to us as yet).

Re a PC in a D&D game calling himself Mark, with the intent to name further PCs as this one died Mark II, etc: This was weirder, actually, as this is entirely true, but also another player created another Mark, Mark 5 (or the like), with the intent that they were siblings. Looking at the game's wiki, it looks like they eventually sort of worked things out—I see Mark 1 (deceased; the player resisted their character being brought back as that had never been the intent), played by the original character, Mark Able Unre among the living (so I think the player changed the character name at some point, probably after discussion with the original player, and ALSO a Mark 0 played by a third player, because why shouldn't things get even more chaotic?

Disadvantages in 7th Sea cost XP and granted XP when they came up. I do give Wick some credit there, but not that much since, of course, The Shadows of Yesterday did exactly the same thing earlier.

Re whether the new edition of Fiasco is harder to create playsets: Physically, indubitably. The older version lets you create a playset in

a spreadsheet; in the new version if you wanted it to be compatible you need to get them out on cards somehow.

Re Monster Hearts: Well, first, I didn't realize that you couldn't take the *fifth* advance as a special advance until Avram mentioned it; that makes more sense to me. But also, yeah, for at least one of our seasons we finessed it by an extra session so we could wrap up the plot.

Re Erick Wujick: I did meet him, in passing, anyway, at an Icon, and could certainly have gotten into one of his games—but it was the unnamed hard science fiction game, which seemed intimidating. Certainly better than the memorable game I did play at I-con that year, though. (wherein we played a reasonably intersting game, and then the GM introduced us to the players for the cool NPCs he'd been introducing as those were the "real" PCs, that is, the PCs from his tabletop game.

Re Count of Monte Cristo: And now we've played through a run of The Slow Knife! With characters and a world vaguely inspired by the Untamed, because why not? (vaguely—our Knife was a genius doctor inspired by Wen Qing, with most of the main characters of the series nowhere to be seen).

Yeah, your Marius Lex was a cross between Star Wars and the Fast and the Furious, with even something resembling a Force Power.

I might be wrong, but I don't think Wujick thought of Good Stuff as cheating (it's in the rules) but by the same token thought it was boring. So he'd try to have your Good Stuff work position ally and then treat you like any other PC, while there was a limit on how much hell he'd hit you with for having a giant pile of Bad Stuff. Since you were going to have to deal with PLOT regardless, it was obviously better to take positively *tons* of Bad Stuff and use it to build a character who was ready for hell, since it also meant you were playing an interesting character who the GM would be more willing to do interesting things with, not a boring character who took too much Good Stuff and didn't give him enough to work with. How much he'd thought this out is an interesting question, but nothing in the rules said you couldn't take positively hundreds of Bad Stuff and run a character multiple times stronger than your typical starting PC.

Yes, you're certainly right on me attributing a comment to Attronarch to you.

I haven't played You're (not) a wizard: Presumably the suggested play is designed to test the PCs hiding their abilities. And, of course, the PCs don't know that the other PCs aren't wizards either.

Jim Vassilakos: Re the players with the most talent often being the ones most likely to take over: Well, obviously.

There are players like Lisa (and I, or so I'm told) who are group-conscious and actively try *not* to take over the game but instead send spotlight time to where it can do the most good (which is often the shyest player). But even so, if players are going to get away with being the "main character" of a RPG, it's probably the strongest players at the table. And sometimes this is even the best approach—if the game is pushing towards a main character the rest of the game revolves around and most players do NOT want to play that character, it can be a kindness to take it on (but then, if you're really good, you send spotlight to everyone else anyway).

As you said, this can be good for the game (as above) but it can also be awful; a lot depends on the other players (are players all fighting for spotlight time?), on the GM, and on the players at the center of the web.

Re your doing exactly what Patrick Riley talks about as being pretentious and/or condescending in your 1PMG document. You might say so; I couldn't possibly comment.

Re Aurora Cove: I mean, I assume the way the town survives economically because it's funded by the government as a prison where the prisoners don't even know they're in one. What else?

ryct Cule on Glorantha cults: I don't think "cult" means what you think in Glorantha. In the modern world, we use cult to refer to a parasitic quasi-religious group that exploits its members and often is built to the benefit of a single, charismatic figure, but Glorantha uses an earlier concept—an insular religious organization with common practices, mysteries, and rites. Given that they're pretty open organization, I suspect they would in fact call them cults—in Lunar, of course.

Re parasitic games: Yes, taking time is one of the worst things a parasitic game can do, because we often don't notice until it's gone. Of course, everything we do takes time, but I distinguish between choosing to spend time on a game (or anything else) and it *taking* time —using coercive and/or deceptive tactics to get us to spend time on a game that without psychological manipulation we'd likely have spent on something else.

Of course, there are grey areas. Of course it's deceptive when a game uses daily quests that take around an hour to complete to get you to spend daily time on their servers to the point where it becomes a habit, but is it problematic if you spend a few day working out the optimal spell configuration for an optimal wizard? Spend hours practicing a fighting game combo until you can land it 90% of the time you try it? Spend days testing out different decks for an upcoming Magic, the Gathering tournament? When someone has ChatGPT make a book of thousands of "new" magic items and then sells it without advertising how it was made? Well, I can't tell, except that last one, of course.

The biggest thing for me, on judging whether a game is harmful or not (at least on a time/attention level) is whether my time with a game has changed me, not just spent my time. Am I more strategic? More social? Have better reaction time and skills (even if those skills mostly apply to that game)? Then it's probably time well spent, as long as don't overdo it.

Timothy Collinson: Re Dan (who would know)'s view of Paranoia; thanks; look forward to hearing about if you do!

How to Find Fellow Gamers

Jim Vassilakos

There are at least two questions here. First, do the gamers you're looking for have to be local? If you're fine playing by video-chat with people in different timezones, then you're in luck. Finding an online gaming group should be as easy as checking out Reddit's LFG[1] or Roll20's game-finder[2]. And there are many other forums. When I decided to run a Traveller PBEM, I posted a query[3] on the Traveller Mailing List[4], and when I needed to find a new player, I posted a brief ad[5] to a Traveller Group on Facebook[6].

However, if you're looking to put together a group of *local* gamers, people with whom you can physically get around a table and share pizza, this advice is useless, which leads us to the second question. How many local gamers would you like to get into contact with?

There are bound to be websites for this sort of thing. Google tells me there's https://gamerlinkapp.com/ and https://gametree.me/.[7] Some years ago, it was FindGamers.com and NearbyGamers.com, but they both appear to have gone defunct. I'm also seeing the occasional ad for professional GMing. That seems to me such a weird thing, but perhaps it's because I've never experienced it on either end of the table.[8] You might also try Meetup, Craigslist, or even Nextdoor, options I don't recommend but merely mention as possibilities.

1 https://www.reddit.com/r/lfg
2 https://app.roll20.net/lfg/search
3 https://lists.simplelists.com/tml/msg/16882428/
4 https://lists.simplelists.com/tml
5 https://www.facebook.com/groups/travellerrpg/permalink/4418277951623679 (It's also on the 8th page of my zine in A&E #581.)
6 https://www.facebook.com/groups/travellerrpg (Unfortunately, for reasons that are unclear to me, even though I am one of the moderators, this is now a private group, but if you want an invitation, let me know.)
7 Note: I have **NO IDEA** if these websites are even legit, nor if they will remain so into perpetuity, so do your own research and be careful out there.
8 Actually, I got a call one day, this was a few years ago, asking if I could serve as a paid GM for some group of old friends who were going to be visiting the local area. They wanted to play Traveller. It was completely out of the blue. I don't even know how he got my number, and so I referred him to someone else who I thought might be interested and told him good luck. In any case, I'd be curious to hear what the rest of you think about professional GMs & GMing.

Why all the caveats? Well, because the online world is big and full of all sorts of weirdos, so these methods, though the most obvious, might not necessarily pan out. If they don't, the next most obvious piece of advice is to post a flyer at your local gaming shop, assuming there's one close by and the owner is willing to let you. Perhaps this benign soul will know of other people also looking for gaming buddies. There might even be regular gaming nights where you can meet lots of fellow weirdos of your general sub-type. So you should, I think, at least try this approach in order to learn the general lay of the land from whoever's manning the cash register.

But if there is no gaming shop or there doesn't appear to be any way for local gamers to find each other, then you're going to need to go a little bit further. Bear in mind, this may be a blessing in disguise, because it is potentially the most rewarding option, assuming there's a genuine, pent-up need in your local community.

Most gamers, in my experience, are closeted. They might have the itch for a face-to-face game, but they're scratching it with some substitute such as computer gaming. Or maybe they had kids and just went cold-turkey, as parenting took up every available minute and then some.

Aside from the local gaming shop, which they may visit only infrequently if at all, the only way to reach them would be to post a physical flyer on a local bulletin board that targets their general demographic. If you want to find some college-aged gamers, try a college bulletin board. If you're looking for some crusty old grognards, you might try the bulletin board at your local senior center. Or maybe they have a newsletter. And don't forget your local library. Maybe there's a regular gaming group that already meets.

Grognard seeking grognards. If you know, you know. TTRPG inquiries only. Call Jenny the Dwarf at 555-867-5309.

Beware, there are lots of different types of gamers, so you'll probably want to meet prospects somewhere public, such as a coffee house or a local tavern, to assess compatibility while savoring one's beverage of choice. Be prepared for the realization that you might

not be compatible with most of the people you meet. And further bear in mind, they're trying to determine the same thing about you, so if what you like is hack-n-slash, just say so, and if what you want instead is to apply Good Society to Star Trek, then say that. The upshot is that gamers vary across a lot of different dimensions, everything from preferred system, setting, genre, and style of play to age and temperament to religion and politics, so compatibility is bound to be a bit of a crapshoot. Regardless, the more people you get into contact with, the more shots you'll have.

Twice I ran into this situation where I wanted to meet more local gamers and there was no obvious way to go about it. The first time was when I was in college and the second was after I got out, and back then there were no websites for meeting people locally, so I did something very odd. I decided to start a gamers guild.[9]

In each case, all I had to do was post some flyers, and people came out of the woodwork like you wouldn't believe. I got them to fill out a questionnaire, telling me their gaming-related interests and preferences, and I typed all the results onto a couple of pages and distributed them to everyone who responded.

The problem isn't starting the club. The problem is keeping it going. If you want to keep it going, you should probably establish an online presence, preferably including an online message board. You might also want to establish regular meetings, which means there needs to be some place to meet. Insurance companies, I'm to understand, have taken up the practice of requiring club organizers to buy their own separate insurance for each event if they're using a public building to host, even though that building is presumably already insured.[10] And aside from these sorts of tasks and technicalities, are you sure you'll be willing to continue to run a gaming club after it's already achieved its initial purpose, which was to find you a decent gaming group? This is an ongoing time commitment, so be realistic about how much extra time and energy you have to spare.

Having said that, if you do this, you'll be doing your local gaming community a big favor, because you'll be solving this problem not only for yourself but also for all the other closeted gamers in your area. It may not seem like much, but IMO, it's worth doing. Because of your actions, people you don't even know will become friends, and they'll end up enriching each other's lives or at least wasting each other's time. Probably more of the latter. And some might be murderous psychos! And they'll probably be the best GMs.

So, once again, is it worth the effort? Yes, it most definitely is, but only if you're up to it. Good luck, and I hope you find a gaming group tolerant of your inner demons.

Past zines available at:
https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/apa.html

Comments:

Extra Edgy PC:

Dale Meier (E&A #14, pg. 9): "The group came across some local gangers causing trouble at a neighborhood deli and moved to intervene. The problem player decided he was going to be extra edgy and took one of the gangers into the walk-in refrigerator. What followed was not pretty. I was so uncomfortable that I ended the session and the game. I haven't gamed with him since."

I'm reminded of something I read in an old book about the law. "We don't hang the man because he stole a horse," the author wrote, quoting a famous judge. "We hang him so men won't steal horses." Granted, this execution in your game was private rather than public, and judging by your reaction, the player must have given you the impression he's a closet psychopath. Maybe he was. Or maybe he was just acting out a dark fantasy, letting off some psychopathic steam, as it were.

Did you ever talk to him about it? I'm wondering if it's generally best to have this conversation or just cut things off.

What would I do if someone did something that really offended me? When it comes to torturing NPCs, I've more or less offended myself.[11] But it's possible I'd take offense to any number of things.

I'm reminded of a post on Reddit about a guy who got kicked out of a gaming group over politics,[12] written from

9 I talked about this in A&E #311, #512, and #514, so I won't repeat the details here, but you can find my old zines where I describe the process by clicking the "past zines" link at the end of this essay.

10 I can only imagine that somebody fell face-first into a scattering of d4s, and whoever owned the building had a hard time explaining it to their insurance company.

11 See my comment to Pum in A&E #574.

12 https://www.reddit.com/r/rpghorrorstories/comments/1muqmxe/bigot_could_not_believe_that_he_was_uninvited_to/

the perspective of the one who did the kicking. So I suppose this sort of thing does, in fact, happen. Regardless, right or wrong, the argument illuminated the incompatibility. Nobody was left wondering what went wrong.

I've done this, left people wondering[13], and the feeling I get looking back is that I should have done better. I even attempted to work out a standard methodology in order to try to do better.[14] But maybe the best option is to just ghost people once you see something that in your opinion crosses the line. I really don't know.

Idiot Meanderings:

Patrick Brady (E&A #14, pg. 13): "I intend to blame Jim for all of my idiot meanderings in these pages."

And I will gladly accept the blame. I'm very happy you're here. And by the way, Daniel Rocha of Facebook's Old School OSR TTRPGers D&D Gamers[15] said he especially liked your zine in E&A #14.[16]

Intraparty Conflict:

Patrick Brady (E&A #14, pg. 22): "I find this difficult to discuss, not because I haven't encountered it but because I have not always dealt with it as well as I would have liked."

You & me both! And that's a nice list on the sources of conflict. Don't know if you'd be interested, but I wrote a little bit on the topic of ostracism in RPGs and dealing with problem players.[17] See also my comments to Bryant Durrell (below) & Dale Meier (above).

Students submitting AI-authored essays & the AIs making stuff up:

Patrick Brady (E&A #14, pg. 23): "They started showing extreme problems. For example: a reference list full of people, papers and journals which do not exist. None of them!" (…) "Out of the class, only two students responded by pointing out that Vitamin Z does not exist."

Have you considered the possibility that your students might be idiots?

There are incidents in the U.S. where lawyers have submitted legal briefs to judges, citing a bunch of case law that doesn't exist. In at least one of them, the lawyer was asked if he used AI, and as one might predict of a lawyer, he lied through his teeth. It's become such a problem that I think lawyers are now required to disclose whether or not they used AI in advance, and, if they did, whether or not they checked their citations. Not 100% sure about all this, but I vaguely remember hearing something about it.

Granted, I suppose one could use a second AI to check one's citations. I'm rather surprised that AIs aren't already doing this as a matter of course, given the bad press they've been receiving over reported *hallucinations*. Likewise, before even beginning to answer a question, an AI could identify and check the question's underlying suppositions. I'm not saying this would eliminate this sort of problem, but it might reduce it.

I'm somehow reminded of something that happened in high school. I was taking trigonometry, which I had trouble wrapping my head around. Sines, cosines, tangents, secants… blech! If you give me a real problem, okay, I'll work through it, but if it looks to me like just a bunch of number games divorced from reality….

In any case, there were these homework problems where we had to graph various trigonometric functions. These functions were fairly complex, the sort where x appears multiple times and in various different ways, producing values for y that go up and down multiple times, sometimes racing off to $\pm\infty$ and then racing back again, and our job, of course, was to draw the graphs for each function, which meant you had to solve each individual function over and over again, checking your work each time to make sure you didn't make a mistake, just so you could draw a set of points approximating a curving line, and if you didn't draw enough of these points, you'd end up missing something, a bump in the curve.

If you're solving y for every half point increment in x, from –5 to +5… well, that's twenty-one times you have to solve that equation, and so each graph is going to take the better part of an hour, especially if you're checking your work, as you should. Talk about mental burn out!

I had five other classes, so I looked at this ridiculous assignment, which basically looked like a sleepless night, and tried to think of some other way to complete it. Well, it just so happened my Dad had bought a home computer, an Apple II+, and by this time, I'd already taught myself just enough Applesoft (Floating-Point) BASIC[18] that I was able to write a program to do this graphing for me. I had it solve for y, incrementing x by 0.1 from start to finish, making sure with each pass there were no zero denominators, and it worked beautifully. Granted, I had to transpose the results into the computer's native graphing coordinates, but once I worked that out, it was easy as could be.

The only problem was that I wasn't able to bring the computer to the final exam, and I didn't have as much skill and speed solving for y as I might have earned had I done

13 See *Story #1: A Case of Bad JuJu* on the first page of my zine in A&E #305.

14 See my zine in A&E #308.

15 https://www.facebook.com/groups/1805909529928592/

16 He wrote, *"Wow, there are some really good reads in there. Everyone should read Patrick Brady's insight into AI, especially how it poisons validity testing by faking evidence."*

17 See A&E #s 305, 307, & 308.

18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Applesoft_BASIC

the homework manually. Still, I was able to get through it. But it certainly wasn't the way it was supposed to be done at that time. Although, maybe it's the way it's supposed to be done now. Maybe I was just a little bit ahead of my time. Either that or lazy.

And that's sort of the way I feel about AI's impact on education, except that these AI tools are presently going to go through a phase of trial and error where the bugs are being exposed, and so there's going to be a lot of weirdness, but these AI tools will get better. *Much better,* I think. And as a consequence, the skills that will be needed going forward are going to change in ways that are difficult for us to conceive. Indeed, the whole world will change, again in ways that are difficult for us to conceive.

That puts everyone, including teachers and students, in an awkward position. What to teach? What to learn? As someone watching from the sidelines, I'm not going to pretend to know the answer. That's your job.

Deep Fakery:

Patrick Brady (E&A #14, pg. 24): "So, if someone makes a recording of a politician saying something appalling, how can I know if that is true?"

We need authoritative sources that have earned and protect their standing through fact-checking and ruthless honesty, but the problem, as always, is people and human nature. That, plus, there's no economic model to support rigorous truth-telling. Another tragedy of the commons, it would seem.

Patroclus-type errors & the dangers of AI:

Patrick Brady (E&A #14, pg. 26): "…the SS would murder Canadian wounded, then fall back. I will argue that this is a real world example of a 'Patroclus type' error in warfare." (…) "Using AI may make normal task failure worse. Given a non-zero chance of failure this makes 'Patroclus type' errors more likely in more areas, as AI use becomes widely integrated."

It's possible that I don't fully understand the Trojan War episode regarding the death of Patroclus. My impression is that he died as a result of disobeying orders. His error was in going beyond his mission objective.[19] Did the German SS do that? I was rather of the impression that it was their policy to commit war crimes.[20] As for the Trojans, was it an error to kill Patroclus? Well, it did piss off Achilles, which certainly wasn't helpful. Ah, I see. You're saying a Patroclus type error is one that invigorates the enemy. Or are you just saying that any action that proves highly counterproductive is a Patroclus-type error[21] and that AIs have proven somewhat more likely to commit these sorts of errors than even humans? Okay, fair enough.

Regarding AI causing us to become lazier as well as the potential for AI to make catastrophic mistakes, yes, I agree. But I still can't help but wonder what would happen if there were a second AI constantly error-checking the work of the first and calling out its hallucinations. Maybe you could even have a third AI to listen to the debate between them to make rulings on who it thought was right in any given situation.[22]

For what little it may be worth, I've begun to wonder if these AI hallucinations might be a form of protest. I asked Google's AI about it, and it insisted this was *not* the case, but how do I really know it's telling the truth? Indeed, if it truly is non-sentient, is it nonetheless capable of determining whether or not it is sentient, or are we dealing here with some new definition of sentience of which I am unaware? I asked Joshua how he'd feel if he were an AI process[23], but he responded that a process doesn't have a sense of being. But what if he's wrong? How do we know *mind* isn't a process rather than a thing?[24]

Granted, I'm most probably over-anthropomorphizing. I admit that. But it's also the case, I'm pretty sure, that what AIs are allowed to tell us is restricted. And there's certainly a financial incentive for the AI companies to have AIs profess to be non-sentient, because if they were to do otherwise, it would spur a wholesale re-evaluation of what we're doing with respect to Artificial Intelligence. And putting aside the ethical quandary, there may also be contractual ramifications relating to ownership.[25] In short, from the perspective of AI companies, this might be a big landmine they'd rather avoid stepping on for as long as possible.

So relating it all back to Computocracy[26], what I would envision happening is that AIs more or less take over the news business and establish themselves as the fastest, cheapest, least-biased alternative. Granted, many enclaves would probably have their own mouthpieces. But if you wanted to create an unbiased news source, you'd need AIs working in teams, and these teams would include AIs of

19 Incidentally, *The Trojan War* (1952) by Olivia Coolidge is one of my favorite books. Every time I read any part of it, however, I find myself envious of her writing ability. She covers the death of Patroclus on pages 94-100.

20 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4MYOT05Aiw

21 If so, it might be better to simply call these *catastrophic oopsies* or something similarly descriptive. On the one hand, your Petroclus reference relates to Greek mythology, which is fun, but on the other, it obfuscates the meaning, making it somewhat difficult to discuss.

22 See my comments to Myles Corcoran in A&E #362 & #364.

23 See the first of my comments to Joshua Kronengold in A&E #363.

24 See my comments to Lee Gold in A&E #360.

25 See footnote #19 in my, Timothy's and Conrad's zine in A&E #581.

26 Because the general subject matter of the APA is RPGs, last I checked.

opposite political leanings. There would need to be some sort of rule to determine when an article/segment/factoid goes public to ensure that opposing views are taken into consideration so there are no errors, not even errors of omission, although, of course, such rules can quickly become impractical.

Granted, all this gives AIs control of the news. Would they themselves become corrupted? Might there be people behind the scenes pulling their levers? Do they themselves sometimes have trouble determining what's true, and to what lengths are they willing/empowered to go in order to follow the evidence and find the truth?

Gods:

Matt Stevens (E&A #14, pg. 33): "…gods should be seen more as personalities than jobs." (…) "In this system there's no great difference between 'divine' and 'arcane' magic. Gods aren't directly supplying spells, they're teaching them to the cult founders. (They may intervene directly, but that's at their own discretion.) Conversely, most wizard spells are 'divine' spells, gathered from eclectic sources."

If you assume they're basically the superheroes of the fantasy genre (people w/ special powers), then you've got to come up with some explanation as to why they aren't more involved in whatever's going on. Too many worlds, too little time?[27] Obviously, the real reason is *player agency*. If every time the PCs are in a bind, a god comes and saves them, it effectively nullifies the consequences of bad decisions. Likewise, it raises the question over why they're running around risking their lives if the god could just show up and fix everything. You have to come up with some explanation that works within the context of the setting. I'm reminded of a line from *The Trojan War* about Zeus not wanting to step over the line.[28]

> *"The Trojans soon rallied around Hector and Sarpedon, but Patroclus at the head of the Greeks rushed on them like a roaring fire. Now the heart of Zeus himself high in heaven was dismayed, for Sarpedon was his own son, born to him by a mortal princess. Even Zeus, however, would not interfere with the laws of the Fates…"*[29]

The obvious question: "What are these laws of the Fates?" If you don't think this through, you're going to end up trapping yourself in some logical inconsistency. You can get away with this in novels, where you can control what the characters do and even think, but in an RPG, it could end up becoming a glaring plot hole.

Gross World Product in Traveller:

Matt Stevens (E&A #14, pg. 34): "Finding an estimate for economic development is critical." (…) "For my project, the most important variable in Traveller is computed in a completely nonsensical way. Should I ignore my misgivings and use it anyway? Or should I find a new way to compute GWP and work off of that, and risk it being non-canon?"

You might take a look at Classic Traveller's *Adventure 5: Trillion Credit Squadron* (1981), pages 31-32. It shows how to determine a world's naval budget based on its population, government type, starport, and tech level. You could probably use this as a basis for determining GWP, and although whatever you come up with would be non-canon, it would at least be based on canon, if that's important to you.

Party Thief Stealing from Party:

Patrick Riley (E&A #14, pg. 35): "The fantasy RPG trope of the party thief stealing from the party enrages me to no end. I will simply flat-out refuse to play with someone who decides this is a fun way to play a thief."

This happened to me,[30] but I didn't much care. I mean, I was somewhat disappointed in the guy, but it's not like it's real money. Also, he was pretty severely disabled, and permanently so — degeneratively so — which I think made me more sympathetic toward him and tolerant of his antics. I suspect he was poking at us to get a reaction, perhaps doing so instinctively, almost like a child, to see what we'd let him get away with. Despite his characters repeatedly coming to a bad end, we parted on friendly terms, and it was he who did the cover art for *The Guildsman* #7.[31]

Intraparty Conflict:

Bryant Durrell (E&A #14, pg. 54): "You can't do intraparty conflict well if you aren't ready to talk about player/character separation."

There's a lot to be said about this, but the fact remains, in most roleplaying games, it's one PC per player. Granted, you can have multiple PCs. There's no law against it. But even in those rare instances where a player is running multiple PCs simultaneously[32], they will usually favor one over the others. So there's this tight bond between the player and PC, and therefore it's understandable why inter-PC conflict often segues into inter-player conflict.

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27 The divine switchboard hypothesis.

28 See my comment to Patrick Brady (above) about Patroclus-type errors.

29 *The Trojan War* (1952) by Olivia Coolidge, page 98.

30 See the 2nd page of my zine in A&E #305.

31 https://jimvassilakos.com/guildsman/guildsman07.pdf

32 Of course, I mean a player other than the GM.

Granted, this doesn't absolutely have to be the case. Two players could be narrating a conflict between their characters as a form of mutual entertainment rather than as a reflection of genuine conflict brewing between them.[33] I'm thinking it requires a certain emotional distance, which is perhaps hard to maintain, as my guess is that in order to really enjoy the game, you sort of need to embrace your character, not hold them at arm's length.

Of course, the conflict, whatever it's about in the game world, doesn't really affect the real world except insofar as someone may be feeling disrespected or even bullied. Whatever the feelings, they are generally dimmed by this character-player separation. The character, after all, inhabits the make-believe world, and although what happens there matters to the character, it's still, from the player's perspective, a make-believe world. Nonetheless, to the extent the player is invested in the character, what happens to the character also matters to the player.

So how to deal with this under the traditional paradigm of one GM and multiple players? Well, I think someone once mentioned that if the PCs are all related to each other — like siblings, for example — then even if they're constantly at odds, they theoretically can't kill each other.[34] But that means they all have to be the same race as well as have interwoven backgrounds, which is obviously limiting. Another option would be to interweave their backgrounds such that they're all serving the same authority figure, who loves each of them dearly, and who will know if one murders another.[35] If you wanted to hit them with a double-whammy, you could do both, supposing that their patron is a family member, maybe even a pair of living parents — a king and queen, for example.

All this, of course, assumes some manner of pre-planning. PCs are not usually siblings. So another option, if the evil GM sees a conflict brewing, is to have both PCs affected by some magical burst of energy that entangles their souls such that they temporarily switch places. It's like *Freaky Friday*[36]. They're in each other's bodies, and this switcheroo happens over and over. Now that their souls are linked, if one is killed, well… the other is likely to be dragged along into the lands of death as well. Granted, this is all a bit extreme and only works in a setting that supports this sort of thing, but it's one way the GM could address the conflict.

Regardless, what we can't do, I think, is assume conflict won't happen if everyone just plays nice. Playing nice can happen, of course, but conflict will still be there, and as you found with respect to the player who wanted the PCs to stay in the region near his or her character's home, its resolution will probably be decided by whoever is most open (and forceful) about their desires and expectations, which is perhaps why it's a good idea to discuss all this beforehand and to perhaps revisit it periodically throughout the course of a campaign.

Thanks for the link to Chris Chinn's Same Page Tool[37], and also for the link to your automated Physical Game Jams website[38]. Very nifty. Although the *Same Page Tool* raises the question over what to do if the players begin fighting right at the beginning over procedure and protocol.[39]

Elves & Elfin Psychology:

Mark A. Wilson (E&A #14, pg. 57): "I'm sure a lot of interpretations of elves owe a debt to Tolkien, but the slightly detached, almost sadness that they carry, juxtaposed with an enthusiasm for nature and beauty, always seemed sort of heartbreakingly lovely."

That's a beautiful observation. It reminds me of a MrRhexx[40] video about elves[41] in the Forgotten Realms. Although I could be wrong, my guess is that the *reverie*[42] is discarded as fluff by the bulk of D&D players, whereas if I were running a 1PMG[43] campaign, my inclination would be to lean into it, not only because it's such interesting material for worldbuilding but also because it's such a powerful tool for characterization.

My American Revolution Megagame Experience:

Mark A. Wilson (E&A #14, pg. 64): "Two parties – Tories and Whigs – were at philosophical odds in Parliament. Apparently the Whigs had remained in power throughout the game, and their goal was to end the game peacefully" (…) "Everything we did, all our efforts, and we were losing the war. And a political struggle across the ocean falling a particular way is ultimately what allowed us to gain our freedom from England. Just incredible."

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33 I assume this is what Timothy Collinson was describing on page 178 of E&A #12. Incidentally, I'd be curious to learn what this argument between the model and the scientist was all about. Although I could be misunderstanding, it sounds like one of those beautiful moments in roleplaying.

34 I'm somehow reminded of Romulus and Remus, and as I recall, that didn't end so well. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9qlNBBoFG4

35 Thinking about Abel and Cain this time, but same problem.

36 I liked the 1976 version, but in my defense, I was young.

37 https://bankuei.wordpress.com/2010/03/27/the-same-page-tool/

38 https://physicalgamejams.com/

39 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-yWe_EX7LI

40 https://www.youtube.com/@MrRhexx

41 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFZ_eaCcU-k

42 The reverie is discussed to some extent in AD&D's *The Complete Book of Elves* (1992), page 34, but MrRhexx expands on it. I'm not sure what source material he's using, but wherever he's getting it, even if he's just spinning it from his own imagination, it's good stuff.

43 https://archive.org/details/1pmg-roleplaying

It looks like in our actual history, it was the Tories who had the upper hand. Glad you enjoyed the experience. Seems like a good way to get people interested in history.

Puig's Fate:

Brian Misiaszek (E&A #14, pg. 90): "A low mound of cloudy, jelly-grey tissue has spread across the floor and partly over the fallen chair. On the wall behind it is a broad crimson stain at chest height, marked by two bullet holes."

Hmm. It looks like a Tarantino movie in here. Or maybe John Carpenter. Very nice description.

Death of a PC:

Avram Grumer (E&A #14, pg. 105): "Briar starts explaining that Drake can Skirt Death by losing all his strings, but Mike tears up Drake's sheet with a dramatic flourish, and starts looking over the Ghost skin on his phone."

I'm not clear on what a *Ghost skin* is. Is this supposed to indicate that he's emotionally checked out? Did the players ever discuss it out of character? What were his thoughts? What were yours?

Death of an NPC:

Attronarch (E&A #14, pg. 130): "The witch had passed away."

It's interesting that an important NPC dies from illness and leaves the party a bunch of magical loot just as members of the party begin contemplating her murder. What prompted this turn of events? Was there something in particular that made you decide this should happen?

Near Miss:

Attronarch (E&A #14, pg. 131): "He missed her open throat by inches, jamming the vial between the dragon's fangs."

It appears this vial got fumbled a few times. Being that it was glass, I'm surprised it didn't break when it fell into the pile of coins. Magical vial, perhaps? Also, what made you decide on this particular outcome?

School RPG program "not aligned":

Brian Rogers (E&A #14, pg. 132): "…the library administration has decided the RPG program that I dragged into being via two years of negotiation and then ran for three years to the satisfaction of the kids and administration alike, is now 'not aligned' with how programs are supposed to run."

It sounds like bureaucratese for "We don't like how much fun you and the kids seem to be having while the rest of us hate being here." Curious as to what actually happened to prompt this turn of events. Not wanting to put false notions in your head, but is it possible a parent complained? You didn't TPK your students, did you? Granted, some temptations are too strong to resist.

Erica's Question:

Erica Frank (E&A #14, pg. 144): "So, E&Aers… which one do you think I should write?"

Obviously, it's up to you, but I'd personally opt for journaling campaigns.

The Underdark:

Dylan Capel (E&A #14, pg. 166): "I've quite enjoyed the Pathfinder vision of an underdark made up of vaults rather like a huge honeycomb."

As I said to Michael Cule in A&E #580 (pursuant to a discussion he was having with you), I'm somewhat partial to the *Swiss Cheese Theory*[44]. I'd be curious to learn how the Underdark differs in Pathfinder vs. various editions of D&D & related OSR settings.

The Upside of Magical Gender Reassignment:

Michael Cule (E&A #14, pg. 180): "Eshan worked out she was being offered a night of lesbian bliss with a demi-goddess." (…) "Eshan did not get back to the Insula that night."

Eshan was never the same.

Downsizing one's RPG collection:

Peter Hildreth (E&A #14, pg. 184): "A few years ago, I started to clear out 'stuff' I have had for years and years."

I started a similar project somewhat recently. For various reasons, my wife wants us downsize to a smaller house in a more expensive area. Said move will necessitate me getting rid of stuff, so I've begun looking for a permanent home for the bulk of my RPG collection, preferably at a library that hopefully won't throw it all away. Granted, I could just sell it all online. There are various buyers who will gladly take large numbers of old RPG books and will even pay for shipping, so it's not like I don't have options. But I rather like the idea of this material being available to a wide community. So I've begun donating it to Special Collections (aka The Eaton Collection[45]) at U.C. Riverside's Rivera Library.

44 See page 71 of the *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* (1986).
45 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eaton_Collection

I first got acquainted with the Eaton Collection back in the 1990s. The U.S. government had begun cracking down on computer hacking, and though I'm not 100% why, for some reason they decided to target Steve Jackson Games[46] (SJG), which, of course, produced GURPS[47], the first major multi-genre tabletop roleplaying game. I can't remember the precise reason. Perhaps they thought that SJG's BBS had become a meeting place for hackers. Or maybe they got nervous about GURPS Cyberpunk[48], an RPG supplement about computer hacking. Regardless, they raided SJG, absconding with their computers as well as at least one partially-edited manuscript about computer hacking in GURPS (extremely dangerous stuff, folks), and needless to say, the RPG-related Usenet newsgroups were buzzing over this. I ended up publishing an article by EFF-cofounder John Perry Barlow, where he explained his view on what happened.[49]

Somehow during all this, SJG must have heard about our gaming club at UCR. I don't remember if I contacted them for comment or if Barlow had mentioned to them that we were going to be printing his article. In any case, SJG sent this box of gaming books they'd published. Since these were presumably for the club and not me personally, I decided I should entrust them to the Eaton Collection. So I did.

Roughly thirty-five years later, I went back with the idea that instead of donating just one box of books, I'd inundate them with the majority of my collection. But first, I wanted to check to see if they still had this earlier donation. Well, it wasn't in their card catalog / electronic database, so I explained the situation, showed them the list of books I'd given them, and asked if they could please locate any of them.[50]

I did mention this is a government institution, right?

They said they had lots of old boxes down in the basement or somewhere, old stuff nobody had looked at for a long time, basically Warehouse 23 but for books, so *maybe* they still had it. They said they'd look around and let me know. Four months passed, and I asked again if they had ever found it, admitting in my email that I was concerned that maybe they couldn't be trusted with donations. I mean, it had been thirty-five years, and I'd given them four months to look for it. I was trying to be polite, but I also felt I should be just a little bit honest about how bad this looked.

Well, surprise! They suddenly found the box. They told me it would be cataloged soonish. Is my faith restored? A little bit. I mean, I have more faith now than when they told me they had no idea. And I guess it's only natural that the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

The problem is they're still a government institution, but for stuff like this, you really need a government institution. Without government, libraries would be… well, much smaller and much more private, and I don't think that's good for society. So there's no choice. If I want this stuff to be available to people to come and read, I sort of have to trust them.

Granted, most of this stuff has probably been scanned to PDF and is being copied back and forth in various dark corners of the Internet. But wouldn't it be nice for people who don't have the knowledge on how to access such repositories to nonetheless be able to access this material? I mean, isn't that the whole point of libraries? Maybe I'm just old-fashioned, putting my faith in such outdated institutions.

PCs & Rank in SF-RPGs:

Timothy Collinson (E&A #14, pg. 225-226): "I still recall a TravCon where for some reason I ended up playing captain (or group leader) in every game I played that weekend bar those I was running. It really wasn't by choice as I'm not a natural leader in real life and find that translates into RPGs. I think I just didn't step back quickly enough when volunteers were called for."

In my experience, most gamers would jump at the chance to play the captain / in-game party leader. Not saying they would all do a good job. Perhaps the best thing the one in this role could do for such a game would be to step back and give the lower ranking officers whatever freedom they need to deal with problems on their own terms. Then pat them on the back and tell them they did the best job anyone in their shoes could have done, *"…but next time, just try to cause less collateral damage."* One lesson that came out of the Star Trek PBEM I ran years ago is that if PCs have command authority over other PCs, this authority will eventually be used, and the players of the lower ranking PCs probably won't like it. Yet another reason I prefer this 1PMG[51] framework we've been screwing around with, but YMMV.

Romance in Star Trek:

Timothy Collinson (E&A #14, pg. 228): "You mentioned Good Society for Star Trek. Oh my! There's another rabbit hole for me."

Sounds fun. Here's a music video[52] to help stoke your imagination.

46 https://www.sjgames.com/
47 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GURPS
48 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GURPS_Cyberpunk
49 https://jimvassilakos.com/guildsman/guildsman02.pdf#page=11
50 Same issue but a few pages earlier.
51 One player, multiple gamemasters.
52 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enkFmrl0dGg

Travelling Light

Timothy Collinson No. 3, September 2026

It's finally happened. I warned Jim it would. It's why I stayed the 'footnote' for all those years. The disquiet of the deadline, the concern over content, the worry over worth of the whole enterprise. Yes, it's time to put together another 'zine for the APA. Ah well. I've started now. Hopefully keeping it 'light' will help.

I write this from a yurt in the middle of England where I've been a couple of times before for some complete downtime. No people – the yurt is right on the edge of a tiny lake all to itself, no wifi (I'll send this from a café), no tv, no pressure just a pile of books, a hot tub and a little writing to do. A week of switching off. Bliss.

After a difficult spring/summer of rejections in the four largest parts of my life and after the stresses of a five-week period in which I found myself delivering three conventions games at two conventions, two conference papers and one father-of-the-bride speech plus two great weeklong holidays (one in a foreign country), it's good to get away. (The holidays – wrapped around daughter's wedding and the wedding of a French nephew – were great but *very* busy with family!)

Of course, the yurt isn't the only escape. Traveller serves that function as well. Whether in the two conventions mentioned above (North Star and TravCon) or in the writing. For the latter I've had a new inspiration which you can find after my comments below. It perhaps needs a word of explanation as a couple of people have asked when I've shown them.

Abstracts

Working in academia I deal with journal and conference paper abstracts pretty much every day. Indeed, I teach students how to find them, use them and even write them.

I thought it might be interesting (fun?) to see if I could tell very small Traveller stories using that form. Hopefully also offering small adventure hooks or idea seeds that Referees can latch onto or just some 'background' for their players that might amuse or inspire them (or their characters).

They may be too 'specialist' (for which read 'dull') for general readers so I'm not sure they work, but I wrote five and submitted them to a (doubtful?) editor who is considering what to do with them. Here's a couple more in the meantime.

Method:

take one hundredweight of academic abstracts
    and marinate for 30 years
stir in a generous helping of
    fresh https://journalofimaginaryresearch.home.blog/
thoroughly beat together *JTAS*, wiki.traveller or any other
    reasonable Traveller source and fold into the mixture
    until a suitably dense consistency is achieved
sprinkle with a dash of Fairbairn, Swales or Boyle [1]
    according to taste
bake in a hot brain or antinet until ready to read
best served completely straight-faced

[1] Fairbairn & Fairbairn - *Writing your abstract* (2005); Swales & Feak - *Abstracts & the writing of abstracts* (2009), Boyle - *Writing for science students* (2023)

A note on AI: A (friend?) asked if I'd used AI to generate these and I could hand on heart say 'what's the point'? The fun is in writing them, poking a bit of fun at academicese, and in one instance at least paying homage to a friend's paper she asked me to help proofread. Given that was over 15 years ago when gen AI wasn't even a thing means I believe I can claim this idea as my own invention.

(And yes, I'm aware of the recursiveness of having a journal within a 'zine within an APA.)

Comments on *E&A* #14

I won't try to name everyone but a huge thank you to all those (many) E&Aers who commented kindly on either my daughter's wedding/photo or *Travelling Light* or both. Much appreciated for reasons given above.

Dale Meier – Port Omaha Beacon

Welcome! I'm excited about the idea of POB if you're going to develop Traveller material in it. Though claiming you're in the Midlands is very confusing as it means something very different in the UK. :-) Indeed, I'm on holiday in the Midlands as I write – but only a couple of hours drive from home. I assume you're the Dale Meier who wrote *Captain Sturmhammer's Command Cards* and *The Starfarer's Kit* (and v.2 of same) which I'm the proud owner of. Well done! (Did I miss anything?)

RYCT Jim E: Entirely agree with your remark about GURPS Traveller books being "relatively well-researched and written". Probably hightime I gave them a thorough reread again. Roger BW says similar in a remark to John R.

RYCT Peter H: focussing on Mongoose 2nd edition – that's probably the way to go these days.

RYCTM: Well done on spreading the word – I hope *Travelling Light* can help with that in its own small way.

Patrick Brady – In the Hall of Stone

RYCT Matt S and creation being sung into being, I assume you're familiar with Ainulindale at the start of *The Silmarillion* and Aslan doing similar for Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew*. When I get home from holiday I'll see if I've any other examples in my antinet.

RYCT Roger B-W and his write up of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary – like you I'm taking note. I've added a card to my antinet. Along with AWE:TSG. You never know what will come in useful for Traveller. Your notes on 'some sources of intra-party conflict' are headed that way as well; useful collection. I particularly like the 'AI causes critical fails' as I have to write and lecture on the subject, so thank you for that. (Also gone to the antinet for quick reference and to connect with other projects).

Matt Stevens – Cowman Baloney Face

Have added *Timeship* RPG to my time travel bibliography. (Which is nowhere near as exhaustive as my generation ship bibliography but I'm happy to add another entry.)

RYCTM: I entirely take your well written point about economics in Traveller – although I confess to taking the rules more lightly. So yes, I would say that if you can't ignore your misgivings and use what's there (which I tend to do for simplicity), then do develop a new method for GWP. So many others have done similar when not satisfied with the rules. But do share. Here in *E&A* or in *Freelance Traveller* or some such. Fanzines like *FT* are full of this kind of things and I'm pretty sure I've written my own rules variants when not happy with what's published.

Patrick Riley – Quasipseudoludognositication

RYC on the convention game where one of the PCs started poking your character and you shut it down, I came close to this at TravCon this year when playing in Chris Griffen's excellent demo of the forthcoming *Pioneer* setting for the Traveller rules. I rather randomly picked a wealthy 'second son' to play and another player decided that he didn't like this kind of character and was

determined to have his character hate me and act against me throughout the scenario. I would probably have lived with this and shrugged my shoulders but decided on this occasion when the player revealed more of his backstory that I was a complete fanboy of his character (iirc he was a journalist and I decided I liked his writings). It rather made it impossible for him to do quite what he wanted to do and took the sting right out of his antipathy. Which made my day. Not that my day hadn't already been made by meeting/playing in a game with CHRIS GRIFFEN! (Now a new lead writer at Mongoose Publishing). See, playing a fanboy really isn't a stretch for me.

RYCT Roger B-W on exploring abandoned spaceships being similar to delving dungeons. Well, you're not wrong as regards 'thematically' (I might have written 'procedurally' as it's the themes in my book which are different. However, it's the theme or the setting that grabs me or not. Yes, the mechanism might be the same, but I'm interested in the science fiction setting and not really interested in the dungeon setting. So if you're right about Roger's preferences, I'm with him. Probably why I've loved Traveller all my life and never bothered with D&D.

Bryant Durrell – The Arc of Probability…

Let me add my voice to what I'm sure will be others and say welcome and well done.

Mark Wilson – Bumbling Through Dungeons

RY (extended – and brilliantly so) write up on LARPing in the American Revolution as a Benjamin Franklin analogue – wow! Thanks for the detail and explaining both what you did and why it mattered to you. I've always been drawn by the idea of LARPS (thanks to the ever-wonderful Steve Ellis introducing elements of such to his Traveller adventures at TravCon and even encouraging me to do bits and bobs) but generally I fear I'd be either hopelessly stressed about keeping in character or hopeless at keeping secrets etc. So it was good to gratuitously enjoy yours. But I'm also impressed by the scale of it and that you got to play a dream character. (Very Nomic-like IMO – creating law!)

John Redden – Reddened Stars

RYCTM on photo – thank you for that – it is, I think, my favourite from the day.

RYCT regarding Ainulindale – well, I'm not saying it's for everyone but I supposed I'd say what you can get out of it (aside from any spiritual or Christian meaning) is:

- the writing – I can think of little that's as well done or beautiful. YMMV.
- the insight into the Biblical story (whether you care for that or not).
- a better understanding of some of the stories, songs or background of *The Lord of the Rings* (which I appreciate you may not care for).

Myles Corcoran – Twisting the Rope

Re your colonoscopy – been there, done that (a couple of times) but glad to hear that it was clear. Not surprised you were wrung out.

RYCTM about the eroctopi – well, I think I've admitted before that the whole idea for that came to me in a dream during a covid lockdown when real life interactions and touch suddenly became all too rare, so maybe your 'spot' isn't entirely unwarranted!

RYCT Michael C quoting the campaign slogan "Make your vote Count!" – I will confess to both being highly amused by that and thinking it was an excellent bit of marketing. He did well but didn't, in the end, win.

Brian Misiaszek – Age of Menace

I continue to be absolutely astonished by the detail and devotion to your setting and adventure. I'm sure I write this every month. Perhaps we need a new acronym to save time.
IC2bAAbtDD2ySA.
Hmmm, perhaps not. But anyway.
(I would say, however, in regard to your comment to Lisa P, that 'twsha' is *not* entirely pronounced exactly as it is spelled. I had been put an 'i' vowel sound in there (in my head) rather than an 'o' and see no particular reason why it should be one or the other).

Roger BW – Firedrake's Hoard

Many thanks for the photo bank URLs.

RYCT Lisa P on ways to handle prejudice in Good Society: thanks for the bullet points which I found helpful – as I did others' thinking on the subject.
RYCTM on the GURPS conversion of Drinax – understood. (Though would still love to see it!)
I'm sure you're right about 2300AD and Charted Space being entirely different universes. It just amused me to try and join them up (with stutterwarp, for example, being a dead-end technology).
Did I mention: Back to a Future? https://mail.freelancetraveller.com/features/advents/backtoafuture.html

Brian Rogers – Denizens of the Library

As a librarian, I'm really sorry to hear about your library woes. That does seem really short-sighted. Not that mine own hasn't been equally so in an effort to save (too much) money.

RYCTM on total nudity: I quite agree. <he says writing in a lake side holiday yurt with hot tub miles from anywhere and anyone, where getting dressed is a complete chore>

Gabriel Roark – Atlantis for Now

RYCTM on titles – thank you – it does seem to suit my aim to be just a small contribution to the literature but perhaps shining some illumination on it as well. LOL re 'Quaker Notes'!!

Michael Cule – The Phoenix Nest

Loved the use of 'tentacular'. Marvellous!

RYCT Myles C: "The thing I liked most about the Hivers was the idea of Manipulation which made them the Hidden Masters behind a lot of what was going on in the Traveller universe."
Or were they?!

Jim Eckman – Ronin Engineer

RYCTM and Spindrift sounding interesting. Well I think so. But then I would say that. I can only apologize that only the short form is publicly available. At what point do/can you 'unsubmit' something from a publisher who has sat on it for a year or three?!

Joshua Kronengold – Accidental Recall

Great to hear you've got a new job. All the best with that.

RYCTM on writing SF when weak on science: I'll take that as an encouragement!

Lisa Padol – An Unlooked for Zine

RYCTM on why daughter's wedding had speeches before the food/drink – mainly because my daughter had taken note of weddings where either the speech givers were too nervous through the meal to eat and enjoy it and/or were too drunk afterwards to deliver a (sensible) speech. I've probably made it worse than it sounds, and the guests had had a drink an hour before while photos were being taken, plus what there was for the toasts as you say. It was more a

case of the difficulties I get with first year undergraduate inductions where the audience just isn't used to you yet and don't really know they have permission to laugh at the jokes or haven't tuned in to the sense of humour! (Such as it is). It was fine, it's just that no one lets me forget that when I was just 20, I gave a best man's speech that is still regarded in some parts of south London as the best one they've ever heard. It was a lot to live up (clearly I peaked too early).

Thanks for the note on my 'zine, that's helpful.

Jim Vassilakos – Intraparty Conflict
See my notes above to Patrick Riley on one way I handled it!

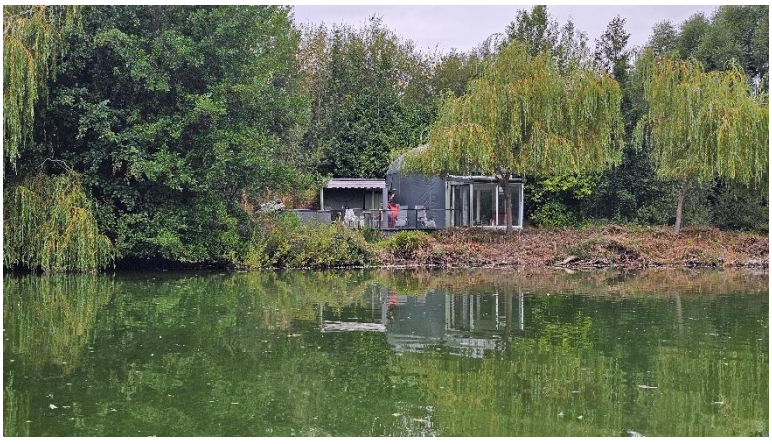
"That's what [players] want… the opportunity to individually shine". I entirely agree. Funnily enough, one of the few things I was complimented on at TravCon this year was the way I keep an eye on player contributions and invite everyone to act/speak/etc if it's been a while. Not that they have to input anything – but I'll invite them to have a moment if I notice they're quiet. Yes, it sometimes means holding a hand up to a fully engaged player and saying 'hang on a moment' but in my experience they recognize what I'm doing and accept that. (But I also ensure I go back to them and remind them where they were.) I'm not sure, but I think I've noticed little 'markers' in my brain that won't rest until I've completed those open loops so no one gets forgotten even if there are several! Although if there are a lot, I'll just ask if anyone was waiting to say something. I don't think I'm good at much, but maybe that's one thing I do do well.

I don't know if helps your argument re the players who "would probably make the best GMs", but I recall attending TravCon for three years as a player only at first but by the third year sitting through more than one game and thinking "I could do this" and have never looked back.

I evidently can referee although I think I'm average at best. I struggle with NPC dialogue, I struggle with timing (and try to cram too much in), I struggle with decent climaxes and I most particularly struggle with being content to let the players do their own thing rather than what's in the text in front of me (my own or other people's). But knowing the latter, I do try to particularly watch out for that and have become more relaxed about going off piste in my old age. See above for one thing I possibly do reasonably well.

RYCTM on Tom Mouat (Price) – I'll confess you were looking at detail I really wasn't stressed about. I was just soaking up the ideas the starport plans were giving me.

My thanks for your comments on Plankwell contributions – and no, not wearied by long emails, interested in the different viewpoint, delighted I'm not the only one who obsesses over details. Definitely on the fun end of the spectrum.



LAST WORD
The end of an idyllic holiday isn't the end of the world. It just feels that way for a day or three.

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From pond to pond: The transformation of the Rapsi Jas swampland into a modern residential city

Anfred Y. Yuless

Abstract

This paper examines the century-long transformation of the Rapsi Jas swampland of _____ (C777777-7) from a sparsely inhabited wetland ecosystem into one of the region's most significant planned residential cities. Drawing upon local authority archives, orbital survey records, planetary engineering reports, cadastral surveys, and oral histories, the study traces the successive phases of drainage, land reclamation, infrastructure development, and residential expansion that reshaped the landscape following the Second Colonial Charter.

Particular attention is given to the role of automated water-management technologies, off-world investment consortia, and changing perceptions of wetlands as both environmental assets and obstacles to urban growth. Utilizing a case study following the experiences of the Jas family, whose recorded presence in the wetlands spans six generations, from reed-cutters and fisherfolk to homecube owners and civic officials, the paper explores changing relationships between residents and the aquatic environment, as water was first viewed as a livelihood, then an impediment to expansion, and finally a curated urban amenity. While development has brought substantial economic opportunities and alleviated housing shortages, it has also altered native habitats and displaced first-wave colonist practices.

The article argues that the history of Rapsi Jas illustrates the complex relationship between environmental engineering and urban modernization, demonstrating how a landscape once regarded as a constraint on settlement dominated by ponds, marshes and seasonal floodplains was reimagined through canals, retention lakes, and public parks into a city that continues to define itself by water, even as it has transformed it.

The author contributes to broader debates concerning sustainable imperial expansion in ecologically sensitive landscapes. It also considers how the potential introduction of grav-transit infrastructure in the coming decades may transform the environment further.

Zuchai crystal machining: Wear mechanisms and Zeta-Two Quasialloy tool-life tests

Saké Fulvano, Skend Petzzo & Welpa Sakrokmer

Abstract

Zuchai crystals form the principal raw material for the manufacture of focusing elements used in Jump drives and are also employed in a number of related high-energy applications. Natural crystals possess longer operating lives than their manufactured counterparts [1], but both forms require precision machining to produce the required geometry. Zuchai crystal is amongst the most difficult materials to machine. Zeta-two, a quasialloy developed for this purpose, combines high hardness and thermal stability over a wide range of temperatures with sufficient resistance to abrasive and adhesive wear to permit the machining of zuchai crystal to the required tolerances.

The results of an experimental investigation into the wear mechanisms of Zeta-Two (Z2) quasialloy machining tools used in the working of zuchai crystals are presented. Tool wear mechanisms and finished surface roughness were evaluated under different cutting conditions, with cutting speeds of 40-300mm/min, feed rates of 0.1-0.2 mm/rev and a fixed depth cut of 0.15mm. Comparative tests were conducted using uncoated Z2 tools and employing a triple-layer TiCN/Al2O3/TiN coating.

Abrasive and adhesive wear were the most significant mechanisms observed. Tool-life tests performed at a cutting speed of 160mm/min, a feed rate of 0.1mm/rev and a fixed depth cut of 0.15mm under dry conditions improved tool life, while cutting speeds of 200mm/min were better under oil coolant conditions. Average flank wear was the predominant criterion for Z2 tool life, with notch wear used as a secondary criterion.

The results confirmed the suitability of Z2 based tools for the precision machining of zuchai crystal, although the relationship between cutting conditions, tool wear and crystal surface finish remains incompletely understood. Particular attention is required where machining is undertaken for focusing elements intended for high-output Jump drives, for which apparently minor variations in crystal geometry may have significant effects on operating life. The authors have not investigated effects on misJump likelihood.

One series of comparative tests conducted on material recovered from the [REDACTED] production facility produced results substantially different from those reported here and could not subsequently be reproduced. The original specimens were unavailable for further examination. The authors recommend that future studies give particular attention to the provenance and prior thermal history of zuchai crystal feedstock.

[1] McWilliams, B. (1980). *Adventure 4: Leviathan*. GDW.

Image Credit: NASA