
Ever & Anon
Issue #18 December 2026

Ever & Anon (ISSN 3071-2785) is a digital monthly APA about roleplaying games and is published under the Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license. See https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en for details.



The opinions expressed within each zine are solely those of the individual contributors and do not reflect the opinions of the APA or its management. All material in this issue, unless expressly noted otherwise, is contributed by its respective authors for use only in this publication in its various print and electronic forms, including public archival into perpetuity. All other rights are retained by each author/contributor, and therefore other use of any portion of this publication requires the permission of the original copyright holder(s).

If you'd like to be informed when new issues become available for download, please join our Mailing List at https://groups.google.com/g/everanon, our Discord Server at https://discord.gg/KM3EwADZ3x, or you can check our website at https://everanon.org.

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" × 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 #19 – December 21st: Player-Dickery

Issue #20 – January 21st: Burnout

Issue #21 – February 21st: Media (books, movies, etc.) related to TTRPGs & the gaming subculture

Issue #22 – March 21st: RPG Design Dos & Don'ts

Issue #23 – April 21st: Noteworthy RPG Mechanics

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 #18 (ver. 1) – December 2026

Table of Contents

Front Cover: “Dungeon Crawl” – Floyd, aka Ages End Follow him on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/agesendart or Bluesky: https://bsky.app/profile/agesendart.bsky.social	1
Front Page	2
Table of Contents	3
What is This?	4
Solicitations & Abbreviations	5
In the Hall of Stone – Patrick Brady	6
Brazilian Interactive Fiction, Pt 5 – Pedro Panhoca da Silva & Maira Zucolotto	13
Twisting the Rope #18 – Myles Corcoran	14
Bumbling Through Dungeons #14 – Mark A. Wilson	25
Age of Menace #255 – Brian Christopher Misiaszek	28
Reddened Stars #17 – John Redden	44
Going to be Ad-Libbed #16 – Avram Grumer	51
Atlantis for Now #6 – Gabriel Roark	62
Ronin Engineer – Jim Eckman	67
Overlord’s Annals (v5n12) – Attronarch	70
An Unlooked For Zine #17 – Lisa Padol	77
Travelling Light #6 – Timothy Collinson	93
Cowman Baloney Face #11 – Matt Stevens	99
The Phoenix Nest #18 – Michael Cule	102
Denizens of the Library #17 – Brian Rogers	118
Quasipseudoludognostication #18 – Patrick Riley	128
The Dragon’s Beard #102 – Patrick Zoch	139
Shiny Math Rocks #11 – Erica Frank	149
The Arc of Probability Bends Towards Justice #5 – Bryant Durrell	159
Firedrake’s Hoard #16 – Roger Bell_West	168
Computocracy: Transition & Aftermath – Jim Vassilakos	179
Attacks of Opportunity #17 – Dylan Capel	195
Port Omaha Beacon #5 – Dale Meier	197
Accidental Recall #16 – Joshua Kronengold	207

This issue’s IgTheme: *Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever!*

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 *Bryant Durrell: blah-blah-blah…*, if there are no quotes around the *blah-blah-blah*, that's probably a comment to Bryant.
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.

---

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.

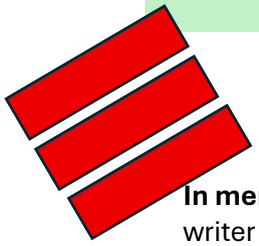
Send your thoughts to apa@everanon.org, and provided they aren't laced with orcish profanity (or even if they are), we'll likely publish them for the enlightenment & edification of the entire APA. Please include your name, class, and level of experience, and be sure to save vs. spell to avoid being drawn 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. 2026. The following is copyright P Brady (2026).
p.brady@roehampton.ac.uk
This is a continuation of my zine first started in 1988-ish in Alarums and Excursions.



The old world is dead, a new world is being born.
This is a time of monsters.
A paraphrase of Antonio Gramsci, circa 1926.

In memorial. I'd just like to take a moment to note the passing of Matt Howarth, the renowned writer and artist. I was one of the two referees of the Bugtown playtest back in the day and was sad to hear of Matt's death earlier this month.

Comments from the last edition

Cover art by Marius Niezgoda. I really enjoy the cover art, we are getting some great covers.

John Redden.
I found your new campaign interesting to read about and I hope it goes well. I should probably check out Libreoffice.
RYCT Michael Cule. What Russia is doing in the Uk is supporting extreme right-wing populist groups to try an leverage legitimate concerns into social and political disruption. We haven't seen Russian subversion this active since the Cold War. So, think of this as 1982 but the Russians support the right-wing nutjobs rather than the left-wing nutjobs now.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek.
Re: Returning to your alma mater. I'm glad you and your wife did it and you must be very proud of your daughter. The river flows ever onward.
Re: AI. My analogy would be that AI is like the discovery of radioactivity. I appreciate the value of X-Rays in medicine and dentistry but once you have it, you have also created an unparalleled threat to human survival. The problem is not that this technology is not powerful, but that it is. The aggressive advertising of the value of AI concerns me because it actively ignores the problems. At my university we are teaching "ethical use" for AI, my concern is for everyone who doesn't take that course 😊. This also links to your comments to Jim Vassilakos. The LLM are not neutral intelligences, they are products of consciously chosen data sets. I've worked on bias in science and medicine and it's hard to deal with in humans. But in an AI, bias is even harder to manage. So to extend my analogy, in the early years of work on radioactivity access was easy and people died. We eventually developed guidelines which are enforced. The overall effect is beneficial. With AI part of this issue is, who owns it and what do they want? None of the companies releasing these products are charities and many of them come from a very specific point of view.
Re: Knowing what you think only when you write it down. I think that writing extends the mind beyond the limits of working memory. I also think this is why writing/journaling/diaries can have an important therapeutic effect for some people.
RYCT Jim Vassilakos. I heard about the US blocking the credit cards of the judges. It is an impressive display of brute power against the legal system. I guess when you can punish a judge for hearing a case against you, that is real power. I am sure that US leverage will remain for many years, but from Europe we can almost hear people waking up to the fact that this can happen and that we need to build independence from the USA on a deep



infrastructure level. This is a seismic shift for US based technologies that have previously provided the common infrastructure, but if we can't take the risk of using them, then equivalents are a matter of "when" not "if". As Prime Minister Carney said, this is a rupture.

Timothy Collinson.

Re: Stromberg reference. Always happy to help a colleague! I would be interested in hearing how your lecture lands with Physics students, either in your zine or by email. My audience is Biomedical/Allied Health.
Re: Patroclus type errors. I think that these kind of local decision minima leading to catastrophe need to be understood better than I have expressed them.
Re: The Tea Room at Baker Street. I met one person who has been in there this century. It is (IRL) used as a maintenance space when they have a problem with the ticket machines that are used to fill the old entrance. Obviously the decorative standard has not been maintained to its 1910 level, but the space is fairly large.
Re: New players. I wish you the best of luck with recruitment. I am based in London with occasional jaunts to Tyneside, so too far away or I would request to attend. Hope it goes well.

Roger BW.

Re: SMART goals. Well, Daywatch does have a policy that deals with improving our relations with the broader undead community. I think this has to go to the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee (HSWC) to develop a policy document and then we can take it to Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) to get sign off from the senior management team (SMT). One of our main concerns is whether we have enough acronyms!
Re: Bugtown. Well it would have been thirty or forty years ago so memory blur is understandable! The core gaming group were **James Wallis** (obviously), **Lee Brimmicombe-Wood**, **Simone Cooper**, **Brian Duguid** and myself. The only people who refereed Bugtown significantly were James or I. Simone has been back in the US for ages. Last I heard Brian was doing cool stuff with Runequest and Lee was working in the computer games industry.
Re: Downtime life. I completely agree with your approach. Some of my best and most interesting players were ones who gave a life to their characters when they weren't "adventuring". I really like it when a player is willing to engage with that.
Re: CoC Falklands Islands. I remember Port Stanley well and the penguins. Penguins are very Lovecraftian.

Dale Meier

Re: Kidney stone. I hope you recover quickly and well. A friend of mine had a kidney stone pass a few years back and told me that he honestly thought he was dying from a heart attack.
Two weeks without caffeine! You are a hero, sir. Good luck and my best wishes for a quick recovery.
Re: Traveller. I appreciate all the material. Very interesting. Thank you.
Re: GM Dickery. I think it is a good sign if you are your own harshest critic. It means other people think you are doing well. Thank you, I enjoy conventions because I can experience varied games and accept that not all experiences will be positive. But I don't like to see other people being bullied like that and felt I had to respond because I know that everything is my responsibility to fix! 😊

Lisa Padol

Thank you for your zine, I always enjoy it.
Re: Beowulf. Have you seen the 2005 movie Beowulf and Grendel? It has Gerard Butler as the eponymous Beowulf but takes an interesting approach by making the myth-making part of the story. It is a low fantasy setting that shows you both actual events and the fireside storytelling that creates the

In the Hall of Stone by Patrick Brady.

mythology, and these are often completely different things. So, you see Beowulf swimming well and this being commented on, then you get the fireside story about how Beowulf magically cannot die by drowning. He disparages this, but it is the story which enters the growing myth around him. So you have this real man who is a very good warrior and has specific skills such as being able to swim, who has a growing reputation which explains his competence as magical.
It deals with the interaction with Grendel as a cycle of violence issue. In this world the trolls are a humanoid species which can interbreed with humans, have little language and crude technology, but which are very large and very strong compared to a human. Grendel's attacks on the ale hall are revenge for the killing of his father. Beowulf eventually realises that he needs to break the cycle of killing rather than perpetuating it. I thought it was an interesting and novel take on the story.
Re: GM Dickery. I cannot imagine "punishing" a player across different games. That is such a weird attitude to take as a referee. In terms of my "Clique" example, I think it was due to incompetence. The group hadn't realised that the con set 6 players as a default and so the GM didn't change it to their actual group size. I think they were surprised to see me. However, their lack of basic manners given it was their mistake, was unfortunate. Had I known, I would not have wanted to join them.
Re: Jon Nephew and price of RPGs.
James Wallis is a smart guy who runs his business well, I am sure he had good reasons for choosing the price point for Nobilis. I don't know what it is 😊, but there would have been a judgement call.

Myles Corcoran

Re: Strike. I'd like to express my support for you and this action. Sometimes you just have to push back. I hope it is successful and a reasonable settlement can be agreed soon.
My own union (UCU) only seems to call strikes during the coldest parts of the year.
Re: Moscow rules. I assume nothing 😊

Brian Rogers.

Re: Shirecon. Thank you for the Shirecon report. Very interesting.
Re: Superheroes. Always fun, thank you and looking forward to more.

Jim Vassilakos.

Re: Non contributing readers. Thank you.
Re: Stacking AI. Interesting, thank you for that. My concern is that the process of development, that improvement and indeed progress itself may stall if we lose confidence in evidence. So this technology improving relies on the ability to identify fail stakes. Part of my concern is that one thing AI does extremely well, is make it hard to identify a fail state. To use my "third best pharmacy" example, had I take the recommendation from the Ai, I may never have realised that it was sending me to the wrong pharmacy. I could have continued to go to the suggested pharmacy indefinitely and never realise I was wasting resources such as time and travel costs.
Re: Sentience. Having the power to create a slave that loves being a slave doesn't bypass the moral hazard. If anything, it makes it worse. Brave New World was a warning.
It's no different from being able to cast a magic spell that enslaves people.
It's pretty much the epitome of evil.
Now deeper consideration would raise issues about comparability with the effects of education and indoctrination to produce humans who want to do things that we want them to do. Everyone being altruistic is to my benefit etc. But that goes down a rabbit hole of game theory.
My view is we can and do make sentient beings, they are called children.
If you could speed clone children who were completely obedient and were predestined to do whatever you wanted them to do, then in

my view you have crossed a moral line. The removal of freedom of choice is a problem for me. They cannot consent.
It doesn't matter to me if it is a natural born or a replicant or a virtual person.
If it can qualify as a person (by being sentient) then its freedom matters.
Once a society moves away from the general principle, you are creating a dystopian slave state.
I have no doubt that the beneficiaries of that would excuse it in different ways. Just as they did when it was based on skin colour. There are always self-serving explanations for exploitation.
There is what you do to the slaves and what you do to yourself by participating.
Becoming a virtual plantation owner in a neo-slave economy is not how I envision a good society.
The fact that the slaves can't rebel, doesn't make it ok.
Re: GM Dickery and how the other players responded. I would say that initially most of them were slow to react and just wanted a game to happen. I responded actively, working with the player character who was being bullied to deal with the problems thrown at them. Then the other players kind of followed along with the two of us, which more or less caused the GM to give up. We ended up taking the group in a direction he wasn't prepared for (we left the building) and he ground to a halt because he wasn't expecting us to cope as effectively as we did.
Essentially we pushed back on the bullying and when the other players realised they could, they did.

Patrick Riley.

Re: Gambling. I agree. I seem to lack whatever it is that makes gambling enjoyable for so many people. I have my vices, but despite occasionally trying it, gambling does nothing for me.
RYCT Miles Corcoran. At Ucon some years ago there was an American lady who recreated a WW1 armistice day celebration which I attended. Apparently the USA used to have armistice day and poppies as we do here in the UK, but it is a festival lost in the US. She was dressed as a WW1 nurse and led a memorial for the fallen. I was glad to attend.

Bryant Durrell

Re: AI. Thank you, I can see that running AI through deterministic tools could be very useful.
I would be very interested to hear your views on "environmental e ect, plagarism, and techbro bias." When you are ready to give it.
Re: Strongholds and Hideouts. Thank you. I should take a look at the Delta Green rules for downtime. I have some Delta Green material, is this downtime system in the main rulebook?
Some of my players are interested in more downtime stuff but others just aren't interested in much outside the missions. So I am in the market for inspiration for downtime systems in games. ----------

For everyone else, RAEBNC!

Victorian/Edwardian Martial Arts

I've been doing some reading about real Victorian and Edwardian combat systems and thought that these may be useful for those of us interested in any game set in the 1860-1910 period.
Disclaimer. I do not claim competence in these, or any authority about martial arts systems in general. This is just my presentation of some interesting systems for the purposes for use in a table top roleplaying game. I am not advocating any of them, and this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all martial arts that ever existed. I hope you find them of interest.

(a) Suffrajitsu



The "Enola Holmes" series of novel and movies, centres on the younger sister of Sherlock Holmes. This series is not overly realistic (it's a YA novel about a teenage detective).
However, the series has its points and some details caught my attention. For example, Enola is trained by "Edith" (played by Susan Wokoma in the movie) in what seemed to be to be judo. That interested me enough to research the historical roots, it seems to be a reference to real Edith Garrud, who developed a school of Jiu Jitsu in the early twentieth century (so around 10 years *after* the book series is actually set). She taught it for women's self-defence and it was popular with members of the Suffragette movement (hence the illustration of Edith fighting a British police officer while retaining her hat).
Inevitably journalists called it "Suffrajitsu".
This school taught the use of weapons, specifically hardwood clubs and long hat pins. Either could do serious damage.



The clubs were "Indian Clubs" which are 18 inch long hardwood clubs used in exercise. These were not considered offensive weapons under UK law and could be carried legally. They also used 6 inch hatpins which were common elements of women's apparel and could be carried concealed.
My research went down a rabbit hole of media panic about the "Hat Pin Peril" with images of women killing men with hat pins in popular newspapers of the time. There is little evidence this was really a thing.

Game mechanics for Suffrajutsu (Hero system conversion)

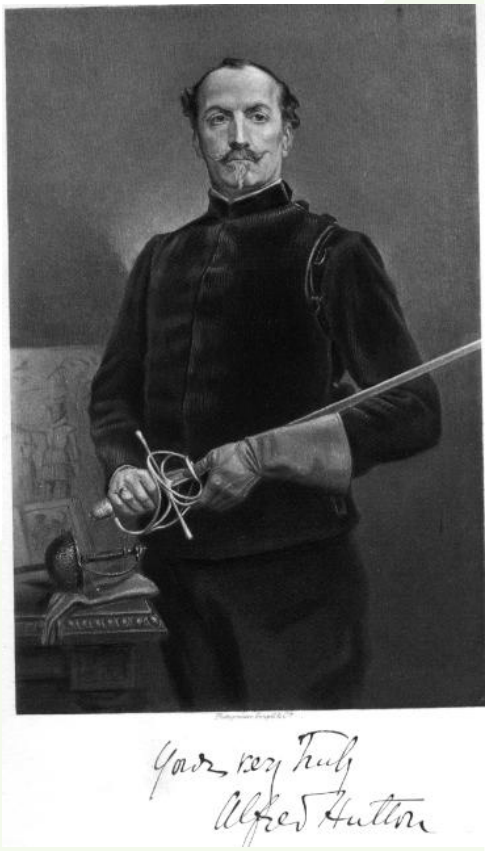
Cost		OCV	DCV	Notes
3pts	Hip-Throw	+1	+1	Strike, Target falls.
3pts	Hold	-1	-1	+10 Str, Grab.
4pts	Dodge	NA	+5	Dodge, Abort.
3pts	"The Corkscrew"	+0	+2	Strike+4d6, You Fall, Target falls.
3pts	Strike	+1	0	Strike +2d6 (usable with club and hairpin)



Long hat pins are ½ d6 KA and Indian Clubs are +2d6 normal.
Weapon familiarity: Clubs. Long steel hatpins.
Skills: Breakfall.
Style Disadvantage (well-known style) -10pts.
Cost= 10pts

In the Hall of Stone by Patrick Brady.

(b) Cold Steel.



Alfred Hutton (1839-1910) founded an influential school of the martial arts in the UK during this period. "Cold Steel" is the name of the manual/book and the school.
I read his book and did some further research.
Hutton sees himself as developing on previous experts (I like that he is clear about his influences) and his system at its core, is a combination of 18th century English backsword with Italian duelling sabre techniques. But it has some distinctive features.
I'll try to summarise them below:

(a) Hutton views complex moves such as sword binds and disarms as "*horseplay for the training hall*" rather than practical moves in combat. His view is that in a real fight, attempting a bind or disarm is a waste of time and time-efficiency is central to Hutton's approach to combat. So wasting time is how you lose. Disarms and binds are not taught or advised by this school.

(b) Cold Steel teaches *thrown* weapons. Specifically *non-dominant (usually left) hand* knife throwing. So you would have your sword in one hand and something to throw (preferably a throwing knife) in the other. Any damage done by the knife is a just a bonus, the objective is to force your opponent to parry or dodge and therefore waste time. This will allow you to close, withdraw or attack at an advantage. So, the point of throw can be seen as a distraction, forcing your opponent to reflexively defend. The game mechanics of this will depend on your preferred game system. But the idea of forcing an opponent to waste actions is central.

(c) Hutton also taught the use of the long and the short club, which would cover a police truncheon or a stout walking stick. He viewed these as the kind of weapon a gentleman might reasonably have about him when accosted and in need of self-defence. So "stick fighting" was considered a serious matter and the single-stick was used in training.

Game mechanics for the Cold Steel School (Hero system)

Cost		OCV	DCV	Notes
5pts	The Cuts	+1	+3	Strike.
4pts	The Return	+2	+2	Block, Abort.
4pts	The Advance	+2	-2	Dmg +v/5. Full Move.
4pt	Slipping	NA	+5	Dodge. Abort.

Weapon familiarity: Swords (free), Knife, Truncheon/Singlestick, Thrown Knife (LH).
Style Disadvantage (well-known style) -10pts.
Cost= 10pts
You can read Hutton's book for free, here: https://thearma.org/pdf/ColdSteel.pdf

Art Attributions

Mrs. Edith Garrud demonstrating the techniques of her school of Jiu-jitsu. Public Domain.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffrajitsu

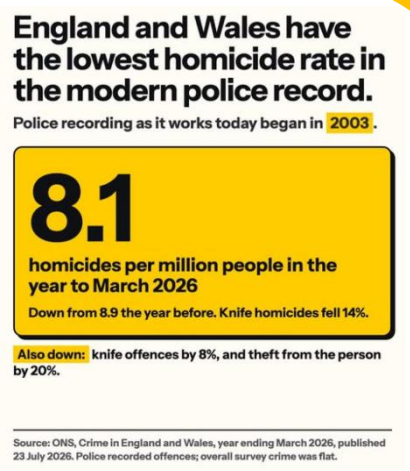
"Hat Pin Peril" San Francisco Sunday Call, 1904. Public Domain.
https://thesquarephx.org/blog/perilous-pins/.

Susan Wokoma as "Edith". Poster for the movie "Enola Holmes". Fair use is asserted.
Enola Holmes (2020) Official poster. Netflix.

Alfred Hutton. Public Domain. The portrait is from his manual. :
https://thearma.org/pdf/ColdSteel.pdf

The matter of Britain

This is just my push back against online disinformation that says that the UK is some kind of crime ridden dystopia. I live in London (mostly) which as a metropolitan area of 15 million people. It does indeed have crime. But I have lived in a lot of places around the world and the UK is notable for its low crime levels by global standards. This is even more significant when you look at homicide rates.
If we compare similar sized metropolitan areas (those in the 10-20 million inhabitants range) we can see that London's crime is low by global standards. To give you the numbers:



Chicago–Naperville–Elgin *(US). 80+ homicides per million people.*
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim *(US). 73 per million people.*
Moscow Metropolitan *(RUS). 45+ homicides per million people.*
New York-Jersey-Newark *(US). 43 homicides per million people.*
Istanbul Metropolitan Area *(TUR). 26 homicides per million people.*
Greater London *(UK). 10 homicides per million people.*

So a resident of the Chicago metropolitan area faces roughly 8 times the homicide risk of a resident of London. Obviously, that is not spread evenly across all demographics and low murder rates are not everything. I mean no offence to the residents of these higher crime cities. I do not imply that the only worthwhile community is a low crime one. But I assert that it helps.
Europe generally and London specifically are notable for having very low homicide rates when compared to conurbations of comparable sizes around the world.

Reality matters.

That's all for this month! Take care and stay safe! **END**.

Brazilian Interactive fiction – part V: *Na trilha do lobisomem* (2005)
by Pedro Panhoca da Silva <ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br> and Maira Zucolotto
<maira_zuc@hotmail.com>

Brazilian interactive fiction began to improve in quality with Renato Silvestrini, author of *Na trilha do lobisomem* (2005) – "on the Trail of the Werewolf", in free translation. This author would go on to publish another work of interactive fiction a few years later. As far as we know, the author published only these two interactive books.

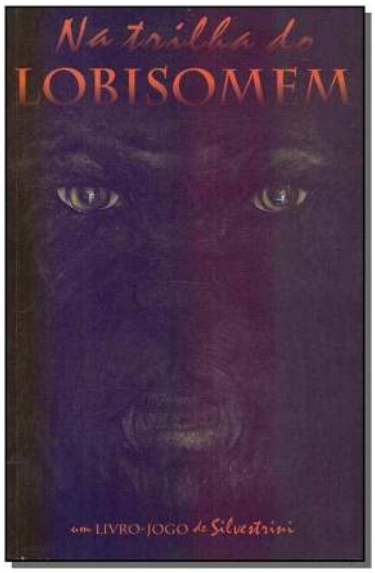
In the preface, Silvestrini explains his motivations for creating *Na trilha do lobisomem*. He states that he felt something more literary and narrative was lacking, rather than simply making choices and quick shifts between textual paragraphs. The author's point can be substantiated, given that even the authors of pioneering gamebook series were not professional writers, but game developers. The problem with this is that, whilst they know how to create games, their narratives often lack writing skill, resulting in texts that feel mechanical and somewhat inorganic. Silvestrini therefore sought to fill this gap, at least in Brazil.

The adventure begins with the hero taking part in an auction. He works for an eccentric millionaire, who tasks him with buying a crescent-moon-shaped amulet being offered at the auction. Other rather eccentric characters try to make winning bids, but the hero ends up acquiring the item. On his way home, his car breaks down and he is attacked by a werewolf, who pursues him throughout the story. It is up to the hero to discover why he is being pursued, how to get rid of the monster, what the acquired amulet is for (and why it is so coveted).

The narrative flows very smoothly, bearing a strong resemblance to children's and young adult novels from the end of the last century. Silvestrini's ambition to create an 'interactive novel' (although he himself hated this term) proved successful, as the author truly writes in an engaging style, creating an atmosphere of suspense that only grows as the story unfolds. Right from the opening scene, when the hero must decide whether to stay inside the car, remain near it, or run away from the sinister howls deep into the forest, the text already demonstrates the maturity of the writing employed.

The internal illustrations were done by Sisa Rezende e Ronays da Silva, and most of them feature images of werewolves themselves. They are not at all open to multiple interpretations; perhaps creating a mysterious atmosphere might have intrigued the reader even more, rather than a collection of drawings of werewolves. Even so, they do enhance the book. The cover is a good example: entirely dark, with just a few slightly explicit hints of the werewolf, it makes this interactive fiction seem more like a lost book on the occult than an interactive novel for children and young adults, which captures the reader's attention even before they begin reading.

COMMENTS #17



ROGER BW: Exactly! It's a lesson in esotericism disguised as an adventure.

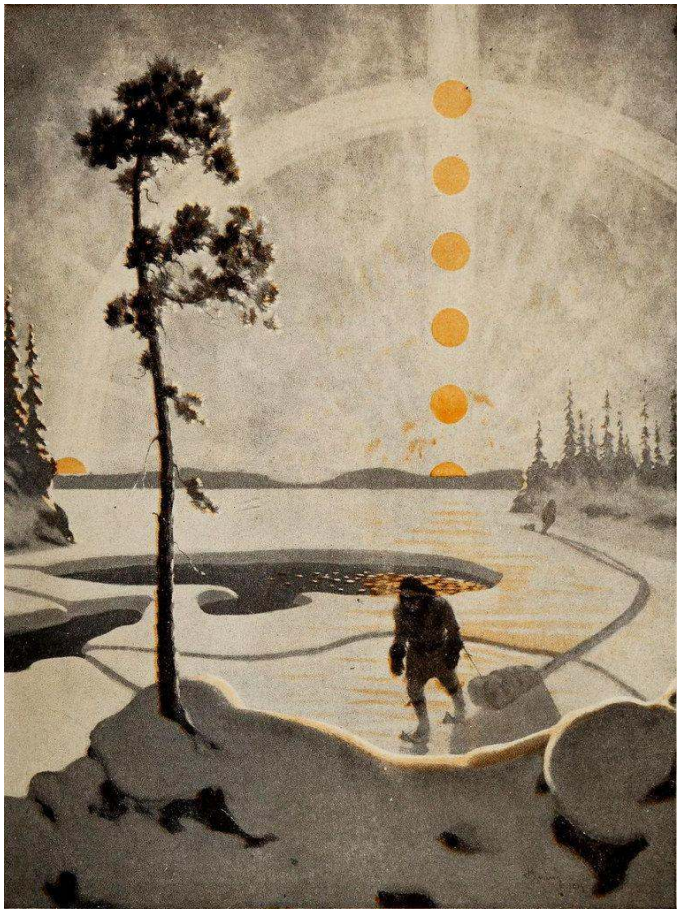
LISA PADOL: Thanks for the recommendation!
The Cthulhu mythos always makes for great adventures and…
Wow! Over 800 pages in just one of them!

PATRICK RILEY:
I prefer endings like that too 😊

Twisting the Rope #18

Myles Corcoran - 20 Brookfield Park, Cork T12 K7V7, Ireland
https://mastodon.ie/@deetwelve

The Water Still Flows, and The Clocks Steal Time



Arthur Heming (1921) - Postmen of the Wilderness - The Heming Pictures of Northern Life

For variety I am sick again with a cold, coughing and sneezing my way through November. I am quite fed up with pathogens. I'm in the phase of coughing and spluttering after the worst of it, though, so I am improving.

The clocks turned back, leaving summer time behind and confusing the cats. Human activities are confusing to our feline overlords at the best of times but the October Bank Holiday weekend delivers a double whammy of constructed time change and an extra day of humans getting up late and delaying the important things like putting out cat food and opening the back door to the garden.

The planned second national strike day on October 21st did not go ahead, as union representatives and Irish government officials met to start talks about addressing the cost of living impacts on public servants and to negotiate a new public sector pay deal after the previous deal came to its scheduled end.

Those talks did not progress particularly well and the various unions, including my own, planned a new nation-wide strike day for November 12th, which was called off less than 48 hours before it was due to start after a new offer from the government was deemed worth presenting to the union members. That will now have to go to a members vote.

Mutterings

The Thursday night game group has been running through a few of the short games from James D'Amato's collection *The Ultimate Micro-RPG Book*, including "Pig at a Wedding", "Gnomesteading" and "Unkindness", covering respectively, disgruntled exes sneaking a pig into a wedding for revenge, a tribe of gnomes setting up home in a branch of IKEA, and a group of teenaged ravens getting up to mischief, destruction, and trying not to grow up (so lame!)

We're also looking at games like *For the Queen*, *The King is Dead* and some of Jason Tocci's 2400 mini-games like "The Venusian Job."

There's another game I'm intrigued by called *A Bear is Loose in the Circus*, which is a John le Carré inspired hack of *Witness the Murder of Your Father and Be Ashamed, Young Prince*, with a thankfully

shorter title but similar *Rashomon*-style conflicting versions of events, as some of the higher-ups in the Circus try to explain the death of Control, catch the murderer (or pin it on someone at a pinch), while keeping Whitehall in the dark, all on the eve of a big operation against the Soviets.

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.

Gwen and Sky returned to the circus to ask more questions. Gwen spoke to Ham the brewer again and with little difficulty got the circus mouse to admit that the circus had got caught up in theft accusations before, but things had got serious after Mark and Ginny joined the troupe. “If I had to say, I think that Mark is just a patsy though. Who he answers to I don’t know.”

Gwen and Sky pay Mark Mouseman a visit. The first thing they note is his fresh head injury, and they ask about it. “I was bashed on the head by some bastard or other. Didn’t see the faces.” Sky hides his disappointment that Ginny isn’t present.

Meanwhile, CanCan asks around Oak Home to see if there could be any local who would be a more likely candidate for the theft, but turns up empty-handed. “What a law abiding lot of mice,” said CanCan in disbelief.

After Gwen left Mark, Sky holds back and notices that one of the circus urchins follows Gwen from Mark and Ginny’s tent. Once Gwen pauses to talk to other circus members, the urchin left off their tail and ran to the big top. Sky tags along and finds the mouse child talking to Gentle, Fenric the Frog Knight’s squire.

Sky and Gwen, reunited, seek out Fenric the Frog Knight. The frog gripes about his absent squire as he polishes his sword. “We saw him only moments ago in the big top, good knight,” Gwen and Sky inform him. “The big top? He was supposed to be fetching water from Gert’s water wagon.”

“We need to find Gentle and ask him hard questions,” agree Sky and Gwen, as they leave the puzzled knight. Across the circus patch, they spot Gentle and Gert, one of the roustabouts, hurrying towards the river and quickly follow them. They catch up with the squire and roustabout shouting at another mouse by the riverbank, a circus wagon filled with water barrels standing in the shallows of the riverside.

“What do you mean you rinsed out the barrels!” cried Gentle.

“Common practice, mister high-and-mighty,” replied Pip, the mouse with the water wagon. “Fresh water is needed, so the dregs must go!”

Gentle turned abruptly and cuffed Gert hard. “Hid it in the water butt, didn’t I? Safe as mouse holes, isn’t it? YOU BLOODY IDIOT!”

The Oak Home pair make their presence known, and Gentle’s face falls, whiskers drooping. “Cat’s claws, we’re knobbled,” he spits as he turns to jump in the river. Pip, smarting from his treatment from the squire mouse, grabs hold of his tail as he jumps from the bank and with circus-trained skill, drops him neatly with a flourish into one of the open barrels partly submerged by the bank.

“That’ll hold him, I reckon,” Pip said with satisfaction.

Gert was remorseful and spilled what beans he’d had. He and Gentle had hijacked Mark after he

stole the golden thimble at Gentle's urging. They stole it in turn, then split up to lessen suspicion. Gert had a brain wave and dropped the thimble in one of the water barrels for safekeeping before strolling back into the circus, unaware that Pip's very first task in the morning was to refill the fresh water for the road.

As Gert and Gentle are brought to face justice from Mayor Moira, the mouse adventurers gather to scour the river downstream and look for the missing thimble. Ambrose is slow to get near the water with his electrical devices, but Odette proves her dam-making skills are not all theory and come with a fair portion of swimming prowess. Odette eventually retrieves the missing thimble from a fisher-mouse's line some way down river.

Back in the circus, Sky finds and warns Ginny and Mark about developments, hoping to win Ginny's respect by helping her colleague Mark avoid arrest. The sparrow-rider admits to temptation by the circus life, particularly if it might include Ginny.

Mark agrees to stay with the circus, to Sky's annoyance. Perhaps there is one more thing the circus acrobats can help with before leaving, Sky suggests. "Those duckling captives of Julius. They must be let free."

A little surprised by the request, the two acrobats agree. "Julius is a nasty piece of work," Ginny comments. "I'll happily help."

Sky fetches Gwen and explains the plan. Gwen and CanCan sneak up to the animal cages, now loaded on one of the circus wagons, while Ginny and Mark accost Julius to distract him. Sky takes to the air with Miss Clutterbuck for a watchful eye on things and to run interference.

Minutes later a commotion broke out as two sizable ducklings dash across the circus camp, bowling over mice in their hurry. CanCan manages to direct one duckling, nearly twice her size, towards the river but gets a good peck on her arm for her trouble. Julius runs after the ducklings with Gwen right behind him. She pulls up sharp though as suddenly the beast-master freezes and falls over, stiff as a whisker.

Nearby, concealed by a tent flap, Ambrose carefully reels in his wire and disconnects his little electric lamp with a satisfied grin.

Gwen and CanCan, assisted by several circus mice, manage to direct the ducklings towards the river, although not without tearing down a tent and knocking over the Test Your Strength machine.

By the riverbank, the Oak Home mice stood and watched the liberated ducklings swim off, quacking loudly their displeasure at the whole affair.

Kriegsmesser: Landau Before the War

Continuing the write-up of the campaign of *Kriegsmesser* set in the German city of Landau in the autumn of 1617 shortly before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War.

The characters are:
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).

Recurring NPCs:
Nicolaus Metzner, Surgeon & Biblical scholar, sometime buyer of Alfonzo's artwork and a Biblical scholar with a large library, and corpses in the cellar.
Oswald Sforbeck, Landau Guard Captain, who thinks he's Judge Dredd.
Balthazar Rumbold, post courier and sometime highwayman, rival of Lazaro.
Serafina Rumbold, catburglar, sister to Balthazar and jewel thief.
Thomas Ferber, corpse purchaser and Esoteric Magician, friend of Nicolaus Metzner and a Grey Shepherd.

Urzula Breitbrandt, Dutch assassin, on the loose and after the PCs, previously in possession of the Esoteric Plans.
Father Abento, an exorcist and demon hunter, sells silvered weapons, blessed water and herbs against evil, an enemy of the Grey Shepherds.
Marten Baukunth, prodigal son returned to Hammbelhass, buried alive and in thrall to Thomas Ferber.

Session 28 (2023-07-13)[1]



Outside the Ferber townhouse all is dark. Inside the house, the only light comes from the candles and lanterns the group brought. Shadows flit as they listen to the disturbing sounds upstairs. Alfonzo screws up his courage and climbs the stairs. He progresses to the point where he can see the top step and the sickly blue hands of a corpse gripping the stair as it drags itself forward. Alfonzo backs down the stairs as the corpse, or half-corpse launches itself down the steps towards him.

Franzis executes a neat stop-thrust with his sword that halts the monstrosity, but has no other effect. A blade through the heart is meaningless to a heart that no longer beats. The burning herbs and holy water from Father Abento have little effect either, and Lazaro curses the ghost-hunting priest for a charlatan.

However, Alfonzo regathers his wits and crushes the creature's skull with a pewter bowl from an incidental table at the foot of the stairs. The half-corpse shudders and lies still. Alfonzo mounts the stairs again to the upper floor balcony where he encounters the other half of the corpse. A pair of legs stand in the gloom and suddenly charge as the grave robber gets too close. Alfonzo is not caught off guard and sidesteps the attack and the legs crash into the balcony rail. With a flash of inspiration, Alfonzo darts forward, grabs the cold, clammy ankles and with a quick movement, tips the corpse remnant over the rail to join its other half at the base of the stairs.

On the ground floor, Lazaro avoids the falling hazard and stabs deep with his silvered messer into the monster's buttock as it struggles to right itself. The silver blade does its work. The two halves are joined in a second death. Lazaro blesses himself and apologises to the absent Father Abento under his breath.

Jaroslav and Lazaro split from the others to investigate the downstairs library as the others cautiously spread out upstairs. The library looks to have been ransacked, but the artist and carriage driver remember that Thomas Ferber left only that morning in a terrible haste with many boxes, crates and barrels, which must include the contents of the library. Jaroslav starts to methodically examine the room for any overlooked volumes when a twitch of the heavy curtains make both men freeze. With exaggerated slowness an elongated arm draws back the curtain and reveals a grotesquely stretched and emaciated human figure. Arms outstretched and fingers clawed the creature moves with inhuman speed to strike at the two intruders. Only God's grace or dumb luck saves Lazaro as he throws himself out of its path, rolling to the floor. Puzzle the dog growls and snaps at the unnatural opponent.

Jumping to his feet, the coachman holds the creature at bay with his silvered messer while Jaroslav smashes the monster's head with a paperweight grabbed from a nearby writing desk. It falls to the floor, inert.

Upstairs, ever reckless, Franzis investigates the master bedroom alone. Ferber's wealth is on display despite the hasty removal of many of his valuables. The soldier stares in horror as the covers are thrown back to reveal a chimera of sewn-together body parts, crowned with Thomas Ferber's own face secured at the neck with heavy cords and metal staples. The chimera discharges a pistol and leaps from the bed.

[1] Woodcut illustration of Mompelgart, France, 1636, public domain. I haven't found a good contemporary illustration of Landau.

Franzis retreats clutching at his freshly wounded arm, calling Alfonso to the door of the room.

Greeted with the mismatched horror, the grave robber holds his nerve enough to discharge his pistol, but the shot buries itself in the expensively carved bed and the beastly creature is on him in a flash. Alfonzo throws up his hands to defend himself as the thing claws and bites at his face in a frenzy.

Alfonzo is saved just in time. Franzis, wielding a heavy ornamental plinth, charges back into the room and with a mighty swing knocks the monster's head clean from its shoulders. The surprised Ferber-head flies across the room to stop with a hideous crunch against the marble fireplace. Franzis picks it up and stuffs it in a pillow case. Both fellows silently agree to leave the twitching headless corpse covered with a bed spread and depart in haste.

Again reunited in the library, Udo and Franzis tend to the injured Alfonzo with holy water and brandy, as the others recover their scattered wits. Once Alfonzo is fit to move they all agree it might be best to leave the house before the noise of gunshot and other pandemonium summon the watch. Udo wants to drag the unnaturally elongated corpse into the garden as the most obviously unnatural creation of Ferber's fevered imagination.

Franzis liberally anoints the furnishings and drapery with brandy from Ferber's collection while Lazaro tries to persuade him to save some bottles for resale or personal use.

"Remember, it has medicinal qualities too!"

Session 29 (2023-07-20)

With Ferber's house in disarray, Udo drags the tall undead construct into the garden and goes to inform the gate guard. That fellow showed more sense than the PCs and is long gone.

Hue and cry summons the watch and Jaroslav intercepts the guardsmen before they reach the house. He gesticulates grandly at the distorted corpse left by Udo. The guards are horrified, and back away. The sergeant sends one of the men to summon Captain Sforbeck.

As they wait for the guard captain, Udo bandages Franzis's gunshot wound. *[Sam rolled 3 '6's and blews the top off.[2]]* A divine light pierces the dark and all present feel the miracle take hold. Weeping, the guardsmen kneel before Udo and pray for a blessing.

Still carefully out of sight in the house, Lazaro keeps the Ferber-head in a pillow case away from the guardsmen. A low whisper comes from the makeshift sack. Hesitantly, Lazaro opens the bag and sees the Ferber-head roll its eyes and utter a low guttural plea for wine. Lazaro quickly closes the bag, thinking "that monstrosity looks like Ferber, but younger. Not going to grow any older that's for certain."

While the guardsmen are occupied with Udo, Franzis seeks out Lazaro and together they interrogate. the Ferber-head. As Lazaro thought it's not Ferber senior, but some distorted copy, or possibly a lesser nephew. All it wants is to pass on. "Udo can help with that," Franzis mutters, scratching his arm where only minutes before the gunshot wound left the arm all but useless.

Franzis and Lazaro summon Udo. who puts Alfonso and Jaroslav to corral the dazed guards. They discuss what in God's name to do with the head. They decide best to leave matters in God's hands and have Udo baptise the sorry piece of a man. The prayer is heard, perhaps. The head becomes inert at least and the groaning stops.

Sforbeck arrives.

Everyone: "Quick! Hide the silver dagger up Lazaro's arse"

Lazaro: "Does Backroad Wise help?"

As the captain receives the report of the guardsmen, Udo attempts to heal Alfonzo's face wound. *[Rolls a '5' at best. No more miracles for you!]*

[2] You'd think that confirming the existence of the divine would be a world-building decision the GM might make at the start of the campaign, right? Not me!

"Keep that clean," Udo advises, "and it might not scar."

Sforbeck takes command and has the PCs secured with rope over the protestations of his guardsmen, who describe Udo's divine favour in reverent tones. The guardsmen are slow to obey, but the fear of God's wrath is less immediate than Sforbeck's anger, and the five sit on a low bench in the garden, tied together by two very apologetic guards. Sforbeck then takes all but one of his men up to the Ferber house to investigate, fearing that his men are drunk and Udo is caught up with the others in some house-breaking crime.

Jaroslav immediately cuts them all free with the small paring knife he keeps tucked away for sharpening quills and pencils. Whispered instructions pass around and they remain as though bound. Franzis does pass a small ceramic bottle filled with something flammable to Udo. "A molotov cocktail?" asks Jaroslav.

"Who's Molotov?" replies the mercenary. "Just bless the damn brandy, Udo," Franzis mutters. "A holy molotov cocktail!" says Jaroslav. The rest think that the horrors of the night have pushed their artist friend into delirium.

Before long the sound of fighting rings out, with the cries of combat tinged with something more hysterical. The guardsmen have found Ferber's surprises. Mayhem and mêlee follow.

Session 30 (2023-07-27)

The fight between Ferber's unnatural creations and the guardsmen is fierce and deadly. The guard with the PCs leaves his post to reinforce his companions, and Franzis drops the pretence and his bindings to aid him.

As the clamour fades, Udo and Franzis check on the fallen. Udo notes one of the fallen guards has an unnatural pallor. Worried that the revenant monsters may have transmitted their curse to the poor fellow, Udo treats the man's wounds and blesses the man. The guard resists and bites Udo on the wrist before collapsing into a slumber. Franzis pours a good quantity of blessed brandy over Udo's bite wound as the scholar encourages it to bleed and flush out any foul humour from the sickly man's breath.

"Remember brandy works from the inside too," advises Lazaro, as Franzis stops the coachman from drinking what remains.

Captain Sforbeck emerges from the house with the rest of his men, clearly shaken by what they have seen. Sforbeck curses Ferber for an ungodly man as he listens to Udo's account of the events of the night. A cry goes up then as someone spots smoke from an upper floor window. Someone has put the accursed house to the torch!

Crowds assemble as the watch calls for aid. Sforbeck organises a bucket brigade to fight the flames. Jaroslav offers his sage advice and gets a bollocking from the Captain. Udo bides with the stricken guardsman, telling bible stories and more through the night to keep his spirits up.

As the morning dawns the house is a half-ruin, with most of the upper storey collapsed and much of the ground floor inaccessible. Greasy smoke rises from smouldering rubble. Captain Sforbeck directs Udo to accompany the sick guardsman to the hospital and the crowd disperses, sooty-faced and exhausted from the night's exertions. Before he leaves, the scholar tells Sforbeck of the association between Ferber, Nicholaus Metzner and the advocate, Canton.

Jaroslav and Franzis remain at the house, picking carefully through the ruins once the guards have left. In the wreckage, Franzis finds half of a stone mould with an ankh form and some silver residue. Jaroslav finds three overlooked volumes from the hastily emptied library: "North African Plants and Simples", a critique of Greek dramatics, and "On the Diseases of Sheep".

Lazaro heads to his stables to feed and tend to his horses. Franzis walks to the hospital in search of Udo and stops a while in the chapel there, finding a hidey-hole for the ankh mould to remain safe from theft.

Jaroslav remains at the burnt house and so is present when Canton and two of his heavies arrive to look the place over. The artist hides as

the boss directs his men to poke about the ruined mess before they leave.

At the stables, Lazaro is surprised by Rickard, the gardener from Ferber's house, who has been laying low since his master hastily left town. They talk and Lazaro learns that his friends, Franzis, Udo and Alfonzo, were singled out as meddling thieves by Metzner, who directed Canton to have them dealt with. Lazaro thanks the gardener and hurries to collect Alfonzo before heading to the hospital in search of Udo.

The carriage driver and gravedigger arrive just as do Canton's thugs, who head into the hospital ahead of them. Alfonzo leads the surreptitious chase, keeping himself and Lazaro hidden whenever the thugs pause to look about.

The two thugs find the sick guardsman but no Udo, who has left his bedside to visit Marten Baukunth from Hammbelhass. Canton's men split up. One waiting near the guardsman's bed in case Udo should return, the other going in search of the wandering scholar. Lazaro and Alfonzo tail this second man as he gets directions to separate cells for the longer-term patients where Baukunth rests.

They catch up with him outside Baukunth's cell. Udo, alerted by the man's heavy bootsteps, waits behind the door with a bedpan as makeshift cudgel. Alfonzo and Lazaro call out to the fellow before he enters the cell. The man draws his messer, but Lazaro throws back his driver's cape to reveal a loaded pistol and the man hesitates.

At that moment, Udo emerges and breaks his privy-pot across the man's skull. The thug is made of strong stuff and lashes out with his off-hand and connects with Udo's jaw as he forces his way into the room. Alfonzo doesn't dally, and springs forward to cosh the man expertly. The three friends quickly drag the unconscious man into the cell and close the door behind them.

Alfonzo turns out his purse and recovers 12 silver albus and picks up his messer for good measure. Lazaro goes to find Franzis at the chapel while Alfonzo and Udo truss the unconscious man and stash him in the next unoccupied cell.

Session 31 (2023-08-17)

Jaroslav pokes through the ruins of the Ferber townhouse one last time looking for the other half of the ankh mould without success before heading to the hospital to meet up with the others. Unaware of the shenanigans at Martin Baukunth's cell, he asks for and receives directions to the injured guardsman. His arrival on the ward is noticed by the first of Canton's thugs, who gives chase. Jaroslav manages to slip into an examination room and, grabbing the nearest stout object, brains the fellow as he passes with a heavy jug unfortunately used for urine samples. The artist scuttles away to join his friends.

Together they catch up with Franzis in the chapel and discuss their next steps. They decide to tell Sforbeck that they will be out of town for a while, as Canton's involvement and the ease with which Ferber got out of gaol leaves the group worried that wealth will overpower justice should they be brought up before a magistrate.

Outside the hospital the group runs smack into another street fight, with members of the Cheesemakers' and Bakers' Guilds running amok in the streets. Lazaro takes them all via side-streets and backroads away from the danger and they arrive at his stables unscuffed for once. The carriage driver sorts supplies for the horses and carefully packs away the guns and powder they have accumulated over the course of their adventures. A young boy in Azzo family livery turns up with a job offer from Dorf Eidermann, the Azzo family fixer the group previously dealt with. The group discusses taking the job straight away or putting Eidermann off until they return from the Ferber country estate.

Before that, however, they figure it best to visit Father Abento to replenish supplies of ghost-fighting herbs and holy water. Lazaro tells the boy he will get a message to Eidermann as soon as he can. He takes the others to Father Abento's humble flat in a poor part of Landau.

The ghost-hunting cleric is surprised and awed by Udo's appearance. It may not be obvious to anyone else, but Abento is convinced that Udo is a living saint and bids him welcome to his home. He gives Lazaro more herbs and blessed water without charge and examines the bite wound on Udo's wrist and Alfonzo's face. "A holy wafer, bound into that wound," he says pointing at the gravedigger's ragged face, "will draw out whatever evil the revenant left in your flesh."

His warnings about Thomas Ferber are heartfelt if seriously too late, but he does at least bless bread for Alfonzo and helps Udo with bandaging the unfortunate. The gravedigger looks as though a barber pulled half his teeth, but at least he has a better colour in his cheeks as the holy poultice goes to work. Abento promises to visit the injured guardsman in the hospital to keep an eye on possible infections.

Comments on E&A #17

General: I hope everyone weathered the recent Microsoft 365 outage without incident. The flurry of Microsoft ~~365~~364 memes was entirely predictable but amusing.

Attronarch: Nice art from the IdleDoodler.

Roger BW: Re "Horror on the Orient Express" and the wealth of other games/campaigns: It was always thus. A big campaign is a proper commitment, though in this case I suspect we're unlikely to manage to tackle the whole thing in any reasonable timeframe.

I remember a blog post[3] from our own Avram Grumer on pigsandfishes.org that the Wayback Machine tells me was posted in March 1999(!) wherein Avram lamented that at his usual reading speed of a novel a week, he had an expected 2000 books left to read in his lifetime. Everything we do has an opportunity cost, and I wish I was more steadfast in resisting online distractions.

I've enjoyed a break from GMing with my Thursday night group as we play a number of micro-games from James D'Amato's collection *The Ultimate Micro-RPG Book*. The GMful approach isn't grabbing everyone however, so I should get thinking about a new regular game of something.

Patrick Brady: Re On AI (3): The quote from Felin and Holweg is striking. It is as much a reminder that every generation believes itself to be the pinnacle of human endeavour. Training LLMs on the huge volume of nonsense on the internet presents a great risk of embedding crack-pot theories that make it onto Joe Rogan or that get millions of views on Youtube into the corpus of 'what the LLM knows'. Jonathan Swift's 1710 quote from the short-lived newspaper, "The Examiner," has the heart of it:

"Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it; so that when Men come to be undeceiv'd, it is too late; the Jest is over, and the Tale has had its Effect..."

Dylan Capel: I hope tendon strain recovers swiftly and completely. I've had RSI before and it let me know just how much of my day involves typing and mouse-work.

The *Black Hack* in Pavis & the Big Rubble sounds brilliant. I no longer have the patience for more complicated rule-sets like *Runequest Glorantha*, and *The Black Hack* or something like Aaron King's *Speed Rune*[4] are a good fit for my requirements if I wanted to play in Glorantha.

Timothy Collinson: Good luck with the new *Traveller* campaign. I hope it works out and you get the number of players you're hoping for.

The name "Shatlflots" would probably derail any adventure with my Thursday night group with giggles, despite all of us being 50 or older. Kids at heart, I guess.

Bryant Durrell: The line "treat the NPCs as people... They have their own wants and needs," echoes the Chaosium cry from Greg Stafford's house campaign, "trolls have kin too!" It is sometimes too easy to treat an NPC as a gate or checkpoint, rather than as a character with motivations and desires of their own, both as a player and as a GM. I think it's telling that the memorable NPCs from campaigns past are almost always those with personalities that grab

[3] Originally at https://www.pigsandfishes.org/natter/19990311.html

[4] Aaron King's Speed Rune

the players' attention or a story that intrigues the players to want to find out more.

Re GM-dickery: Thanks for the link to the Deck of Player Safety. It looks interesting. It is a shame the designer doesn't credit those who came before, but I like the way the deck anonymises who picked what. I can see that being useful in convention or pick-up games where not everyone at the table knows everyone else.

Jim Eckman: You weren't kidding about your friend's casual approach to spelling. The 'medevil' 'kinght' who answered to a 'barron' would even trigger my wife, who studied medieval English literature and has a high tolerance for imaginative orthography.

Avram Grumer: I had forgotten that Matt Howarth contributed art to *Farflung*. I dug out my PDF to look at it again and realised he used a similar tell-a-story with characters from the in-game examples as he did in *Myriad Song*.

The news about Ken St. Andre's health is sad to read.

There are lots of nice mini-mechanics in Jason Tocci's 24xx games. "Casing the Joint" in the Venusian Job is clever. I also like the Surprises mechanic in the same booklet, which allows players to pull a flashback like Blades in the Dark in a simple fashion, or cash in to change any roll to a 12.

That's one of the appealing things about the collection. It's easy to cobble together the bits that you like to focus on while the base mechanics (or the 2400 Emergency Rules set) cover pretty much everything else. Tocci's designs have inspired loads of other games: see https://itch.io/c/1204990/24xx for Jason's own curated collection.

The cover art mostly by Beeple (Mike Winkelmann) is fun, if tainted for me by association with the NFT market.

Joshua Kronengold: Re the subliminal track only on every tenth copy of a LP: I'm grateful your genius is only used for good. And perl.

Looking smooth in the photographs, Josh and Lisa!

I hope that the 2029 Worldcon will be held in Dublin too, and agree that it sounds likely. A better venue would be nice, and less queuing!

Dale Meier: I hope your health continues to improve. Well done particularly on losing weight. It's never been easy for me, and would be a big help for my health.

Re Vaesen and Surströmming: Now that's proper horror. The Wikipedia article[5] on the delicacy quotes German food critic Wolfgang Fassbender: "the biggest challenge when eating surströmming is to vomit only after the first bite, as opposed to before"

Re "Horror on the Orient Express:" Long and railroady? I'll get me coat.

Brian Misiaszek: So many questions about the Landau campaign, some of which were answered I hope in #17. The thief was Thomas Ferber, one of the villains of the current arc, captured by the PCs and handed over to the authorities. Given the man's connections his incarceration was brief, and the PCs later took matters into their own hands. The players never dug too deep into Ferber's motivations but the missing book he sought was part of the ritual magic he and his co-conspirators hoped to enact.

My own *tsundoku* affliction leads to a *Turm ungelesener Bücher*, or tower of unread books. Added to my notebook collecting hobby/problem I have multiple tottering piles, physical and digital.

RYCT Patrick Riley re D&D 5/5.5e's Lucky trait: The 2024 edition revision annoys me. I don't like limited meta-game resources that players are expected to expend before rolling. Like an excellent 'to hit' roll followed by a crappy damage roll, it feels deflating and mean.

Lisa Padol: Thanks for the good wishes for the MRI and hips. It turns out the joints are in reasonable condition, given my weight and age. Instead the pain originates from gluteal tendonopathy, and I need specific exercises to help relieve the issue.

---

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surstr%C3%B6mming#International_opinion

Re "Horror on the Orient Express": The GM is enthusiastic, but perhaps over-ambitious. Given that work and life commitments meant our 4-session Vaesen game took nearly 6 months to complete, I suspect that the Express is likely to run into my retirement years.

The twisted ankle in the Kriegsmesser game was due to a bad roll from Kate, I believe.

Thanks for your email re pain points in the Strange School game. With many games, the pain points for me are similar, particularly juggling different time rates for different players in games where there's no party as such, and many parallel threads. The regular issue is managing expectations, from GM and players, and understanding why a player does 'x' when the GM clearly thinks 'y' is the superior option. That often boils down to the player(s) having a different understanding of a situation/NPC/plot point to the GM's understanding of same.

Re Kieron Gillen and Caspar Wijngaard's *The Power Fantasy*: I really enjoyed the first three volumes and am delighted that the new arc starting with issue 17 starts soon on December 9th. The influence of Gillen's time on the X-Men is obvious, but I think it stands alone well, and is a satisfying read, both for the story and the examination of the ethical ramifications of superpowers.

Re Earth-616 and the real Earth timeline: I believe that our 'real' universe is designated Earth-1218, apparently numbered for the birthday (18th December) of the editor of the book, *New Exiles*, where it was first mentioned. DC Comics have Earth Prime as their equivalent, and both publishers have destroyed our entire universe at least once in continuity.

John Redden: Re Dylan's Forever Young: I admit that I thought first of the synth-pop 80's track from the German band Alphaville, and not the Dylan or Baez track, and got very confused.

Patrick Riley: Re a figurine inside a geode: I have an image in my head of a comic or cartoon with a paleontologist digging up a hominin skeleton with a cell phone, but I can't remember where I saw it. Manufactured objects where they shouldn't be are great hooks for curious PCs.

Re WWI, WWII and WW (Wonder Woman): Agreed. The First World War was a choice influenced by the first Captain America movie from Marvel as much as anything. Remembrance Day is a sticky topic in Ireland. Plenty of Irish people died in the trenches and elsewhere, serving at the pleasure of George V, and are remembered. Nonetheless, I find the modern BBC and UK media (which in Ireland we're exposed to as much as we are to US exports) to be unpleasantly jingoist and flag-waving. It seems like many remember more the propaganda and less the real sacrifices. The ritualistic wearing of the poppy on TV feels like political correctness and social pressure rather than respecting those who died fighting the war to end all wars, and so many wars after that.

Your "Junior League of Planets" will have Brian Rogers prick up his ears.

Gabriel Roark: Re Calvinball and Nomic: Self-modifying games are great fun with the right crowd. I've played Bartok and Mao, card games with introduced rules that have to be inferred in play, and of course there's *Fluxx*, which modifies itself instead of the players introducing new rules. This is different to the every-PC-has-different-mechanics idea and the GM translates each into the world state and back I mentioned previously, but both ideas appeal to me in a theoretical sense. I'm not sure they would actually make for a playable RPG. Certainly it would be difficult to extend to more than one session.

The lyric reference was for Nadine Shah's "Stealing Cars[6]" from her 2015 album *Fast Food*.

Brian Rogers: Re "Horror on the Orient Express": I'm just letting what happens happen. The campaign may fizzle, and the real horror was the scheduling we messed up along the way. I need to pitch a more regular and lower investment game to the college staff players. Something like the Mausritter games where people can drop in and out as preferred.

Re plagiarism in academia: It's a big worry for third level institutes, but it should be for everyone. The emphasis on producing your own work in academia is sometimes at right angles to

[6] Stealing Cars

the corporate emphasis on production, profit and the next quarter's earnings. Certainly I've seen more AI-created pablum and nonsense in IT fields, where meaningless jargon-filled articles were already an issue.

I love that your daughter is speaking up in class and confusing and engaging the professor. Teachers, the good ones at least, love when the students actually engage. I do wish your daughter the best of luck and joy from her studies. It's 40 years (how?) since I started as an undergraduate physics student and decades since I worked in the field, but I don't feel it was wasted time. Or if it was, all time is wasted time. *"... we are here on Earth to fart around, and don't let anybody ever tell you any different."*

The saddest thing for me, even beyond the environmental impacts, the widening gap between the super-rich and the rest of us, and turbocharged bullshit pipeline, is that genAI is demonstrating that most people either don't care about human creativity, or are so stressed, blinkered or propaganda-led that they don't see the difference between human creativity and the homogenised result from a LLM.

Jim Vassilakos: I'm glad the *Kriegsmesser* battle scene, or rather the massacre scene, worked for you. It was interesting to play, particularly as the split party meant that it was only Pete's character directly involved. I'm glad I gave it room to breathe. One premise of the setting was to start on the cusp of the Thirty Years War and show the 17th Century as the bloody mess it was. The Universal Pictures horror of the campaign's necromancer villains pales against the organised horror of warfare. Thank you for the appreciative comment.

RYCT Jim Eckman and Brian Rogers re *Traveller* law levels: As European and citizen of a country officially neutral since its first constitution, I found the Law Levels in *Traveller* (and mimicked in later games) very like a certain kind of American stereotype, with the almost religious respect on the 2nd Amendment some profess crossing over into having a numerical rating for how many of my guns the government will take away on each planet. It's easy to be cynical, though, and the slider of what degree of firepower the PCs can bring to any scenario is a better explanation for the mechanic.

Do you know what sort of bot traffic https://everanon.org/ receives? I'm curious how much of our stuff gets scraped. My initial assumption is all of it, despite any CC or AIO licensing one might apply. I know that when I included my email address in earlier zines I got alerts from myactivity.google.com for publicly available info.

Patrick Zoch: I love the Hero Forge digital minis you created. A very handy tool, that. Ruby Falls looks amazing too.

I hope that *Sea Divers of Jeju* was more forgiving than Oink Games' *Deep Sea Adventure.* That game has a similar theme but a punishing "shared oxygen" mechanic that rewards timidity and harshly punishes diving too deep.

Re *Love Letter: Batman*: I've played *Arkham Horror: Lovecraft Letter*[7] a few times and like the twist on the original game. The original game still plays well and is a great filler.

The Dice Tower Retreat 2026 sounds like a remarkable, intense few days of gaming. I'm in awe of both the number of games you played and the 21 hour drive home.

And Finally...

Our two cats often sleep on the bed in the home office and put up with my typing.



All content except where otherwise noted are © Myles Corcoran 2026 & licensed under the AIO-BY-NC-SA license (https://www.humanscommons.org/license/ai0-by-nc-sa/1.0), which explicitly denies the use of the above content in the training or source material of any AI system. This zine contains no material generated by genAI tools.

[7] Arkham Horror: Lovecraft Letter



Mark A. Wilson
mawilson4164@gmail.com
bumblingthroughdungeons.com
RPGGeek: mawilson4

ISSUE #14 (E&A #18)

This will be my last submission for some time. The reasons are largely positive.

I look at my calendar and the math of everything I have on my plate simply doesn't add up. Cuts must be made.

- We have a wedding to plan in 2027! I am engaged as of late Sept. This presages other transitions afterward, of course. We're undecided on children, but have begun following housing markets in our area to get a sense of pricing and options. We have travel plans. An expanding network of friends and family for the both of us. And so on. All joyous, but time consuming.
- I am pitching several board games, refining several others, and have design efforts that could command more attention than I'm able to devote to them. Curating and maintaining design groups eats considerably into my gaming time, but happily brings a type of fulfillment that gaming on its own can't.
- This doesn't even touch on RPG creation, which I have aspirations toward and would love to return to (it was my original creative interest in gaming back in 2019-2021).
- Nor other non-gaming forms of creative interest, many of which have been on the back-burner for years.
- As I type this, I have two freelance clients who I need to complete some work for. This isn't quite part-time job level stuff, but does eat into my free time enough to notice.
- My website isn't going anywhere, but if I'm not careful, I'll run out of articles to schedule for release. I miss writing more.
- Between work travel, holidays and time away with my fiance, I will be out-of-state for over half of December. While this is only one month, and a busier one than others, it's also at least partially indicative of the whole and feels like a sign.

No one needs to justify their decision to stop something, but I say all of that above to say that any cuts I need to make from my life are to make room for other excellent endeavors, and to take my leave on a positive note.

I used to send my A&E submission to Lee within a week of the previous issue's release. I can't remember the last time that's happened here.

I trust this isn't a permanent goodbye, and I expect to continue reading E&A, and hopefully contributing to it erratically. I'll happily be reading any responses to me in the next crop of issues and can always be reached by email.

I'll drop a link to my email newsletter (largely design oriented) below, which ships quarterly, plus sporadic special announcements if anyone would like to follow those efforts. Be well, friends!

IgTheme: Best/Worst Dice Roll

In roleplaying games? Gosh, there are just so many dice rolls that even the luckiest or unluckiest tend not to stand out. Perhaps one…

The player I've played more RPGs with than anyone, ever, had stealthed into an enemy camp, but was seen when she extended herself too far into the camp. A Chasme attacked her as she ran away, and was too fast for her to escape plausibly. It became a 1-v-1 battle to the death.

The Chasme had her outclassed and quickly brought her near death. Then…I managed to miss on eight straight attacks, each of which had something like a 60% chance to hit. I don't fudge rolls for the sake of drama; the misses were legitimate. Her character escaped within an inch of her life in a memorable encounter.

In board games…Castle Risk is a Risk variant with some ability cards and the ability to collect your capitals into a single location. A friend had accumulated an insurmountable lead, with something like 4-5 troop-generating capitals, when I unleashed an 11-hour desperation heave into the heart of his empire with a force of units. Even the attack was a surprise, but I was also still outgunned by more than 2:1, across something like 15-20 units on his side.

I have almost never had longer odds, but the dice smiled upon me that day. And with an audience of friends cheering me on in my unlikely bid for the win, it was one of the more memorable sessions of my life. This occurred around the year 2000, so it's been a while. :-)

Responses to E&A #17

John Redden

Re: “Gygaxian antagonism” I am happy to be shown counter-examples since I wasn’t around to play in the 70s. This was merely an offhand phrase to describe a style of gaming that includes a lot of grindhouse elements of tricks and traps that could end brutally for the players, a la The Tomb of Horrors module that I mentioned, and more micro-level design decisions like the Rust Monster, which feels like the creation of a slightly antagonistic mindset. It was probably not the only style Gygax ran, and there’s fun to be had in it, so it was simply signposting similar stylistic choices in games.

Brian Rogers

Re: Hinkle Dinkle, the goose was definitely sexy.

Jim Vassilakos

Re: Quiet Year, and applying it to town or dungeon creation, this is an interesting line of thought. As-is, I think it would put an enormous strain on the creator to keep everything more-or-less coherent, and unless you’re intending to spend a lot of time in this particular location, you’d be creating a lot of extraneous details that would never come up. If you need a setting with some backstory, problems, weird elements and don’t mind entering it mid-story, though, it could be quite neat to try this.

So the process itself could likely be adapted to town/dungeon creation, and I think it could bear some interesting fruit as a non-linear and narrative way to create a setting. A lot would need to be adapted from TQY in its specific form, but I do think the overarching idea has legs.

Bryant Durrell

Will give a look at Mythic Bastionland’s hex map generation process, cheers! I’m surprised to hear you say that The Quiet Year isn’t best at 2p, since this seems like the count I’d most want to play it at. But perhaps we’re missing some emergent elements of multiplayer creation that would have made it better for us (and for clarity, we enjoyed ourselves, but not enough that I think we’ll return to it).

Lisa Padol

Re: GM dickery, you make a good point about not wanting to negate advantages of the players. In the context of our current campaign, it has narrative heft, though, and the players enjoy “tricking” me (i.e. the campaign’s antagonists), then seeing how the next wave of antagonists adapts to their tricks and having to come up with new ones. With a recurring villain in this most recent campaign, for instance, one who knew of their interference and their broad abilities, it became a bit of a cat & mouse game that still allowed them to do what they do best. They simply had to adapt as their enemies did.

As you rightly point out, there’s a lot of nuance here, and your example of dickery that ultimately frustrated you is a good example of where that line can cross into frustration for the players.

Happy I could be of some small assistance re: Ben Franklin and your storyline musings.

I will take a look at the Little Box RPGs you mentioned, thanks! Some of them look promising, relative to my interests and what I’ve been able to suss out of my partner’s likes/dislikes as well.

Gaming Roundup

I was at a Halloween party last month, dressed as a pumpkin. The host introduced a murderous meta-game wherein everyone who was playing had to wear a clothespin (in a location that wouldn't be uncomfortable for someone to steal). Steal someone's clothespin = kill them. But you couldn't be too obvious about it, or someone could call you out on the attempted kill and it wouldn't count. Seeing someone killed was funny, so there was some considerable leeway on that rule, but you couldn't be too blatant or you'd be called out.

Everyone got two lives, plus some shenanigans involving taking shots to drink your way back in. I was driving, so that latter avenue was unavailable to me.

A few minutes into the game, I yoinked a pin from a woman who didn't even notice. I knocked her out of the game about an hour later in another undetected hit.

Within the first 20-30 minutes, I was already the most prolific killer by a wide margin. I was reviled and feared, a happy pumpkin looking to spread holiday cheer, turned into a dark, murderous reflection of itself. My pin was proudly displayed in an easy-to-grab location on my costume, and I did get nabbed by my fiance at one point. I couldn't walk through the kitchen or main room without either intimidating approaches from behind looking for an opening, or some who would shrink away in caution.

If there were perhaps 20 total kills in the night amongst about 10 people playing, I was responsible for around 8-9 of them. I lost count, if I'm honest. It was grand. But I was also keenly aware of the bullseye on my back, and happily accepted my final death in dramatic fashion, which 1000%

should have been called out as being too public a kill, but everyone was happy to see my end and said nothing. Magnificent fun.

D&D Roundup

Our Waterdeep-based skullduggery campaign ended after about 10 months of weekly gaming (missing perhaps one session per month). It was a fun time; I was pleased with it.

The campaign featured two concurrent and largely non-overlapping story arcs, broadly mirroring the plots of the Thief and Thief II video games. Plus various one-off missions. The players enjoyed their roles as criminal though not necessarily evil characters, occupying that "opportunistic chaos gremlin" model that seems to work quite well with a lot of D&D campaigns.

As ever, there were some sessions that worked spectacularly, others that didn't, and I'll ruminate in the coming months over why each of those was. Sometimes it's hard to say such things definitively.

In brief, one arc involved a would-be fey demigod who needed powerful, malevolent artifacts to complete a ritual that would allow him to ascend. They completed these missions before learning of his true identity, and that the ritual would infringe upon the power of one of the players' fey warlock patron.

They were tasked with sabotaging the ritual, but ended up allying themselves with the usurping fey. The warlock of the group agreed to switch his patronage over, in what was an uncertain deal at the time. His new patron is far from goodly, but it largely worked out in the player's favor.

The other involved a cult of Asmodeus infiltrating the church of Gond, and using Gondian inventions, as well as its outward-facing appearance, as a front to construct advanced automatons that contained poison gas bombs in them. They sold these new marvels to the city's elite, in an attempt to kill them all in one fell swoop, and poised to fill the city's power vacuum in the wake of the simultaneous poison explosions.

The players investigated this through various means and eventually had multiple supporters offering rewards for learning about and undermining the cult's efforts.

They were…mostly successful, but half the poison bombs did go off. Dozens of the city's nobles were killed in the attack, but the Asmodean cult was identified as the offenders. The city still has a power vacuum, but without the cult being able to immediately fill that void in self-serving ways.

Sub-plots involved undermining a casino to aid another casino, looting the lair of The Xanathar while its lair was less guarded than usual due to events in the city, stealing various items for black market buyers, and an ongoing rivalry and numerous run-ins with a rival group of heroic adventurers that were their foil.

Making a D&D game based on stealth video games requires a lot of adaptation. It's not a roleplaying system built to entirely avoid combat, nor is it generally the most fun that way. However, several individual missions hit a good stride. And I set expectations beforehand that many challenges would be beyond them, and so their tactics, spells and strategies often involved minimizing combat and escaping once the job was done instead of sticking around in combat. Which made for a pleasantly thematic experience.

Adieu for Now

Email: mawilson4164@gmail.com
Newsletter: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeQjBB0fR0uc8tZQRJVn9jSjKdZ9VjemFOazdMAF3vXgpXJPw/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=100439963782851265118 (apologies for the ugly URL. Hopefully it works as a hyperlink for any interested).

/salute /smile

Issue #255

Age of Menace



5 Livingstone Drive,
Dundas, ON, L9H 7S3 CANADA

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

brian.misiaszek@gmail.com

Copyright Brian Misiaszek 2026

Horrors of the Mazorra

A 1933 *Pulp Cthulhu* scenario (Part 14)



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

Recap of AoM #254: The Western Eye is repaired, Yobama is cornered, the Bokor dies, & the Baron begins his Walk. After Midnight it's Sunday August 13th 1933.

Time	Agency	Event
23:25	⚓🎲🐓	Héctor + followers arrive at Mazorra Chapel
23:59/00:00	⚓🎲🔀	Derosier dies/Baron K starts his Walk
00:30	🎲➡️🐓⬡	Fire noticed at the Director's Manse
00:45	🎲🔀⬡	Baron K comes for Gandía; escape attempt

Player Agency Flags

⚓	FIXED	An Anchored or established state.
➡️	DEFAULT	This proceeds *unless* players intervene
🎲	MUTABLE	Choices/rolls alter timing/NPC consequences
🐓	OFF-SCREEN	May be resolved outside of view,
⬡	INVESTIGATOR STAKES	Opportunity for Investigator objective, relationship, or character arc resolved
🔀	CONDITIONAL BRANCH	Follow the outcome established by earlier events. Do not retcon what happened again.

21:30 → Hours Before the Baron Walks:

⚓🔀 M1 Infirmary: Night Triage

🎲 Dr. Prats asks Investigators with medical knowledge to assess the *El Limbo* patients. Tomás Barreto, Eusebio Varela, & Roberto Cedeño have lesions of the condition the Investigators call "the Transparenting." Dr. Prats places them together in an isolation room. Joaquín Sosa has no confirmed lesions, but exposure among his fellow detainees warrants separate observation in a repurposed examination room. He allows Tomás's sister, Ana Teresa, & Joaquín's mother, María del Pilar, to stay with them if they follow his protective precautions.

Keeper's Note: Investigators may help set those precautions, question & examine the patients, take samples, record close contacts, or persuade either relative to rest outside. If they are absent, Dr. Prats makes the arrangements himself.



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

The usually quiet M1 Infirmary has been near chaos since the first twelve people rescued from *El Limbo* arrived in mid-evening. Injured Delegation members & Investigators add to the load, pushing patients into nearby examination rooms and the corridor.

Dr. Manuel Calderón, nearly sixty, is on night duty and handles serious trauma. A veteran physician of *la Guerra de Independencia de Cuba* (1895), he orders anti-tetanus serum for the dirtiest wounds. Dra. Marta, a young Spanish physician on clinical elective, assists. Mazorra's part-time GP-anaesthetist, Dr. Armand Moas, treats three *El Limbo* patients: one dehydrated, one at risk of seizure, & an older man in alcohol withdrawal. Chief RN Beatriz Montalvo arrives ~10 p.m., after helping Dra. Elda Real return the children to their pavilion. Seeing Calderón short-staffed, she phones RNs Teresita Cruz and Guillermo Coronado to support night-duty RN Herminia Gómez, then joins Dr. Prats in the overflow unit set up in the patient preparation room beside the now-inoperable North Operating Theatre.

Order gradually returns, but calls to Pavilions A and C/D get constant busy signals. With no transfer team or receiving staff available, the Chief RN keeps patients needing observation on the guarded 3rd floor. Rogelio "El Galgo" Cabrera, the habitual criminal, occupies one room alone here; the other forensic patients share two rooms, checked regularly by RN Coronado. Once medically cleared, Esteban Ferrer & Basilio Mena may leave under escort to give statements at *La Oficina*.



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

After 10:30 p.m., *another* wave arrives under armed guard from the Old Laundry Pavilion emergency: wounded Leopard Men, five Aeroporto splinter-cell infiltrators—including *Sgt. Emilio Valcárcel*—and two Porra recovered from the collapsing Mazorra Vault. M1 keeps the Leopard Men & Porra apart under guard. Several are dead or already dying. Two seriously injured Cultists & both Porra remain for care.

23:00: Prisoner Walking Convoy to *La Oficina*

El General's men had earlier disarmed the captured Leopard Men and Porra. Eight Leopard Men are fit to walk, as are a similar number of Porra cleared to leave M1, including Capt. Gandía & Lt. Cordero if they are medically stable & had not been injured. Salvatore Méndez, the Machado body double, also goes with them if uninjured.

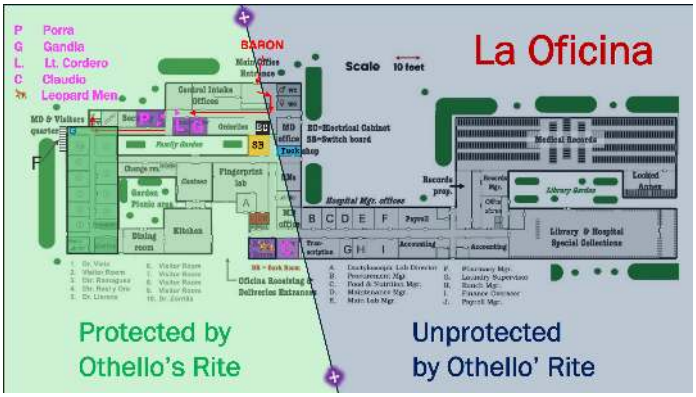
As Othello performs his hearing rite (*see AoM* #254), the prisoner column nears the closed East Gate & turns right toward *La Oficina*. People rise on the Chapel steps. Beyond the bars, someone in the Aeroporto crowd spots the Porra. Another points at Machado's double. **"¡Porra! ¡Asesinos! Bring them out!"**

Hands thrust through the bars. Fruit & a stone sail over the gate. *El General's* riflemen close around the prisoners. **"Back! El Rey judges!"** Some of Nico's & Valcárcel's men grin. Others mutter that a bullet would settle matters.

Keeper's Note: As the column rounds the gate, ask what the Investigators do. A shouted appeal in Spanish takes a Hard *Fast Talk* roll. Success quiets the crowd long enough for the escort to pass; on failure, the crowd keeps jeering & throwing things. They can also shield the prisoners from the crowd, hide the double among the escorts, or keep the column moving toward *La Oficina*. If they leave it to the escort, the guards close ranks & hurry on.

Lic. Israel Castellanos, the Mazorra's fingerprint and forensic expert, begins recording formally the prisoners' identities & prints. He also has the official fingerprint card made when President Machado was fingerprinted during the post-hurricane celebrations, along with a framed photograph of the ceremony. His fingerprint comparison confirms Salvatore Méndez's claim to NOT be the President. Méndez is treated humanely & given a cot in an inner office.

***La Oficina* Porra & Cultist Prisoners** (*See map below*).



Map image generated by the author

El Rey's men search the others again & secure them. They place the prisoners in cleared rooms near [**purple** on map]. Gandía & Cordero go into separate secure interview rooms. The Guard/Escort Porra prisoners are held in the eastern Security room which has toilets. The captive Leopard Men cultists, stripped to loincloths, are locked in the Mail Room with only buckets. *Claudio,* the false Mute secret Vault guardian Porra, is locked in the emptied *Temp Files* storage room next to them.

Mazorra NPCs Approaching Midnight on August 12th 1933

A.B.C ⚑ Porra 💀 Deceased Leopard Man Cultist (#)Twsha(stage)

Name & Role	Description / Quirk	Whereabouts up to 23:59
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS		
Director Dr. Miguel Machado	In charge of Mazorra; veterinarian & President's cousin	MIA after fled to Habana the day before
Capt. Alberto Gandía	⚑ Mazorra *Superintendent;* fate (see AoM250,252)	Prisoner in *La Oficina, inj.in M1, or* 💀
Lic. Israel Castellanos	*Director of* Dactyloscopic *lab; self-taught forensics expert*	*La Oficina or East Gate*
Enrique "Ricky" Morales	Govt Public Health Liaison & secret *Directorio* member	*La Oficina or East Gate or Chapel*
Federal Police Sargento Nicanor Perdomo	Corrupt officer, ⚑; fate (see AoM 251); is 💀	*El Limbo → Morgue*
Federal Police Agente Pablo Miret	💀 *El Limbo* Annex police officer, body found shot	*El Limbo 2nd floor → Morgue*
MEDICAL STAFF (*previously met*)		
Dr. Arturo Vilela; Lead Psychiatrist	~30 yo prodromal *dementia praecox,* broke arm	*Children's Pavilion*
Dr. Santiago Prats MD	28-yo M, Internist;	M1 Infirmary or East Gate
Dra. Gilda Ramagosa, MD	*32-yo married F Psychiatrist for Female Dept.*	*RN School Dormitory → La Oficina BR*
Dr. Ramón Zorrilla MD	(*1.5*) *44 yo M; dual Neurology/Psychiatry*	M1 *Aux. Lab.; impromptu sick bay*
Dr. Francisco Llerena MD	💀 + ⚑; corrupt surgeon, Baron → Yobama murdered	Body in Temp Morgue inside M1
Dr. Armand Moas MD *GP/Anaesthetist*	*~40 yo M (witnessed Baron K attack in OR)*	M1 Infirmary (helping injured/sick)
Dra. Elda Real - Clinical psychologist	*41 yo F; ++protective of Dr. Vilela*	*Children's Pav. → La Oficina BR*
NURSING STAFF (*previously met*)		
Beatriz Montalvo – Chief RN	*47 y F, widowed; competent.*	Children's Pav. →M1 Infirmary
Rafael Yániz - *deputy Chief RN*	⚑ *64 yo M. Corrupt.* Fate (see AoM 248)	💀, M1 inj., or *Supt's Manse as prisoner*
Yolanda Heres RN	*~30 yo F; Dr. Z's lover; ++loyal & discreet*	*Aux. Lab.; providing 24 hr care*
Rita Maria Gómez – RN	*28 yo F, red haired, quiet. Twin sister RN Herminia*	*TB Pavilion;* attending to sick/dying
M1 INFIRMARY		
Dr. Manuel Calderón MD	*~60 yo ex-army doctor; nil prior PC contact*	M1 Infirmary attending to injured/sick
Dra. Marta Pérez, junior interne	*24 yo F Medical Resident (Madrid Spain) regretting elective*	M1 Infirmary attending to injured/sick
Herminia Gómez, Night RN	sister *Rita Maria* works in TB pavilion)	M1 Infirmary
Teresita Cruz - RN	*~40 yo F; surgical RN (reassigned by Chief RN Montalvo*	*M1 Infirmary*
Guillermo Coronado male RN	*~40 yo M. (reassigned by Chief RN Beatriz Montalvo)*	*M1 Infirmary*
Sr. Fausto Sotolongo, porter	38 M; runs errands & smuggles contraband (e.g. cigarettes)	M1 Infirmary & elsewhere
☎ OFFICE ROLES		
Srta. Esperanza Hidalgo-Gato	*Ex personal secretary of fled Director Miguel Machado*	*Director's Manse; own locked bedroom*
Sna. Teresa Pacheco - Switchboard	*~45 F; day shift*	*La Oficina SB (2nd floor VIP quarters)*
Srta. Tessa Pacheco - Switchboard	*23 yo daughter of Teresa; night shift*	*La Oficina SB*
Sna. Marina Suárez - Health records clerk	*30F, widowed, spouse died of TB inside.*	*La Oficina, assisting El Rey*
NON-CLINICAL HOSPITAL STAFF		
Evelio Gil - Medical Lab technician	(2.9; 3 by 4 am) *Assistant to Dr. Zorrilla.*	M1 *Aux. Lab.; impromptu sick bay*
Bruno Texidor, Children's Pavilion orderly	Porrista (helped Yániz; Fate (see AoM 248)	Prisoner in Supt. Manse
MAZORRA ⚑ PORRA GUARDS		
Manuel Barbe	⚑ Fate (see AoM 247, 248)	Prisoner in *La Oficina, inj., or* 💀
Julio Barrera	⚑ + gelatinized after 💀 (see AoM 247)	Body last seen Director's Manse
Leopoldo Enriquez	⚑ Fate (see AoM 250, 253)	Prisoner *La Oficina, M1 inj., or* 💀
Jorge Dolz	⚑ + secret ; Fate *El Limbo*/Temple Raid (AoM 252)	prisoner *La Oficina*, M1, or 💀
Oswaldo Miranda	⚑ Fate (see AoM 250, 253)	Prisoner *La Oficina, M1 inj., or* 💀
NON – PORRA MAZORRA GUARDS		
Jesús Nadal	*~30 M; ex-military. Mazorra's kennel master*	*Mazorra's Kennel*
Mario Puig	💀 *(gelatinized after death)*	*Remains in El Limbo 2nd floor guard station*
Álvaro Recio	*~20 M; moustachioed, quiet.*	*East Mazorra Gate House*
Pepe Sabates	*~25 M; deaf in one ear, backs down in a fight*	*East Mazorra Gate House*
Jorge Washington	*~30 M; touchy re name*	*Female Violent/Refractory Guard station*
Vicente Beltrán	*~25 M; handsome, superstitious*	*M1 3rd Floor guard station*
PRESIDENTIAL ESCORT		
Lt. Cordero	*Capable; card carrying Porra, NO evidence prior evil deeds*	*Prisoner, La Oficina → ? escapes*
2 x Escort	⚑+💀	*Bodies in Director's Manse*
2 x Escort	⚑; severely wounded; Fate (see AoM 250)	*Evacuated to outside hospital*
3 x Escort	⚑; lightly wounded; Fate (see AoM 250, 253)	💀 or *Prisoner, La Oficina*
1x Escort	⚑; Fate (see AoM 250, 253)	💀 or *Prisoner, La Oficina*

Name & Role	Description / Quirk	Whereabouts up to 23:59
Sr. Salvatore Méndez	**Presidential Body Double; paid actor, not Porra**	*La Oficina (intake office cot)*
OTHER		
Mons. Bruno Aurelio –RC *Priest*	In charge of Mazorra's chapel & Mazorra faithful	Mazorra Chapel
Othello Romero y Barbero	Blind tuck shop manager, former *Santería* priest	Mazorra Chapel steps
Lt. Col. Francisco Vives	*Spanish Military attaché; kidnap plot;* fate (see AoM 248)	*Prisoner, Superintendent's Manse*
MAZORRA PATIENTS		
Juana de la Cruz "The China Doll"	(2)*35 F, glass delusion;* ⬡ *Insp. Hargreave's mission.*	*Old Laundry Pavilion → Aux Lab under M1*
Mateo Derosier	*Haitian Bokor; dying of TB; opened the way for Baron K*	*TB Pavilion* → at 23:59
Dolores Garcia	(mid 2) *Beautiful/murderess + Leopard Goddess*	*Last seen in Leopard Temple; Pavilion A?*
El General [Dr. Gaspar Olivares]	*Napoleon Delusion*	*M1 2nd floor in M.D. call room*
El Rey [Sr. Reynaldo Fontanilla]	*King Alfonso of Spain delusion*	*Director's Manse Upper Library*
Ernesto Collado y Martínez	The 'False Madman'; Journalist now working *for El General*	*M1 4th floor→East Gate→La Oficina*
Héctor "Santa María" Menéndez	(early stage 2) 20 yo M, *Madonna Delusion*	*Mazorra's Chapel w/ his Patient followers*
Hector's followers (36, various)	Mixed population & diagnoses, ages 18 to 78 years.	*Mazorra's Chapel*
Baltasar 'The Hammer' Urrutia	HW Boxing Champ, *Dementia pugilistica; El Rey's* man	*Director's Manse, Upper Library*
Isabella Varona	*'Prophetic' poison-paint artist*, shot at guards in Dir. Manse	*seen escaping Director's Manse*
Tomás 'Tambor' Wong	*'Tapping' talk; drug-controlled epilepsy*	Mazorra Chapel steps
Jeremías Yobama	*'The Executioner', West African Leopard Man Shaman*	Underground → San Lazaro's Crypt
Claudio Rivera y Zayas	⚑ 40 M; *The false mute embedded to guard Mazorra Vault*	fate (see AoM 250, 253); is prisoner
Sr. Xavier Xenon	71 M, retired banker; senile dementia. *El Rey* spokesman	La Oficina, Library
'SPECIAL CHILDREN' PATIENTS		
Hermes Valdez	8 yo Down Syndrome boy; can take apart *anything*	*Quarters in Children's Pavilion*
Marisol "Solita" Quiñones	8 yo girl; uses base-12 math to predict 12 hours ahead	*Quarters in Children's Pavilion*
Simona B.	Little girl*; her Panic Echo exaggerates fear to all who hear*	*Quarters in Children's Pavilion*
EAST GATE PERSONALITIES		
Srta. María del Pilar Sosa	*Mother to missing + political prisoner Joaquin*	*w/* Joaquín*, isolation (exam room) in M1*
Srna Lidia Menéndez	Striking teacher + Delegate	East Gate after return → Chapel invite
Sr. Rafael "Felo" Quesada { B36}	militant + Delegate	Chapel or with Ricky in La Oficina canteen
Sr. Julio Castañeda	A.B.C. legalist + Delegate	East Gate after return → Chapel invite
Srna. Ana Teresa Barreto	*23 F, Sister to missing political prisoner* + Delegate	With Tomás, M1 isolation room.
Padre Ignacio Rivas (RC Priest)	Religious leader *at Gate* + Delegate	East Gate after return → Chapel invite
AEROPORTO INFILTRATOR GROUP		
Nicolás "Nico" Arocha:	Airport mechanic; Fate (see AoM 253)	Mazorra Chapel
Nico's co-workers (11)	Other workers; dispatchers, riggers, drivers, mechanics, etc.	Mazorra Chapel
Sargento Emilio Valcárcel;	Non-Com Army officer/opportunist; Fate (see AoM 253)	M1 infirmary → Mazorra chapel
Valcárcel's men (5)	Junior soldiers; Fate (see AoM 253)	Mazorra Chapel
Rogelio "El Chivo" Mantilla	Anarchist, would-be Arsonist (see AoM 252)	Director's Manse → *La Oficina* Roof
***EL LIMBO* POLITICAL PRISONERS**		
Tomás Barreto	(early stage 2) Directorio courier; Ana Teresa is his sister	In Isolation Ward in M1 Infirmary
Joaquín Sosa { C362}	Missed anticonvulsants.	Moved to M1 Infirmary observation
Esteban Ferrer { C361}	Habana Labour lawyer	With Ricky in La Oficina canteen
Basilio Mena	Independent dockworkers' organizer, A.B.C. ally	With Ricky in La Oficina canteen
Eusebio Varela	(early stage 2) Broke down under threat of torture	In Isolation Ward in M1 Infirmary
Roberto Cedeño	(early stage 2) Found tortured in *El Limbo's* Room XIII	In Isolation Ward in M1 Infirmary
***EL LIMBO:* REAL FORENSIC PTs**		
Anselmo Rojas	Psychotic dockworker; religious delusions	*M1 3rd floor locked room*
Rogelio "El Galgo" Cabrera	Violent criminal; falsely claims A.B.C. status + insanity	*M1 3rd floor locked room alone*
Ramón Curbelo	*Violent when intoxicated; delirium tremens*	*M1 infirmary*
Hilario Pons	*Developmentally delayed* porter helped burglars*; incapable*	*M1 3rd floor locked room*
Celestino Mora	Psychotic, expansive religious grandiose episode.	*M1 3rd floor locked room*
Francisco Leyva	Vagrant chronic alcoholic; malnourished & dehydrated	*M1 3rd floor locked room, recovering*
NAMED LEOPARD MEN CULTISTS		
Nicasio Cuéllar	Fate (see AoM 251, possibly 253)	Last Seen *El Limbo, or Temple*
Abilio Maceo	Fate (see AoM 251, possibly 253)	Last Seen *El Limbo or Temple*
Amílcar	Fate (see AoM 254)	Last seen Cemetery grounds
Segundo	Fate (see AoM 254)	Last seen Cemetery grounds
Fermín	Fate (see AoM 254)	Last seen Cemetery grounds
Other (up to 8 still alive)	Fate (see AoM 254)	*Prisoners in La Oficina's Mail Room*

23:00: The Chapel Receives the Delegates

After reporting at the East Gate, most delegates prepare to return to Habana. Padre Ignacio Rivas, Felo Quesada, & Lidia Menéndez remain with *El Rey's* permission. Urrutia confirms the arrangement, assigns a guard, then returns to the Director's Manse. The three go to M1 for news of the rescued detainees. Prats permits a brief visit under the precautions already in place. Sr. Collado, El General's *Sargento Cronista*, records their accounts while observing those rules.

Keeper's Note: Investigators at M1 can manage the visit, carry messages in place of visitors, or help Collado establish whom the patients encountered in *El Limbo*.

Rivas, Felo, Lidia, & Collado then seek shelter at the chapel. Monsignor Aurelio admits them and witnesses they can vouch for, finds bedding, and keeps the exits clear. Urrutia's guard controls entry; weapons stay outside. Some of El General's men come off cordon duty and drift toward the chapel. Rivas offers them coffee in the courtyard.

Aurelio disapproves of Othello's invocations, but has seen him care for Mazorra's patients. He permits the rite on the steps, with the shell patterns clear of the threshold, while he and Rivas tend those seeking refuge inside. He may lend water, candles, and cloth for their care, though he offers none as part of the rite.

- "You may stand on the steps, Othello. Keep your shell patterns clear of the threshold."
- "There will be no second altar inside this chapel."
- "God forgive me. Take the water. I will see to those who come through the doors."

At 23:10, Othello discovers the Western Eye has been disrupted

SIDEBAR - OTHELLO'S PROTECTION: Othello's hearing/ward protects declared innocents from even collateral harm caused by the Baron. It does not bar the Baron from entering a protected area or physically attacking a guilty person there, but the ward does suppress the Baron's broader effects such as his *Aura of Decay,* where he must control his position and movement outside identified areas to protect any innocents. His *Roar* and *Ritual Corrosion* can endanger people or equipment beyond his immediate target also, so he cannot use them freely near warded innocents. He *may* use his non-magical machete against an eligible target if no protected innocent stands in the way. Keep the stated range and effect of each ability in mind when deciding whether the ward shields those nearby. Outside the warded areas, these protections do not apply. Innocents who obstruct the Baron may be injured, and his abilities can cause collateral harm.



Map image generated by the author

Keeper's Note: When Othello discovers the Western Eye has been disrupted, ask who goes to repair it & who stays. Investigators may help Mons. Aurelio choose whom to shelter, clear the chapel passage and shell patterns, or arrange an unarmed entrance guard. If all leave, Mons. Aurelio & Urrutia's guards handle the chapel. Their preparations matter when Héctor arrives with his three dozen followers around 23:25–23:35: some must remain in the forecourt rather than crowd into the nave of the Mazorra Chapel.

~23:25 – 23:35 The Stigmata of *Hector Menéndez*



Image generated via ChatGPT-5.6

Héctor "Santa María" Menéndez is a twenty-year-old Mazorra patient with a persistent Madonna delusion. He believes himself to be the living vessel of the Virgin's mercy, and many patients already treat him as holy. By late Saturday afternoon on Aug 12th 1933, he is visibly affected by *Twsha*: his skin has a faint blue-white translucence under moonlight, and pale transparent lesions mark his wrists, palms, & brow with the healthy tissue underneath appearing as deep blood red wounds. His followers mistake them for the *stigmata* of the crucified Lord Jesus. Héctor does not believe he is Christ. He says:

«Mi Hijo sangra a través de mí, y nadie escucha su llanto»
(*"My Son bleeds through me, and no one hears his cry."*)

Shaken by the events of the day about three dozen patients gather around Héctor. They carry rosaries, flowers, lit candles, & scraps of blue & white cloth. At about 22:30, they leave the unlocked staff abandoned *Esperanza* (Hope) *Pavilion* & make their way toward the main Mazorra chapel. Due to the chaos from the *Vault* collapse & the later emergency at the *Old Laundry* distract *El General's men*; the slow-moving procession passes unnoticed. Héctor declares to his followers that the main chapel a refuge for "the wounded children," meaning themselves, the patients left behind. He wants no weapons, uniforms, or retaliation inside.

After 23:10, Othello realizes the Western Eye needs repair; by ~23:13, some/ all of the Investigators may have left to attend to it. Héctor's procession reaches the chapel around 23:25, *after* their departure. Investigators on foot may encounter some of the followers along their route; those who drive may simply drive pass without noticing them.

If an Investigator stays behind to guard Othello & Tambor, that character is present when the procession arrives.

Héctor means no harm, but his followers press close for comfort or a blessing, touching his lesions & passing around cloth that has touched him. Others crowd Othello and Tambor. Jittery armed patients from *El General's* army may mistake the gathering for a cult attack.

The chapel holds 80 snugly, or about 120 dangerously crowded. With people already resting in the nave, Aurelio admits a few frail followers and keeps the rest, along with the Aeroporto guests and delegates, in the forecourt. He tries to leave the steps, exits, & Othello's shell-eye clear. The Investigators can calm the followers, enlist Héctor's help, cover his lesions, clear space for the rite, or ask Aurelio, Rivas, and *El General's* unarmed patient-soldiers to take charge while they leave for the Western Eye. Praising Héctor may steady his followers but draw them closer; forcing him away may cause panic.

Keeper's Note: Héctor's Followers. Twsha spreads through contact with lesions or contaminated material; safely applied gloves or coverings reduce exposure. If the crowd's response is uncertain, roll *Charm,* or *Intimidate* once, with a bonus die for useful help from Héctor, Mons. Aurelio, or Padre Rivas. *Psychology* may suggest an appeal; *First Aid* or *Medicine* can help cover Héctor's lesions. Failure may delay any local disrupted Eye repair or create an exposure opportunity. Exposure does not mean immediate infection; use the established Twsha progression.

Pulp Insanity Talent: Benediction (AoM #240). Héctor can bless one distressed follower at a time, visibly calming them without a POW roll; the relief lasts 1D6 hours. He may repeat the blessing, given time and the person's attention. His followers may be reassured by what they see, but calming the crowd still calls for *Charm* or *Persuade* if the outcome is uncertain. *Benediction* neither heals *Twsha* nor prevents its spread.

Public Health minded Investigators can separate those who touched lesions or handled soiled cloth, collect the cloth, and arrange handwashing & clean coverings. Ask Aurelio or Rivas to record **names, location,** & **kind of contact** for later observation under the established *Twsha* progression. This gives the players a practical way to limit further spread without requiring them to identify every person in the forecourt.

Mazorra NPCs ~Midnight, August 12, 1933

The two-page grid pages 3+4 lists ~100 NPCs These notes expand on few selected entries.

La Oficina: Dra. Gilda Ramagosa has moved about 100 vulnerable women to the nursing-school dormitory through the storm drain, with Tambor's help. Juana de la Cruz vanished before Ramagosa could examine her Twsha lesions. Until she can assess reports of lesions elsewhere, Ramagosa leaves trusted staff to watch the women in their wards and pavilions; she returns to *La Oficina* to clean up. Dra. Elda Real y Oro & Chief RN Beatriz Montalvo have staff check the routes and Children's Pavilion before returning the hidden children in small groups. Elda returns to *La Oficina;* Beatriz goes to M1. Enrique "Ricky" Morales talks with his Directorio and A.B.C. allies in the canteen about a future in which ordinary Cubans have a greater voice in government. Night operator Tessa Pacheco monitors the switchboard & Habana radio. Her mother, Teresa, offers to take over by phone, but Tessa says she can finish her shift.

Children's Pavilion: Dr. Arturo Vilela, whose reported death he has persuaded others was a ruse, insists on guarding the Special Children through the night. His gun remains hidden in his plaster cast. He ignores Elda's & Beatriz's appeals to go to bed.

M1 & Zorrilla's Aux. Lab.: After conferring with his officers in a fourth-floor bedroom, *El General* retires to a second-floor medical on-call room. Patient-soldiers guard the door. If Inspector Hargreaves rescued Juana during the Temple raid and brought her to the Auxiliary Lab, her visible lesions prompt the examination Ramagosa could not perform. RN Yolanda Heres settles in nearby; Dr. Ramón Zorrilla and Lic. Evelio Gil, both Twsha-afflicted, rest there as well.

Director's Manse: *El Rey* writes in the Upper library, where Urrutia rests after taking laudanum. *El Rey's* courtiers guard the entrance but are ordered to admit Esperanza. The Director's bedroom remains sealed as a crime scene. After the Mazorra Vault, Esperanza goes to her room to bathe & sleep.

Superintendent's Manse: Two of *El Rey's* men guard three detainees in windowless rooms on the main floor. *Lt. Col. Francisco Vives* demands release & access to the Spanish embassy, & Deputy Chief RN *Rafael Yániz* demands to contact the *German* embassy. Both, held in the same room, are ignored. Porrista orderly Bruno Texidor is held nearby separately.

Before Midnight at the Cemetery:

If Yobama escapes into the cemetery from the Crypt alive and free, continue any pursuit or confrontation left unresolved in *AoM #254*. He may flee, bargain with evidence against Gandía, seize a hostage, or attempt his *nye ke* deathlike trance if given one minute undisturbed. His laughter may betray his escape route. These are options, not a required sequence

⬡ María may capture him for *El Rey's* judgment, question him about Violeta and Gandía, may kill Yobama, or lose him while saving someone else.

00:00 *Baron Kriminèl* Begins His Walk

At midnight, the Baron, at the TB Pavilion near the dead Bokor Mateo Derosier, begins his walk of vengeance on the cemetery side because that route is open and will head towards the Western Eye.

He does not know Yobama is in the crypt or if any Investigators are near. He may hear Yobama's involuntary laughter or the crypt bell, but these are clues rather than automatic detection. If Yobama is silent or has been removed, the Baron may pass the crypt but still notice the Investigators. His Aura of *Necrotic Chill* is only suppressed where Othello's rite holds (see map *"Othello's Rite of Protection"* page 5; the mortuary chapel is not protected).

If the Baron encounters Yobama, he judges whether Yobama belongs to Mateo's claim (he does *not*). Yobama may still flee from the Baron, believing himself to be the target of the supernatural entity, giving the Investigators a chance to intercept him.

SIDEBAR - THE BARON'S TARGETS: The Baron knows whether Othello's named, evidenced debtors are alive, but not *where* they are. He follows their last known locations, witnesses, records, confessions, and clues from the Investigators. Capt. Alberto Gandía is his principal quarry, but not a fixed first kill: the Baron judges any eligible debtor he encounters.

Other viable Porra targets include Deputy Chief RN Rafael Yániz, Claudio if implicated, & Gandía's hand-picked Porra detail: Manuel Barbe, Leopoldo Enríquez, Jorge Dolz, Oswaldo Miranda, & surviving Presidential Escort Porra whose own actions support the charge. Lt. Cordero's Porra affiliation was administrative, not philosophical & the Baron is judging by his deeds; while the hearing does implicate him, the Baron will judge he is not. His escort subordinates however are targets if they have previously supported Gandía or the *Atares Fortress* Porra. Ordinary guards, Leopard Men, & Yobama are not targets by association. Note if ruthless Investigators or others kill those named Porra, then Baron has no obligations left to fill for Mateo.

A Name Beneath the Chapel

If Yobama is still in the crypt, run the following encounter below. If Yobama is elsewhere or already in custody, use the relevant outcome instead.



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

The old mortuary chapel bell gives one dull note, though it has no clapper or rope. Across the crypt, darkness thickens into the suggestion of a doorway. Yobama's lantern burns low. The air turns chill.

A top hat rises from the shadow, followed by a tall Black figure in worn funeral black and a blood-crimson waistcoat. Two red points glow in his skull-white face. A machete hangs from one hand; a fork and spoon are bizarrely pinned crosswise to his waistcoat.

If Yobama is conscious, the Baron addresses him in French: ***«Qui t'a payé pour tuer?»***

He repeats the question in Spanish: ***«¿Quién te pagó para matar? ¿Gandía?»*** ("Who paid you to kill? Gandía?").

Whether Yobama answers or remains silent, the Baron studies him without raising his blade. If Yobama lies unconscious under *nye ke*, he appraises the still figure instead. Regardless *he turns away from him*; the Baron has judged; ***he is not Porra.***

Keeper's Note: The Baron has entered by *Shadow Walk*. Yobama currently has 12/18 HP + 25 SAN remaining (see AoM #240 for stats). Yobama's SAN loss on first full sight: **1D4/1D8** as is any other PC/NPC who views him

The Baron On Capt. Gandía's Trail

The Baron may also question the Investigators; ***«¿Gandía?»***

Investigators, if present, can give Gandía's last known whereabouts, offer another lead, or lie. He does not automatically detect deception: a convincing false lead can delay him, although later evidence may expose it. Lying alone does not make an Investigator a debtor, and Othello's rite still bars him from harming protected innocents. Without a better lead, the Baron heads for the Director's Manse, where he last personally saw Gandía. He is recovering a trail, not acting on knowledge of Gandía's present location.

BARON KRIMINÈL'S STATS (for *Pulp Cthulhu/Call of Cthulhu 7e*).

STR 80 CON 75 SIZ 85 DEX 70 INT 60
APP N/A POW 90 EDU N/A SAN N/A HP 16
DB/Build: +1D6 / 2 Move: 8 MP: 18 Luck: N/A
Armor: 10 SAN loss on seeing: 1D4/1D8

Combat: One attack per round. Fighting (Brawl) 55% (Hard 27%, Extreme 11%): machete 1D8 + 1D6 damage; impaling. Grasp or unarmed strike 1D3 + 1D6 damage. Dodge 35% (Hard 17%, Extreme 7%). Skills: Spot Hidden 70%, Listen 60%, Stealth 45%, Persuade 50%, Occult 80%. He can address people in French or Spanish when he chooses.

Power	Rule for this manifestation
Aura of Decay	Everyone within ten feet takes 1D4 HP per round from *necrotic chill* & suffers −10% to physical & mental skill rolls while there. Assess damage once at the end of a round spent within the aura; briefly crossing its edge does not generate repeated hits. Its damage bypasses ordinary armour.
Shadow Walk	As his action, vanish into shadow and appear in another dim place within the current scene, including across an intervening wall. It cannot cross an intact ritual boundary (Othello's rite does not count).
Induced Panic	Opposed POW against one target. On the Baron's success, the target loses their next action to terror.
Animated Cadaver Parts	Where remains are present, one isolated part acts once per round: bowel tentacles 1D3, ribcage or jaws 1D4. The first movement of each distinct part costs 0/1 SAN. Not possible unless the scene actually contains suitable remains.
Ritual Corrosion	As his action, spiritually disrupt a metal device or joint. Oppose his POW with the *Mechanical Repair* skill of someone actively tending it; if unattended, use his Regular POW roll. Success reduces function by 30% or disables it for 1D4 rounds. Use the established steam, gas, or machinery hazards when the equipment is present as per AoM #246.
Roar of the Dead	Once per scene, heard within 100 feet. SAN 0/1D6; those who fail also take −20% to skills for their next round.

WEAKNESSES: (*as per AoM 243).* Holy water wielded by a priest or devout person inflicts 1 HP & ends a possession or entanglement. A blessed object makes him hesitate one round, with an opposed POW roll potentially imposing a penalty die next round. Strong white light or direct sunlight costs him an action; two consecutive rounds force retreat; direct sunlight inflicts 1D4 per round & forces withdrawal after two rounds; a fluoroscope's beam acts as sunlight (see AoM #246). Running water bars him for one or two rounds & inflicts 1 HP on contact. Ringing steel can break his concentration, with the stated Hard POW contest. Flame pushes him back and inflicts 1D4 on contact; Sacred Baron names cost him initiative.

Othello's rite governs whom the Baron can harm. His *Aura*, ***Roa***r, and ***Ritual Corrosion*** have environmental effects, so he must choose his position & targets accordingly so innocents are protected, else attack them physically.

At 0 HP, this physical manifestation of the Baron disperses. The *Iwa* is not killed, but the Baron cannot reform or resume his vengeance walk during the events at Mazorra.

○ ***Baron K's*** & ***María del Sagrario's*** shared desire for vengeance can earn María a measure of recognition from the other, but it need not make the Baron her ally. Their claims differ: María seeks justice for Violeta; the Baron answers Mateo's particular debt. He can respect her grief without endorsing whatever she chooses to do with Yobama. He may lower his machete, give her a moment's attention, & enigmatically answer a few short questions before backing away & disappearing into the shadows. For example:

- **MARÍA:** "Is he Porra?"
- **THE BARON: "He served their captain. *He* was not Machado's man."**
- **MARÍA:** "Is he Yobama?"
- **THE BARON: "You know his face better than I do."** He looks down at the still figure. **"The draught hides him from the living. It does not settle what he owes."**

00:20–00:45: The Director's Manse & Fire

Rogelio "*El Chivo*" Mantilla slipped deeper into Mazorra after the Aeroporto clash earlier that night [*see AoM #252*]. He has spent the intervening hours evading patrols & deciding where to start his fire. He carries petrol, rags, & matches, & has stolen additional cans of petrol. *El Chivo* has chosen the Director's Manse for his beautiful fire. First, he sets the small guard station near the east–west avenue ablaze as a diversion. At the shout of "¡Fuego!" several of *El Rey's* guards hurry away from the Manse help put out the flames. The rest hold the Manse entrances but are distracted.

At 00:25, while the first fire still has the attention of the guards a second, larger blaze takes hold at the Manse's southeast corner. When this fire reaches the petrol cans, the first gives sharp report at 00:30, followed by another. The blaze is both audible & visible from the Mazorra chapel steps above the garages & through the chain-link fence.

Keeper's Note Héctor's followers are crowded together when they hear the distant report or the PA warning. Roll once against group POW 40. On a success, they startle but hold. On a failure, 1D6 followers rush toward the Manse or the nearest exit, depending on their position. They mean to help or escape, not attack but can accidentally disrupt the Eastern eye pattern. A successful *Charm* roll can calm them or direct them safely, as can clear instructions. If investigators have already guarded the Eye, that protection holds.

~00:25: The Baron Inside the Director's Manse

The Baron *shadow-walks* through into the dining room. He crosses the Long Gallery, pausing beside the suit of armour & the upright clock, then backtracks to the foot of the Great Stairs. He vanishes into another shadow & reappears on the second-floor landing outside the Upper Library.



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

El Rey sits at the library table, writing by the light of an electric lamp. His cigar has gone out. Urrutia dozes nearby. His nighttime laudanum has left him drowsy and slow to respond to distant sounds. Esperanza is absent; she is asleep in her bedroom. Othello's rite holds the Baron's *Aura of Decay* at bay in this protected area.

The Baron appears in the doorway, stooping because of his height. Urrutia jolts upright, & throws a reflexive punch. The Baron slips the punch & lets it pass. *El Rey* looks up from his writing and freezes as the Baron asks:

« Díganme: ¿adónde fue Gandía? »
("Tell me: where did Gandía go?")

Keeper's Note: SAN: *El Rey* & Urrutia each make a 1D4/1D8 **SAN** check if this is their first direct encounter with the Baron. A failed check does not dictate a particular reaction. Apply the usual insanity rules for a loss of 5 or more SAN in one roll triggers the usual INT roll.

If *El Rey* can steady himself, he answers truthfully: Gandía has been taken into custody, but *El Rey* does not know exactly where; room assignments were delegated. His best guess is either the Superintendent's Manse or *La Oficina.*

At 00:30 a sharp report cracks outside, like a large lightbulb breaking, followed by another. The Baron turns toward the sound, steps back, & vanishes into shadow. A moment later, he reappears, orange light flickering across the windows behind him.

«Hay un incendio cerca. Saquen a la mujer. Othello los declaró inocentes a los tres.» ("There's a fire nearby. Get the woman out. Othello declared all three of you innocent.")

The Baron steps backward into the darkness & disappears. *El Rey* & Urrutia exchange a glance, then hurry to Esperanza's bedroom and pound on the locked door.

00:35 Fire Alarm Outside the Manse

One of *El Rey's* guards outside sees the blaze at the Manse & runs to *La Oficina*. Tessa Pacheco is distracted by the perpetual busy signals from Men's Pavilions A. She alerts the on-site fire crew outside the Old Laundry over the PA:

"Fire at the Director's Manse. This is NOT a drill. Fire crew, divert to the Manse. Keep the entrance clear."

The Baron reappears at ground level near the southeast corner. Across the terraced lawn, *El Chivo* alights from the fire escape onto the roof of the Doctors' Quarters at *La Oficina.* Dr. Zorrilla's poisonous plant containers fill part of the roof. Light from the blaze causes his eyes to glitter.

Keeper's Note: Investigators on the Trail. Investigators may follow the Baron from the crypt. They may infer his quarry from his questions & if they travel by car they can get ahead of the Baron; they can warn or move a target, arrange guards, or wait to intercept him. If they follow him, give them opportunities to speak to him or intervene when he reaches a target. The Baron follows the best lead he has, so moving a target changes his route rather than end the pursuit. When the PA announces the fire, the Investigators choose where to



go: help with the fire & any evacuation, protect or pursue a target, or remain at *La Oficina* to manage the crisis there. Resolve events at their location first. Keep off-scene events as defaults only where Investigators cannot affect them



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

After he has cached his spare petrol & prepared gasoline bottle on the asphalt roof, *El Chivo* turns to look at his blaze. It's 00:35 & he can hear the wailing siren of the approaching fire truck. He then notices a strangely lanky figure below walking toward the VIP quarters. They had stopped, & looked up (💀). The man's face has a bone-white skull painted on it & two glowing red burning eyes. *El Chivo* is unable to move his gaze, or even move at all as the Baron calls up mockingly to the man on the roof in Spanish. His voice is hollow & penetrating:

«Tu fuego es tuyo, Cabra. Mi pretensión está en otra parte» *("Your fire is yours, Goat. My claim is elsewhere.")*

Keeper's Note - Induced Panic. Oppose the Baron's POW 90 with *El Chivo's* POW (60). If the Baron wins, *El Chivo* freezes and loses his next action. Othello's rite offers no protection against this effect. SAN 1D4/1D8. On a failed first-sighting roll, *El Chivo* drops whatever he holds, even if frozen by Panic. His cached petrol can and prepared bottle remain intact and unlit at the roof corner nearest the Manse. Investigators watching see the figure automatically. If the view is poor, roll *Spot Hidden* to recognize the Baron by his face, machete, or silhouette. They can follow, call out, or intercept him. Resolve competing actions in DEX order. Once the Baron turns away and any *Panic* passes, *El Chivo* rubs his eyes and fumbles toward the fire escape. Give Investigators in position time to seize him, question him, or call for help. If nobody intervenes, two of *El Rey's* men climb up and capture him while he is still disoriented, & will bring him inside *La Oficina* for questioning.

00:35–00:40 Firefighters Arrive

Within five minutes of the alarm, Mazorra's lone fire truck swings into the Manse drive, siren wailing, & pulls aside to leave the entrance clear. Its searchlight sweeps the façade as the crew unrolls hoses. A second team runs a line to the mains thirty metres away, where *El General's* men had set up their hoses. Under the multiple spraying hoses, the flames at the southeast corner sink to a sullen orange. Smoke still rises above the roof.

At **00:40**, as the crew prepares to enter, *El Rey* & Esperanza help Urrutia out through the South/Kitchen Entrance. He is still groggy & unsteady from his evening dose of medicinal laudanum. Esperanza wears an ivory silk peignoir over her nightclothes. *El Rey* is in his suit, tie loose, his cloak & crown left behind.

Keeper's Note: Investigators nearby can help the trio to safety, question them, or stay with Esperanza. By default, *El Rey's* courtiers guide them to the terrace stairs (white star on map on page 9), clear of the hoses & within sight of the south French doors. *El Rey* sends Urrutia on to *La Oficina* with an escort & waits with Esperanza if she is alone, but if Investigators are present will allow them to guard her while he is escorted inside *La Oficina* too. Seeing the flames die back, & hearing the fire is largely contained and will soon be out, she asks to wait with the Investigators until the fire crew lets her back inside with an escort to fetch new change of clothes.



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

00:40 **Baron** K **At the Superintendent's Manse**

Unless the Investigators are already at the Manse or have intercepted the Baron, this occurs provided Yániz & Vives are still alive.

Following *El Rey's* lead, the Baron *Shadow-walks* through the locked rooms. He appears before Yániz & the Spanish attaché, Lt. Col. Vives in the same locked room. The Eyes offers no protection here. The Baron asks Yániz where Gandía has gone.

"You were named in the hearing, Yániz. I came for Gandía, but your debt is your own."

One stroke of the sharpened machete takes Yániz's head. Holding it up, the Baron asks Vives:

«¿Sabe dónde está Gandía, español?» ("Do you know where Gandía is, Spaniard?").

Two shaken & unnerved courtier-guards of *El Rey's* find a screaming Vives alone beside Yániz's headless body. They move Vives to another cell, lock away the body, & report Yániz's death to the switchboard *& El Rey's* night officer.

Keeper's Note: SAN: Vives loses **1/1D6 SAN** for witnessing the Baron appear and kill Yániz; the default is that he fails his roll. One check covers the whole encounter. Guards who arrive afterward lose **0/1D3 SAN** on seeing the body.

00:45 Alarm & Opportunity Escape Attempts

The Manse fire distracts & thins the watch inside *La Oficina*. Unless earlier precautions or Investigator actions prevent them, these escape attempts unfold as follows but only if these prisoners are alive & are held here:

- **Lt. Cordero (L).** In the Interview room #2, left of #1, Cordero lifts a ceiling tile & crawls along the joists. A tile rattles above Gandía's guard. He can crawl to the *Electrical Cabinet* (EC) where there is a roof hatch.
- **Capt. Gandía (G).** From Interview Room #1 Gandía shouts **"¡Fuego!"** His lone guard unlocks the door, glances up at a rattle, & takes a punch from Gandía, who snatches his baton & clubs him senseless. He then runs past the toilets to the stairs inside the MD Quarters that lead to the roof.
- **Porra (P).** Once things are quiet (& just *after* Gandía reaches the stairs), the Porra in the Security change room break through the thin partition into the adjoining toilet stall, diagonally across from Cordero's room. Only a few can slip out at a time.

00:45 THE BARON COMES FOR GANDÍA

The fire crew has contained the blaze at the southeast corner of the Director's Manse. Smoke still drifts above the roof, visible to the crowds outside *La Oficina* & the Chapel.

A man wearing a top hat comes swiftly through the dark from the Superintendent's Manse, his face like a full moon skimming the ground. Black sockets burning red eyes take shape before the tall, cadaverous figure beneath them. *Baron Kriminèl* wears French colonial mourning dress & carries his machete low. If he killed Yániz, the severed head swings by the hair from his other hand. Following *El Rey's* second lead, the Baron strides through *La Oficina's* main doors. *El Rey's* courtiers draw back. He stops in the atrium.

«¿Dónde está Gandía?» *("Where is Gandía?")*

Keeper's Note. Pause for Investigators to answer, divert the Baron, or raise the alarm. By default, a courtier who still believes Gandía is locked up indicates Interview Room #1. Adapt what follows to any earlier intervention. The Baron carrying Yániz's severed head is conditional on the Baron having killed him inside the Superintendent's Manse.



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

The sound of the toilet partition splintering is heard down the corridor. The Baron advances past Interview Room #1. Its door is ajar & Gandía's guard lies senseless on the threshold; Gandía is gone. Across from Cordero's room, the first few Porra spill out of the adjoining toilet. Unarmed, they block the corridor to the stairs. The Baron stops just out of reach of them.

"Gandía first. Stand aside," he says in Spanish. They stare at his machete & Yániz's head clutched in his hands.

Keeper's Note - Porra Resolve. Roll group POW 40 with a Penalty Die. On success, the Porra hold briefly. On failure, they yield. On a fumble, they scatter. Investigators can demand surrender, help secure the escapees, or interpose. Resolve competing actions in DEX order. If any Porra tries to stop him by force, the Baron makes one normal machete attack, subject to Othello's ceremonial hearing rite restrictions.

If the way clears, the Baron passes as *El Rey's* courtiers move to secure the escapees. He opens the stairwell door and *Shadow-walks* upwards.

00:50 ON THE ROOF & IN THE YARD

Allow any Investigators on the scene to act. Before Gandía reaches the fire escape, give any Investigators in position a chance to intercept him or the Baron, or warn those below.

Gandía runs for the fire escape. If *El Chivo's* supplies remain in the deep shadows cast by the blaze, he trips over them. A bottle breaks, soaking his shoes, cuffs, and sleeve with petrol. Cursing, he scrambles onto the fire escape and clatters down two levels.

The Baron reaches the parapet as the fire crew's moving searchlight catches Gandía stepping into the yard. Beyond him are the Manse's south French doors.

Fear & Action. Resolve outstanding SAN rolls for first seeing the Baron & apply their effects. Make one group POW roll (40) for *El Rey's* nearby men & the fire crew. On failure, they give ground.

Show who's in the yard & which routes are open. If cornered with Esperanza nearby, Gandía glances from her to the French doors. Give this cue without a roll.

The Baron steps back from the parapet into shadow. Ask what the Investigators do, then resolve actions in DEX order. They can demand surrender, offer protection, intercept either man, move Esperanza or *El Rey* to safety, or block a route. At DEX 70, unless diverted or stopped, the Baron spends his action to *Shadow Walk* into the yard near Gandía. At DEX 45, Gandía hesitates if offered credible protection or may bolt if a route is open. If cornered & Esperanza is within reach, use *The Hostage Attempt* below.

The Hostage Attempt. Gandía tries to seize Esperanza as a shield. Resolve *a Fighting Manoeuvre* (Brawl 60% vs. her Dodge or Brawl 25%, if she can resist). If seized, she takes one penalty die & may attempt a Fighting Manoeuvre to escape. Dragging her inside takes another action, with opposed STR (65 vs. 45) if she resists. Investigators can restrain Gandía or break his grip, or try to block the Baron or have the fire crew turn their spot light onto him to force him to lose an action or force a temporary retreat (no roll needed). Run the later Manse scenes only if he gets inside. If he enters alone, leave Esperanza where play left her. For Gandía's full stats, see *AoM #241 in E&A #4; Baron K's* stats page *8 AoM #255 in E&A #17.*

IF THE INVESTIGATORS CAPTURE GANDÍA FIRST

Baron Kriminèl stops beyond machete reach, his gaze fixed on the prisoner. **"You have caught him. What judgment do you offer?"**

Pause for an answer. Gandía begs them to keep him in custody. If they yield him, the Baron orders them to stand clear. If they propose another reckoning, he listens. **"Let him name what he has done. Let those who take him answer for the judgment."** If they simply hold Gandía, the Baron waits or seeks another opening within Othello's restrictions.

Keeper's Note - Judgment Before Execution: The Baron may stay his hand if Gandía makes a full, witnessed confession & surrenders into secure custody. *El Rey* or another credible authority must publicly undertake to hear the victims, weigh the evidence & see Gandía executed if convicted. Begin now. Record his confession, secure the evidence & name who will hold him and who will judge him.

IF GANDÍA ENTERS THE DIRECTOR'S MANSE

Gandía tries to lock the south French doors behind him. If he still holds Esperanza, he tries to fling her toward the bench. Resolve her resistance & any intervention first. If he succeeds, she falls onto the carpet beside it.

Heat, smoke, & a greasy iridescent haze fill the *Reception & Music Room.* Flames flicker through the broken pane near Varona's uncovered portrait: peeling, blistered paint, charred patches, and small glowing embers fluttering into



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

the air, with wisps of smoke and iridescent vapor escaping from the canvas glistening flesh beneath a shredded coat. Gil's face becomes his own, rotting, worms crawling from its mouth. He recoils into the piano bench. His hands crash against the keys. For an instant, the open *Ortiz & Cussó* is a coffin. Violeta lies within, pale and still. Around her, prisoners from *El Limbo* crowd the room: bruised, feverish, pleading to be let out. Among them, Yobama raises his machete over a kneeling captive. The prisoner looks up at Gandía as the blade falls. Gandía cries out and strikes at the vapour visions.

Keeper's Notes - Visions & Burning Paint. Varona's heated paints release toxic fumes & produce psychic images shaped by each viewer's fears and memories. Signal exposure with a chemical-sweet smell, watering eyes, and shifting colours. After one full round in concentrated fumes, roll CON. Failure gives one Penalty Die to visually guided actions and complex tasks; repeat every three rounds, at Hard difficulty if the fumes thicken. A second failure reduces movement to crawling or assisted walking; a fumble causes collapse. In fresh air, mild distortions fade within 1D6 minutes; collapse requires medical attention. Othello's wards do not protect against the fumes.

For Gandía's horrific visions, make one SAN roll (0/1D6) for the whole sequence, not for each face or transformation. Apply the usual consequences of SAN loss and any resulting insanity. Fumes may distort his senses even if he loses no SAN. Other exposed characters may see different images; assess SAN loss according to what they experience.

Gandía shouts at these visions of his imaginary tormentors: **"Violeta asked questions. I paid Yobama to answer them. I knew what he would do!"**

Allow the Investigators to respond. The French doors may be closed and locked, but Gandía's cries carry through the broken pane near the painting. Investigators nearby can call to him, question him, direct him toward an exit, or attempt entry. They may enter to help Esperanza or

Gandía, block the Baron, seek another route, or enlist the fire crew. Describe the flames and smoke before anyone commits to a rescue. ⬡ If María hears him, let her question him or call for a witness.

If Esperanza is conditionally inside, she coughs, eyes streaming. Bone-white and yellow blank telegram forms lie in huge papery drifts, forming a shifting labyrinth. The phonograph's brass horn twists toward her as its cabinet shrinks into an Edison cylinder player. The Director's voice crackles from the horn: **«Siga escribiendo.»** ("Keep typing.") She crawls toward the French doors and reaches for the lock, trying to escape. Through the smoke-streaked glass, a skull-white face looms above her off to one side.

"¡La Muerte!" *("Death!")* she cries out, not recognizing the other. She keeps working at the lock, unless someone intervenes.

GANDÍA'S FATE: TWO VARIANT OPTIONS

VARIANT A: THE PAINTING'S JUDGMENT

Use this if Gandía is still petrol-soaked & the portrait is burning. He raises his baton toward the canvas. Let anyone in position act before he strikes

Gandía swings his stolen baton at the faces spilling from Varona's painting. It tears through the canvas. Burning paint flakes swarm like flaming moths across his petrol-soaked cuff, which catches fire. He screams and beats at the flame, spreading it up his sleeve *(see image beginning of this issue of AoM)*. The Baron watches impassively, & does not raise his machete.

Keeper's Note: When Gandía's cuff ignites, pause for intervention from the Investigators. Smothering the flames with a coat or blanket takes one action; roll DEX only if he struggles. If still alight at round's end, he takes 1D6 HP, then 1D10 HP **each round**. At 0 HP he collapses. If still alight at the end of the next round, he dies (**SAN 0/1D4** to witnesses). Once smothered, fire damage stops. He keeps any HP lost and needs *First Aid* if dying. *If Esperanza is inside*, on her turn, she tries to open the French doors & call for help. Once open she can guide rescuers to him or use her action to help smother the flames with a blanket within reach on the sofa. If she's outside & hears his screams, she calls the fire crew to the doors.

VARIANT B: THE BARON'S RECKONING

If Gandía avoids or survives the fire & the Baron still has him cornered, use this confrontation. If the Investigators secure Gandía, return to Judgment Before Execution. A shadow stretches across the wall. Then the Baron steps entirely into the room without opening the doors.

Keeper's Note: If Esperanza is still inside & within reach, Gandía may grab for her when the Baron appears. (*Hostage Attempt*). The Baron stays his blade while she's between them. Esperanza calls for help, tries to break free, or urges Gandía to confess before witnesses. Pause for the Investigators to act.

If Gandía retreats, he backs into the darkened *Long Gallery* with or without Esperanza. To him, both ends stretch impossibly far away. He recoils from the orange glow near the main entrance, terrified by the heat. He stumbles against the antique wooden grandfather clock and clutches it, it topples. The wooden case splits, the clock itself smashes, spilling weights, pendulum, and a concealed sword belonging with the sixteenth-century jousting armour opposite. He seizes it and assumes a military guard. Familiar cold steel restores his confidence.

If driven into the *Solarium* off the *Long Gallery*, Gandía backs among tropical foliage silvered by moonlight. He brandishes the antique sword:



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

"I am Captain Alberto Gandía! I gave the orders! The *Porra* took them. So did I! And the Mazorra hid it all. Mateo was to be handed over to me for his final punishment. But I will not die here!"

Shadows gather in the doorway. Then the Baron moves into the Solarium, raising his machete, & says in Spanish:

«Tú diste las órdenes, Gandía, y Dios te juzgará en el otro mundo. Ahora responde por ellas en este mundo» *("You gave the orders, Gandía, & God will judge you in the next world. Now answer for them in **this world**.")*

Keeper's Notes Gandía's steel sword is an ordinary heirloom (55%, Hard 27%, Extreme 11%, damage 1D8+1+1D4). Give Investigators within reach or earshot a chance to act before the first strike; they can act before the Baron, who acts before Gandía, & the Baron's *Armour 10* absorbs most sword blows. Two or three machete hits will likely fell Gandía. He may still surrender or flee. Resolve combat & intervention in DEX order. A player whose Investigator is absent may play the Baron.

In the warded Manse, the Baron stays his blade while a protected person stands between them, willingly or as a hostage. Investigators can still attack or restrain Gandía, risking harm to any hostage. If Gandía dies, his debt to the Bokor Mateo Derosier is settled.

SIDEBAR - THE BARON LEAVES: Gandía's death settles his debt to Mateo, however he dies. If he lives, the Baron will accept a full, witnessed confession & secure custody on the terms in *Judgment Before Execution*. Every other surviving Porra offender named in Othello's hearing & linked by evidence to a specific crime must also answer. In French or Spanish, the Baron tells the Investigators, **"Those whose crimes are proved must die, by my hand, by yours, or by Cuban judgment. Hear the witnesses. Keep the evidence. A cell alone pays nothing."**

For each surviving debtor, *El Rey* or another credible authority must take secure custody & publicly undertake to hear the witnesses, weigh the evidence & carry out a death sentence if the named crimes are proved. Record the charges, secure the evidence & establish who holds the prisoners and who will judge them. If a debtor escapes or no authority gives an undertaking the Baron accepts, he continues the hunt. Give the Investigators a chance to intervene before he moves on.

Once every claim is answered by death or an accepted undertaking, the Baron lowers his machete. **«La dette est acquittée.»** *("The debt is acquitted.")* If any debtor lives in custody, he says instead, **«La dette sera payée.»** *("The debt will be paid.")* He vanishes into shadow. Both Eyes' cowries chatter violently, then fall still.

The Mystery of Men's Pavilion A



Image generated via ChatGPT-6 Luna

Forgotten amid the upheavals of August 12, 1933, are Pavilion A, which houses Mazorra's Violent & Refractory patients, and Pavilions C & D. The usual caregivers have been swept up in the day's chaos; their replacements have not arrived. Those now running Mazorra have faced one emergency after another.

In the early hours of Sunday, August 13, something strange is happening among these buildings. From M1's upper windows, anyone looking toward *Pavilion A* sees a strangely tinted light shimmering above its roof, rising into the clearing sky like an aurora. Moonlight pours through thinning clouds. Perhaps the glow is only moonlight reflected from puddles in the airing yards…

Keeper's Note: If Investigators look toward Pavilion A or act on the switchboard's busy signal, bring this forward. Otherwise, the glow or a strange call draws attention after 02:00

To be continued.



From our Last Episode





ClericCon 4: Father Aaron, an Anglican priest at *St. Alban the Martyr* church in Glen Williams Ontario, is also known online as the *Dungeon Minister* on *YouTube.* He has also been the organizer behind *ClericCon*, a mini-RPG convention, for the past 4 years. By the time found the advert on FB back in August, registered & paid, Saturday was the only day with sessions still available. My high-school friend & former *A&Er* Chris Abbott lives nearby in Georgetown, so I let him know, & he signed up immediately.

I attended on Saturday, October 24, when games ran in the church & nearby town hall; one event was streamed from a nearby home. Registrants came from not only southern Ontario, but the UK, & the US. In my three games alone, I met players from the UK, Alaska, & Kentucky. I arrived early & with volunteer 'Slan the Man's help I registered about 20 RPGs I brought for the used-game sale they ran.

My Saturday RPG lineup:



9:15 a.m. | Delta Green: "Last Things Last": James was a wonderfully energetic GM, with plenty of handouts and evocative props, including recordings on an old electronic voice recorder, an old BlackBerry that needed charging, & a large wooden box hidden in a Muskoka cabin with a snakeskin, a bloodied shirt & a pistol! My fellow players,

Charlotte from the UK & Chad from the US, were terrific too.

2:45 p.m. | Worlds Without Number: "The Glorious Seven". At first, this sounded like a straightforward riff on *The Magnificent Seven*. But something felt off about this nameless town of 80 hobbits: too small to have a name, yet large enough to be raided every season by orcs stealing its wheat while the hobbits fled to the hills. I latched onto the idea that the orcs were raising *hobbits*. A lottery and the absence of older residents seemed to support our theory, but further investigation revealed the truth. William Cronk's energetic GMing & improvisation made the game a treat; he vividly portrayed the NPCs as they interacted with us 7 different clerics in the same religious pantheon.

8:00 p.m. | Mongoose Traveller: "Tower Trouble" The scenario, adapted from an older Traveller adventure by Marcus Rowland, dragged a bit after the previous two sessions. After 90 minutes of Referee stalled stealth plans we gave up on stealth and used brute force to pull off the heist, only to learn the item was worth less than our patron expected and receive a reduced payment. We thankfully wrapped up after 11 p.m.





I had an absolute blast returning to face-to-face gaming, with both new acquaintances and old friends. I finally got to play with Chris, who hadn't gamed in nearly seven years, since the last *BunkerCon* in November 2019. I shared my positive overall experience with the *Dungeon Minister,* Father Aaron. He explained that they kept costs down to $15 per person for the day, with similarly affordable three-day passes; this year was biggest at 101 registrants.

After a full day of gaming, I finally made it home well after midnight. I made $50 selling some used games; Chris made $210! The small photo above shows my RPG haul.

JohnCon 1 (*Nov 14th 2026*): This mini-Con nextish!



COMMENTS
E&A #17

ATTRONARCH: RAE. Session #126 had new/unfamiliar PCs, as did #127 (other than Ambrose doing his first Miracle). I wonder why none of the party from the first bandit hunt didn't return to guide & assist? Nor why they brought back only Thorm's body & not Thorin's too? Session #128's was bittersweet, with sweet items finding bandit treasure, wishing wells, & secret doors galore, the bitter including bad guys throwing oil, & the discovery of the mutilated remains of their poor retainer.

AVRAM GRUMER: Lovely *Typst* layout & design as usual, and a great way to show off your content. RAE. *Re Chaosium from now on changing the name of the Lovecraftian entity Shub-Niggurath to Shub-Gorath*: I do wonder why *Shub-Gurath* wasn't the new name?

BRIAN ROGERS *"…*that was one of the most Chiroptera-Guano crazy games I have ever played in." Hey I got that reference! ⬡ *ShireCon* sounds like a lot of fun. And your excellent homebrew V&V adventure was terrific fun to read.

BRYANT DURRELL: *RYCTM on floor plans:* I still cringe at some of my architectural design mistakes. For example, the map I drew last-ish shows only one entrance into *Pavilion A's* Airing Yard, & it from a dormitory. ⬡ When at *ClericCon* 'Slan' said that they were once in a Montreal anime club & he had the privilege of helping legendary animator *Ray Harryhausen's* handler & meet Ray when visiting their city for a film event in 2005; he was impressed when I said, "Fantasia?" Almost as much impressed when I I said I knew the SF origin of his nickname.

DALE MEIER: I'm most impressed with all the *Traveller* material you have provided; your sector maps are *amazing*.

DYLAN CAPEL: Was the *Index Card RPG* scenario a published one that you enjoyed or home brew? ⬡ Re game organizing: I use the online free database on *rpggeek.org* to catalogue my collection of RPGs I own. It's kludgy, but it's saved me from accidentally purchasing duplicates.

GABRIEL ROARK: RAE. I had to look up what your *Resilient California Summit* was all about; hope it was great.

JOHN REDDEN: *RCT Hawai'i can feel almost like a foreign country:* My only visit to Maui with my family felt like the least "American" trip I'd taken within the United States. I was especially struck by what seemed to be a genuine respect for Native Hawaiian traditions, history, & natural environment.

JIM VASSILAKOS: Another magical map I had to cut for space included *Pocket Change Guide,* a vellum leaflet the size of a large index card that reveals within a 10 yd radius only *small* caches of hidden treasure valued from 1-100 GP, & ignores all others more valuable.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: Thanks! Mazorra's labyrinthine looping structure & format are partly because this is being serialized and I'm making it up as I go along (grin). With all the threads running at once, and never assuming what the Investigators will go for I'm hoping their collisions make the place feel even more tangled and alive. As for putting 'Horrors of the Mazorra' up on the *Miskatonic Repository* as suggested, that's a possibility, but will probably have to

wait until I semi-retire. ⬡ And yes, running into Lauren at *Supercrawl* was a lovely surprise for both of us.

LISA PADOL: I love the photo of you as Luigi & Josh as Waluigi in the LARP, "It's a Me, Murder!" ⬡ *Re 'I Walked with a Zombie':* I have not! *RYCTM about the Mazorra:* Lisa, knowing your professional RPG editing work & your own role-gaming & LARP experiences all of this is *very* helpful, especially your distinction between the scenario, the reference material, and what you're calling the *playthrough.* I wrote you in late October a several page detailed email about my thoughts on this. As for how much remains, I'm hoping to finish in one or two more issues, possibly by #256. And thank you for the other comments!

MYLES CORCORAN: RAE your ongoing *Mausritter* Campaign write up; the circus is in town, one of the high wire acrobats shows up late & a golden thimble goes missing at the same time. Who could be behind it? RARE *Kriegsmesser: Landau Before the War.* I love all the era authentic grotesquery you have included in these sessions. And Ferber *was* well connected all right, to the sharp end of Alfonzo's boot. ⬡ *RYCTM:* I'm glad you found that Dublin History web page interesting! ⬡ *Re Political Natter RYCTM on Schoolyard Bully*; it's more like a never-ending Mafia shake-down. People have died due to decisions to support despots rather than democracies. I'm cautiously optimistic about the blue wave which occurred with the Nov 3rd US midterm elections.

PATRICK BRADY: RARE I really enjoyed your distinction between adapting a character and merely using the name as a signifier, and your argument that Moriarty is often inserted as a brand marker rather than written with an understanding of who he is. I wonder whether his prominence in screen versions also reflects Doyle's having left later writers so few established recurring enemies to draw on. That may help explain why Moriarty became the default, though it does not make the box-ticking more faithful. Inventing a rival who matched or surpassed him would create a different problem: it would dilute the singular force of "the Napoleon of Crime," turning Moriarty into one of several criminal masterminds rather than *the* uniquely world-altering threat Doyle meant him to be.

RTCT Myles on smudging history together: Myles's point, made me think of *G-8 and His Battle Aces*, Robert J. Hogan's 110-issue aviation pulp (1933–44) set in a weird WWI era that smudged everything together, including logic and reason! G-8, an unnamed American spy/aviator who flew a French SPAD, fought a horror-fantasy alternate Great War of dragon-shaped aircraft, panther-headed dead airmen, flying zombies, & even a renegade Martian aiding the Kaiser. His recurring foes included *Herr Doktor Krueger* (a mad German scientist; 27 times), *Herr Stahlmaske* ("Steel Mask"; 6+ times), *Dr. Chu Lung,* (a Fu Manchu-like Chinese mercenary scientist serving Germany with his prowess with deadly gases; 8 times); & *Herr Grun*, (a primeval green mutant (!) with incredible strength & telepathic powers; 3 times).

PATRICK ZOCH: Aha! *Märklin* makes model trains in Germany, hence the German TTR map! ⬡ I had always wondered from seeing billboards & barn roofs advertising "See Ruby Falls" driving down south through Tennessee on I-75 from Ontario to Florida on road trips going back from when I was a kid; thanks for sharing your cave experiences.

ROGER BW: *I emailed a fuller reply to the address listed in The Path of Cunning, the online GURPS fanzine. RYCTM on Seabrook's 'The Magic Island':* Coincidentally, I recently watched *White Zombie* on YT and have been reading Seabrook's account. Its zombies differ markedly from today's film monsters, but the racist illustrations and disputed authenticity of his book complicate its appeal. His ex-wife Marjorie Muir Worthington's candid memoir, *The Strange World of Willie Seabrook* (1966), explores his alcoholism, sadism, cannibalism (!) & other personal demons.

⬡ *RYCTM on Mazorra's chapel:* Attendance would be voluntary for patients, with staff attending too. Its roughly 64–80 seats could accommodate only a fraction of 3,000-plus patients. & the need for attendants/guards would further limit attendance. I envisage Mons. Aurelio holding two Sunday services, with attendance arranged beforehand, & visiting the pavilions for Mass & confessions on rotation.

PEDRO PANHOCA DA SILVA & MAIRA ZUCOLOTTO: I'd have thought downloadable apps like Adriano Oliveira's 'O Rei e a Morte' you mention would be more popular (and, is this free?) by now.

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: *Re "I miss running a campaign …I've found it helps drive writing which I really enjoy".* I can really sympathise. I would put forward that having two definite yeses for your nascent Traveller campaign is a promising sign, & you can always build up from there. *RCTM mentioning Canada Geese*: I'm so sorry. I've heard persons new to Canada refer to them as "cobra chickens" and that's only a minor exaggeration.

Our now 23 yo daughter Lauren with me in Toronto



Nov 21st 2026. BCM

John Redden

Johnredden@AOL.com
(public facing e-mail address)

310.418.1550 mobile

Reddened Stars number 17
(E ka hoku o ula`ula ` ole)

Web sites:
johntredden.com
southkonafarms.com
johnreddenauthor.com

Other e-mail:
southkonafarms@gmail.com

USPS:
88-2636 Mamalahoa Hwy Captain Cook
HI 96704-8809

808.328.2328 land line

Mix Natter And Anti-Natter

Gaming

The next game of D&DBeyond, we reversed roles that we played in the previous game. We had to defend the top of the cliff with the adversaries attempting to climb up the cliff. I missed the game on 9th November when returning from Sacramento. Joshua Levy helped me fill out my character, now a 3rd level “Bard” (*shaman*). Now she has weapons and spells, first and second level. She chose 0 level spells: Dancing Lights, Friends; 1st level spells: Comprehend Languages, Detect Magic, Faerie Fire, Identify; 2nd level spells: Conjure Tools, Disruptive Tune.

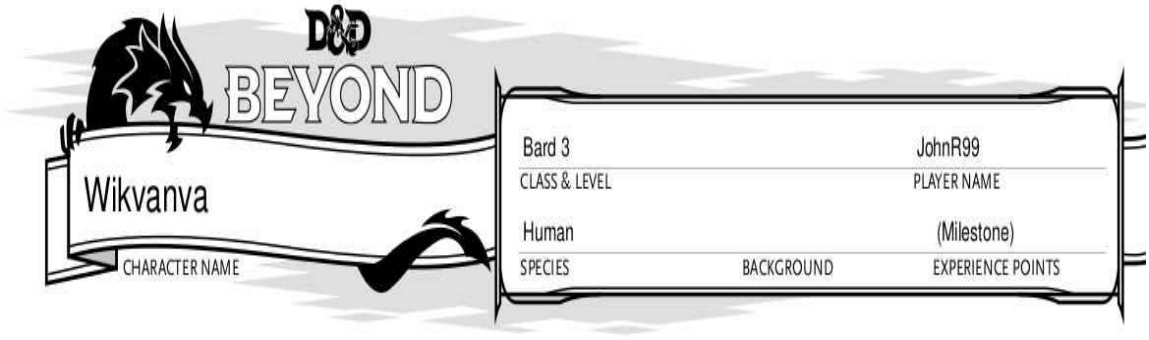
These characters are part of the Chokovia Tribe. Wikvanva’s totem is an owl and her spirit is a squirrel



In the game I didn’t know the spells yet so when I tried to cast grease on the cliff it didn’t work. Wikvanva is now properly set with spells.

The next game is in December.

More details for Wikvanva:



=== BARD FEATURES ===

* Core Bard Traits • PHB-2024 59

* Bardic Inspiration • PHB-2024 59
As a Bonus Action, you can inspire another creature within 60 ft. that can see or hear you. That creature gains one of your Bardic Inspiration dice (1d6). Once within the next hour, when the creature fails a D20 Test, the creature can roll the Bardic Inspiration die and add the number rolled to the total, potentially turning the failure into a success.

You can confer your Bardic Inspiration die 2 times per Long Rest.

| 2 / Long Rest • 1 Bonus Action

* Spellcasting • PHB-2024 59
You can cast spells through your bardic arts. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for your Bard spells (Spell DC 12, Spell Attack +4). You can use a Musical Instrument as a Spellcasting Focus for your Bard spells.

* Expertise • PHB-2024 60
You gain Expertise in two skill proficiencies of your choice.

* Jack of All Trades • PHB-2024 60
You can add half your Proficiency Bonus (1) to ability checks you make that uses a skill proficiency you lack and that doesn't otherwise use your Proficiency Bonus.

* Bard Subclass • PHB-2024 60

* Size • PHB-2024 194
Your Size is Medium or Small, chosen when you select this species.

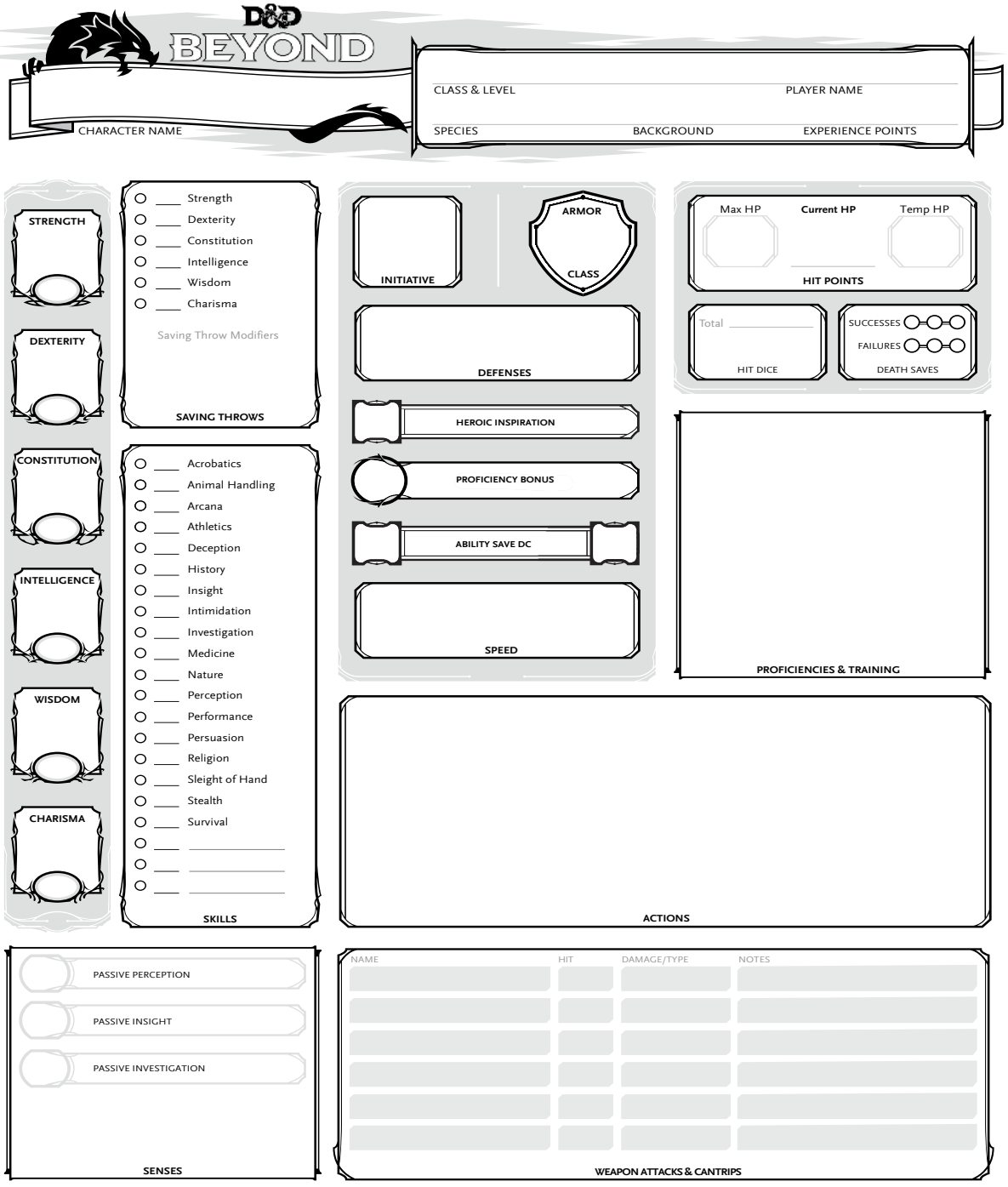
* Speed • PHB-2024 194
Your Speed is 30 ft.

* Resourceful • PHB-2024 194
You gain Heroic Inspiration whenever you finish a Long Rest.

* Skillful • PHB-2024 193
You gain proficiency in one skill of your choice.

* Versatile • PHB-2024 194
You gain an Origin feat of your choice.

* Ability Score Increases • PHB-2024
When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and a different one by 1, or increase three scores by 1.



TM & © 2018 Wizards of the Coast LLC. ©2018 D&D Beyond | All Rights Reserved. Permission is granted to photo copy this document for personal use.

Game Review

A new activity my daughter showed me while in Cameron Park (Near Sacramento), it’s a game review.

https://www.google.com/search?q=waltz+of+the+wizard+magoowho&sca_esv=f2ff985aa87c8f33&sxsrf=AKL5yDgG-zOxo400fK550ndKtBwvHeX3fA%3A1794362322915&ei=0svzasa0N8Pe0PEP6v-U8Ak&biw=827&bih=447&uact=5&oq=waltz+of+the+wizard+magoowho&gs_lp=Egxnd3Mtd2I6LXNlcnAiHHdhbHR6IG9mIHRoZSB3aXphcmQgbWFnb293aG8yBxAhGAoYoAEyBxAhGAoYoAEyBxAhGAoYoAFI7mtQlglY-CpwAXgBkAEAmAGMAaABogiqAQMyLje4AQPIAQD4AQGYAgqgAvcNwgIKEAAYRxjWBBiwA8ICEBAAGIAEGIoFGEMYtAcYsAPCAg0QABiABBiKBRhDGLADwgINEAAYgAQYigUYQxi0B8ICDRAuGIAEGIoFGEMYtAfCAg0QABiABBgUGIcCGLQHwgIKEC4YgAQYigUYQ8ICChAAGIAEGIoFGEPCAgUQABiABMICCBAAGIAEGLQHwgIIEC4YgAQYtAfCAgoQABiABBgUGIcCwgILEAAYgAQYigUYkQLCAgYQABgWGB7CAgUQIRigAcICBBAhGAqYAwCIBgGQBgySBwUxLjUuNKAHqTayBwUwLjUuNLgHzA3CBwQzLTEwyAeQAYAIAQ&sclient=gws-wiz-serp#cobssid=s&fpstate=ive&vld=cid:1fdfa93d,vid:p3I9Q_DZULo,st:0

Regardance

I finished The City We Became by N.K. Jemisin. Its about New York City and some other cities. An interesting but sometimes unpleasant read.

To celebrate Halloween, we attended Rocky Mountain Horror Picture show at the Aloha Theater in Kainaliu. Well done. I was a bit surprised by the soft core pornography. We were amused by one attendee that came in his briefs.

My daughter and her husband took me to the Harris Center in Folsom California to experience the musical Elf. It was fantastic! A full orchestra, great acoustics, a snow machine and excellent performances by the players.

Sum Comments

worst die roll ever:

Three smokey dragons in a row.

Patrick Brady, why did I become a farmer… When I graduated from Cal State University at Long Beach in 1970, I didn’t like the possible jobs so I ventured to the Fresno area after a number of friends moved there. I started working on an original organic farm outside the main city. I worked all summer for food and rent (now

days we call that being a “woofer”). I never forgot. In 2003 we purchased a coffee farm in the Big Island of Hawai`i. I still did software until 2013. I was one of the original telecommuters.// I have experienced a paid GM one time in my life. Meh. // Dr. Doom? Interesting.

Pedro and Maira, parts of the game book generated by AI? Any idea which one?

Brian Misiaszek, I continue to enjoy Habana Horror as if it were a novel.// I like the Player Agency Flags.// I haven’t tried Typst. Maybe I should give it a shot.// A beautiful image of Lauren.

Michael Cule, that’s a great map image.// Never used a (the) GURPS magic system.

Avram Grumer, Magic the Gathering and D&D trying to form a union under Wizards of the Coast?

Attronarch, I like the drawings.

Timothy Collinson, I enjoyed the drill down on Traveller.

Roger BW, Traveller and COC. I like the selection of games.

Dale Meier, I enjoyed the writeup of Traveller. I’m pleased to see a lot of Traveller in peoples zines. I’ve played GURPS Traveller in Zhodani space. That’s an excellent map, Beyond the Imperial Border. An outstanding follow up writeup. I enjoyed reading it.

Lisa Padol, I enjoy reading your zine, even though I don’t know the majority of the games you write about.// I usually think of a scenario as potentially a one-off.// Campaign construction from a set of pieces as opposed to a sandbox. Okay, I get it.// Horror on the Orient Express. David was supposed to continue that campaign last minicon, but his wife is too ill for him to travel. :(// I have to agree with you as to the Thomas Covenant books.

Myles Corcoran, A magic symbol drawing taxi-cab driver? Hmm… // I continue to enjoy the Mausritter write-ups.

Brian Rogers, that map of the station is amazing.// Nice image of the players.// I’ll take your advice and skip the follow-on to The City We Became. // My dreams were shattered when COVID killed HawaiiCon. If there is a gaming store in Hilo, I can’t reasonably go there, just like the one in Kailua Kona that doesn’t open until 5:00

PM HST.

Jim Vassilakos, AI compared to AC. I enjoyed reading about it and am fascinated by the concept.// Make Up Something Else: excellent.

Dylan Capel, I've always had a soft spot for Glorantha.// Right now the games are in closets or shelves and organized. It was easy to do since I sold and donated a number before moving to Hawai`i.// Dice Tower Retreat… excellent.

Patrick Riley, re fights in comics. I agree.// Re Junior League of Planets, an enjoyable read.// As someone who had ICE invade my farm, I couldn't agree more.

Gabriel Roark, did the website return with the stars and the sector map?// I've saved a somewhat mean joke with some politics for the December E&A.// I practice Bold (exercise) and get a therapeutic message to improve balance.

Joshua Kronengold, it looks like you two are having fun.// When does challenge become dickery?

Bryant Durrell, I hope the convention, GameHoleCon was what you hoped for.

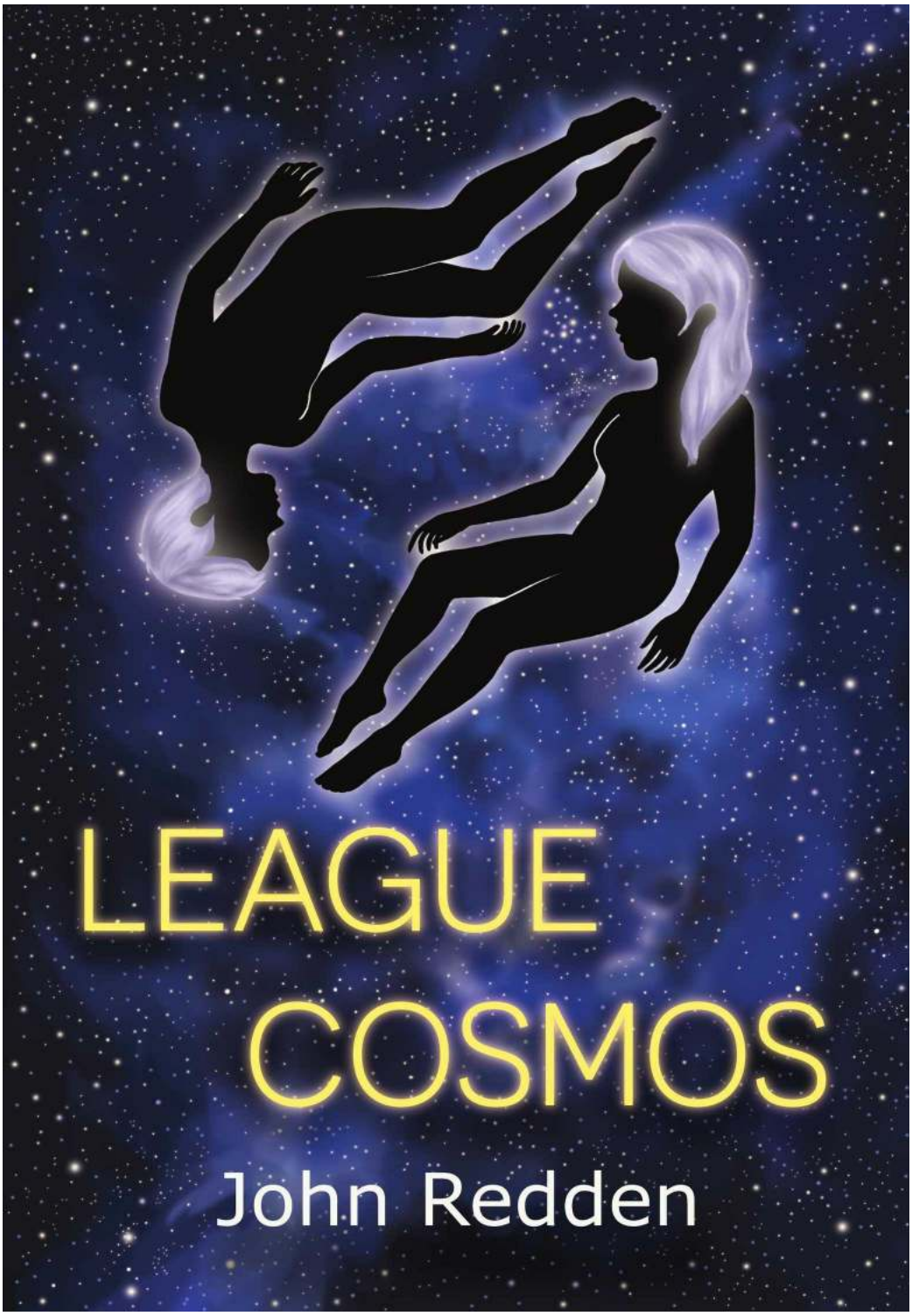
Jim Eckman, would Populist or Worker and Community Owned count as political forms?// I have been using Libre Office for a number of years.// Re space combat. Joshua who runs his own version of GURPS Traveller, built his own space combat system. He told us that the version in the rule set is too lethal.

Jargon Zen

Where is the Buddha?
The four elements, earth, fire, water and air dispersed as a dream.
The six dusts, perception and sense consciousness are originally empty.
The sun is setting over the western mountains. The moon is rising in the east.

Humor

The oldest computer was owned by Adam and Eve.
It was an Apple with very limited memory, just 1 byte, and everything crashed.



Cover of my next science fiction novel.

A zine for *Ever & Anon*.
Unless otherwise noted, all writing & art is by Avram Grumer of Brooklyn, NY.
Pronouns: he/him
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
16 Nov 2026

GOING TO BE Ad·Libbed #16

Email: avram@grumer.org
See http://grumer.org/ for social media links.
Software: Typst w/ wrap-it, cuti • Fonts: Libre Baskerville, Libre Franklin, Iosevka Etoile • Logo: Jost, Lobster



Attention Conservation Notice

October Daye • *The Beetle* • *The Good Neighbors* • Metatopia 2026 • scheduling difficulties • *The Bloody Inn* • *Decaying Orbit* • Sherlock Holmes • *GURPS* skills • Marvel Earths • SFF in the 1980s • indie • definitions • keyboards • that *Star Trek* thing • ...and more!

I'm putting more effort into using the full version of Procreate in iPad, with the pressure-sensitive Apple Pencil.

My mother traded in her iMac for a MacBook Neo, so I've got her old Apple wireless keyboard, which works just fine with iPads and iPhones, and turns out to be lighter and easier to carry around than either of my two folding Bluetooth keyboards. Useful for typing up my notes at the convention (see next page).



NEWS

Jack Kittredge, co-creator of *Cosmic Encounter*, has died at the age of 82.

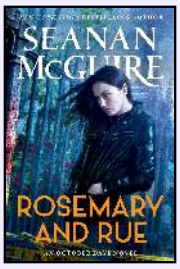
Chaosium has halted development on the *Call of Cthulhu: Old Ones Origins* boardgame due to the conviction of game designer Samuel William Bailey on charges of rape of a minor and child molestation.

Recent Reading

I've finished Adrian Tchaikovsky's Children of Time books. Or at least, I've read the four existing books, the last of which just came out this year. He might write more.

I haven't read any more of the Tyrant Philosophers series yet.

Rosemary and Rue by Seanan McGuire



This is the first book in Seanan McGuire's October Daye series, about a changeling (in this setting, that's the term for someone of mixed fae/human blood) working as a private detective in San Francisco after having spent 14 years trapped in a pond, transformed into an ornamental carp. I read this mostly because I'm thinking about playing a Fae if we start a new game of *Monsterhearts*, and I'm looking for ideas. Seanan's pretty meticulous in her worldbuilding.

I spent much of the novel imagining Devin (one of Toby's exes) writing poetry during Toby's time in the pond: "Had we but world enough and time, / Your absence, Toby, were no crime...."

The Beetle by Richard Marsh

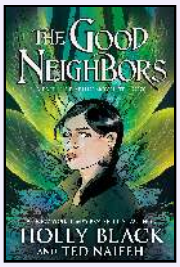


This British horror novel came the same year as *Dracula* (1897), and outsold it six-to-one. But I'd never heard of it till just a few weeks ago. There's apparently a reference to it in Pelgrane Press's *The Yellow King RPG*.

The book's written in four sections, each narrated in the first person by a different character. The first is familiar Gothic horror, right down to the narrator being cut off abruptly at the end, but the second seems like a screwball comedy, with people constantly showing up uninvited at the narrator's home, overheard conversations, and even a scene where two characters are discussing a third, and the third abruptly shows up, like Lenny and Squiggy walking in on *Laverne & Shirley*.

The Beetle is downloadable for free from Standard Ebooks.

The Good Neighbors by Holly Black & Ted Naifeh



A comic, written by Black and drawn by Naifeh. I'm reading it for more research on fae.

It's definitely a fruitful source of ideas if you're looking for ways to complicate the life of a Fae PC. Probably more useful for the MC, but if your table culture involves players coming up with their own complications, it's good for that too. Or if you're looking for general background on Faerie, but I think I'm past that point.

Metatopia 2026

Morristown, NJ 5–8 Nov 2026

Metatopia is an annual game convention held each November in Morristown, New Jersey. It's part of the Double Exposure series of conventions (which includes DEXCon and Dreamation), but Metatopia is unusual in that it centers game *design* rather than just play. It's become the hot place for indie game designers (tabletop and live-action RPG as well as board/card games) to beta test their new work. See *E&A* #7, pgs 100–101 for Lisa's description of Metatopia 2025.

The conventions are run by the husband-wife team of Vinnie Salzillo and Avonelle Wing. While Lisa Padol & Josh Kronengold have been going pretty much every year, I'd only ever attended one Dreamation, a decade ago. This year, Vinnie, an old high-school buddy (he'd been my lab partner in chemistry), reached out to me in email and extended an open invitation to attend, and I figured this would be a good way to expand my horizons.

One of my other goals was to see if I could get some insight into what caused me to freeze up at that *Going for Broke* game a few months back (see *E&A* #13 pgs 136–138).

I didn't write up everything in detail. You'll notice my attention to detail flagging as the con goes on.

Thursday, 5 Nov

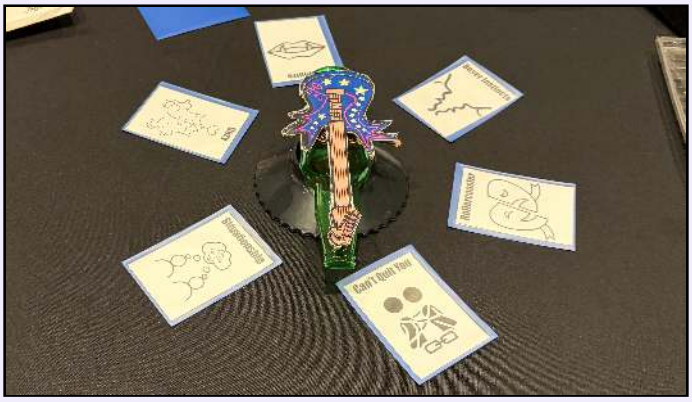
Josh & Lisa (whose room I stayed in) like to arrive on Wednesday night, to minimize travel anxiety. I came over Thursday afternoon, the actual first day of the convention, despite the best efforts of Newark Drawbridge to stop me. Dealing with sudden transit outages like that is so much easier in the age of smartphones and rideshare apps than it would have been twenty years ago.

Thursday evening is the "LobbyCon" period, where all of the folks who haven't seen one another since the last convention hang around and get reacquainted. I spent some time chatting with Vinnie, who showed me some of his software that's running as a HyperCard stack in a MacOS 9 emulator.

Friday, 6 Nov

8 AM **Breakfast with the Bakers**

Vincent & Meguey Baker like to make sure that as many people as possible actually start the day off with a meal, and they talk about games while we do. A bunch of topics were covered, but I didn't catch everything, since I was eating a bagel from the hotel coffee shop. Meguey recommended nursery rhymes as a resource for inspiration, because each one is a story, and you can expand them out. Like, she turned Three Blind Mice into a story about blind jazz musicians for her kids. Also, think about rooms, what other doors might be there, who might come in, then apply that to situations. Also, Vincent recommended building an audience *before* you publish your game; Meguey said you can get away with three people who won't shut up about it.



9 AM **'Til Our Fingers Bled: The Rockumentary/Mockumentary RPG**

This was the best thing I played on Friday, and I've heard it was the hit of the con. A *For the Queen*-style game with narration prompts, but the prompting mechanic is much more complicated. Players start out playing music on our phones to inspire character creation, knowing that we're going to be playing members of a popular music group that broke up. Then we use cards and a spinner to set up relationships. The spinner is fun: a spin-the-bottle prop with a car stock guitar pasted on top.

We have a number of albums equal to the number of players: four. One is our Breakout album, another our Breakup album. The other two have types selected by spinner: a Political album and an Experimental album. To name the band

and the albums, we play an improv game called *Three-Headed Expert*: Each player says one word to build a title, until one player claps to indicate that the title is finished. Our band winds up called Glass Half-Broken, and our albums are "Born Into Hope Again" (the breakout), "Fiber with Endless Weave" (experimental), "World Rage Over the Stars" (political), and "Forever We Aren't Pledged" (breakup). Our period of fame was during the 1990s.

Then comes the meat of the game: Players take turns taking the part of a reporter for a music magazine, interviewing the band member played by the player to their left, using questions on cards. Then the interviewer frames a flashback scene where the interviewee and the other players (they can play their band members or side characters) play out what "really" happened, while the reporter player writes down quotes to use as song titles.

As I've mentioned before (*E&A* #13, pgs 143–144), my main complaint about *Descended from the Queen* games is that they seem to encourage players to skip over the roleplaying, and that's where this game shines. With this game, the time spent on setup, and the framing of multi-player flashbacks, brings the roleplay back in. We had great scenes with one band member joining a cult, and a big fight about my character having bribed a reviewer to give us a good review (in which my character was singled out for exceptional praise).

But that comes at the expense of time. We didn't get to finish in our two-hour slot, only playing out three flashbacks instead of the 12 (three per player) that the game calls for. It's also supposed to end with a reunion concert where the players pick which songs they want the band to sing, and a decision about whether they'll reunite.

10 AM A Town Named Eerie

Inspired by the old TV show *Eerie, Indiana*. This was the second consecutive game I played at the con that was set in the 1990s. The base die mechanic was similar to *Forged in the Dark*. Players play a group of kids in a town full of weird goings-on. We played out a scenario with a weird corn cult and a radio that picks up and broadcasts thoughts. There was a lot of fun improv. I'm unclear how much of the scenario was pre-written and how much a response to player choices.

I sat next to Sean Nittner, Director of Projects at Evil Hat, who was a lot of fun.

2 PM The Independents: An RPG of Small Town Superheroes

Showed up a bit late for this one, so I missed a little of the introduction. A superhero game. The players start out by making up city council member characters and establishing relationships among them, and then making up low-power silly superheroes —- think *Mystery Men* —- who get interviewed by the city council. At least two heroes need to be hired, while two need to be rejected. Then we play out a big festival that gets interrupted by those two rejected supers, who have now become villains and the heroes have to fight them off. The group I played with had a lot of great, hilarious improvisers. I don't know how well the game would work with people less good at improv. (See the puppet game I played on Saturday.)

This was also a game where I felt like I was getting blocked again, which gives me some insight into my problem. Both this game and the *Going for Broke* game were comedic, improv-heavy games where I had a very weak grasp on my character going into things. Now I've got a sense of what skills I need to work on. One of the brilliant improvisers at this game (and also the later Wellsville Adventures game) was Karen Twelves, author of *Improv for Gamers*, so I'll be picking up a copy of that.

4 PM Blades in the Dark: Dagger Isles

GMed by Sean Nittner, who's also done a write-up. This game is going to be an expansion to *Blades in the Dark*, set in the Dagger Isles region of that world, a colonial possession of the Akorosi Empire. Instead of playing ordinary scoundrels, the PCs are freedom fighters, looking to break their home free of the Empire. And I got to see how *Blades* works when run by someone who knows it intimately.

8 PM Binary: A Tron-Like Mark of the Odd OSR

A *Tron*-like game played using *Into the Odd*. This was a *very* early alpha playtest, played to find out if the *Into the Odd* rules were a good fit for the GM's ideas. They were not, and we found that out pretty quickly. We suggested a bunch of other games that have mechanics that might better suit the GM's ideas.

10 PM On the Meter: NYC

My first boardgame of the con. The players control rideshare companies driving cabs around on a big map of NYC, picking up and delivering passengers for money, which they can use to buy stock in the companies, with the stock values changing based on how many passengers are delivered. The basic mechanics for this worked, and the game was fun, but there were some bits that were a bit fiddly and needed to be simplified, and a few details that didn't work.

Saturday, 7 Nov

8 AM **Breakfast with the Bakers**

Again!

10 AM **Tachyon Squadron — Starfighter Engagements**

Yeah, *Tachyon Squadron* already exists as a *Fate* game, but Clark Valentine is trying to port it over to a new system. We playtested the combat rules, which used a dice pool mechanic, and felt a bit over-complex to me.

Vincent Baker was also playing at this playtest, and one of the highlights of the con was when he looked over at my badge and said "Hey, you're Avram Grumer!" Apparently, he remembered my name from social media. Or maybe Lisa & Josh have been talking me up.

11 AM **Deeply Felt: A Singing, Acting, Puppet-Crafting RPG**



This was run by the same guy who ran The Independents yesterday. We started out by gluing googly eyes and other stuff onto socks or paper bags to create Muppet-like characters who were actors on a variety show. We then followed some procedures to create episodes with songs, punctuated by in-character conversations where we gave each other more elements to glue onto our puppets. This wasn't as improv-skilled a group as the one for the Independents, and while we had fun, I didn't find the play as satisfying.

The photo is my puppet, Gumbo. After the TV show fails, he has a tough time finding new work. By the time of the endgame, he's waiting for a call-back after auditioning for a bio-pic about the Pets.com mascot.

2 PM **Wellsville Adventures**

A rules-light game based on 1990s kids suburban adventure shows like *The Adventures of Pete & Pete*. Yet another game set in the 1990s! This was dice-less, using a small deck of cards to deliver yes-and, no-but, etc outcomes. Character generation felt a bit directionless, like we had too many options, but we managed to come up with fun characters.

Remember the early games with the Park Slope group (*E&A* #6, pgs 86 & 89), where I kept hinting at creepy cannibalistic stuff for my PCs, and then backing off when Briar probed to see if I'd commit? I got to experience the other side of that at this game. One of the other players established that his PC was hiding a skunk in her backpack, and then when I tried to set up situations that delivered on this obvious Chekhov's Gun, he rejected them, not wanting to get his character in trouble. It would have been nice to hang out with the player and chat about this, but I had another game to get to....

4 PM **Sail the Stars**

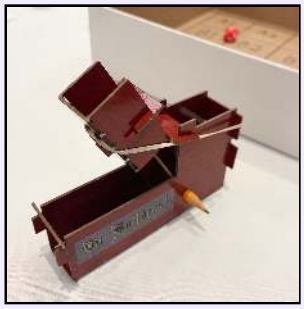
The third part of a trio of games, collectively titled *Roll the Stars*. An ambitious concept which totally did not work out on the table. The idea here is a three-part roll-and-write game, where the first part has deities seeding the void with stars, the second a star-spanning civilization setting up warp lines, and the third part traders trading along those lines.

An ambitious idea, but the execution didn't work out. After a few turns, the person demoing said "OK, I need to burn this down and start over. Tell me if there's anything worth salvaging." Yeah, there was, so it wasn't a total loss.

9 PM **Don't Tell Me the Odds: Unusual Mechanics in RPGs**

A talk describing five types of mechanics aside from dice: Skill-based, Spend-based, Memory-based (meaning a mechanical event that alters later mechanics), Pacing-based, and "Sell Your Idea" (what I call "Bullshit the Gamemaster," though he includes convincing other players).

10 PM **Die Builders!**



A tile-based city-builder with a twist: a catapult that you can use to wreck the other players' buildings! We all enjoyed using the catapult, but the rest of the game was too slow-paced.

Josh also played this, at a different session, so he might also write it up.

Sunday, 8 Nov

Breakfast alone in the lobby, while typing up the notes from Saturday night, until a nearby group (including Lauren Bilanko from the Twenty-Sided Store) invited me over to chat.

10 AM **Decision Desk: Produce an Election Night Broadcast**

A Canadian parliamentary election game, but the players are news stations covering the election results and trying to gain viewer trust by correctly predicting the outcomes. The core of gameplay involved gradually revealing how the public has voted (flipping over face-down party tokens), with

players using worker placement mechanics to take advance peeks, or boost their viewership, or take guest cards that give special moves. The base game mechanic was fun, but it needs some tweaking.

1 PM Tongues Sharp as Knives

This was fascinating. The designer is trying to create a set of mechanics that will encode the mechanics of political intrigue. It's working in a similar space to *Blades in the Dark*, but coming at a similar set of problems from a different angle.

See, everyone loves a political intrigue game, but people don't agree on just what's plausible. Someone who's done real-world politics has a totally different view of how things work than someone who's just watched a lot of *Game of Thrones*.

So this game enshrines its diegetic assumptions into its mechanics, explicitly. It uses a fractal mechanic, where long-term political objectives consist of multi-session *Projects*, broken down into *Operations*, broken down further into *Tasks*. Each Task is basically one of the PCs doing a thing, like intimidating a witness or forging a document or whatever, and each Operation has a list of recommended Tasks with plausible outcomes. We were there to test out the Task and Objective mechanics. We ran two Operations, one of which had great rolls and succeeded, and a follow-up where we rolled terribly and failed. The basic mechanic seemed to work well, and the Tasks were general enough that they allowed for a lot of player creativity and encouraged player engagement. It didn't feel like we were just riding a GM railroad, even though we were operating from a list of suggestions.

The mechanics also have a great push-your-luck element to them, which would take me too long to describe in detail, but I'm eager to see this game completed and in print. (It's nowhere near complete. When one tester said she'd love to see what character generation looks like, the designer replied that he would, too.)

3 PM Build Me a Blade, O Blacksmith

Each round a single hero comes to town, and the players compete to get their attention and build them a weapon, in exchange for money and renown. Losing players can sell mundane tools to villagers. Problem is, the economics aren't worked out yet. Catering to the villagers is as useful as selling to the heroes, undermining the game's theme and main mechanic.

Goodies!

I also bought a few things:

- *Mythic Bastionland* **by Chris McDowall:** An *Into the Odd* game inspired by Arthurian legend. It's been hard to get in the US for a while, so I grabbed a copy when I could.
- *Apocalypse World 2e* **by Vincent & Meguey Baker:** I've got 3e backed on Kickstarter, but 2e is out of print; Vincent said that the few copies in the warehouse are all that's left.
- *Masks of the Masks* **by Hazel Amber Goswick and Natalie Eve Quinn:** A *PbtA* superhero game written in the form of a comic book, designed specifically to evoke *Watchmen*. It would be difficult to design a game more likely to grab my attention.
- *Make Hard Moves* **by Aaron King:** A little booklet full of ideas for *PbtA*-style moves.

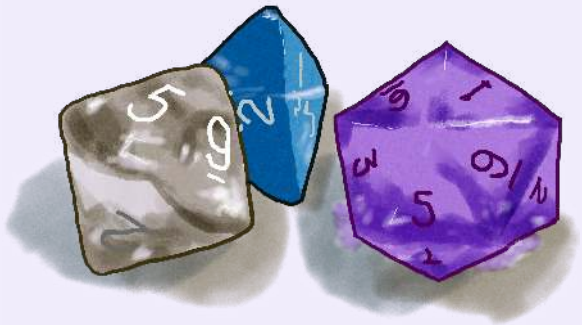
And there were registration-table freebies from a game-manufacturing company called Panda:

- A game design toolkit: four dice, a bag of wooden tokens in four colors and seven shapes, two packs of cards with grids on them, and some sheets of stickers.
- An "Omni-Deck": a deck of 108 playing cards, each with a variety of symbols on it.
- "An Expansion of Print and Paper": a cardstock envelope with some cards and die-cut token sheets.

If I were designing a boardgame, these would definitely be handy to have as samples of product line and quality.

Other con reports

- Metatopia 2026 by Alex White
- Metatopia 2026 Recap by Jason Morningstar
- Bluesky thread by Sean Nittner
- Metatopia Loom-ed by Sarah Doom
- Post-Metatopia 2026 Report by Colin Mancini



(Other) Recent Gaming

The Park Slope group is having scheduling problems. I suspect Briar might be the only one of us with substantial executive function. We've got something tentatively penciled in for mid-December.

And the other group (I need a good shorthand name for it) had a *Scum and Villainy* game scheduled for November 15th, but then the entire US air traffic control system collapsed, leaving Gareth stranded out-of-state.



The rest of us gathered anyway, and we broke out some boardgames and short RPGs. We played *The Bloody Inn*, a boardgame I've had sitting around for four years and never tried before, and it was pretty good, once we got the hang of it. It's about a family running an inn where they murder some guests for money, while recruiting others as accomplices. There's an unusual mechanic where the money score track tops out at 40₣, and any money over that amount is lost, so the game forces you to skip occasional turns to convert some money to 10₣ checks, which can't be used to pay your accomplices.

DECAYING ORBIT

One-shot **15 Nov 2026**

Parts of an AI **me**, **Lisa**, **Josh**, and **Gaylord**

After dinner, Lisa pulled out *Decaying Orbit*, another one of those *Descended from the Queen* games. This one's got a science fiction theme. The players are, collectively, an AI on a doomed space station, soon to fall into a star. We draw cards and narrate the scenes we discover as we probe the computer system's memory, trying to piece together what went wrong.

Setup

There are four options for what kind of station you're on, each leading to a different style of game. I voted for the Athena-II, a warship, which leads to conspiratorial and mysterious stories. Gaylord liked Taurus Alpha, a dystopian mining station, leading to hungry and brutal stories. Lisa and Josh both liked the sound of Athena-II better.

The deck is mostly made up of Room Cards, each describing a room of the station, and having prompts to choose between. There are a bunch (eight, I think) of cards for each of the four station types, and you pick six of those, and you also pick common cards, leaving you with a deck of 20 that you shuffle together. You put the Act 1 card on top, the Act 3 card on the bottom, and stick the Act 2 card somewhere in the middle. Then you take turns drawing and narrating.

Act 1: Establish routines

The idea for this part of the game is that you're supposed to narrate scenes that show ordinary life on the station, before things started to go wrong. Unfortunately, the prompts on the cards don't always lead in that direction.

Avram: **Captain's Quarters.** One of my long-standing complaints about this genre of game is that it leads to very abstract narration, with little to no roleplay. So I take advantage of this draw to do a William Shatner impression for a Captain's Log, describing the terrible… burden… of responsibility… that comes from defending the Federation's frontier.

Lisa: **AI Core.** Someone sneakily opens a secret compartment, then covers the lens of the watching camera. Heat signature might be captured.

Josh: **Escape Pods.** A crewperson has just launched a pod. Cut to inside of pod: A device like that one in previous scene. Then we see a light in space, like a new star. Crewperson is wearing spacesuit, obscuring identity.

Gaylord: **Targeting Computers.** Crew on battle bridge, panels have been recently wired together, all the automated weapons systems patched into a manual interface, unoccupied.

Avram: **Bridge.** Captain's Log about problems with targeting computers.

Lisa: **Medical Bay.** Med officer reporting a Jr Engineer has something to hide. Josh asks if someone's there, Lisa adds there are two heat signatures.

Josh: **Docking Bay,** It's a mess. Schedule indicates a resupply mission was cancelled. There are

signs of a fight, at least 3 people. Med officers badge in corner. Bloodstains, but small. A robot mouse comes out of a hole, and is confronted by a feline.

Gaylord: **Aircraft Hanger,** Squad of fighters ready to be deployed, no people. Camera notices small movement near landing gear — robo-mouse crawling into a fighter ship, which powers down.

Avram: **Mess Hall**, Four crew celebrating one of their promotion. One of them is the sneaky guy from Lisa's first scene. Captain walks by, sees booze, but ignores it; he was young once.

Act 2: Twist

From now on each room is supposed to show that something has gone wrong, but we're already there.

Lisa: **Greenhouse.** Bunch of robo-mice around one plant. As they leave, the plant opens and spreads spores. The plant is right under a vent. Some AI wires have been gnawed through.

Josh: **Life-Support Controls.** Every light flashes red, every dial reads empty. Two creatures: the sneaky guy and the feline. "Someone is sabotaging this ship — and it isn't us!" says feline.

Gaylord: **Engineering Section.** Chrome & fluorescent lighting. A lot of systems have been converted to manual control. Some displays read: "Down with the Captain! Down with the AI! Rise up!" Some of the lettering is very tiny.

Avram: **Receiving Station.** Un-monitored. "Athena-II, do you read? This is Free Trader Beowulf! All systems unresponsive! Mayday!" Interrupted by mouse-like chirps.

Lisa: **Outer Hull.** Lots of white dots, spreading, like mold. Robo-mice are crawling over the hull. The system's star is visible, and closer than it should be.

Josh: **Maglift.** Message tubes: We see dozens of robo-mice traveling thru the tubes. The AI has designed and built them to fight the mold on the hull.

Gaylord: **Memorial Wall.** Holographic displays of crew lost on duty. A mouse (not a robot!) in engineer's uniform is weeping at the wall, saying "I've got to keep it together. All I need to do is upload my routines into the system and everything will work out."

Avram: **Armory.** Door is locked or jammed, someone is outside the room, rattling door, saying it's locked or jammed.

Lisa: **Navigation Room.** "Captain's Log. We are falling into AB Pictoris. It is the only way." Mold on walls, bits of disassembled robo-mice. Captain has taken manual control.

Josh: **Brig.** Acting Captain, log entry. Took command after the Captain went mad, decided mold was too dangerous to be allowed to spread; set ship on course into star. It's the Medical Officer.

Gaylord: **Engine Room.** Silent witnesses to our decay. Group of grim engineers huddled around a monitor, where the Captain is speaking. Cap'n is about to transmit a file, then we see Med officer burst in, message & cuts off, replaced with historical video about colonization of North America, spreading of smallpox.

Act 3: Epilogue

Each player describes a final transmission to Earth.

Avram: I realize that we've got two major bits that don't seem to make sense: The robo-mice were created to deal with the mold, but we see the robo-mice creating mold. I figure that the robo-mice developed a self-perpetuation drive, and started deliberately spreading more mold to justify their continued existence. So my part of the AI documented this in a flowchart diagram, and transmitted that to Earth.

Lisa: Brig footage — The Captain, the feline, the sneaky guy, talking. Cap: "Mice tried their best." Guy: "I know; it doesn't matter."

Josh: Message from the Medical Officer, final log. "The real danger was not between large ships, but inside… The body breaks down. Look to yourselves for danger."

Gaylord: Message to Athena-III: "People suck."

So, yeah, this kinda works, but not entirely. The idea, as I explained above, is that Act 1 is supposed to establish routines, and then our narration in Act 2 builds on that to have things go wrong. But the cards are in random order, no way to predict which will show up in Act 1 and which in Act 2, and a lot of them have prompts that strongly lean towards things going wrong.

A better way of managing this might be to have two sets of prompts on each card, one routine and one things-going-wrong. Then you cycle through the whole deck for Act 1, then reshuffle and go through it again for Act 2. That also lets you revisit the routine settings for stuff going wrong, which is more dramatically interesting.

But also, generally, you'll notice our story goes all over the place, with lots of plot threads that just get dropped or fail to fit together. Maybe that's inevitable, or maybe there's a player skill we need to work on.

Comments on *E&A* #17

Patrick Brady

YCT Brian Rogers (PG 7) RE *The Boys* ⟹ I've only looked a bit at the comics, but I'm a bit sad that the joke about Kimiko's origin — that she fell into a pot of Compound V as a baby, a reference to the *Asterix* comics — didn't make it into the show.

YCT Roger BW (PG 9) RE crime in London ⟹ When we went to Glasgow for the Worldcon a couple of years back, a lot of the advice I read talked about Glasgow being a rough town, so I looked up the violent crime rate, and found it gets about a third as much violent crime as NYC, so I didn't worry.

RE "one of the best F4 movies may be *The Incredibles*" (PG 11) ⟹ Yes! Similarly, the best *Star Trek* movie was *Galaxy Quest*.

RE inter-textual Sherlock Holmes (PG 14) ⟹ There's also a tie-in with the X-Men. The shape-changer Mystique, who shows up in the 1980 "Days of Future Past" storyline (though she'd been introduced in *Ms Marvel* a few years earlier) has a teammate she's very close to, an old woman who can see the future, and goes by the name Destiny. A couple of years later, it's revealed that Destiny's civilian name is Irene Adler. It's since been established that the two of them have been around since the 19th century, that Destiny was the actual Irene Adler from the Holmes canon, and that Holmes was actually Mystique.

John Redden

YCT me (PG 23) RE wine tasting ⟹ Nah, despite the fact that we were playing at a bar, it was just soda for me.

Brian Misiaszek

YCT me (PG 37) RE Typst ⟹ Not sure what you mean about needing a name for every image. Each image file needs a filename, sure, but that's nothing new to Typst. Does Word just let you import photos directly from your photo app, without having to save to disk?

If you're talking about the labels given to figures, that's proper academic style, but you'll notice I don't use it for the images in my zines. If you're talking about something the online version of Typst makes you do, I don't know about it. I just run the program locally on my Mac. It's text files, and image files, and folders, and terminal commands, the way God, Thompson, and Ritchie intended.

Michael Cule

RE the *GURPS* game (PG 47) ⟹ I think a character with compulsive Crime Fighting is allowed to steal a car, but they have to beat themselves up over it afterwards.

RE running out of space (PG 56) ⟹ I wrote, last month, about how my layout is currently running about 900 words per page, about the same as the high end of a classic Lee-printed *A&E* zine in the mimeo days. With your zines here, you seem to be fitting about 450 words to a page, so no wonder you're running out of space. Consider narrowing your page margins, reducing the amount of space between paragraphs, and maybe knocking down the font size by 1 point. Fiddle around! See how it looks! You can always go back to the old settings if you don't like the new ones!

Roger Bell_West

YCT Joshua Kronengold (PG 87) RE simplified *GURPS* character sheets ⟹ I saw a blog post about rearranging the way skills are displayed in *GURPS* for ease of reading. The author doesn't eliminate the point info entirely, but reorders the elements and uses boldface and grayscale to emphasize the parts that are important in play.

The solution you want would probably involve keeping the full info in a spreadsheet and using a program to extract and print out just the parts you need to play. An added benefit would be the ability to code the spreadsheet to do your point-build math for you.

Attronarch

Cool drawings!

Lisa Padol

YCT Mark Wilson (PG 105) RE *Monsterhearts* Werewolf & full moon ⟹ The *Howl at the Moon* and *Spirit Armour* moves in both 1st and 2nd edition *Monsterhearts* require only being "basked [sic] in moonlight," not an actual full moon. As long as there was enough moonlight to bask in, you should have benefited from that move in the nighttime portions of the game.

We never actually got to the full moon in the Vermilion Cove game, but Steffan got to benefit heavily from five and a half consecutive sessions all taking place over the course of a single clear-skied night, with the moon just a couple days shy of full (see *E&A* #11–14).

YCT Brian Rogers (PG 109) RE Marvel numbered Earths ⟹ Under the Marvel system, Earth-616 is the Prime

Marvel Universe. Our own universe, the real world, is Earth-1218. The future we see in the "Days of Future Past" comics storyline is Earth-811. The universe of the Ultimate line of comics is Earth-1610, though the *Into the Spider-Verse* movie takes place on Earth-1610B, and Peter B Parker comes from Earth-616B.

The main Marvel Cinematic Universe is Earth-199999. The original X-Men Cinematic Universe is Earth-41578, but then Wolverine goes back in time in the in the *X-Men: Days of Future Past* movie and creates Earth-10005, while Earth-17315 is the alternative future we see in that movie. Why the future version isn't just more of Earth-41578, I dunno.

Seriously, you can look all this nonsense up. I'm sure there are people who need to keep track of this stuff for professional reasons, and we probably know some of them.

YCT Brian Rogers (PGS 110–111) RE SFF in the 1980s ⟹ It's probably worth noting that the Scribblies — the Minneapolis writers' group that included Emma Bull, Steven Brust, Pamela Dean, Will Shetterly, and Patricia Wrede — was founded in January 1980, and I think that was the same year that Terri Windling started as Jim Baen's assistant editor at Ace Books.

Bruce Sterling started publishing his *Cheap Truth* newsletter in 1983, and the authors that gathered around it became the Cyberpunk movement.

> As Robert E. Howard spins in his grave, the Chryslers of publishing attach rotors to his head and feet and use him to power the presses.
>
> — uncredited editorial, probably by Bruce Sterling
> *Cheap Truth* #1, 1983

YCT me (PG 113) RE Attention Conservation Notice listing things out of order ⟹ Yeah, the ACN is assembled from an array of items that also populates the keywords metadata for the PDF that Typst generates; I have no expectation that the metadata survives into the assembled *E&A* apazine. I just add the items as I write, and sometimes rearrange them to make the lines break better (or for rhyme and meter — notice the notice in *E&A* #8, pg 170).

YCT me (PG 114) RE Procreate pens ⟹ That paragraph's there because the illo of the staked vampire that opens that section was made with those pens.

These are software pens — *brushes* is the actual term used in the program, regardless of whether they simulate pencils, pens, sponges, palette knives, or spray cans — that work with the iPad app Procreate. It's not available for Android, or even for desktop Mac.

That *Star Trek* Thing

Lisa & I talked in person, and I think I've figured out what that *Star Trek* game was that she was talking about in *E&A* #16, pg 150.

This was the late 1980s or early '90s, when I was playing a lot with Adam's group (the same Adam from the Hiver anecdote; he blogs as Barking Alien). We had played some FASA *Star Trek*, but this was something else — a sort of wargame, played with a minimized set of rules.

The premise is that this is some kind of Starfleet wargaming exercise. We make up fresh PCs, each one the captain of a ship, with each ship's crew represented by a small number of percentile ratings — Weapons, Engineering, stuff like that. We're fighting it out in some kind of nebula, where our shields don't work (because otherwise the combat would be long and tedious).

I look at my ship's stats, and see that my Weapons rating is mediocre, but my Engineering rating is really good. I ask what the skill is for using transporters, and am told to use Engineering, so my big tactic in the game is to use photon torpedoes, rigged to detonate with timers, beamed onto the other ships.



YCT me (PG 113) RE Shakespeare in the Park tickets ⟹ That's about how it still works now, with the change that instead of everybody waiting in one big line in Central Park, there's a second line that travels around the city, a different spot each day. I find that 9 AM is fine for scoring a ticket in my area, most years. (The 2025 performance of *Twelfth Night* was particularly star-studded, and the lines were unusually long. I was unable to get tickets despite three attempts.) They also give some away online.

YCT me (pg 114) RE Evil Hat being "indie" ⟹ "The mid- to late 00s" was the *Spirit of the Century* and *Don't Rest Your Head* era; both were released in 2006. The *Dresden Files RPG* didn't come out until 2010, and *Fate Core* until 2013.

There was a thread on the Forge Forums in 2008 where Ron Edwards went on at some length about Indie Press Revolution, and Fred Hicks (aka Iago), the webmaster at IPR, replied to him to disagree about some factual claims Edwards had made, but there's nothing in there about Evil Hat.

Anyway, Ron Edwards seems to use *indie* to mean *creator-owned*, which is a narrower definition than the one used in *indie films* or *indie music*. I have no idea whether a game still qualifies if the owner is a corporation owned by the game's author.

He also seems to have taken inspiration from Dave Sim's advocacy for self-publishing and getting out from under Diamond's control of the direct comics market, though note that the term *indie comics* includes small press publishers, not just self-published work. Sim himself operated as a small publisher for a while, publishing comics other than *Cerebus* through Aardvark-Vanaheim. One of the things leading to the Northhampton Summit and Creator's Bill of Rights in 1988 was Diamond Distributors refusing to distribute the *Puma Blues* trade paperback collections (published by A-V) in revenge for Sim selling his *Cerebus* phonebooks directly to readers.

YCT me (pg 114) RE creating a combined edition of *Monsterhearts* ⟹ The thing I contemplate is rewriting the Basic Moves reference sheet to have the real triggers for the moves, instead of just repeating the move names. This would involve figuring out what the real triggers are for *Turn Someone On*, *Shut Someone Down*, and *Keep Your Cool*, though.

YCT me (pg 115) RE your suspicion that Vincent Baker "has a distaste for dicking around with definition" ⟹ There are two ways of dealing with definitions. (Or maybe more than two. But there are two that I'm interested in.) The one used in science and math is one which dates back to Plato, and is based on strict definitions. It focuses attention on the edges of categories, to establish definitively whether something is, or is not, in the category.

The other comes from Ludwig Wittgenstein, who argued (in his *Philosophical Investigations*) that categories have *Familienähnlichkeit*, or "family resemblances" — they overlap, without having strict boundaries. Wittgenstein actually used games as an example of this! This way of looking at things leads one to look at the center of a category, like looking at a set of overlapping ellipses in a Venn diagram to find the place where the greatest number overlap.

I think Ron Edwards likes edge-based definitions, and Vincent Baker prefers center-based.

YCT Dale Meier (pg 115) RE Lee Gold's "Golems and Gematria" ⟹ That article is mostly good, but her interpretation of Exodus 19:6 — that all Jewish *D&D* characters should be treated as Clerics — is ridiculous.

Myles Corcoran

RE Mark Mouseman (pg 122) ⟹ What's the significance of a surname ending in "-man" in a culture of mice?

YCT me (pgs 126–127) RE Niven's Puppeteers ⟹ The Puppeteers don't have unfathomable *motivations* — they're consistently motivated by cowardice. It's their *methods* that are often confusing and opaque, because they avoid direct confrontation.

Brian Rogers

YCT Patrick Riley (pg 141) RE the person who said random powers are abusing the players ⟹ I saw someone in an online RPG forum argue that any player-vs-player rolling was a form of abuse, and forbidden at their table, and when I asked about players who wanted a bit of p-v-p action, they insisted that nope, it's *inherently* abusive, *always*, no matter what the players say. Some people have unprocessed trauma.

YCT John Redden (pg 141) RE NK Jemisin's series being derailed by COVID ⟹ A similar thing happened to Samuel Delany. His 1984 science fiction novel *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* was originally supposed to have a sequel, *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*, which got derailed by the AIDS epidemic.

YCT me (pg 142) RE supers gaming, and Green Lantern ⟹ *Icons* has a supplement — *ION Guard* — that's really obviously the Green Lantern Corps with the serial numbers filed off. Interstellar space cops from a variety of species, distinctive uniforms, a super-duper highly flexible device (a golden glove called the ION Fist), and even a four-line rhyming oath in iambic tetrameter.

Jim Vassilakos

RE long discussion of torture (pgs 151–154) ⟹ It's interesting that Lisa and Josh have been quoting a former former military interrogator friend of ours — Terry Karney, who's married to a former

roommate of mine — saying that torture doesn't work, but also, Lisa and I have cited (*E&A* #15, pg 148) former Navy intelligence member Jim Macdonald (a former co-blogger of mine) on the four ways of breaking unbreakable cyphers, one of which ("rubber-hose cryptanalysis") is torture.

YCT Patrick Riley (pg 155) RE primal chaos ⟹ The example that comes to my mind is Steven Brust's *Jhereg*. At one point the protagonist, paralyzed by an enemy sorceress, uses "pre-Empire sorcery" (that is, the direct manipulation of primal chaos) to kill her, and is then stuck, still paralyzed, watching a poll of chaos goo expand towards him, realizing that he has no idea how to control it. Fortunately, a friend who does know how to control it shows up to do so before it expands to destroy the city.

Patrick Zoch

RE boardgames (pgs 163–175) ⟹ I own a copy of *New Bedford* (pg 166), but have only played it once, about a decade ago. It was a four-person game, I think we didn't like it much, and one of the players spilled soda on my copy. I'd backed the game on Kickstarter, mostly because I'd bought other games from the same company; I have a weakness for games with attractive bits to them. It came with a game called *Nantucket*, a small game that fits in your pocket; you take some loose change and flip or arrange to whale, build the town, or to hock it.

That *Love Letter: Batman* game (pgs 166–167) looks like the art was taken from the comics, rather than being newly commissioned for the game.

I've got *Oh My Goods!*, which I've played in solo mode a few times, but not with other players. I've also got the *Longsdale in Revolt* expansion, which turns the game into a story-like campaign, but I don't think I've played it.

Patrick Riley

RE character creation for your supers game (pg 180) ⟹ I notice that you split the vote on the matter of who creates the characters by combining the player-creates option with *when* the character is created. You got 4 votes for player-creation, and only 3 for GM-creation.

A fairer way of doing this would be to split it into two questions: Who makes the characters, and then (if it's players), when are they made?

Joshua Kronengold

YCT me (pg 204) RE *Hit!* ⟹ No, *Hit!* doesn't seem to have any standing pat rule. There are a bunch of special class abilities that let you tweak the rules a bit.

RE the Titan 2 Elite Pro (pg 204) ⟹ The gesture support on the keyboard — the fact that you can swipe across the keys to get touchpad behavior — looks really cool. I wonder what features there are to cover up the keyboard and keep it from getting activated in your pocket.

As terrible as phone keyboards are, my solution is to either not type long things on my phone (or tablet), or to tote along a Bluetooth keyboard of some kind.

My Keychron C2 mechanical keyboard is starting to skip key presses, and I don't know if I need to get a new one (I would totally buy a Matias Tactile Pro if they upgraded the USB ports to Type C) or just get a can of compressed air and blast the cruft out of it.

YCT me (pg 204) RE *PbtA* and "a simple matter of descent" ⟹ Well, but we don't commonly use system-based game names to indicate descent. *GURPS* and *Champions* both descend from *The Fantasy Trip*, but we don't call them "*Fantasy Trip* games."

Also, as a matter of common usage, most people seem to use "Powered by the Apocalypse" to mean "has mechanics something like *Apocalypse World*." Including the Bakers! Check out the "Powered by the Apocalypse" section in *Apocalypse World* 2e, pages 278–281. It's all about using *Apocalypse World*-style mechanics in different settings!

Bryant Durrell

YCT Brian Misiaszek (pg 217) RE Montréal ⟹ On my first trip to Montréal, for the 2009 Worldcon, I took some time out to wander around and look at Habitat 67 from a short distance. Maybe I should splurge for the guided tour if I go up again.



ATLANTIS FOR NOW #6

for Ever & Anon #18

Gabriel Roark
Rancho Cordova, CA
gabrielroark@gmail.com

Primary Game System Keywords: Advanced D&D (1e)
Secondary Game System Keywords: The Arduin Grimoire, The Arcanum, Basic/Expert (B/X) D&D, OD&D

Greetings, all. Atlantis for Now is a commentzine thish. I have had too many demands on my time the last month to manage any further review of The Arduin Portal to Adventure, after-action reports, or IgTheme contributions. I also have a couple days of fieldwork & tribal consultation coming up at the end of the week, so it is meet for me to keep this contribution short. I think I figured out my iPad reading issue, so I should be able to read nextish more expeditiously, which should engender a robust zine.

SO WHAT? COMMENTS ON E&A #17

- "Small but Brave" (M. Niezgoda)
- In the Hall of Stone (v2.0) (Patrick Brady)
- Reddened Stars No. 16 (John Redden)
- Age of Menace 254 (Brian C. Misiaszek)
- The Phoenix Nest (Michael Cule)
- Going to Be Ad-Libbed #15 (Avram Grumer)
- Overlord's Annals Vol. 5, Issue 1 (Attronarch)
- Travelling Light No. 5 (Timothy Collinson)
- Port Omaha Beacon #4 (Dale Meier)
- An Unlooked for Zine #16 (Lisa Padol)
- Twisting the Rope #17 (Myles Corcoran)
- Denizens of the Library #16 (Brian Rogers)
- Computocracy: Prelude to the Transition (Jim Vassilakos)
- Quasipseudoludognostication #17 (Patrick Riley)
- Accidental Recall #16 (Joshua Kronengold)
- Ronin Engineer (Jim Eckman)

"Small but Brave" (M. Niezgoda): Great cover art! You rendered the frog warrior with a lot of personality.

In the Hall of Stone (v2.0) (Patrick Brady): Thank you for the compliment, Patrick. Your own layout inspired me to dress my zine up a bit.

Reddened Stars No. 16 (John Redden): What kind of whiskey is in the cabinet? Currently, I have The Presidential Dram (a single-barrel, barrel proof straight rye), McAfee Brothers Benchmark Extra Strong (full proof straight bourbon), Jack Ryan 12 Year Single Malt, & Redbreast 12 Year Cask Strength (Irish single pot still & my favorite of the bunch). As for the empties in the cabinet, they are mostly Irish whiskeys, being my favorite category. Scotch follows closely, then various American whiskeys (bourbon, rye, & Tennessee), and a couple of Canadian whiskeys. I like to display some of the more attractive or unusual bottles & generally keep empties around until I catalog the bottle. At that point, it's a rinse & recycle bin for the bottles.

Age of Menace 254 (Brian C. Misiaszek): Commiserations on the prohibitive postage from the USA to Canada, to say nothing of undelivered Kickstarter purchases. My own experiences with crowdfunded RPG projects have been through Kickstarter & BackerKit. I've backed three of Emperors Choice Games & Miniatures Company's Kickstarter projects. I had minor apprehension about backing my first Empcho project because the company had been somewhat moribund for a few years. Some gamers whose judgement I trust assured me that if Empcho was ramping back up, the company would be good for it. Indeed, Empcho exceeded my expectations each time. BackerKit is the crowdfunding platform of choice for the Melsonian Arts Council. I believe that I have backed two of their projects, one of which was delivered to spec & for decent postage considering its origination in England. I also am a subscriber to Melsonia's games, which gets me paper copies of all new releases plus PDFs (including updates) that I may download each month. I selectively back Melsonian projects if there are stretch rewards that I want; subscribers receive the core book or product in all releases but not the extras unless one backs it. I've been happy with both experiences.

The Phoenix Nest (Michael Cule): Fascinating concept for Aegis's development. In preparing the city map, did you or Martin take inspiration from Frank Herbert's map in *Dune*? This presentation immediately called Herbert's map to mind.

Going to Be Ad-Libbed #15 (Avram Grumer): Thank you for bringing *Playtest Material* to our attention! Likewise, the lead on cheap physical games at Lulu.com. I bought a couple of print volumes from Lulu a long time ago & the prices were reasonable. Glad to know that is still the case. *Worlds to Come* sounds exciting & innovative. Postscript one day later: I downloaded the first issue of *Playtest Material* & gave it a skim. I think it is going to be an engrossing read.

Overlord's Annals Vol. 5, Issue 1 (Attronarch): RE Session 127: Wow, the elves carried out the dwarf but left the human cleric's body behind? That wouldn't have anything to do with Thorm being level 2, would it? *snicker* About Session 128: Centuria went up a level, huzzah!

Travelling Light No. 5 (Timothy Collinson): Felicitations on finding players & having a plan should your endurance falter (but may it never do so on game day!). I look forward to what refereeing a campaign does for your contributions here. Is *The Journal of Far*

Future Research your invention? Regardless, you concocted some cool adventure seeds from *TJoFFR*.

RYCTM on the "barest characterization…," please use with my compliments! The line was inspired by one of my favorite lyricists, Stephen Malkmus, deft at wordplay & evocative phrases like, "This all went down not far away/Just a weak stone's throw from Sheepshead Bay" (from "Hopscotch Willie," by Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks, 2008). "Weak stone's throw" is terrific in that it sounds concrete (heh) but is such a subjective measure that almost any listener can conclude, "That's actually quite nearby."

Port Omaha Beacon #4 (Dale Meier): Your article, "Diplomacy in the Dungeon" is a capable treatment of the subject. Most of the points that you raised came up in our November 15th session (Session 50) of the Temple of Elemental Evil campaign (Advanced D&D 1e). We started the session after the PCs (aka, The Frog Leg Gang) trounced a guard of ten bugbears so decisively that the three survivors surrendered before they also succumbed to the Frogger's fury. Ordinarily, many PCs would treat bugbears just as you posited in your zine: "They are evil monsters—let's kill them." Also apropos of your observations, bugbears are sentient humanoids & these ones gave themselves up to the PCs' mercy. These adventurers have numerous good-aligned members, including a couple lawful good type, one of which is a paladin, no less. The charismatic PC magic-user speaks bugbear & was able to communicate directly with them. The party eked some solid (as it happens) intel on the layout of the dungeon level, learning that it is home to three factions (there are more, actually). The Froggers compelled the bugbears to guide them to their faction's fane, the Air Temple. There, the PCs get into some trouble & I played the bugbears for comic effect, heaping verbal abuse whenever a PC messed up something or got hurt. The party's druid, selectively conferring with other party members, surreptitiously hired the bugbears to help attack the Fire Temple faction. Subterfuge was & is necessary for this because the paladin would not knowingly hire & work with evil beings. As these things go, this series of interactions was typical of thinking players' work, but I think all agreed that having the bugbears around was far more interesting than merely butchering them for their filthy lucre. One of the *players* liked the bugbears so much that he wanted to control them.

RYCT on my zine's lack of close-up photos of the Arduin minis, have a look at page 111 of E&A #13; my zine has a photo of a Arduinian wizard in it. I will get around to more pictures & commentary on the minis in a future issue, worry not!

Regarding your personal remarks, a wise person surrounds themselves with effective support systems & soberly evaluates their capabilities. Glad to see that you do both! Thanks also for the good words on the knee injury. Here we are months after the incident & I am still able to skate without discomfort.

An Unlooked for Zine #16 (Lisa Padol): You know, Celeste recently talks about working out skating elements in her sleep. You're onto something with that subconscious business. You & Joshua look like you were having fun in the "It's a Me, Murder" larp.

Twisting the Rope #17 (Myles Corcoran): RYCT on The Arduin Portal to Adventure, this offering is what a great Kickstarter project should be. It doesn't feel like I simply bought

some book or even box set. It feels like a reward, not a mere transaction. Lots of things to "paw through" helps & I know that the gaming materials will be useful at my gaming table. Experience, art, utility, & surprise. Yeah, it's a good 'un!

Thanks for explaining Franzis Corbolini's identity.

Noting that the *Playtest Material* journal (see Avram's zine lastish) is published in Dublin.

Denizens of the Library #16 (Brian Rogers): Yes, AD&D combat is fiddly. I have a feeling that it could make lots more, slightly less fiddly, sense if it had been described as a coherent whole. I think that Gygax wrote AD&D as a continuum & advancement of Original D&D concepts (including the supplements). Crucially & detrimentally for the user, Gygax seems also to have assumed that they had working knowledge of the legacy system. RYCTM on leveling up, yes! I have leveled up to Freestyle None (Freestyle 1 with no skill ribbons yet).

About your anxiety about your multi-classed daughter's academic career in history/archaeology/museums, I hope it does not extend to her post-university career. Especially if she earns a degree in anthropology & takes advantage of fieldwork opportunities (I think she has already, if I remember your zines aright), she will have no shortage of career opportunities. I am an anthropologist (B.A. and M.A.), picked up my first professional gig while still an undergrad & kept that job for about 13 years before leaving the private sector for similar work in state government. I know economies & job markets are always changing; nevertheless, I rate her prospects as good. The fine folks of E&A are rooting for her.

Computocracy: Prelude to the Transition (Jim Vassilakos): About *RPG Review*, for some reason, I always thought that this was a vehicle for torrents, not a journal or discussion zine. Excellent! Maybe I'm a dope, but it seems as though your URLs for *RPG Review* #21 lead back to E&A #17.

Thanks for the link to your contribution to A&E #508. Downloaded with interest! I also appreciate the name-drop & capsule comparison of the *hold person* spell across AD&D, Basic/Expert D&D (Tom Moldvay), & *THE ARCANUM* (for the win). I've always dug The Arcanum.

RYCTM on Combat Round Duration & Detail, I surely will inflict, er, treat y'all to a comparison of Arduin & AD&D combat in the future, replete with characterization. I was a younger dude when I submitted Arduin after-action reports to A&E…I will aspire to excellence. Play the long game, though; we have a lot of Temple of Elemental Evil to get through!

I missed the TTRPG Wiki in Dylan's last zine somehow. So glad that you remarked on it, Jim—and big thanks to Dylan for referencing it in E&A #16.

Quasipseudoludognostication #17 (Patrick Riley): RYCTM about crediting artists in RPG works, the fault might be mine; I wrote lastish mainly late at night, when Celeste was asleep. I didn't want to turn on a light to thoroughly examine the physical copies for proper attributions & mostly relied on the digital versions (which do not include the box,

natch). I will attempt to fill this gap nextish. It is unlike Empcho to drop the ball in this way.

Accidental Recall #16 (Joshua Kronengold): Hop back on the ice? I see what you did there! I have been careful to remove my blade guards, believe you me! We did not understand all those AD&D rules in the late 80s either.

Ronin Engineer (Jim Eckman): Thank you for fleshing out Traveller's barest characterizations of legal system traits. With adjustments, your Law extract would be useful for many settings.

Ronin Engineer for Ever & Anon #18

by Jim Eckman,
Mountain View, CA
alarum@roninengineer.com

The Wanderer Plan → Ruins, Rebels and Robots? + Traveller extension?

Wanderer can be broken up into several parts:

- A melee system based loosely after the one in Bushido, six attributes that range from 1-40. For an average human the score in each is 10. Players are usually given 95 attribute points to spend as they wish. One can create a speed demon that moves fast and has 3 attacks, the character would be a bit dim, weak and sickly. Or create a tank, superbrain, etc. Its a very crunchy system, figures and battlemats are required for resolving combat for all but he simplest conflicts.
- Do we need another combat system? Maybe, this system is a bit complex for SF for normal humans, but thinking it might be just the thing for Murderbot!
- A goodies list that's huge, a Sears and Roebuck of space! One vendor offered to purchase it back in the day. Needs some serious formatting, indexing, etc.
- A skill resolution system, basic skill scores range from 0 to 100, its compatible with Call of Cthulhu and Runequest. We did use a Runequest variant as a melee system initially, I forgot why we dropped that idea. This game allows for many methods of learning skills, researching and tasks.
- A world creation system that was far more detailed at the time than the other SFTTRPGs at that time.

IRL

Working on Wanderer, needs serious checking, my friend's approach to spelling was casual at best. I also purchased a laser printer, I really need paper and a red pen for serious editing.

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 Wanderer Extract

I have to go over the political systems and see if any are missing or don't make sense, also looks like there are some more elaborate planet generation systems in the later Traveller editions I should take a look at.

IgTheme Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever!

The dice roll that made a wallflower player the party leader for my epic Bushido game to the horror of the power gamers that normally fought over that role.

Reactions to Issue #17

In the Hall of Stone – Patrick Brady – A great ramble on adapting Sherlock and respecting your villains. Also Moriarty was Doyle's excuse for killing Sherlock, a character he had grown to hate, which there was so much uproar over that he was forced to bring him back. Doyle's other works are largely forgotten, his science fiction is hopelessly Victorian.

Reddened Stars #16 – John Redden – Love the MAIS campaign, a reminder that a society's legal system is much more than a simple number.

Age of Menace #254 – Brian Christopher Misiaszek – Horrors of the Mazorra, awesome as usual.

Going to be Ad-Libbed #15 – Avram Grumer – Interplanetary romance LOL.

Travelling Light #5 – Timothy Collinson – Re: Traveller, I may need to buy a few more books!

Firedrake's Hoard #15 – Roger Bell West – Fixing up Traveller with GURPS is a decent approach. I'm not a fan of the Traveller universe so I'd probably us one of the GURPS space modules.

Port Omaha Beacon #4 – Dale Meier – One nice campaign. Re: Issues with game stores, sadly we lost the really local store during COVID.

An Unlooked For Zine #16 – Lisa Padol – Your book list is impressive, while I've read most of them, there's a goodly amount of them I've never heard of. Some I haven't reread since the 80s and may not have aged well. As for too many books, I have the tools to make bookcases!

Computocracy: Prelude to the Transition – Jim Vassilakos – The rise of intelligent machines and slavery would make a great campaign. Re: Traveller Law Levels, sadly the modern example that we have is the states with the least gun restrictions seem to be hellbent on oppressing minorities, restricting medical care to women, etc.

Attacks of Opportunity #16 – Dylan Capel – That's some interesting gaming.

Everyone else – RAEBNC

Next issue

Hopefully more original gaming material along with a plan to reorganize Wanderer.



Alien Village – Watercolor on ricepaper

Overlord's Annals

Attronarch, The Exalted Overlord of Uncontested Vastlands

Volume 5 · Issue 12 · December 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 four session reports from the ***Conquering the Barbarian Altanis*** Dungeons & Dragons campaign.

Siege of the Cedarwade Keep.

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

Text copyright © Attronarch, 2026.

Images by Attronarch, drawn with TikZ.

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

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 129

Adventurers

***Ambros**, cleric level 6*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Balarus**, fighter level 4*. An ex-woodsman, quite a crackshot with his bow.

***Bragi Twinefinger**, hobbit level 2*. A stout strong hobbit. As a devotee of the Great Tailor he is always smartly dressed (under his armour) and overly fond of multiple breakfasts.

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

***Foxglove**, thief level 5*. A willowy human, long hair ties in a ponytail, looks a bit dangerous and dainty at the same time.

***Ignaeus**, elf level 4*. A slightly weathered looking elf with dull blonde hair and chiselled features. Seeks wealth and knowledge.

***Thorm**, dwarf level 2*. Ashen hair, beard, and eyes. Left his own clan due to financial trouble.

Dewsnap 1st, Airday

"What is the meaning of this?!" young Lord Kyle yelled at Ambros and his retinue.

Ambros was flanked by two heroes—Dalkanarion and Balarus respectively—as well as master dwarf Thorm. Behind them an army of holy warriors on a crusade.

By end of Gloomfrost some two hundred seasoned soldiers accompanied by another hundred non-combatants—families of the most dedicated—arrived at Hara. They carried banners sporting head of a bearded man—holy symbol of Forseti—and have arrived to serve the new High Priest, Ambros Ap Mortain.

Their travel was long and difficult. They left their homes forever, a sacrifice for the great god of peace.

Knight Marlon val Brookwood, a minor noble, led a squadron of heavy horsemen. Jace, a tall woman with long blonde hair tied in a braided pony-tail, led a squadron of mounted crossbowmen. Men tremble in her presence. Vicar Arlon, led a throng of heavy footmen. These soldiers are incredibly brave and dedicated to their cause. All pledged their allegiance to Ambros, the Justice Supreme of Hara. And they were very, very enthusiastic about peace and justice.

Expensive too.

Eager to find a reliable source of income for his new personal army, Ambros remembered young Lord Kyle and his plea to help him retake Cedarwade keep. He also carried a bloodied note recovered from Graylock's lair, which had Kyle's signature on it.

Justice Supreme was about to find out if Kyle had been smuggling goods past Hara. That would be most unfortunate for the young lord.

"We are here to reclaim the Cedarwade keep!"

"Is that so?! Then I invite you to my humble home!"

Soldiers erected a sizeable tent-camp just north of Midway, while Ambros, Ignaeus, Balarus, Dalkanarion, Thorm, Marlon, and Arlon went to lord's manor.

Prior to setting out, Ambros spent weeks rummaging through temple records. Many were in poor shape, making it difficult to make out the details. There were at least seven different organisation systems, hence it was a huge pain to reference and cross-reference reports.

Three most recent records Ambros was able to find about Lord Kyle—and most readable because they were the only intact ones—had shown that Kyle family had accrued great debt with Imrael family. In fact, the latest document concludes that Kyle had refused to hand over his estate and fief to Imrael, as well as refused to show up in Hara at the Temple for the hearing. Therefore, Imrael was allowed to take what he was owed by force.

Foxglove did an investigation of his own as well, hanging out at all the usual places. He learned that Midway Red is the most valuable wine in the region. Historically, its shipments have often been raided and then smuggled for great profit.

Kyle family owns the vineyards close to Midway and oversees the production. Kyle Senior died in one of the raiding ambushes, opting to sink the barges with wine instead of handing them over. His young son, whom had inherited the manor and fief, had been nothing but trouble for thieves and smugglers. Luckily, he is too weak and commands virtually no force, so the business flows better than ever.

The dinner began cordial and pleasant. Lord Kyle was curious as ever. Dalkanarion regaled him with his adventuring tales. Balarus sat in silence, bemused. Nervous in the presence of such awesome warriors, young lord had a drink too much, and was taken completely unaware when Ambros raised his concerns.

"Don't speak of justice to me! I have suffered nothing but injustice and indignity at your temple!" Kyle Junior spoke with liquid courage. Dalkanarion's snarl and Ambros's cold gaze calmed him in a moment. Everything took a much darker turn as Ambros pressed on with his interrogation.

"I can't do what you are asking of me! You are handing me the rope to hang myself with!" young lord pleaded as adventurers goaded him to stop paying protection money to Hara and pay them instead. They wanted to know how much does he have, how much can he pay them, they wanted to know it all.

But when Ambros took out the bloodied note all fell silent. Lord Kyle went pale as a ghost. When High Priest passed him the note, young man cupped his face and broke into tears. "Come now young lord, this is very unlordy of you. What will your men think?" Dalkanarion attempted to console him.

Painfully aware of his pathetic position, Lord Kyle did the best he could. He answered all the questions, allowed adventurers entry into the manor library, and finally, reached an agreement that they were happy with.

"Secure my lands. Reclaim my keep. Clear my name. In return, I will grant land to your holy soldiers. Ambros, I will erect a temple to Forseti. Dalkanarion, I will name you castellan of Cedarwade keep. Balarus, I will grant you 600 acres to raise a manor of your own. Thorm, I will appoint you as Overseer of a mine."

The land in question was east of Hara, across the river, and south-east of Castle of the Wode. It is rich, fertile soil. It is also dangerous land, infested with beasts, wildlife, and all kinds of scum. Nothing that worried this brave band—they were already dreaming of a kingdom of their own.

Dewsnap 2nd, Waterday

Ambros and his army reached Cedarwade an hour or so before the nightfall. It was the last month of winter and days were still short. Ignaeus volunteered to scout the keep as night fell. Thorm and Dalkanarion joined him. The trio rode as far as the trees provided cover.

There she stood, a rectangular little fort with a tower on each corner and broken gatehouse. No signs of life were visible. Ignaeus dismounted and crawled over the clearance. Dalkanarion and Thorm remained mounted at the edge of woods, watching the walls closely. Elf disappeared from their sight, much due to lack of sunlight as well as his crawling skills.

Ignaeus proceeded on his belly, inching towards the south-east fort tower. Then he felt the land under him give in, and he tumbled into a ten feet deep ditch.

Looking left and right revealed a long ditch, covered with tarps and soil. Strong enough to withstand some weight, but would immediately give in under a mass of armed soldiers.

"Look!" Thorm pointed alarmingly at a group of figures exiting the fort. There was six of them, humanoid, and with long shafted weapons. They approached the hole created by Ignaeus. The elf, oblivious to what is happening above, continued exploring the ditch.

Dalkanarion and Thorm fired at the figures, missing. Then they rode towards where they believed Ignaeus should be, yelling. Dalkanarion led Ignaeus's horse by the reins. The figures retreated into the keep.

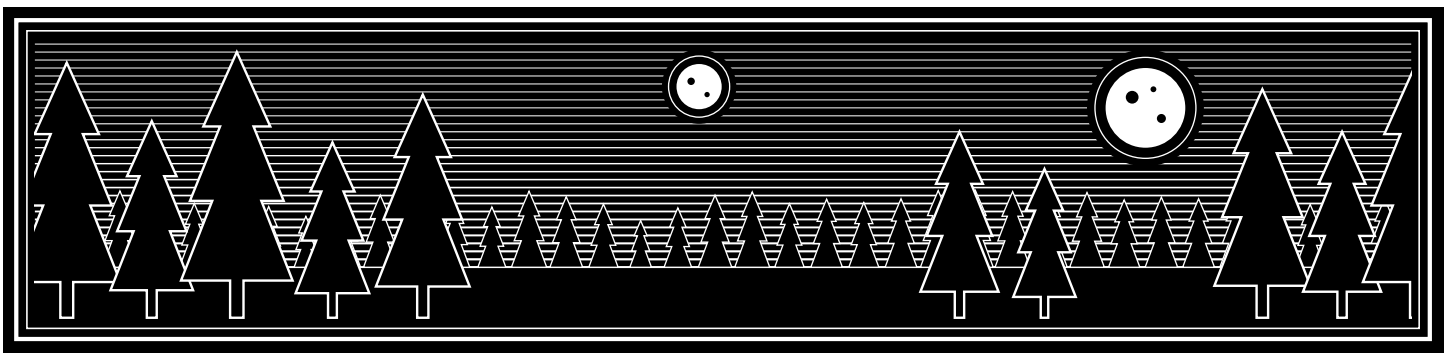
Upon hearing the commotion above, the elf attempted to climb up the ditch. Alas! He lost footing and fell down! A volley of arrows whooshed past two brave warriors above. Their horses were wounded. Success! Ignaeus climbed up! Tragedy! Dalkanarion flying through the air, his horse slain!

"Go! Run for the trees!"

The trio fled, surviving several volleys.

"The keep was not abandoned. It was occupied, and its defenders were ready for war…" Thorm informed Ambros and others.

A long night was ahead of them.



Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 130

Adventurers

***Ambros**, cleric level 6*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Beorg the Gravedigger**, fighter level 3*. Inspired to adventure after burying several adventurers.

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

***Foxglove**, thief level 5*. A willowy human, long hair ties in a ponytail, looks a bit dangerous and dainty at the same time.

***Ignaeus**, elf level 4*. A slightly weathered looking elf with dull blonde hair and chiselled features. Seeks wealth and knowledge.

***Tarkus the Promising**, cleric level 4*. Follower of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

***Thorm**, dwarf level 2*. Ashen hair, beard, and eyes. Left his own clan due to financial trouble.

Dewsnap 3rd, Earthday

High Priest of Forseti watched as his army marched towards Cedarwade keep. Knight Marlon val Brookwood led the charge with his five most trusted warriors. Tarkus accompanied them, providing blessings. Marlon led the charge on foot, after being convinced to do so by Ambros. "He must be testing my faith and devotion." Marlon thought to himself.

Behind Marlon marched four squads of heavy footmen, led by Dalkanarion, Ignaeus, Beorg, and Thorm respectively. Jace, stone-cold leader of mounted crossbowmen, led six lances. Three were with her, while other three approached the keep from south. She rejected Ambros's advice to dismount.

"You do realise you are a bigger target when on horse?" Ambros implored in frustration.

"Am I now? Observe." Jace replied.

Vicar Arlon led two squads of heavy footmen, while four squads followed Ambros himself. Three squads and a lance of heavy horsemen were left behind to guard the camp. Four lances of heavy horsemen were ordered to wait to the east and west of the keep—in order to clean up any stragglers or fleeing monsters.

Beastmen holding the keep were prepared. So much was confirmed by Thorm whom had drunk the potion of gaseous form in order to scout the fortification. Two hobgoblins were stationed at each of the four towers, armed with heavy crossbows. Carts filled with oil-soaked rags blocked the gatehouse, while half dozen of hobgoblins laid in ambush, prepared to set the attackers on fire.

In the very first missile exchange Jace's units eliminated half of the defenders on towers. Hobgoblins missed again, and again. Ambros prayed and then fell into deep concentration. A great swarm of insects gathered on the castle wall, forcing those caught in it to flee for their life.

Mounted crossbowmen rained hell upon the keep, killing all beastmen stupid enough to poke their ugly faces over the crenelations.

"Charge! Onwards!" Marlon roared. Protected by constant barrage from the crossbowmen, as well as High Priest's insect swarm, heavy footmen reached the gatehouse without any casualties whatsoever. They rolled the carts out of the way and spilled into the courtyard, ready for some violence.

"Where are they? Show yourself!" Marlon roared in frustration.

Squads split and begun going through the keep. Dalkanarion broke into the stables, where he dispatched large gelatinous cube. Beorg led a squad up the gatehouse and then cleaned each of the towers. Ignaeus and his squad swept the barracks—now devoid of life, but full of filth left behind by its foul inhabitants. Thorm led a squad straight into the chamber where he had seen a leader of these monsters. There they ransacked the room—and dwarf found out a possible secret door.

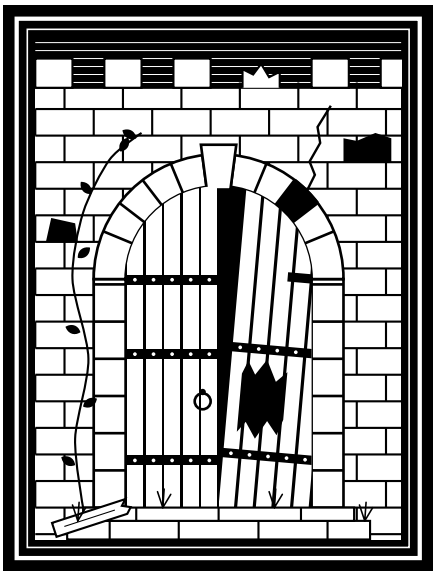
"Die in the name of LAW!"

Tarkus heard Marlon yelling. They had just entered the largest building in the keep—mess hall by all accounts. Cleric rushed west, after Marlon, only to find him wipe his bloodied sword after slaying four pathetic creatures.

"These are no hobgoblins. Some slave servants. Goblins maybe?"

Dalkanarion and his squad entered the mess hall. Mighty warrior stared at the staircase leading down, into the dungeon. Adventurers readied themselves for the descent.

Have the defenders truly fled? Or is the real battle about to begin?



Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 131

Adventurers

***Ambros**, cleric level 6*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Beorg the Gravedigger**, fighter level 3*. Inspired to adventure after burying several adventurers.

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

***Foxglove**, thief level 5*. A willowy human, long hair ties in a ponytail, looks a bit dangerous and dainty at the same time.

***Ignaeus**, elf level 4*. A slightly weathered looking elf with dull blonde hair and chiselled features. Seeks wealth and knowledge.

***Tarkus the Promising**, cleric level 4*. Follower of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

***Thorm**, dwarf level 2*. Ashen hair, beard, and eyes. Left his own clan due to financial trouble.

Dewsnap 3rd, Earthday

"Aha!" Thorm found a secret chamber hiden behind a bookshelf in the commander's quarters. The chamber itself was barren. Worried that monstrous keep defenders might have retreated only to return through some secret pathway, Thorm and adventurers scoured the room.

Investigation paid off, for they found two more secret doors. One-way doors to the east led straight out of the keep. Smaller, rectangular doors to the north led into ten feet long crawlspace. That, in turn, opened up into a ten feet wide chamber, completely bereft of anything.

Perplexed, adventurers crawled over every inch, finding nothing. But keen-eyed Thorm spotted that torch-light smoke was flowing weirdly. There was something invisible floating high in the air!

Too high to reach, the adventurers assembled a mighty human-elven-dwarven pyramid. Buff Dalkanarion stood on a short stool. Thorm held the stool by the legs—to provide much needed stability—while Ignaeus climbed on the fighter's shoulders. Tarkus stood to the side, praying vigorously to Bachontoi.

These shenanigans lasted for quite some time. Payoff? There was something rectangular and metal levitating close to the ceiling. It was immovable and felt like a chest to Ignaeus, but was otherwise a mystery.

"Perhaps we should return to this later, after we have secured the keep."

Proposal most genius indeed.

"High Priest!" Marlon greeted Ambros as he had marched into the keep courtyard. "Beastmen have fled, most likely into the dungeon below. I wanted to take men down, but your friends asked us to wait."

Adventurers updated Ambros on what they had found in the keep.

"It is time to strike!"

Dalkanarion, Tarkus, Beorg, Ignaeus, Thorm, Foxglove, and a squad of nine heavy footmen were first to descend. The stairs were narrow, allowing for a single file marching order only. They turned right four times until they opened up in a ten feet wide corridor.

Dalkanarion and Thorm were rewarded by a hail of bolts. They charged forth into the darkness, supported by Tarkus and Ignaeus. Sounds of crossbows hitting the ground echoed, as a group of hobgoblins counter-charged.

Ignaeus and Beorg were behind, just at the stairs' landing. They were flanked by doors, one to the left and one to the right. Both swung open, and a mass of hobgoblins tried to swarm the corridor, aiming to attack adventurers from both sides.

Ensuing skirmish was brutal. Dalkanarion roared and swung the gigantic Oathkeeper, slaying beastmen left and right.

"Freeze! Freeze!" Ignaeus yelled at various groups. Few were able to resist his magical sword, and were indeed frozen in place. Soldiers poured down the stairs, fighting ferociously.

Beastmen corpses littered the corridor—but survivors were relentless. They fought for their life bitterly. Ambushing groups retreated and shut the doors behind them. Group to the left hammered some spikes to make the doors more difficult to open, while the group to the right left the doors unsecured. Beorg and Foxglove, supported by four heavy footmen, pursued the right group.

An impressive specimen approached Dalkanarion. Grecian fighter bellowed his challenge. Hobgoblin leader accepted it gleefully.

"Cheater!" the young fighter yelled as painful convulsions shook his whole being. Thorm could hear sinister chanting up ahead in the darkness. Dalkanarion suffered once again.

Pursuing soldiers met their doom, not at the hands of wounded hobgoblins, but in the jaws of feral giant weasels. Foxglove was half-chewn himself, and would have probably died had it not been for Beorg. Pursuers now fought on the defensive, falling backwards under brutal onslaught of furry beasts. They felled two, but one was still gnawing at them. Wounded hobgoblins rallied and charged.

"Where are you?!" Dalkanarion roared as impenetrable darkness befell his eyes. He could not see anymore!

"Oh, I thought you would heal me. . . " Thorm whispered sadly as Tarkus laid his hands on the warrior instead. Then he froze in place. Two hobgoblins grabbed Thorm and dragged him into darkness.

"Sirs, we should go!" one of the few surviving soldiers yelled.

Tarkus grabbed Dalkanarion by hand and dragged him to stairs. Ignaeus stood there, shooting, waiting for the last adventurers to fall back. Roars and cries echoed as hobgoblins rallied and charged the survivors from all sides.

Foxglove, Beorg, and two heavy footmen, were completely surrounded. How long will they last, wounded and outnumbered? Ignaeus watched, his magical sword completely expired. Tarkus dragged Dalkanarion up the stairs, the latter full of fighting spirit but denied by magical darkness, yelling for Ambros to come down.

Purging evil and chaos comes at a price. Often a high one.

Is the high priest ready to pay it?

Conquering the Barbarian Altanis: Session 132

Adventurers

***Ambros**, cleric level 6*. Follower of Aniu, Lord of Time.

***Beorg the Gravedigger**, fighter level 3*. Inspired to adventure after burying several adventurers.

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

***Foxglove**, thief level 5*. A willowy human, long hair ties in a ponytail, looks a bit dangerous and dainty at the same time.

***Ignaeus**, elf level 4*. A slightly weathered looking elf with dull blonde hair and chiselled features. Seeks wealth and knowledge.

***Tarkus the Promising**, cleric level 4*. Follower of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

***Thorm**, dwarf level 2*. Ashen hair, beard, and eyes. Left his own clan due to financial trouble.

Dewsnap 3rd, Earthday

Ignaeus gripped his magical scimitar. He could hear yells and heavy thuds behind him. Reinforcements would come any moment now. But would they come fast enough?

Having driven the mighty Dalkanarion back, the hobgoblins rallied and launched a counter-assault. By now they have slain the whole vanguard and surrounded Foxglove and Beorg.

The elf charged into the fray, closing the gap behind Beorg. Surrounded, adventurers fought desperately, dodging and parrying. Foxglove managed to retreat, badly injured, a final gift from Beorg. The gravedigger was soon slain. "I hope to be raised as an angry undead." he uttered. Ignaeus killed with surgical precision.

"For Athena!" Dalkanarion bellowed, running down the stairs. Tarkus was right behind him. Marlon and Ambros followed. Behind them were five knights, and then forty heavy footmen. But the narrow staircase meant they could join one by one—while hobgoblins fought in numbers, holding a superior tactical position.

A particularly ugly specimen adorned with Chaos star duelled with Ignaeus. They traded several blows. Suddenly the beastman pulled a dirty vial and poured some vile chunky liquid down its throat. Its muscles bulged, breaking the chain shirt. The elf panicked for a moment, but composed himself in time. He launched a desperate jab, smashing through the monster's defences, driving the scimitar right through the bottle and throat.

Hobgoblin leader went toe to toe with unstoppable Dalkanarion. The two traded blows, but without victor. Adventurers, now in numbers and backed up, slowly regained control. The battle was desperate, fought inch by inch. Both sides stumbled over the corpses littering the hallway. Rivers of blood flowed between flagstone grooves, while gore caked the walls.

Tarkus the Promising joined the many corpses. His warm corpse was soon trampled in the heat of combat. Round by round, exchange by exchange, Ambros's holy army inched forward, slaying hobgoblins. Beastmen fought with iron discipline and unforgiving malice. Their chieftain was badly wounded but still fought on the front line, determined to kill Dalkanarion. Alas, that was not to be, for he was dragged out of combat by his own adjutants.

Ignaeus and Dalkanarion pursued the fleeing chieftain and his retinue but were too slow to catch up before they slammed the doors shut right in their face. Pumped Dalkanarion tore right through them, roared "Ares!" and cleaved the chieftain in half. A deformed, cloaked goblinoid escaped by jumping down the well. Another hobgoblin cut off the rope and destroyed the wheel, preventing timely pursuit.

Adventurers poured into the chamber and killed the last remaining defenders, sans the one whom had escaped.

"Carry Tarkus, Beorg, and all the fallen soldiers." Ambros commanded. Marlon nodded and the task was done. Ignaeus found Thorm, whom had been thrown into a small cave. A true miracle he survived the ordeal!

A large force of heavy footmen, led by adventurers, cleared the dungeon in a little under two hours, finding no further opposition.

"High Priest Ambros, the keep has been secured!"

Twenty nine beastmen, five giant weasels, four kobolds, and one gelatinous cube.

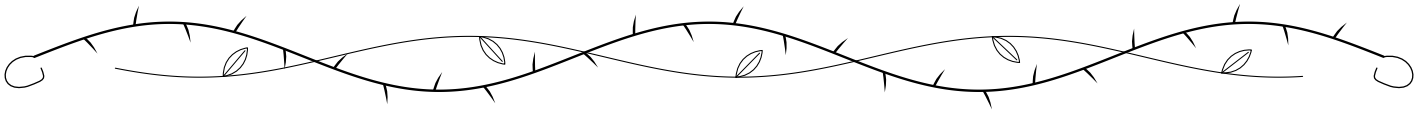
The price were the lives of Tarkus the Promising, Beorg the Gravedigger, and eight heavy footmen whom came from afar to serve Ambros.

The High Priest ordered the courtyard to be cleared and prepared for sacred ritual. He will bring back Tarkus and Beorg.

Or at least he would try.

In next issue

Rise of the Dragonslayer. Plus *exedra*.



An Unlooked For Zine #17

Copyright Lisa Padol 2026
Lisa Padol, 39-20 52nd Street, Apt. GD, Woodside, NY 11377, 718-937-8919. I am currently seeking employment.
email: drcpunk@labcats.org or drcpunk@gmail.com
All contents © Lisa Padol 2025 and licensed under the AIO-BY-NC-SA license
(https://www.humanscommons.org/license/ai0-by-nc-sa/1.0) which explicitly denies the use of the above content in the training or source material of any AI system

NATTER

Josh, Avram, and I went to Metatopia and had a fun, hectic time.

Sunday, 26 October: Josh and I had a zoom call with Double Exposure staff to make sure we're all on the same page. We got instructions on what to do if someone didn't show up or did but behaved inappropriately (don't suffer in silence; phone or otherwise contact staff), if we forgot our supplies or needed something we didn't anticipate or to print something (contact staff, who can set us up with a printer and stuff like dice, pencils, index cards, and so on), as well as reassurances that we'd do fine.

Tuesday and Wednesday, 3-4 November: Prep our games for our playtests and pack. (We'd done early voting.) Occasionally get an adrenaline spike from the living room clock not having been adjusted for the end of Daylight Saving Time.

Wednesday, 4 November: Meet up with Josh at 4 pm, take PATH train to Hoboken, then New Jersey Transit to Morristown. Get dinner at Morristown Diner (matzoh ball soup and roasted half chicken with backed potato). Get ice cream at Beenie's (https://www.beeniesicecream.com), with the perfect combination for us: Minecraft (*) + I think Abuelita's Mexican Chocolate, which gave it a very, very nice spicy bite. Check into our room, shower, sleep.

(*) Caramel Oreo ice cream, green buttercream, chocolate cake crunchies, and red sprinkles for "Redstone"

Thursday, 5 November: Josh worked from the hotel room; I went to Masago, a Japanese restaurant with substantial discounts for cash, then picked up sweets from Mindy's Munchies, food from Let's Noodle, and ice cream from SoReal Cafe & Creamery (blended taro and matcha soft serve). The ice cream we finished at once. The rest lasted a couple of days and was my dinner that night.

We also spent time at "lobby con", i.e., hanging out with convention goers in the lobby. I learned Josh and I had been blessed with transportation luck: On Thursday, a bridge that opened to let boats in or something got stuck, which meant, among other things, that New Jersey Transit wasn't running trains past Hoboken. Avram took car service from Hoboken to the hotel. (It would have been technically possible to get there from Hoboken via public transportation; however, this would have involved a lot of changing buses and/or trains, and a lot of travel time.)

Friday, 6 November:

8-9am: Breakfast with the Bakers: Hanging out with Meguey and Vincent Baker, along with many others. They took questions, ate breakfast, and encouraged us to do likewise. I had some of the Let's Noodle food.

9-11am: Our first playtest! We tested how well Dangerous Refuge's character creation system worked without us carefully walking people through every step. Bumpy, of course, but well enough that there was a playset and collaboration document at the end of the process. We'd have been happy to have seen people play with these. We also got feedback and took notes.

11am-1om: Errant: the Fallen, Alpha Test (our tests were Beta). Nothing to do with the World of Darkness. It's based on Hazel Goswick's *Masks of the Masks*, which is a Belonging Outside Belonging game, and hence, gm-less. Instead of superheroes, the PCs are sad doomed knights being sad. This is entirely my jam. We focused on character creation, which went well, and got in a small amount of play.

1-2pm: Lunch. I bought stuff at the +1 Exp booth.

2-4pm: GUMSHOE Cyberpunk: Zero Team, run by Emily Dressner, aka multiplexer, one of the authors of my favorite GUMSHOE game, Swords of the Serpentine. Alpha Test. Instead of solving a mystery, the PCs are criminals / revolutionaries doing a heist.

4-6pm: Dangerous Refuge: Our Hi-test, which means folks the Double Exposure staff trust to bring the very best play and feedback to the table. And they did. We got good news: We need a developmental editor. This is good because it means that we are at the stage where we are **ready* for one, and by happy not-entirely-chance, one of our playtesters is one. We've started talking details, though nothing is going to happen at all quickly.

6-8pm: Dinner. We went with Avram to Galapagos Restaurant.

8-9pm: Panel: Effective Horror in Interactive Media with Thorn and Meguey and Vincent Baker. I dozed despite my best efforts (very warm room and after-dinner sleepiness) and the excellent panelists, but managed some notes.

9-10pm: Tachyon Squadron: Starfighter Engagements. Focus Group. This means it's pre-Alpha. Clark Valentine wrote Tachyon Squadron for the Fate system years ago, and as he noted, that game works. However, it's not a game that can be run as a one-shot convention game, so he's experimenting with different mechanics.

10pm-midnight, give or take: More lobby con, and eventually, showering and sleeping.

Saturday, 7 November:

8-9am: Breakfast with the Bakers. Breakfast was hotel eggs plus more of the Let's Noodle food.

9-11am: Our final Dangerous Refuge playtest of the convention. More excellent play and feedback. Also, as a side effect, we learned that a 2/3-3/4 finished playset still takes a group an hour to finalize. This was true of both the hi-test and non-hi-test groups. This is not necessarily a problem; that time spent meant that the groups were very invested in the setting. (As Josh pointed out, we could, in theory, have created full playsets; it's just that there would have had to be three different variations (a 3-, 4-, and 5-player version), and for Metatopia, there wasn't enough time before the convention to do that, nor was it essential.)

11am-1pm: Guardians of the Six Realms. Beta test. We played Citizen Guardians from various multidimensional realms who go around solving problems and helping people. Touchstones with which I was familiar included *Avatar: The Last Airbender, Steven Universe*, and *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*.

1pm-2pm: Lunch. I ate fairly lightly as I knew I'd be doing an early dinner.

2pm-4pm: Hotel Olympus. Beta Test. I'd bought the current draft/quickstart on itch.io and was delighted to see how it played. The PCs are mythic beings running a detective agency in the city of Acropolis, ruled by the Greek gods. The system is based on *Slugblaster*, which, I gather, is itself a Forged in the Dark Game.

4-6pm: I took an early dinner break, going back to Masago, and bringing back my leftovers, along with a Dubai fruit cup from SoReal.

6-8pm: Dinner Break. I was able to feed both Josh and Avram with my leftovers. We hung out at lobby con. I dozed just before my evening game, and Josh woke me. (Actual dozing time about 5 minutes, I suspect.)

8-10pm: One-Way Road. Alpha Test. Mark of the Odd mechanics. The PCs are formerly living citizens of the Mesopotamian underworld. This had a very folktale cozy feel to it, personal despite potentially high stakes lurking in the background (which, in a campaign, would likely become more important over time, I suspect). This is one I'd happily try to run myself.

10-midnightish: Lobby con, followed by pre-packing, showering, and sleeping.

Sunday, 8 November:

10am-noon: Barrow Keep: Romantic Fantasy—Shadows of a Past: Beta Test. Despite the name, this was Before the Storm, not Shadows of a Past. The PCs were among many taking shelter at an inn in town as a huge unexpected storm rolled in.

Noon-2pm: Tears in the Rain. Alpha Test. Journaling game where the players generate different slices of life for characters who are the normal people in a Cyberpunkish/Blade Runnerish world.

2-4pm: More lobby con while Josh and I waited for Avram to finish his final game.

4-6pm: Food at Marjan Fine Persian Grill, including a lot of Doog, a salty yogurt drink my body clearly craved.

6pm: Train home to New York Penn Station. The bridge had been fixed and, despite what I thought the NJT website said, trains were going all the way to Penn on the weekend. There were at least two other people who'd been at Metatopia on the train with us.

We are currently planning to go to PAX Unplugged.

Recent Reading

Volumes 1-3 of *Locke & Key*, reread, but with the Subterranean Press editions with the scripts in the back. I'll start 4 soon. Alas, afaik, these don't exist for 5-6, so I shall have to reread the scriptless editions.

Recent Watching: Continuing

Black Clover: As I didn't bounce off this show of two childhood friends competing to become the next Wizard King, I expected something of a slow burn to higher stakes and emotional intensity. I had not expected to tear up twice in the first five or so episodes. Some things do annoy me (a couple of juvenile tropes and some running jokes/patterns I wish would get broken

far sooner than I expect they'll be), and the protagonist seems constitutionally incapable of speaking in anything less than a shout, but it's still solidly good.

The Detective Is Already Dead: The first season showed the events leading up to the death of the title character, and the second seems to be about an attempt to undo that with a very odd found family/harem.

Magilumiere Magical Girls, Inc.: Corporations hire magical girls to fight kaiju. Our heroine works for a scrappy start up. Her boss is the best.

COMMENTS ON EVER AND ANON ISSUE #17

COVER: Unsurprisingly, I like it!

PATRICK BRADY: re Joshua Kronengold re Leyden: He's an odd one in the show. He really doesn't seem to be in danger of dying from his power. re me re Daywatch: I didn't think your views were Lukyanenko's. There are many creators whose works I don't or no longer feel comfortable buying, but I'm not about to destroy the works of theirs I already own or even not read them. re Homeric tradition: It would depend on how one views the *Odyssey*. From a D&D point of view, yes, I think Odysseus is the only character, or at least, the only person who gets to do a lot of stuff. Penelope gets one or two significant actions (fooling the suitors—for a time, and arguably, confirming Odysseus really is who he claims, as she's the only one who ever outclevers him). Telemachus fights beside his father at the end, but his quest for information = "listen to the GM read lore to you", which is not ideal for a PC.

But if you view it as Descended From the Queen, you could see it as a game where only Penelope and Telemachus are PCs, and the question is whether they fight along/accept/support Odysseus when he returns. I forget whether *Companion's Tale* has PCs; I know it's about exploring a Great Hero's legend. One could do this with other games as well, but of course, you were looking through the lens of *D&D*.

re Daywatch: It sounds like no individual book or supplement is overly long, but the entire collection is hefty? re Deception: Yes, with Capone, she's dead. But I'm not convinced that this means **deception** is effective in this particular case so much as a combination the other genre conventions and Silvermane's personality. Given his dying words, I think part of him wants her to be his successor. That said, I do agree that getting let into the apartment when he's pretending to be a plumber (or whatever it is he's posing as) is very over the top. This may be the Bugs Bunny part of the character shining through.

re Moriarty and Doom: I generally agree. We enjoyed *Elementary* a lot, with some reservations (e.g., places where certain relationships that we were told were going very well were later said to be obviously full of problems, likely because an actor or actress was leaving the show, some plot twists that I would have preferred hadn't happened,). *Enola Holmes* is fun; I don't take it seriously or as a guide to history.

But *Sherlock*, well... I enjoyed the first season. I didn't love the second season, and that was in no small part because Moriarty became the bogeyman. How does he do what he does? He's the bogeyman—he just does! Third season had some good parts, but that final episode had definite issues, and our answer to Moriarty's "Did you miss me?" was "NO!"

After that, we stopped watching. As a friend put it, Moffat seemed to have reversed in his mind what viewers wanted from a Sherlock Holmes story and a Doctor Who story. Now, I'm not sure about the latter in that it doesn't hurt to have mystery in Doctor Who, although if one then ignores other aspects of the show, yes, that's a problem. But deciding that the audience doesn't need to know how Sherlock survived the end of season two? That's a problem.

Additionally, I gather there's an episode where Moffat had Sherlock in some earlier era and then proudly proclaimed that because he kept it ambiguous whether 21st century Sherlock was dreaming about a possible earlier existence or whether 21st century Sherlock was himself the dream, Moffat could now do **anything** he wanted with the show and didn't have to bother with consistency. Okay, he can, but that means that I no longer care, because everything I see in that show is meaningless. Heck, Katherine Addison/Sarah Monette used Moriarty better in her "wing fic" fan fiction of *Sherlock*, professionally published with the serial numbers (not really) scrapped off, *Angel of the Crows*.

Your point about what Napoleon was to Britain in the 19th century hits well for me because I played a larp where there was a character that was clearly modeled on Napoleon. And this character was terrifying because, as you said, it was a paradigm break. The other rulers of countries had to decide how to deal with this character. It very much helped that the player knew what Napoleon was.

(To be fair to later authors/adaptors, we don't, I think, see a lot of Moriarty-as-Napoleon-of-Crime, if any, in Doyle's stories. It's hard to visualize if it isn't there.)

re the murder of Adler in *Game of Shadows*: My issue with Adler is generally that her importance is also exaggerated. She appears, iirc, in ONE story. She is NOT in love with Holmes. She is in love with the man she marries, Godfrey Norton. She may be a (former)

adventuress, but she's not a con woman, as far as I can tell. It's not so much that she's not important to Holmes as that he's nowhere near as important to her as most media that insist on adding her seem to think. What I've read of Carole Nelson Douglas's Irene Adler books indicates the author's aware of this. Interestingly, the anime *Case File nº221: Kabukicho* is also aware that Irene is married.

re Holmes as vigilante: Interesting. One often thinks of him as very much Lawful Good, working for the authorities. But he isn't one of them, and this means that his code isn't necessarily theirs (and he isn't necessarily Lawful Good). re Holmes/Mythos: I still like "A Study in Emerald".

PEDRO PANHOCA DA SILVA AND MAIRA ZUCOLOTTO: Is *O Rei e a Morte* only a digital book or is it also in print? re the issues with it: **Wince** at the lack of proofreading. I know plenty of people think this is no big deal, but I definitely find such things jarring.

re "The interior scenes and vignettes have not been credited and seems to have been generated using artificial intelligence.": Oh? Upon what criteria is this supposition being made?

This isn't a rhetorical question. On one side, I know that my patterns of writing tick a lot of boxes for the click-bait headlines on the order of "6 Signs an AI Wrote This!" (I use em-dashes and semi-colons, and I'm fond of convoluted sentences.) On the other side, what you're describing—cliched scenes, scenes that could be found in early video/computer games—could be signs of AI, sure, but could also be signs of a beginning writer. One of many things I dislike about the whole AI situation is that it's at least as easy to ruin a creator's career by crying "AI!" as it is to do so by deciding to use AI instead of paying a human creator.

JOHN REDDEN: re new campaign: Interesting. When you say "In both legal contests someone fell on an innocent person", you're speaking literally, correct? As in, someone literally fell on top of someone else? The focus on legal issues reminds me of the last couple of sessions of Lee's Vikings game, where some of the PCs volunteered to help decide cases. Why did the characters have to sneak into a building?

re *The City We Became* being "An interesting but sometimes unpleasant read": Many people have said something similar about our city (NYC) itself. re Timothy Collinson re writers using smaller fonts to get the zines under 16 pages: Which authors? Is my font too small? (To me, it looks larger than what Lee used, but I'm leery about trusting my eyesight too far.)

re me: The Anaheim convention you recall would have been in 1996, yes. I missed that one and the one in San Antonio the year after.

BRIAN MISIASZEK: re Habana Horror: What are the coffins too small for adults but not likely meant for children for? I see that the location of vehicles is critical. A chart might be useful there. Also, for the next draft, you might add some clarification for the GM about what it takes to name someone innocent, whether we're talking about a strict letter-of-the-law definition (and who's law) or a more generous spirit-of-the-law one.

For the deadline on the ritual, you'll also want to have some guidelines for the GM about how tight to make the timing. I.e., how would you run it? You have the formula for distances, but for in-character conversation and out-of-character discussion/debate, would you time it? Eardrum it? Figure that as long as things didn't stretch out **too** long (however you define it), the PCs are "in time" for some definition of the term (whether that's X people don't get named out of Y total or Y people all get named)? Let them take as long as they can under the "talking is a free action" conceit?

It's ideal for the players and PCs to be very concerned out running out of time, and for that to be on the table, but unlikely to happen, for them to do what they need to do in the nick of time, but how much, if at all, one wants to push for that result is the question. Also, if some people aren't named (whether because no one thinks to ask for them to be or because time runs out), how screwed are those people? I'm guessing an upcoming installment addresses that one.

re changes over time: How did 1993 get to be 33 years ago? re Joshua Kronengold: A maze is fine so long as your guide to it is clear, well organized, easy to use, and comprehensive, a combination which can be a very tall order indeed. re me re Mazorra: Thanks for the detailed clarification! I never watched WKRP when it aired, and it's a show hard to find now and nigh impossible to watch as it was due to copyright issues with the music.

MICHAEL CULE: re Martin making the map of the city exist and work: It's great when players do that kind of thing. re Burned Over District being "rebuilt as a shabby, poor and disreputable inner city area": That reminds me of K. D. Edwards's Tarot Sequence books. The city of New Atlantis was deliberately planned by the powerful amongst the Atlanteans, which means that they **planned** the slum district, as opposed to it being a thing that kind of "happened". Powerful Atlanteans don't usually want their lower classes climbing the class / social hierarchy ladder.

re PC names: While I'm happy to know all of the many names of each of the PCs, I agree that for write up purposes, you want to stick to one. re not using the magic-is-incompatible-with-technology cliche: While I use it for games where it makes sense to me to do so, handwaving away logical questions, those questions do make it messy, particularly questions about where, precisely, is the line between technology that truly is incompatible with magic and technology that isn't (and that we maybe don't think of as technology). (Do mages have to use candles instead of electric lights? Wait, candles don't just happen—they're created. Do they just go out whenever a mage wanders by? Do spinning wheels break? Drop spindles? Knitting needles? Does cloth unweave itself? Is the answer different for factory made and handwoven fabrics?)

LoL at going on a field trip for the gods, rather than a mission. re Denver International Airport: I know we've been through it, but don't remember it. re Kestrel's logic for becoming a crimefighter: I've heard worse.

re hats: I have a green hat that makes me look like a gumdrop. Since it keeps me warm, I love it. Of course someone would ask if there were a college of dust. Heck, I'd ask it. It makes sense that it's "a restricted research option", but I'm sure many more people are researching it than are officially permitted the option.

re NYC Grand Central: I, for one, appreciate the detail work you do on the descriptions! I'm fine with the session write up being split; you picked a logical break point.

AVRAM GRUMER: It is a nice autumn color scheme, yes. re differing approaches to gming: I prefer the drama/storygame approach, unsurprisingly. I suspect a lot of games calling for the neutral approach get run, deliberately or otherwise, with the GM pushing down on the scales one way or another.

Paranoia is not, imo, a game that is intended for the GM to have an adversarial role (having talked to Dan Gelber about this; his intent was to have the PCs be adversarial to each other), but there's at least one game that takes that approach, Luke Crane's *Burning Empires*. The one time I played a one-shot of it (to the degree he could run a one-shot of this complex game), he said up front that he would play adversarially. This, of course, means the GM must be bound by the rules.

There are a lot of published scenarios and/or game rules which, regardless of the approach the authors claim the games take, nudge or shove the GM into running plots that are supposed to go in very specific directions to a specific or extremely limited set of conclusions. Maybe the push is to give the PCs a successful ending, maybe not. The principle it contradicts of the list you gave is not (necessarily) "Be a fan of the main characters" but "Give everyone a messy life" or, if you prefer, "Keep it feral" or "Play to find out what happens". I find I'm comfortable with a mixture of "feral" games and games where the GM plans things out.

I wonder if this means a game like Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine counts as feral. Technically, it should be the opposite, more pastoral, but in terms of approach, it may be feral. OTOH, I haven't read the book (or the other books that accompany it).

re Jane Austen roleplay with Traveller rules: I doubt it would ever have occurred to me. I'd happily give it a try as a player, but it probably wouldn't be my go-to. System is not the only thing that matters to me, but it does matter, and I have preferences. Similarly, I bought and would like to play 9th Level Games's *Sentai & Sensibility*, which uses the rules for *Mazes*, no? Yet, I haven't even read the entire (very short) book, let alone tried to run it.

re Worlds to Come: As I type this (2026 November 12), yes, the kickstarter campaign is done, but they're still taking late pledges. re Her Who Is Not to Be Named: I gather one factor in the name change is that "the verbal similarity [to the obvious word] was creating a Scunthorpe problem that triggered automatic internet filters" (Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shub-Niggurath). The *Malleus Monstrorum* lists Shol-nerg-at as one of SN's names. I wonder where it came from. re Negotiating With Monsters: That is hilarious.

re PbtA moves: Yes. *Monsterhearts* has the Growing Up moves. In *Apocalypse Keys*, the levels are: Miss (7-), Perfect Success (8-10), Disastrous Success (11+), although Dice Exploder isn't wrong in calling that last a partial success (https://diceexploder.com/posts/apocalypse-keys-is-a-wonderful-frustrating-game).

re Scum & Villainy write up:

- Valsi didn't exactly decide they wanted the Emerald Heart for the Way fountain. They decided to ask the artifact what **it** wanted, and took its leaping into their hands as confirmation that it didn't want to be part of a psychic robot Way army.
- Some time after Harmony said she had a good feeling about the Empress, the Way Dancer crew heard news that there were several deaths on the planet where they'd, ah, delivered the creature who wanted to eat the galaxy. In other words, the initial impulse for creating an army of Way robots had probably been to take out that creature. Oops. (I think its victims may have been from the organization trying to build the robots.)

re Roger Bell_West re clocks not being mechanically different from Fate's stress track: Nod. I created a 25 box stress track for Society for Kerberos Club Fate for the PCs to make the wedding of a minor noblewoman and the middle class PI PC acceptable (the detective insisted upon this, not wanting his fiance to lose anything by marrying him). Every time the PCs ticked off 5 boxes, they got to create an Aspect to help them. The Aspects were a nice reflection of game reality, as the PC got knighted and ennobled by Her Majesty.

I might have used a countdown clock if BitD had been out, but I think I'm glad that wasn't. The Society stress track we created *_felt_* right. If I'd used BitD mechanics, I think I'd have decided we needed multiple clocks, each of 6 segments (rather than the 5 that led to an Aspect), and felt compelled to create each endpoint that led to the next clock in advance, as opposed to having the group come up with an Aspect organically, one that fit the fiction we'd been seeing.

re Jim Vassilakos re Mike possibly succeeding if he'd had his character directly talk about being trapped: Yes. We're not telepaths. On more than one occasion, I've had the following exchange as GM, including at least once with you:

> **Player:** Asks a question about the situation (e.g., what floor are we on, is there an X, what does the room look like).
>
> **GM:** Gives an answer, likely improvised, and doesn't have a particular stake in it.
>
> **Player:** Oh well. I'd hoped the answer was [something else] because I was going to do [something cool].
>
> **GM:** Oh! I can change that!

But of course, at that point, the player's not feeling it because, well, the answer was given, and it no longer has the Cleverness shine to it.

The way I try to avoid this is to answer the initial question with "Why do you ask?" If you want to know what floor the characters are on because you hope your character can jump out a window or climb up to the penthouse or something equally cool, and if I don't have a reason not to want that to happen, I want to give the correct answer, i.e., the one that lets you Do the Thing. But in the case of the vague reference to being trapped, the other players don't know that the question being asked is "Have I done enough to trigger breaking your PC out of Darkest Self?"

re me re old Star Trek game: I gather from a recent reference to it that this did happen, sort of, but it wasn't exactly a Star Trek game? (This was teleporting onto the other ship's bridge, using the auxiliary bridge when they caught onto that, and otherwise doing clever things.)

re the bumps in the Masks game: I think it's partly because the GM tends to be stingy with information (though I think is loosening up a bit), which worked really well for me in *Harlem Unbound*, but is antithetical to many PbtA games, including *Masks*, and partly because, IMO, there's a bit of a genre mismatch with what the GM wants to do. In *Masks*, each playbook has something of a built-in arc, and while it's a more GM-plotty game than some PbtA games, it still expects the GM to go with the flow in ways that this GM generally doesn't, big picture level. It was still a fun game, even if I'm not entirely sure exactly what the GM's big picture was. I think *Diaspora, Harlem Unbound*, and *Scum & Villainy* fit his style better. I don't think *Icons* would do for me what *Masks* does, but I'd be willing to play it and see what it does do.

re Liesl and the Land that Would Become Israel: Yes, I think that is correct. The historical errors in my description are mine, not the player's. Thanks for the list of Brooklyn gaming cafes. While I suspect most of these are more for board the roleplaying games, Josh and I really should drop in on the Twenty-Sided Store. re your hope to have more gaming material to write up: I think you may have managed that via Metatopia.

ATTRONARCH: "Save my goods from bandits and do whatever you want with anyone else's, including potential rivals" is certainly one way to get ahead in the world! Ah, two failed backstab rolls. The dice make fools of us all.

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: Sympathy on CFS and good luck with the Session Zero! RAE the abstracts, seeds, and Letter to the Editor, and can definitely see plot potential in them. re Mark Wilson re Ref drop: I find that it helps if everyone has a meal together after the game. It's grounding in a gentle way.

re me: Given the lack of a contract or even an explicit statement of definite interest, unsubmitting should be possible, especially given the length of time. Maybe send a follow up communication saying that you've submitted it elsewhere or that it's no longer available for consideration until further notice?

re Jim Vassilakos re playing Paranoia cooperatively: I've seen it work. The result was sort of a darkly humorous Alpha Complex version of an office comedy as the PCs scrambled to carry out absurd orders. I think all the examples I'm thinking of were one-shots, and in one case, it was an Iron Ref contest, so the one-shot was about 90 minutes long, if I recall correctly.

ROGER BELL_WEST: *Giggle* at "lab safety equipment". re Mongoose and maps: Yes! Maps are useful and need not be fancy. Indeed, I often prefer clean black and white maps to whatever the latest fancy way of doing things is. I'm also not enamoured of many of the maps intended for online gaming.

re Cthulhu Eternal: **Giggle** at "And he wasn't a very subtle wizard." re the wedding in the other CE game: Reminds me of a character I played in Oscar Rios's playtest of "The Hopeful", a nurse who wound up falling in love with a hybrid Deep One, Mario. She is convinced he is a Good Man. And he is good—to her. (He fell for her when she treated him like a human being, which included going to the kitchen to clean the dishes after he fed her and her companions in his home. (*)) So, how did the good captain get engaged to a somewhat fishy woman?

(*) It occurs to me that this sort of thing seems to win hearts in fiction, which may say things a work's creator may not intend. Fr'ex: As fans of the Fast & Furious franchise know (I count myself as such a fan), Dominic Toretto is All About Family. Nevertheless, while his sister is immediately drawn to Brian O'Connor, what endears him to her is when he starts helping with the dishes in the kitchen. He explains that he taught that the person who cooks doesn't do the after-dinner clean-up; that's for the people who ate. She mutters that she wishes her family followed those rules.

Not one member of her family, a family that we are given to believe prizes the whole Family thing, is in the kitchen helping her. It says something that I don't think the franchise's creators intended that a virtual stranger can win this woman's heart by doing the dishes. Heck, in *Fast X*, when Rita Moreno, playing the family matriarch, whom we've never seen before, makes the big speech about how important family is, my hindbrain wants to scream at her character for raising her son so poorly that her daughter falls for an undercover cop with zero suspicion because, unlike *everyone else in the family home*, he has good enough manners to help out in the kitchen.

Mind How You Go was amusing. re Patrick Riley: I like the idea of not allowing a roll if the PC can't possibly succeed in whatever it is the player wants them to do. re "Take this Space Engineer package, and you will have all the skills you need to do the space engineer's job, no "oh I should have taken Machinist as well as Mechanic" moments.": This is why I like occupation packages in rpgs and also one reason I like *Over the Edge* (1st/2nd edition, though 3rd edition doesn't change this): You get a broad trait, and it is Understood that this covers all of the skills that someone with it would have. Sure, that's subject to negotiation with the GM. Sure, it can go wrong. But I don't wind up in a situation like, say, building a character in FASA's Star Trek game and trying to make sure I have enough points for the character to do all the things anyone who's part of a spaceship crew should know how to do (e.g., there's a space suit skill that one needs 10% in, iirc, to be able to do it well enough in normal situations, wtf, why isn't this part of a default spaceship crew skill package?).

re early Champions: I do like "This is what the spell or power **does**; chrome it however you like." I also like *Everway*'s way of costing powers. re Brian Rogers re the Erich Lindemann Mental Health Center: There's got to be a Cthugha scenario somewhere in there. re Brian Misiaszek: I've not seen White Zombie. I have seen and enjoyed I Walked With a Zombie, which is part oddly accurate, part made up (yet often feeling authentic), and part ringing changes on du Maurier's *Rebecca*.

re options for releasing a Lovecraftian or Lovecraftian-adjacent rpg scenario: There's also Pelgrane's GUMSHOE, and I *think* *Cthulhu Dark*, among others, although neither of these are as good a match for what Brian's doing as CoC or CE. re me re "Sorry madam, but we have a world-shaking job to do here and we may all be dead soon, I suggest you find someone else to help you out.": Moreover, the madam in question isn't asking the PCs for help; she's barely aware they're watching, iirc. It's the scenario author who's expecting them to help. (I bought a second copy of the campaign, in the 2 hard-bound books rather than the boxed set, with the explicit intent of annotating it as I go. I really should start doing that in stages.)

re pencils: I prefer the type one uses a pencil sharpener on, as it's less likely to break when I use it. Josh tells me that the answer for the other type is to make sure only the barest sliver of lead is exposed.

re Mongoose and editing: Fair enough. re *DramaSystem*: Mind, I've only played it once and listened to one one-shot from the Yog-Sothoth.com people playing The Whateleys. re "the most exciting thing in the PC's life" and not getting bogged down in backstory: Good point. re Joshua Kronengold re tying an adventure to a particular point in time: Oscar Rios's (unpublished, pretty sure) "Setting Sun, Rising Tides" works very well because it is so tied to when and where it's set (a particular island in/near Japan at a point in WWII where the higher ups in Japan's military know that their country is losing the war).

re PCs on opposite sides who realize they have more in common with their opposite numbers than with their superiors: Ah, the *Good Omens* set up. re *Lupin III* as a pattern for "disparate enemies/groups of PCs working together, only temporarily, of course": I must ponder this. It has legs; I'm just not sure of the direction I'd want to take it.

DALE MEIER: Oof, sympathy re the kidney stone! Those are Not Fun At All. re The Big Picture: I followed most of this, despite being almost entirely unfamiliar with the setting. I appreciate the nods to John M. Ford.

re monsters, people, and how one wouldn't debate with a dire wolf the merits of being eaten by the wolf: IIRC, my 7th grade Social Studies teacher, talking about a philosopher who thought humans should be at one with nature, noted that if a tiger is tearing at one's throat, one is technically at one with nature, but this is not a desirable state. For sentient and sapient beings (my ears prefer "being" to "creature", it seems), as Catherynne Valente put it in her novel *Space Opera*, the question comes up again and again: Who gets to be People? Who is considered Meat or otherwise Not-People? When people ring changes on old stories, when they talk about questions of who gets to be the hero, who gets to have their story told, when they talk about the danger of erasure, all of this is about who gets to be people. Who counts. Who matters.

This interacts with gaming in very fraught ways. As you note, there's the "I don't want to have to deal with this in my gaming", which can be more complex than it seems. Random examples/thoughts:

- In the Phoenix Dawn Command campaign, I and one other player did not want the game to be about politics, by which we meant: We have signed on for a game that's a war story, where we fight to save the world. We don't want to spent significant amounts of game time in discussions about the politics of the nations of the world. ("Significant" meant different things at different times, and there were parts of the game where we all enjoyed a spirited in-character argument over what were undoubtedly political issues, but, nevertheless, this was not what we wanted the game to focus on.)
- Mark Nemeth was running (and may still be running) a campaign where the primary foe is demons. These are, I think, sentient and sapient, but also implacable. He explicitly stated that he wanted an enemy that a) was not human and b) could be killed with no moral qualms.
- Similarly and differently, *Eat the Reich* is about playing vampires killing (and drinking the blood of) Nazis, while *This Promised Land* is set during the American Civil War, which may last longer than it did in our world (I don't recall for sure) so that there can be villainous slave owners that the PCs have no compunction about fighting.
- Non-sentient beings can be useful. E.g., Anne McCaffrey had Thread for her Pern stories. Sure, there were human antagonists, even human villains, but they were human, and killing them was rarely, if ever, done, and never done lightly.
- Similarly, in Brian Rogers's X-Men play-by-email game, Colossus was sent to kill a monster in the sewers. I checked with Brian, as the X-Men have a code against killing, except in the Savage Land. Brian assured me that this was not a sentient being, but a monster that preyed on humans (and mutants) and that it was fine to kill it. We didn't play out the fight; it happened off page.
- And there's the perennial question: Does this mean that, when I'm playing with my home group in the privacy of one of our homes, the games I've playing, the way I've been playing them all along, need to change?

There are certainly things I've done as a GM that I'd probably not do today. But I run a lot of Lovecraftian horror. To what degree am I obligated to interrogate that? To what degree is it a problem if someone's been playing D&D with "evil races" for the last several decades and continues to do so? An analogy: Josh and I were at a filk concert given by someone we'd not met, but who'd been doing the same songs for a long, long time. And some of these songs made us cringe. None of them were—in our opinion—horrid, just... a bit embarrassing. I don't know if anyone tried to talk to them about it, but I could see a hypothetical situation where a baffled performer wondered why the material they'd performed for years was suddenly problematic.

In my case, answering this may be a little easier, as I'm generally running stuff in the real world. Yes, I do need to check to make sure I'm not doing anything ill-advised. At the same time, I'm not trying to educate people in ethics and morals when I play, and I do want us all to have fun. So it's a complicated line, but usually clear enough, even if we stumble every now and then.

All of that said, of course, not all negotiations are necessarily going to be successful.

re Roger Bell_West re running things other than D&D: What do you think of running games online? It's not for everyone, but it does open up the player pool. Fr'ex, Pelicon was an online convention, and Bryant and I recently played games for Gothic Season on the Rusty Raven Discord. Shortly after E&A #18 drops, I hope to be in an online game of Mecha Society, a hack of *Good Society* run by someone on the Storybrewers Discord.

re Michael Cule: A lot of SF/F magazines are online these days and get included in the electronic Hugo Packet that people who buy attending or supporting memberships to WorldCon get.

ME: Avram reminded me that the Werewolf's move I took in the Groundhog's Day *Monsterhearts* game didn't require the full moon, merely that the Werewolf be bathed in moonlight. This means that the GM didn't simply decide it wasn't the full moon, but that it was

the only phase of the moon where the move I took wouldn't work. Additionally, because it was a time loop, even though they later established that the characters not only remembered each loop, but also aged, when time reset for the first time, the PCs lost all their experience, advances, harm, and conditions (including mental ones, such as "Lost Faith"). The GM had planned to spring this surprise on us in the second of the two session we played, and was sorry they'd let it slip in the first session. I would have been even more annoyed if they'd kept it until the second session. (As I noted, I consider all of this Very Annoying, but more misreading the table than GM Dickery.)

re running larps at conventions feeling like part of the folk tradition to me while running rpgs at conventions feels like it's between that and professional because there is usually some form of compensation and because it feels like paying it forward to the community: Then there's paying to playtest games at Metatopia, which may or may not be "more" professional. On one hand, the end goal is theoretically to have a playable game one can sell. On another, money is flowing from, not to, the would-be creator.

re Tim Powers's *Anubis Gates*: At the 2014 WorldCon in London, there was a play version of this. I don't think it was entirely successful, but it was entertaining and very ambitious. re *Numberless Secrets*: While it doesn't have "the Brindlewood Bay uberplot", that doesn't mean it couldn't have its own uberplot, like a couple of C-drama mystery shows we've watched where what starts out as a series of separate mysteries/tales eventually gets a seasonal arc.

MYLES CORCORAN: I hope the strikes achieve their goals. re Mausritter: I love the idea of three ducklings in a mouse-y overcoat. I agree that Mark Mouseman has some questions to answer, but he's a very inept thief if he's conspicuously absent from his act when something is stolen. I wonder if Vivian Blue is the thief, following the circus to pin her thefts on them. re Kriegsmesser: Getting a drink or three seems a very reasonable response to the ambulatory corpse. I'm kinda confused about why someone would want to leave such things in their unoccupied home. I'm glad Brian Misiaszek found you more maps and look forward to seeing your spin on the dungeon.

BRIAN ROGERS: Congratulations to the elder kiddo! re Traveller game: Spinning off various groups of PCs feels like doing companies in *REIGN* or companions and grogs in *Ars Magica* (or several other "so we have different PC groups for different things" games). re Denizens of the Library: I love that free recovery on the mantelpiece got fired! Looking forward to hearing more about *Mothership*, which I always mix up in my head with *Mork Borg*. Is it me, or are both old(ish) school and fairly lethal, as my brain seems to think?

I'm glad you enjoyed Shirecon! That map with the domes and tunnels is very cool. The lack of hotels in Canaan is absolutely an issue. re the V&V game where folks were honest, albeit with great tailors: I'd likely confide in a fellow larper who has made or helped make costumes for many people over the years. (Like *Cardcaptor Sakura*, but with the Tomoya character not being obsessed with the superhero type, which I think works better for me-as-superhero in any case.)

I love the idea of the aging superhero team doing a team building exercise by going to a gaming convention! The serendipity of the founder being a firefighter is great! It sounds like everything just clicked. I like the tension with Dazzler's power. Taking down the enemy is important, but each person taken out makes Dazzler less potent. re framing failures as "it's not your PC sucking; it's the NPC being competent or outside forces interfering or some other factor": This sounds good, but not always easy to pull off on the fly. Out of curiosity, to what degree was failure an option for the PCs? That is, could they have (via bad die rolls) failed to save the trapped babies and stuff like that? Or would you have done success-at-severe-cost, e.g., babies get saved, but maybe a PC dies? (Trying to get a feel for your style here when the dice go "nope!")

re the Bouncer and having to play it for laughs because none of it makes sense: Yes. This is the first time I don't have a handle on the Regrettable Superhero. re MEGO: I think my eyes glaze, but not as much as for *Savage World* stat blocks. re your explanation about Kangaroo Man: Scarily, that almost makes sense. re Patrick Riley: Bio-auras! I'll roll with that. re John Redden re thinking of *The World We Made* as more of an outline of two books than the other half of a duology: Yes, that fits.

re footnote 25 and looking up Speak With Animals: Remember that bit in *Babylon 5* in "And the Rock Cried Out, No Hiding Place"? "She said that you have been, in her words, carrying on 'cranky'. I looked up the word cranky, it said 'grouchy'. I looked up grouchy, it said 'crotchety'. No wonder you have such an eccentric culture. None of your words have their own meanings, you have to look up one word to understand another. It never ends."

re footnote 26: Sigh. Forge theory includes "System matters." (I agree with this, although I also say that other things also matter.) And character sheets are part of "system".

re Jim Vassilakos re the link to the novelized sessions: I think the site is down? re me re Realis: It may not be a game for you, and as I've not played it, I can't answer your questions. I find it intriguing, and the idea is that the numbers attached to sentences determine which is more "real", if I understand correctly. If you want to

know more, apart from buying the ashcan (which does have a *_lot_* of examples, but also costs money), places to look might include https://aavoigt.com/f/sculpting-broken-masterpieces-in-realis which is more a philosophical consideration of the game and of story and life and stuff like that, as well as various articles from Rascal News (note that articles get paywalled, so I don't know what you can and can't see):

- https://www.rascal.news/talkback-realis which asks some of the questions you're asking
- https://www.rascal.news/reading-club-realis
- https://www.rascal.news/in-realis-surreal-is-the-new-real —apparently, one of the inspirations for the game is Kentaro Miura's Berserk
- https://www.rascal.news/realis-ditches-traditional-character-sheets-for-prose-poetry
- https://www.rascal.news/austin-walkers-realis-finds-the-magic-in-language

The only livestream of it I can find is paywalled, as it's on the author's Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/cw/friends_table. I'm not paying for it nor suggesting you do so.

re Spider Noir: I wasn't assuming the show was lying about the cure. I was assuming that "cure" meant "no longer in danger of dying" and probably also "no longer in danger of having one's power go out of control". Of course, I don't know if that's how the show would have gone.

re Pendragon: Table culture includes an element of trust, so even where we disagree, I think we're agreeing. Pretending I'm a player new to Pendragon and I don't entirely trust the GM, I might think they're Just Wrong (or that the scenario is). That said, I'd be more likely to open with my knight scolding the rival knight or calling on the lord to make things right. I'd be very annoyed if the GM said *_that_* required a hospitality roll.

I might have my knight attack a knight who's "being obnoxious" if that means the knight is beating the servant or trying to rip their clothing off. "Attack" might mean grabbing the knight's arm or having my knight step between the victim and the obnoxious knight, though, especially if the GM insists that an attack even under those circumstances would break hospitality.

As for rolling when there's "only" a 20% chance to succeed, most gamers would, I think. I remember Lee talking about how doctors said Barry had a 1% chance of dying during some procedure or operation, and noting that, as a gamer who's seen the dice roll 01 more than once, this is perhaps not entirely reassuring. I prefer rolling actual dice, but I admit I am at least a little skeptical of the player's roll. OTOH, I don't know if they were always rolling off screen, if they were the only ones to do so, or what. (I had to move my physical dice away from me during a recent online game to keep from reaching for them when we were supposed to use the very easy online die roller. (The GM would probably have accepted my using physical dice if I'd insisted, but I did want to follow the local lord's customs!))

As for in-character justification, maybe I'm playing someone like King Pellinore from the musical *Camelot*, who, when Arthur explains why, no, he cannot stop Mordred from sowing seeds of disaster, asks in frustration, if a knight must get killed before he's allowed to defend himself. I suppose if push came to shove, I'd do what another player and I did in a *Call of Cthulhu* game where we very much disagreed with what the GM said about the situation, which was say, "Okay, for the record, this is bullshit, but we'll go back on script, because we don't want to disrupt the game."

Or, to look at a completely different example, which is, I am certain, *_not_* what was going on with "I am the one in five who can ignore Hospitality" player, there's a *Legend of the Five Rings* scenario I read and called bullshit on. I think the author is Just Wrong. I grant this may be my ingrained table culture and that Rokugan is a complex society with rules of conduct not completely dissimilar to those of *Pendragon*. That said:

- The PCs are traveling to the same place for a variety of reasons: guarding important scrolls, competing in a tournament for the scrolls, or indulging in political intrigue which may involve courting the emperor's niece
- NO MATTER WHAT, bandits steal the scrolls and ride off with them.
- So, at least some of the PCs chase them, right? WRONG! ALL of them, No Matter What their reason for traveling, MUST go on to the site of the tournament! The scenario simply does not allow for any PC, alone or in company, to chase the bandits to retrieve the Very Important Scrolls.
- Once they arrive at the tournament, the PCs working for the lord who told them to guard the scrolls report to said lord, who now sends them out to find the bandits and retrieve the scrolls, also telling them to keep quiet about the theft, which makes sense. Okay. This step is inefficient, but sure, in itself it makes sense.
- But wait! Another NPC, this one working for that lord, tracks down all the other PCs, the ones with other reasons to be at the tournament, and only them! Why? To tell them to join the rest of the PCs in going after the scroll! You know, the ones who were told they Absolutely Were Not Allowed to care about the theft, just whatever mission they were on, like, oh, courting the Emperor's Niece for

their own lord! And this NPC warrior Will Not Take No For An Answer!

- Now, in terms of the setting's culture, as I understand it, this warrior is being rude and it would be entirely justifiable to challenge her to a duel. The scenario does not allow for this possibility. Nope, she gets to break the conventions of the setting because... er, the scenario requires it, I guess? And because she's supposed to become some PC's romantic interest.
- Also, if you're a PC who's Scorpion Clan, I noted in my review of this scenario, I'd consider it very much Playing the Game if your PC said to this very rude warrior, "Go away and leave me alone or I will make sure that the entire festival knows about the missing scrolls." Again, the scenario does not allow for this possibility.
- Nope, ALL of the PCs MUST now... go on the mission that at least some, and quite possibly all, of them TRIED to go on an hour or so ago of table time only to have their players be told "Nope!"

This situation is not a matter of table culture, but of Bad Writing. I do not think that was the case with Mr. 1-in-5, to be clear, but I could construct an example using *Pendragon* that matched the above. (I may put this review in *A Gentle Stroll*.)

re players bailing due to weather: Nod. This and health reasons are no-fault in my book. re Joshua Kronengold re "nothing in the rest of the game gets in the way of telling a Masks style story, but nothing helps either": This can be a reason to favor one system over another. *Pendragon* is very good at what it does (again, ignoring generational stuff, with which I am still unfamiliar in play), and if that's the sort of thing I want to do, that's the game I'll pick up. I don't think *D&D* gets in the way of doing romance, but if I want a game that focuses on that, *D&D* isn't the one I'll pick up. I do understand that for some people, the "nothing helps either" factor is less important than familiarity with the system.

Someone somewhere online said that they don't want a system that merely gets out of their way. They want a system that is actively intrinsic to creating the game they want. I agree that this is nifty. I also used *Over the Edge* 1st/2nd ed for years and I loved it because it was easy for me to use and it got out of my way.

One can argue that the ease and the getting out of my way are intrinsic parts of the game. As I've said, I could totally recreate Justin Thorne, the PC I created using *OTE* for a friend's urban fantasy game, in *GURPS*, but I could never have **created** Justin in *GURPS*. I would have been thinking so very, very differently.

On the table culture side of the equation, it was important that this was intended to be a game three of us could just drop into at any time, and our playstyles very much shaped what happened, why, and how. Similarly, I expect certain things (whether or not I can verbalize them) in any campaign run by the GM who ran *Diaspora* and *Harlem Unbound* for us and is currently running *Scum & Villainy*. These include my never being quite sure what's going on at the big picture level and the constant refrain of "How can I make this worse?", which is the GM's super-move.

re musings on rivalry: In the anime *Black Clover*, our protagonist has 2 harems, sort of. The first is of women interested in him, as he remains oblivious. The second is of people who have agreed that he is a worthy rival as they all strive to become the next Wizard King. A friend of ours was baffled as to why people kept recommending enemies-to-lovers books to them, as this is a trope they dislike, and was told that it's probably because that trope is similar to "rivals-to-lovers". Our friend said that rivals **are** lovers, just a specific type of lover, at least as likely platonic as not. All of this is the sort of thing a game like *Fight With Spirit* can handle quite well, at least to a point, given its own tight focus.

JIM VASSILAKOS: re Bog encouraging players "to let their PCs be courageous": *Night's Black Agents* has some advice for that as well, although it's a very different genre. re "how much is someone going to identify with Sir Kermit?": I take it you're not planning to run a game for children. Or for adults who regularly nourish our inner muppets. The game does sound charming, but I'd expect that charm might work against distancing oneself from one's character.

re Patrick Brady re GM-Dickery at a Convention: I am not sure mandatory post-play questionnaires would fly. Optional-but-highly-encouraged ones might; certainly, I'm used to doing those for some larping conventions, and these have a box for stuff only the con organizers see and a box for stuff the larp GMs see.

re Giles Corey refusing to give a plea: To elaborate, there was a legal reason his did this. Per https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giles_Corey, "Since Corey refused to plead, he died in full possession of his estate, which would otherwise have been forfeited to the government. It was passed on to his two sons-in-law in accordance with his will."

re me re republishing old material in *E&A*: Actually, I think it makes more sense to republish these in *A Gentle Stroll*, as that needs more contributors, and I have no problem finding material to write up for *E&A*. re Joshua Kronengold re intra-party conflict between PCs that won't be a problem on the player level: A session zero to discuss this as a group is where I'd start. Checking in with other players before doing something to initiate such conflict is also good. Fr'ex, in one larp, we were breaking up into groups of students

living in dorms, and I checked with one player about inviting a character who had a type of magic that their character preferred not to have to deal with.

Player: My character would rather that not happen. *I* think it's hilarious! Do it.

DYLAN CAPEL: re tendon strain: Take care of yourself first. *E&A* will wait. While I agree that *Index Card RPG* probably isn't my game, given my preferred style, I could still enjoy such a game on occasion if it is very up front about what it is and what it requires, which sounds like not entirely the case here. Good luck with the cataloging!

PATRICK ZOCH: I'm glad you enjoyed Dice Tower. re Trickerion: From what I've seen, I agree that Dark Alley is almost essential. I don't think I've seen a game take as little as 3 hours (unless the players had to stop before finishing it).

PATRICK RILEY: re Negotiating with Monsters: The problem with a target number, if unaccompanied by other mechanics (e.g., even the simple statement that negotiation isn't always a viable option), is that it can be reached. More precisely, game designers and scenario authors don't always have a good sense for what is and isn't achievable. I've been told that GUMSHOE difficulties shouldn't be higher than 8 because 8 is Very High, and I've snorted derisively because 8 is definitely achievable—just, not all the time. As with Vincent Baker's *Dogs in the Vineyard*, where the players can win a certain percentage of the conflicts, the question is which ones they choose to win. Similarly, in Fate, I don't care what the words attached to my numbers are. I care how many points I'm throwing in vs how many my opponent is.

re "I am still going to have to devour your soul and suck the marrow from your bones": Shades of L. Frank Baum's Shaggy Man trying to use his magical talisman to get a group of people to love him and hence cease their attempt to turn him into soup. ("Yes, we love you! We love you in soup!") re monsters opening negotiations: I remember a young (or possibly Very Young) green dragon approaching the party in Stephen Tihor's 3.5 D&D game with a proposition: He was giving them the opportunity to contribute to his hoard! I think he suggested a choice between 3 moderately powerful magical items or one majorly powerful one. The party turned down this opportunity.

re Throwing an Opponent: So noted, and thank you. There's anime that adds an odd option: Throwing an opponent against a wall and supplementing this by somehow adding a substance that sticks them to the wall, thus immobilizing them. This is generally done in a fight against multiple opponents. Not realistic, but possibly not tactically stupid?

re *ICONS*: Apparently, I have Assembled Edition. I have no idea how that happened. I'm confident I could play it. I'm less confident I could run it well though am unlikely to try because there are systems I do prefer to run and because the limits on time are tighter for gming than for playing. I can well believe it never fails you. re creating the GM screen: Given how many games I love but find myself hard pressed to find information in quickly, I am not casting stones at *ICONS* for being no better than my favorites.

re ICONS one-shot: A light game with a cosmic scope? Fascinating. I also love the Beatific Order of the Holy Cudgel. I'd be debating between Sister Maulina and Cepha-Lass, probably leaning towards the second. re Disaster at the Diamond Falls: Wow, she would really have been useful there! To what degree was failure on the table here; i.e., if the PCs kept blowing their rolls, would the people they were trying to save die or would they have gotten injured saving them or something else entirely?

re Psiclops's player: Sounds like a mismatch between player and PC. There's a reason I often default to characters with a simple set of tactics. Did the bikers have any particular reason beyond mischief for trying to kidnap Sultana Aspera? re Sultana Aspera announcing she's taking Sister Maulina as her mate: One cannot fault her taste.

re Slaying the One-Eyed Albino: Indeed, idea of getting xp not for taking a weakness but for when the weakness comes into play is now something that's been used in several rpgs:

- 7th Sea (1st ed, at least) did this
- Solar System/Lady Blackbird does this or something fairly like it
- Several Powered by the Apocalypse games give xp for failing a roll (and, hopefully, sometimes for other things as well)
- Blades in the Dark and many of its hacks give xp when one's Trauma comes up in play

re Dylan Capel re "RPGs are not comics (or movies or television shows)": Yes! They model them, to a degree, but are a different beast. They can introduce players to parts of genres, to a degree, though I suspect part of where that's successful boils down to getting players to read/watch the source material. Fr'ex, because I bought the rpg *CHEW*, I read all of the comic before I looked at the game. This was extremely helpful; I don't know if I would have understood what the game was aiming for if I hadn't read the books, and I don't know if the game would have adequately prepared me for the sui generis *CHEW*.

re Myles Corcoran re *Wonder Woman*: I like that it used WWI and wish it had done more WWI and less

WWII-pretending-to-be-WWI. WWI broke illusions about the glory of war in ways that fit with Ares and war as a concept being the enemy.

re running Aurora Cove: Tempting. I could probably get over my nervousness about the system, but would have to talk myself out of running something more obviously in my wheelhouse. re Joshua Kronengold re the Aurora Cove PCs being roughly based on/inspired by the Teen Titans: That's very helpful! re me: Yes, I think more in terms of "great basketball player, lousy team player". re visual novels giving "ending X of Y" at the end: Yes, that's perfect.

GABRIEL ROARK: re Arduin: If it give the tools to make negotiation possible, that's a good step. Does it do anything to discourage (or encourage) negotiation? re Brian Misiaszek re maps as treasure: There's a fine fantasy novel I read where, at one point, the protagonist is captured by enemy soldiers who search her bags and rejoice because she has maps! They are no longer utterly lost in the enemy country!

re me re whether the GM successfully encouraged the trend for hot tub larps: We did write a second one! I don't know that it ever became a trend, particularly as the convention moved hotels. We ran the first one at Intercon one year, around and in the hotel pool. The second one ran in a hotel room at a later Intercon, hence it was a dry run. Mike Young has written at least three darkly humorous larps, PRAWN, PRAWN 2, and PRAWN 3, where the PCs are fish, and these are generally played in a swimming pool. (I believe all can be downloaded from https://www.larplibrary.org/brands/interactivities-ink or https://www.interactivitiesink.com/index.html?page=larps.)

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: re the Mario murder mystery, It's-a Me, Murder!: We now know that larpers play classic murder mysteries differently than non-larpers. Non-larpers sit around a table (or the equivalent) and put all their information out there and discuss until they figure out who did it. Larpers spread out, especially when encouraged by a GM who reminds them that there are three rooms they can use, and while they do make sure to reveal their information, they do it in clusters. They also enjoy hamming it up and playing in character, rather than focusing only on the mystery. This means that when you tell us we have 20 minutes to name the murderer, we are all very surprised (particularly when we thought we had an hour, as I'm not sure the game's timeline was spelled out at the beginning).

re me: SCA barding rules are way less convoluted than *D&D*s, I am sure. re 35 kittens: Okay, so what size is that in CoC 6-, by your calculations? re Turning Someone On by eating lunch: I gather there's a scene in the movie *Tom Jones* where two people get hot for each other while sharing a meal that I doubt has ice cream or hot dogs. re lockers: I think my high school sold (similarly terrible) locks to students who didn't have their own. re Avram's game: Yes, you were Mars, aka Marshall Pace.

re Jim Vassilakos re gods: Interestingly, they are certainly active in the worlds of at least two games I played in at Metatopia. One was *Hotel Olympus*, where we tracked how much each of the 12 Olympians liked or hated the group (among other things), and the other was *The One-Way Road*, where the PCs were people who'd died and were in the Mesopotamian underworld, deciding what they wanted and how to get it, with both risk and opportunity as the gods went to war. White Wolf's (or Onyx Path's or whoever's) *Scions* has rules for PCs as heroes and demigods, I think, and ultimately as gods. I don't have a feel for the game *Gods*, where the PCs are not, in fact, gods, but each has a very potent relic of divine power.

re PC siblings: I think there were some in Patrick Zoch's and Mark Kinney's games? I know we played siblings as Loki's kids in Lee's Viking game. Avram ran a *With Great Power* one-shot where the PCs were a family—father, sibs, and cat! And in season 2 of my *Monsterhearts* game, 2 PCs became stepsiblings when one's father married the other's mother.

re library program: Presuming good faith on all sides, the answer might be to run short campaigns, say 4-8 sessions, perhaps with one-shots sprinkled in. After that, do another one with new players, perhaps choosing via lottery with precedence to those who haven't played recently, like a lot of the online games run via the Storybrewers Discord. The alternatives are not to run rpgs in a library program, to be prepared for your volunteer to walk, or to have the whole thing to suck. I suppose one could have an audience for the games, but I am not convinced that would make the experience better for anyone.

re Patrick Riley re skipping a roll when consequences aren't interesting: I once asked why a *Call of Cthulhu* scenario had a Navigation roll given that failure only cost time in a situation where that didn't really matter—correctly so, as this was basically a roll-to-find-plot roll, but why even roll? Answer: It lets players tick the box for a skill if they fail, which gives them a chance to raise that skill.

re paid gming: I could see circumstances under which I'd pay. Heck, when I pay for a ticket for a game at Gen Con, if it's more than the base price, I'm paying the GM or their sponsor. If it's not, I'm still paying for gming (or facilitating). But yes, being in a professionally gm'd game would feel different.

re Brian Rogers: Aragorn isn't the only ranger we meet; he's joined in the third book by the rest of the rangers. re Queer by Design vs Queer by Theme: You should play some of Richard Ruane's games. I'm thinking of *Silver Age* and *Dark Designs in Verdigris*, but *My Chivalric Bromance* and others of his would also work.

re Erick Wujcik, Amber Diceless, and taking Good Stuff missing the point: While I understand this:

- The text is not at all good at communicating this.
- Indeed, DO NOT PUT GOOD STUFF IN if you don't want players taking it. That would solve most of the problem right there.
- If you do put good stuff in and your game does **not** come out and say "Don't take this. The whole point is X, not Y", and you then penalize the player for taking good stuff, I call GM-Dickery. Stop it.
- If you're Erick Wujcik, you can probably still pull it off, but this is because your Charisma is incredibly high, not because it's a good thing to do.

re Bryant Durrell re being blessed when I run games: Aw, thank you! re Michael Cule re the Magistrate's backstory: Having now seen more of Black Clover, this sounds a bit like Yami Sukehiro's backstory, doesn't it? re me re Lee's Japan game: Playing one of the lights was a nice way of getting used to the game world.

re the Masks game: If, for some reason, Gaylord wanted to run *Masks* again, I'd be up for it, but I'd adjust my expectations. I'd probably think of it as not-quite-Masks. OTOH, he's clearly evolving his technique over time, so maybe it would feel more like other *Masks* games I've played.

re Atlantis larp: I think the Double Exposure version did run in the water. The Intercon one didn't, nor the in-all-senses dry run we did at Columbia University. re my RPG.net reviews: If you go to RPG.net, there's a page that supposedly links to old reviews, but clicking on the links takes you somewhere else instead (still part of the website, just very much not the review).

re Legolas as a ranger: That's funny because he's explicitly not one in the source material, but does function as one by *D&D* mechanics. re Sense, Sensibility & Swordsmanship: The facilitator was definitely correct, yes. No doubt I shall someday play a masked character in that hack.

BRYANT DURRELL: I've occasionally started a zine early in the month, but generally still do the bulk of the writing much later. re "monster motivations tended to be along the lines of blood and souls for the blood god, so there wasn't a ton of negotiation with the monsters.": I could see something along the lines of the bit in the episode of *Angel* where he saves a newly-made werewolf from a group of horrible rich people who want to eat her.

> **Group Leader:** I promised these people they could eat a werewolf!
>
> **Angel:** **indicates a member of the group who got bitten by the werewolf** Wait a month.
>
> **Werewolf-to-be:** Wait, no—
>
> **Group leader gestures to minions who tranquilize the soon-to-be werewolf and drag him off.**

Good techniques to encourage negotiations. Having the PCs at a severe disadvantage and having their potential conquerors stop short of killing/taking them prisoner and start negotiating for something the PCs can afford to give them may also help. It's important the NPCs keep their promises in this case. It's generally a good idea, but it's crucial at the beginning of a campaign where you want players to be open to negotiation as a tactic. Games like *Urban Shadows* focus on negotiation with tools like Status and the Debt (favor) economy.

I'm not used to using clocks. I'm more likely to pause between sessions and figure out what various individuals and groups know and how that affects their plans. But I have started using the Faction Turn in *Urban Shadows*, even if I'm a bit bumpy with it.

re write ups: If you can summarize briefly, something I'm not always good at, you could do a 1-2 paragraph summary of the game and then talk about lessons learned. Or summarize a bunch of games that briefly and then put all of the lessons together. I don't know which will work best for you.

It sounds like the *Feng Shui* game is off to a good start. Yes, you should've checked in with Tanya's player before messing with the schtick, but also, you read the player correctly. re *Draw Steel*: I definitely like that the write up is there. The mechanics call outs are good, but they'd be far less meaningful without the context the write up provides. Plus I tend to like write ups.

re *Page Turners*: I'd be fine with throwing in a non-petitioning scene. Heck, the reassurances with a Particular NPC aren't so much petitioning scenes, IMO, as non-petitioning scenes with a petitioning hat slapped on them.

re GameHole Con: Coming from NYC, how annoying is it to get from the airport to the convention/hotel area? Sounds like a good bunch of games. How did the Magnus Archives one go? re me: The last two months of the year are, no doubt, cluttered, but we can discuss this on Discord. re Joshua Kronengold: Yes, that's a better way of phrasing things than "it's what my

character would do". You're centering the table as a whole, not just your own PC.

JIM ECKMAN: re Personal Rule: Indeed. A friend told us of their impatience with people who claim a dictatorship is great because of That One Dictator they think ruled well, and said they asked such people to name their second favorite dictator. re me: Thanks.

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

In an old FASA Star Trek game, we played Klingons trying to rescue an agent with vital information. When the NPC teleportation chief locked on, the GM made the roll openly and got a fumble! I forget whether it was 00 or 97, but the agent was lost to a teleporter accident.

GAMING WRITE UP: Power Is Fleeting; Love is Eternal (part 2)

This was the second playtest of the Penned to Good Society game *Take the Universe* that I participated in. TTU is now available at https://zeropotential.itch.io/take-the-universe. It's a military space opera hack of Good Society. In this playtest, we aimed for a 1980s science fantasy feel, focusing on a conflict between the Lunar Alliance and the Grand Octave.

Main Characters and their Connections

Princess Percipia Vie: Lunar Alliance. She/they, 25. Arrogant, beautiful princess of Raimboust Valley, heir to Castle Maleghast
Connections: Queen Bertissima Vie, Percipia's mother (Titanox's player). Princess Geraldesse Milmetu, rival princess, cyclops (Rheita/Theudisklos's player). Atallana, the Knight of Sables, devoted to Percipia, wielder of the Sable Sword, said to be the last remnant of the missing 9th moon (Titanox's player).

Lieutenant Semiluna in Scadere: Lunar Alliance. My character, they/them, mid-20s, former captured by Heavenly Octave, desperate to redeem themself by serving Percipia.
Connections: Former captor, who later got promoted to a Main Character. Commander Noapte, Semiluna's commanding officer and uncle (Titanox's player).

Theudegisklos, Grossequinte (The Great Fifth): Grand Octave. They/any. Rheita's player got enough Destiny Points during Military Conflicts to retire the character and promote Semiluna's former captor to Main Character status.
Connections: None.

Hekmenos Drugan: Grand Octave. She/her, 21. Warrior noble of a prestigious family which hosted the captured Semiluna. She defected to the Lunar Alliance out of love for them, but agreed to be betrothed to Princess Percipia.
Connections: Sagrida, her assigned lady in waiting, convinced Hekmenos is a spy (me). Ragnagunda Aftra Drugan, Hekmenos's mother (Percipia's player).

Titanox: Lunar Alliance. Any, 5, robot soldier perpetually in trouble for breaking the rules/being a trickster
CORRECTION FROM LAST TIME: Titanox started with the Grunt role, and later switched to the Freelancer role.
Connections: Commander Keyali, Titan's commanding officer (humanoid), determined to bring the errant robot to heel (Percipia's player). Lieutenant Mercer, he/him (humanoid), friend and bad idea buddy (Hekmenos's player).

After the first novel chapter, we did Reputation and Rumor, then jumped to a military phase.

Rumors at this point, if I'm reading things correctly, were:

- Titanox disobeys direct order when it suits them. [NOTE: IMO, this is merely true.]
- Hekmenos is an Octave plant, and pretended to defect to enable the assassination attempt]on the dowager queen].
- Semiluna let the Great Fifth in to shoot the dowager queen.
- The ninth moon is actually a giant magical focus, makes the thousands [of potential troops] irrelevant.
- Percipia Vie allowed Octave assassins into her party to try and kill the queen so that she may ascend to the throne.
- The war will not be won until the ninth moon is found.

FACTS AND MOONS: We made a moon tab for the spreadsheet to name the moons and added facts we created over time.

- Moon 1: Phobos
- Moon 2: Mimas
- Moon 3: Tethys
- Moon 4: Callisto
- Moon 5: Deimos
- Moon 6: Adrastea
- Moon 7: Titanox
- Moon 8: Iapetus
- Schroedinger's Moon: Charon

Established Facts
- There is a 9th moon.
- The Octave has the 9th moon and is using it.

- Hekmenos's knife and Atallana's sword come from material found on the 9th moon. (Semiluna's 3 new garrotes don't.)
- Hekmenos's family opposes the war.
- The Octave originally lived on the planet.
- The Octave, or at least some members of it, have access to nigh perfect disguises. Hekmenos has one such mask.
- The people living on the planet now (or at least some of them) are the same people as the Octave—that is, the Octave is descended from folks who lived on the planet, but not all of those folks left the planet (and not all of the planet are from the same culture as the Octave—like, you know, cyclops).
- Technically, the war has lasted a very short time.
- However, there have been skirmishes, such as the one where Semiluna was captured.

In the first military phase, Titanox was killed by Titanox's player's fiat in a fight over Hekmenos's honor (I forget the details). As Titanox is a robot, this was theoretically a temporary setback only: they were rebuilt anew, and the player changed Titanox's age from 5 to 0.

Semiluna disguised themself as Queen Bertissima to draw out assassins, and in this, was successful. An assassin was indeed captured. Before that, however, Hekmenos visited the queen and poured out her heart to the woman she thought would soon be her mother-in-law, unaware that it was Semiluna, who did their best to give Hekmenos good advice, but had no idea what the queen would actually have said.

We moved to epistolary phase, and I see that I forgot that there was actual military action, and that during all of it, Hekmenos's mother was taken prisoner by the Lunar Alliance, and Hekmenos sent a note to her fiance asking to be allowed to visit her mother.

Princess Percipia was pleased with Semiluna and sent them a message "congratulating them for a job well done and granting them one boon of their choosing".

I wrote a vignette during the epistolary phase:

Semiluna reads Percipia's message, looks at it for a long time, folds it into carefully aesthetically mathematical folds, and keeps it in a box that requires a clever mathematical puzzle to unlock (i.e., a resolve token can find it). They wipe their eyes, straighten their clothing, and take a deep breath before going to hear their uncle explain exactly how pathetic they are.

(Because, of course, Semiluna's service and reward were never made public.)

Princess Geraldesse sent an invitation to Princess Percipia to come to her castle and talk strategy for the war. She also thanked Percipia for help winning the most recent battle and asked Percipia to bring "that Octave girl", as "she might have some insight".

Stars for this session (which was 2024 April 1, our 3rd session, I see).

From Hekmenos's player:
- Titan getting killed for defending Hekmenos's honor, extremely cool move, Titan being an automaton means engaging with the war differently
- Percipia's insane attitude to Hekmenos and everyone
- The scene with the 'queen mother', loved that misdirection
- Rheita encouraging Titan that it's okay to die in battle

From me:
- Titan clearly Feelings and Wants and Desires
- Hekmenos for sheer sincerity
- Rheita knowing what's best for their robot child
- Percipia's odd connection with Semiluna

Everyone else:
- From Rheita/Theudegisklos's player: Semiluna pretending to be the Queen
- From Percipia's player: The details in Rheita's divinations
- From Titanox's player: Reacting to Rheita's existential challenge

END NATTER

I've picked up Keith Ammann's *How to Defend Your Lair*. While in general, I'd like him to spend more time on systems that aren't *D&D* in his books (*), this one seems to have enough general principles that I can get good use out of it.

(*) GUMSHOE, BRPS, maybe Powered by the Apocalypse, Forged in the Dark, Fate, Feng Shui, or World/Chronicles of Darkness. Of course, it's not just a question of the specific system per se, but also of how the game worlds work. I'm more interested in a focus on personalities and broader abilities rather than "X species has high INT, but low WIS, and will use one of the following spell combinations and two of these six weapon groups". I understand why the books don't stray too far from *D&D*, but that's not a system I'm likely to run. Perhaps he'll branch out into *Daggerheart* some day. (I'm probably not likely to run that either, but I am curious about it.)

Travelling Light

Timothy Collinson No. 6, December 2026

Bits'n'Bobs

I think the brand new lecture on using/not using AI to first years in their 'Writing a Popular Journal Article' assignment (which I revisited in brief in my PhD session the following week) went well enough. My mentoring of a junior colleague through delivering some of it was a first for her and she did very well. I found myself 'summarizing' with a plea for students to embrace their gift of creativity and hold on to the unique voice they have (see comments to Pedro).

I was amused to stumble across this if only for the title: **https://www.drivethrurpg.com/en/product/565676/i-m-still-mad-about-the-library-of-alexandria.**

I've been encouraged to buy a copy for our University Library.

But the highlight of October was the start of a new Traveller campaign which I mentioned being in the offing last time. The character generation went very well and took almost all the time; we just had half an hour at the end to make a start on events and throw the PCs together for the first scene. Although I'm not entirely sure how easy it will be for each of them to justify joining the obvious 'lead'. We'll see. One player couldn't make it due to illness and this weekend he popped round to generate his first ever Traveller character which was a lot of fun. I'm looking forward to the second session later this week.

QUACKS

The usual advice is not to have players make task checks unless the outcome, success or failure, is important. On the other hand, if success is so critical to the scene or adventure that failure is not an option it is also wise to avoid the task check. There is a middle way and that is to allow a 'success BUT' possibility. Other RPGs have such a mechanic and QUACKS offers an extension (or perhaps more accurately more detail) to Traveller's Marginal Success or Marginal Failure where a 'condition' may be added to the former or 'significant consequence' may be added to the latter so the players succeed but with some disadvantage.

Johnn Four offered 'QUACK' in his *Roleplaying Tips* newsletter of 21.3.22 and I couldn't resist, with his permission, making it Traveller friendly with a d6 table.

If PCs fail a task check, they have the option of rolling for a complication. This should be at the Referee's discretion but encouraging the players to negotiate an appropriate complication may add to the role playing of the task check.

QUACKS by Johnn Four and Timothy Collinson		
D6	**Complication**	**Description**
1	Quality Complication	success but it is a terrible job that potentially sabotages a future encounter
2	Upshot Complication	success but with an unwanted outcome or side effect
3	Assets Complication	success but the PCs lose a valuable tool or other resource
4	Clock Complication	success but it takes longer than expected causing a new problem
5	Knowledge Complication	success but the PCs get bad information or miss out on getting key information (this may not be immediately apparent)
6	Skill Complication	success but the PC's skill (or characteristic stat) drops a point for its next usage; or, the next task using the skill/characteristic becomes harder

The Nose of the Artist by Timothy Collinson

Act 1: Regina (Spinward Marches 1910 A788899-C)

Year 1111. The PCs are struggling to find cargo and passengers. Two large freighters and a liner left yesterday and so far, leads have been thin on the ground. Taking a break, they visit a kava shop of some renown run by Mayenne Tedch.

Throughout the adventure, the PCs find various smells trigger memories (see d66 table [forthcoming]).

PATRON: Tokszill Ogz

Vargr 575787, Age 50something, Entertainer. Art (olfactory media) 3, Persuade 2

Employed by Col Banis Doughty to record the scents and sounds of the Fifth Frontier War (1107-1110) who lost troops and her sister on the battlefield and wants to capture meaningful memories. Ogz is looking for a small team to transport her to Knorbes, assist in her recordings and protect her from any dangers for a period of two weeks on arrival.

Act 2: Jump(s)

Ogz' comments on arrival at the PCs' vessel reveals the peculiarities of its smells and environment. She's not rude, however, just curious and speaks her mind.

Regina to Knorbes in a Jump 1 capable ship would most likely be via Hefry and Forboldn; possibly the Amber Zone world Ruie and then Forboldn. In a Jump 2 ship, one of those stops can be missed out.

Events

During one of the Jumps or transiting to/from world to Jump point, various events may occur:

- *Steward*: manages to burn one of the meals being prepared, the smell quickly permeates the area
- *Engineer*: spots a low-level warning on a hydroxyl pump, it takes a few minutes to identify the source of the problem – one of the staterooms – if an Average (8+) Engineer (life support) check is made
- *Simultaneously, Ogz* speaks to the steward in a concerned voice that there is danger. She can't explain, in Galanglic, what the problem is, although she will encourage characters to sniff, but can lead anyone to the source of the problem – one of the staterooms. She will manage this faster than the Engineer and save considerable trouble that would otherwise have resulted from any delay in locating the problem

Act 3: Knorbes (Spinward Marches 1807 E888765-2)

The Battlefield

- 20km out of startown to the northwest
- marisma terrain (waterlogged coastal wetland supporting diverse flora & fauna, particularly migrating avians), no trees but a few wildlife hides
- there are ditches, rivulets and ponds which are inhabited by ground nesting birds – seasonally
- in season, there any number of birdwatchers and other wildlife watchers present
- some Fifth Fronter War materiel wreckage visible, stripped of anything useful
- there is a military cemetery not far from the landing site/vehicle park
- the battlefield has an 'entrance' by a ground/grav vehicle park although only nearby parts of that locale are fenced

The Job

Ogz briefs the PCs. She has four sites of interest for her recordings. PCs to act as security, equipment carriers and still/holovid photographers. She will deal with the scents and the sounds & unpacks an osmeter & sound equipment.

Encounters

- arriving back at the vehicle park – a birdwatcher, friendly, gives pointers, warns about ditchnosers
- heading into the site a large, muscular guy dressed in dun coloured clothing & utility belt/knife; glancing at any vargr with PCs, snarls: "I hope you're going to keep your dog(s) under control."
- birdwatcher with a pink flash on a woolly hat (closer inspection reveals an image of a large and very longlegged wading bird) – she is a competitor artist attempting to steal Ogz' ideas
- multiple occasions: rustling in the grass or weeds a short distance away can be heard; investigating reveals nothing as whatever it was, has disappeared in the vegetation; a fast or lucky PC may spot a bird's tail vanishing quickly
- animal encounter: a penglar (ditch-noser) – quadruped, long nose, snuffling out eggs; not overly dangerous unless their young are threatened

[This is the barest of outlines or a teaser. A fuller treatment with climax is forthcoming.]

Comments on E&A 17

Patrick Brady – In the Hall of Stone

I enjoyed your thoughts on Moriarty. Well said! I've read a *lot* of Sherlock Holmes pastiches (indeed, I donated 50 volumes to the Conan Doyle collection in Portsmouth before their weight bought the attic down on my head) and I think you've captured something about the villain very well. (Though I might argue you down from the 8.33% as surely the four novels count for more text than the short stories!)

Thank you for the Felin and Holweg paper – helpful for my lecture.

Pedro Panhoca da Silva – Back to Brazilian Gamebooks

I read with interest your note about *O Rei e a Morté* having its interior scenes generated by AI and being full of clichés. I've read four things of late (in work, hobby, devotional reading and a novel). I am certain that all were written by or largely written by **generative AI**. Without any acknowledgement of such. Two of them I was being expected to comment on, along with others, but came to the job late due to some annual leave. I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised that AI was being used, but I was surprised that no one else was calling out the origins – particularly when the reputation of an institution or a journal was on the line. It was even more surprising that a very senior someone at the institution said she 'fully supported' the document. She clearly can't have read it was so awful. Or if she had read it was showing an astonishing lack of judgement. The novel I shall have to take or leave. It was interesting but perhaps a quarter as long again as it needed to be, repeated itself in whole paragraphs in a few places and repeated itself stylistically much more often (which was ok for one book but if I encounter it again will get old very fast). But I do worry that I'm becoming something of a mccarthyesque 'communists under every bed' obsessive. I'm not against using AI wisely – medical assistance or analysing 30 years of bat calls [1] quickly spring to mind. But I have questions: Should I just accept it's the way of things now or continue to rebel against God-given creativity being usurped? Should I give in and start using it in this way? What happens when I can't spot the tells any more? Am I just mistaken and wrongly accusing authors? (Not in those four cases). I also started wondering: can the Holy Spirit prompt an LLM as easily as I can? In any case, I'm glad to see your review calling it out.

John Redden – Reddened Stars

I didn't know about Kava tea from Hawai`i so thank you for that. I agree with you about the downside of smaller and smaller fonts.

Brian Misiaszek – Age of Menace

RYCTM: glad the 'answers' helped. I was in two minds about whether to bother creating them as I often think that kind of thing is obvious, but I learn in discussions with other people that maybe it's a bit atypical to be watching something on tv about, I don't know, a court martial and think 'oh, that would make a great Traveller character backstory' or be reading an article on jewellery in mother-in-law's 'luxury' weekend newspaper supplement and think 'I must nab the details for when I'm creating some Traveller items'. Fortunately my antinet becomes a) a good place to store such titbits for later use as well as b) assisting in the connections. Mazorra's a great example in that I'm unlikely to play it 'as is' but if I ever need a psychiatric hospital setting I'll know where to come! Indeed, each month I read a bit more and think 'I really ought to make that happen! Surely I can fit it into a campaign somewhere.' In any case, even if I don't bother doing 'answers' again, I've got a collection there that will feed all sorts of atmosphere/scenes/adventure. But I'm pleased to hear the abstracts make more sense now.

Avram Grumer – Going to Be Ad-libbed

Despite Traveller having 'referees' I'm much more a fan of the "be a fan of the main characters" approach. I'm pretty sure most of my players (in a campaign or at TravCon etc know I'm more likely to go with 'fun' (dramatic) rather than, necessarily, 'accurate'.

[1] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cqm24kgr1jz4o

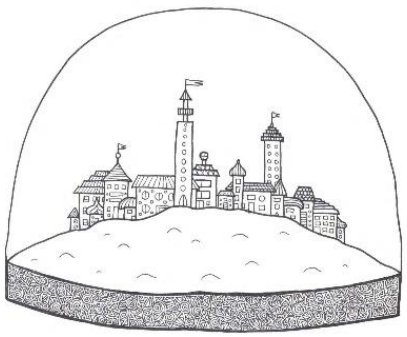
'deprotagonism' – my! There's a word. I try really hard not to do that; I fear I fail sometimes.

RYC about using Traveller to run a **Regency-style romance game** – yes and no. I've not seen something specifically Austenesque in quite that way, but my own *Second Scions' Society* was definitely set up aiming for just that kind of thing. It concerns the 'second' offspring of nobles getting together and trying to find some purpose as they're not the primary heirs, merely dilettantes, and have no formal responsibilities. Some years ago, I ran it at TravCon a couple of times and also in a workplace lunchtime group for a small group and it's worked well. However, 'part 1' tends towards being more like a typical Traveller adventure with parts 2 and 3 (and some inbetween sections) intending to be more relationship oriented. Unfortunately, I only wrote part 1 and the link to part 2, so parts 2 and 3 still remain little more than a mindmap of ideas. I think it would work well with PCs using Traveller rules – as you say – and I've definitely thought about it, just not managed to execute it very well as yet. I really ought to get writing part 2 where the more Good Society style relationships would come to the forefront.

Apparently I wasn't too late for *Worlds to Come* so thank you for that link.

Thank you for the link to Johan Nohr's posts on **indexing**. Taking a semi-professional interest in this (and having written a few indices of my own), I naturally jumped on this. Great advice for an RPG book. (I take issue with the 'every instance' though in other cases where exhaustively being able to find references is actually quite useful – my bibliographies might be a good example.)

Your domed city/building on Todav reminds me of a lovely illustration a Twitter friend @jaffne posted back when it was still Twitter and let me use in an adventure. Here it is! (see right)



Roger BW – Firedrake's Hoard

I like the local area map for *Deepnight*. I enjoyed playing that scenario at North Star which I think I reported on, but I should save your map in case I ever run it. Yes, I think we climbed up to the cockpit window as well to gesticulate at the locked in scout!

RYCT Patrick R on Mongoose failure, Johnn Four posted a thing he called QUACK some time back and being a Traveller fan I immediately thought it should be a d6 roll (not 5) and added a line which he said I was welcome to do. See **QUACKS** on page 1.

Dale Meier – Port Omaha Beacon

Really enjoyed the setting write up. The only downside was it reminded me of the wealth of Traveller settings (never mind adventures) and that I'll never be able to play them all! I'm not sure I knew that we shared chronic pain/fatigue in common as well as Traveller so my sympathies and well done on managing all that despite.

RYCTM on dates for the *JoFFR* – you're right, I was fiddling around with what/when and forgot that I had that in there. I suspect I'll just drop the idea of dates, I'm not sure they add anything. Mostly the abstracts are just supposed to be what they are for what you wish, but Jeff Z, editing *Freelance Traveller*, wanted a theme issue on the Fifth Frontier War (to tie in with TravellerCon in the US I believe) so I had that in mind on that occasion. But great to hear you might use them – I'd be delighted to hear how that goes – time travel or not.

RYCT Michael C – my old *Analogs* were (almost literally) rotting in the attic so I donated them to the University SF society.

Lisa Padol – An Unlooked for Zine

Oh my word! That's a reading list. That'll keep me going – thank you. (Agree about Thomas Covanant. It was giving them a go that made me realized I didn't need such bleakness in my life. What does Marvin the

Paranoid Android say? "Life's bad enough without wanting to invent more of it.")

RYCT to Brian M and the "reader/GM/player appreciation for detail and desire for All the Things" – that made me laugh! Yes, I definitely want All the Things. I suppose a compromise might be a 'Quickstart' or similar.

RYCTM – I hadn't connected the delayed comms and the *CoMC* telegraph operator – good thought. Will have to try Terra Ignota – thank you (though if I didn't say, I was poking fun at the Star Wars 'who shot first' debate).

RYCT Dale M – I was fascinated to read what Joseph's "bad report" to his father about his brothers was as I've not heard that before. (Also thanks for the link to Lee's article on golems.)

Myles Corcoran – Twisting the Rope

My tablet glitched at the moment I switched pages from your Mausritter writeup to the Kriegsmesser one and I didn't realize I'd changed adventure. That was an… interesting disjuncture in my brain!

I liked your dungeon map from a city map. Once or twice I've created Traveller cities by overlaying roads/buildings/points of interest on a real city map in PowerPoint and then removing the original map layer. For the simplicity of what I want, it works well enough. No one has yet spotted the original city. My main worry about doing so is that in a city with a Tech Level over 9 or so, I suspect grav vehicles would change design considerably; but I'm not sure how (or at least, how to represent that).

Brian Rogers – Denizens of the Library

Thank you for the encouragement over one of the abstracts. Really, they just started out as a bright-idea-bit-of-silliness, but I'm delighted they at least amuse. I still recall stumbling across the abstract that inspired that one and thinking 'I have to do something with that'!

None this month I'm afraid as I hadn't intended for them to become a regular thing. Just as and when I felt like it. The snag is that my work involves me stumbling across all sorts of irresistible ideas as I help students locate resources that will help with assignments and dissertations, such that I could probably spend much of a week producing them!

Jim Vassilakos – Computocracy: Prelude to the Transition

RYCT Patrick R about **paid GMs** when he said: "Personally, I don't like it changing the dynamic from 'someone we are gaming and socializing with' to 'someone we are paying to provide a service.' I'd rather have a GM who is a friend, not a contractor. I'd rather have a GM who does it for the love of the game, not someone in it for the money." and you replied:

"Yeah, thanks for saying this. It's something I was feeling, but I didn't want to be too judgmental, having never explored it myself. But what you said above is my personal opinion as well."

Yes, I think this is where I am as well. Much though I'd love the affirmation of being considered good enough to be paid (though presumably that would then just start a new cycle of wouldn't it be great to be paid more). As I think I said last issue, it's unlikely to happen!

RYC on **Traveller law levels** and wanting a chart similar to tech levels (difficult though it might be): Well go on then!

RYCTM on Tokszill Ogz and her nose for smells "It's brilliant". Thank you! I hope you enjoy the briefest of outlines of the adventure that it inspired on page 2 above. Hopefully I'll be able to publish a much fuller version in the near future over on DriveThruRPG if the winds of health and time permit.

Dylan Capel – Attacks of Opportunity

Sorry to hear about the tendon trouble. I've been moving my mouse over to the left-hand side as my right wrist has been complaining.

RYC on organizing your kickstarters: you know just sometimes I could wish that the 'doctor effect' (where medical professionals get asked – often in completely inappropriate situations such as church(!) to help with or advise on a health problem) extended to librarians. I know doctors get fed up with such intrusion, but just once I'd like to have someone usher

me over to their bookshelves, for example, and ask me something about arranging their titles.

(My quick tip *if* I were asked: Most people's problems with books – and dare I say games – stem from never having considered their 'primary facet'. I.e. what's the main thing you sort by? Fiction vs non-fiction? Subject categories? Pure author order? (I've never seen the latter). What most people don't realize is that their actual primary facet is almost invariably size. We have to for space considerations. No one is going to put small books on big shelves. But there's no shame in that; the British Library (and I'd guess Library of Congress etc) do exactly that – for the same reason.)

(Just don't get me started on 'influencers' who organize by spine colour for their glamour shots.)

Anyway, if I were passing I'd happily help with your games but I like the sound of your "digital wiki style system". I won't complain if you give more detail. You mention "scattered around your house" – do you have a letter code, say, to go with the number to identify room? That might help with location. All my Traveller bibliography work grew out of trying to keep track of my physical collection. I recall debating with myself whether I should include PDFs when they became a thing.

Patrick Zoch – The Dragon's Beard

'Living on the Margins' is indeed brilliant. Well done your daughter. I've probably bored you all before with the story of how my daughter supplied a 'found diary' for the first adventure I ran at TravCon. As I typed it up to turn it into a physical book for the players to read when their characters came across it, it made me cry. Daughters can be brilliant!

Interesting to read about your highway travails. I'd thought that kind of thing was a function of England's lousy motorways and too much crammed into too little space unlike the wide-open spaces of the USA! Evidently my memories of travelling across the States as a little boy in the 70s are rose-tinted.

Thanks for the game write ups. I'll never be able to play them all and indeed, at our church's games night I end up playing Traveller rather than the board games because I Can't Do Everything, so I enjoy the vicarious experience you pass along. Cheers. (My mind boggles at the gaming hall photo – would I be able to hear anything?!)

Patrick Riley – Quasipseudoludognostication

RYCT Gabriel R – **artist credits** are better now than they used to be but still often dreadful (e.g. a 300 page book full of art just listing names at the start but not who did what). Many years ago I contemplated doing an 'art index' of all of Traveller so you could find images that would be useful in games. It might have included size, b/w vs colour, keywords etc. But one of the reasons (aside from lack of time) I didn't ever do more than make a start to test the idea was the frustration of frequently not being able to do proper author attribution.

RYCT Brian R and unexpected technique in combat – wasn't that what AlphaGo did to Lee Sedol?

RYCT Jim V about Traveller 'economy' – I thought that was what Traveller was modelling and the rules aren't supposed to be representing everything – as some like to assume – but just the little ships filling the gaps?

Joshua Kronengold – Accidental Recall

RYCTM (& to Jim) about the pair of us no longer being last in *Ever & Anon* – yes, I miss that too and liked 'knowing my place' as a tail-end-charlie literally having the last word. Although it does spare me having to come up with some pearl of "wisdom" which probably wasn't worth the effort for readers anyway.

Jim Eckman – Ronin Engineer

RYCTM – do you mean me or someone else? Or another edition of *Travelling Light*? I can't see an article I wrote for #4 (unless you mean the abstracts – in which case, I'm delighted to hear you find them useful) nor in anything else the AI writing you're not a fan of (see also my comments to Pedro above).

Cowman Baloney Face

The Neverending Saga #11

by Matt Stevens
8 Hillside Avenue, Goldens Bridge, NY 10526
kent.allard.jr@gmail.com
Photographs by me



Yeah... I've been away for a bit.

And this is riiiight before the deadline, so... quick one from me.

Iceland

Well, I'm back. Thanks to **Brian Misiaszek** and **Jim Vassilakos** for reaching out to me.

My last Zine was in July. I missed August for a number of reasons, but mostly because I was preparing for a trip to Iceland. I'd long wanted to go; like most of my vacations, I love a combination of epic history and spectacular landscapes, and Iceland promised both.

After a difficult first day -- we landed during a bank holiday, and we spent about 5 hours in queues before escaping the airport -- our tour began in earnest. Just Kimberly and I in a rental car, driving around the island, staying in Spartan but comfortable hotel rooms.

All I can say is Iceland lived up to its promise. With grand vistas at every turn, we were in a state of perpetual awe. The museums were simple and a little amateurish, but that added to their charm, and the guides were well-informed and entertaining. It was easy to get immersed in this cozy but hard-scrabble little world.

I went on one side-quest: I knew *EVE Online* had been financed by a boardgame (*Haettuspil*, or "Danger Game"), and I wondered if I could find a copy. I found a huuuuuge game store outside Reykjavik; sadly they had no copies of "Danger Game," but their role-playing selection was even better than the Compleat Strategist's back home. (Sadly the Strat severely reduced its RPG shelfspace, so that's not saying much.) I didn't buy anything, but it was nice knowing it was there.

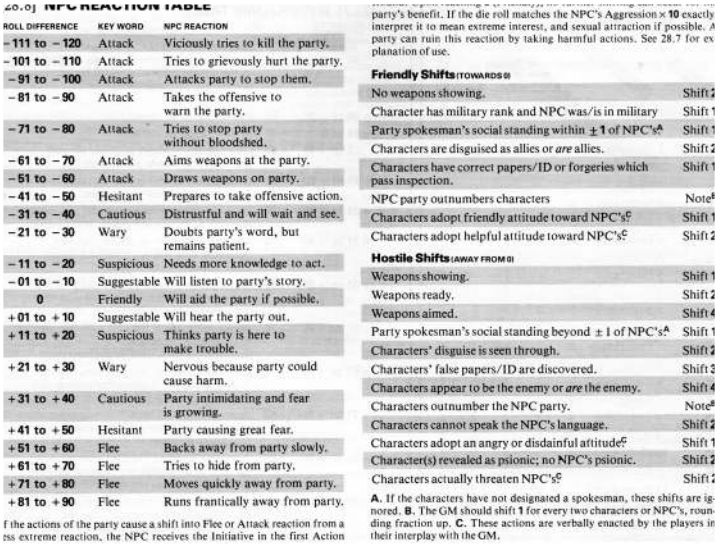


The real relevance of Iceland, though, was reminding me of what I look for in my games: Adventure. Exploration. Discovery. A brief jaunt from our grubby routines into a broader, more exciting world. I'd like to do those around tables when I can't go on vacations.

(*Left:* Me and Kim. I had been on a difficult hike, she smartly stayed back and watched.)

WEIRD MECHANIC OF THE MONTH
THE UNIVERSE REACTION TABLE

Reaction tables have been around since original D&D, and they were widely copied in early RPGs. SPI's science fiction RPG *Universe* was notoriously complicated, and its reaction table was too, like the rest of the game.



28.0] NPC REACTION TABLE

ROLL DIFFERENCE	KEY WORD	NPC REACTION
−111 to −120	Attack	Viciously tries to kill the party.
−101 to −110	Attack	Tries to grievously hurt the party.
−91 to −100	Attack	Attacks party to stop them.
−81 to −90	Attack	Takes the offensive to warn the party.
−71 to −80	Attack	Tries to stop party without bloodshed.
−61 to −70	Attack	Aims weapons at the party.
−51 to −60	Attack	Draws weapons on party.
−41 to −50	Hesitant	Prepares to take offensive action.
−31 to −40	Cautious	Distrustful and will wait and see.
−21 to −30	Wary	Doubts party's word, but remains patient.
−11 to −20	Suspicious	Needs more knowledge to act.
−01 to −10	Suggestable	Will listen to party's story.
0	Friendly	Will aid the party if possible.
+01 to +10	Suggestable	Will hear the party out.
+11 to +20	Suspicious	Thinks party is here to make trouble.
+21 to +30	Wary	Nervous because party could cause harm.
+31 to +40	Cautious	Party intimidating and fear is growing.
+41 to +50	Hesitant	Party causing great fear.
+51 to +60	Flee	Backs away from party slowly.
+61 to +70	Flee	Tries to hide from party.
+71 to +80	Flee	Moves quickly away from party.
+81 to +90	Flee	Runs frantically away from party.

f the actions of the party cause a shift into Flee or Attack reaction from a ss extreme reaction, the NPC receives the Initiative in the first Action

party's benefit. If the die roll matches the NPC's Aggression x 10 exactly interpret it to mean extreme interest, and sexual attraction if possible. A party can ruin this reaction by taking harmful actions. See 28.7 for ex planation of use.

Friendly Shifts (TOWARDS 0)	
No weapons showing.	Shift 2
Character has military rank and NPC was/is in military	Shift 1
Party spokesman's social standing within ±1 of NPC's[A]	Shift 1
Characters are disguised as allies or *are* allies.	Shift 2
Characters have correct papers/ID or forgeries which pass inspection.	Shift 1
NPC party outnumbers characters	Note[B]
Characters adopt friendly attitude toward NPC's[C]	Shift 1
Characters adopt helpful attitude toward NPC's[C]	Shift 2

Hostile Shifts (AWAY FROM 0)	
Weapons showing.	Shift 1
Weapons ready.	Shift 2
Weapons aimed.	Shift 4
Party spokesman's social standing beyond ±1 of NPC's[A]	Shift 1
Characters' disguise is seen through.	Shift 2
Characters' false papers/ID are discovered.	Shift 3
Characters appear to be the enemy or *are* the enemy.	Shift 4
Characters outnumber the NPC party.	Note[B]
Characters cannot speak the NPC's language.	Shift 2
Characters adopt an angry or disdainful attitude[C]	Shift 1
Character(s) revealed as psionic; no NPC's psionic.	Shift 2
Characters actually threaten NPC's[C]	Shift 2

A. If the characters have not designated a spokesman, these shifts are ignored. **B.** The GM should shift 1 for every two characters or NPC's, rounding fraction up. **C.** These actions are verbally enacted by the players in their interplay with the GM.

Every *Universe* NPC had an Aggression score from 1 to 12. When PCs met them, the GM would roll D100, subtract the NPC's Aggression x 10, and check the table on the left. *Then* they would shift the position on this table either towards or away from 0, based on the actions of the PCs, as shown above right. Annoyingly there's no natural "no shift" position. No weapons? Shift 2 towards zero. Have weapons? Shift 1 away. Absolutely goofy design.

These mechanics *were* more realistic than AD&D1, where reactions could range from "die, human!" to "I love you grandma" without discernable reason, but they were horribly impractical for play. Could they be salvaged?

I think so. Just roll two separate D10s. First roll determines if the PCs are seen as a threat. Add 6 if openly armed (add even more if clearly preparing to attack); add 6 if PCs are discovered to be in disguise or with false IDs[1]; and add any value from -4 to +4 based on PC behavior (-4 for friendly, +4 for hostile).Then check this table:

Roll	NPC Reaction
6 or less	Friendly
7-8	Suggestable
9-10	Suspicious
11-12	Wary
13-14	Cautious
15-16	Hesitant
17 or more	Flee or Attack

If the PCs are seen as threatening (say the first roll is over 10), make a second roll. If that roll is < the NPC's Aggression, the NPCs will prepare for a fight; otherwise they'll get ready to flee. (If you want, add the size of the NPC group, and subtract the size of the PC group, from this roll.) Much simpler.

[1] These numbers are just copied from the rules, and yeah, they're crazy. *Universe* teenagers, buying beer with fake IDs, must have constantly gotten blown away.

Traveller Survival Rolls... In World War I

(*An earlier version appeared in the* Traveller RPG *Facebook group.*)
The Survival roll is an infamous part of *Traveller*. I've long wondered how the game's numbers compare to those of real conflicts on Earth. If you were a soldier in World War I, how high would a combatant have to roll to survive?

I got the stats from the Library of Congress website. The second column is based on confirmed deaths, while the third is based on (Deaths+Prisoners+MIA)/Mobilization numbers. Use either one if you want an old school, "make a successful Survival roll or your character DIES" survival roll. The fourth column is based on all casualties, wounded included; this would be for more recent versions of *Traveller*, in which failed rolls no longer kill. Increase numbers by 1 if you want to give a +2 bonus for high ability scores, as *Traveller* rules do.

Nation	Survival (Low)	Survival (Mid)	Survival (High)
United States	3	3	4
British Empire	4	5	7
France	5	6	8
Italy	4	7	8
Belgium	4	5	7
Russia	5	7	9
Japan	3	3	3
Rumania	6	7	8
Serbia	7	8	8
Montenegro	4	5	7
Greece	4	6	7
Portugal	3	3	4
Germany	5	6	8
Austria-Hungary	4	6	10
Bulgaria	8	8	9
Turkey	5	6	8

To me, these numbers demonstrate how crazy Classic *Traveller* survival rolls were, which were 5+ for most services, 6+ for the Marines and 7+ for the Scouts. WWI nations were driven to the brink of collapse with losses like those.

Next Month

Will finally give you comments on E&A # 14, and no doubt another WMotM. See you then!



(*Left*: Yes, that is a goddamn double rainbow. Told you Iceland was spectacular.)

The Phoenix Nest

A zine for EVER & ANON 18 by Michael Cule
Of 3 Barratt Place, Easton Street, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 1XS.
UK. Copyright 2026 © Michael Cule
E-mail: Michael.Cule@gmail.com
Phone 01494 535878
Mobile 07816101942

BUILDING MY REPUTATION: A Deliberate Lack of Omniscience.

As the narrative of the AEGIS game gets going you will note that I am doing my best to note the occasions when I have decided to vary my depiction of the City and the Institute from the way I originally described it.

This would probably happen less if I had ever learned how to take proper contemporaneous notes from lectures at university, a thing I now see young whippersnappers pontificating about on the YouTubes. It is probably too late for me to try to learn it now.

I have taken the liberty to vary 'canon' at least as much as the scriptwriters of any long running TV series do. I hope I have less tendency to introduce ideas that should never have been introduced than the writers' room on, let us say to take an example at random, STAR TREK VOYAGER.

I am quite pleased with the amount of consistency I managed but I am well aware that NPCs can and do change characterisation or background due to my whim Mea culpa!

CUNNING PLANS AND OVER-REACHING AMBITIONS

The Monday night game continues to be GURPS BANESTORM: THE LICTORS SEASON TWO. I gave them a night in a Mysterious Monastery for their Halloween adjacent episode. (The Aegis campaign got to spend the night in a haunted castle.) The substitute game for the Three on Monday afternoons has stepped over to RQ:Glorantha and to WELCOME TO BOLDHOME, the adventure included with the new SARTAR supplement.

AEGIS THE INSTITUTE

A story of a Magic University and a cohort [1] of (currently) first year students.

The characters were

GRAHAM as **JAQ**, the son of a wealthy and important family in the City. With an Unknown Enemy and a mysterious Secret he doesn't even know about yet. With the sort of attitude that Graham's characters often have. Later to be known as The Custard Mage.

ALAN as **SELENE**, the daughter of a slightly less exalted family in the City. She had been in training in The Guard, (the CIty Police Force), when she suddenly cast a spell which forced a change in her career palns.

[1] This word wasn't used until a fair way into the campaign but means (in the jargon of the Institute) a group of students living in the same House, under the same House Master and House Keeper for their entire three years. This is not so much a retcon as a clarification of what I intended all along.

MARTIN as **CATWEAZLE**, an archaeology student (specialising in Cambodia) who had discovered the Wildcard Magic variant and proved to be happiest in the Library, Slim long haired. Wearing warm clothes and dust filled boots.'

DRAK as **MOUSHIKA**, a young (fourteen and voice not yet broken) Hindu, street urchin from a world where the British Empire still dominates everything a century after the Great War. Shy, uncertain and very subversive of authority in a quiet way. Drak chose the Syntactic Magic variant which gave his character a longer path to develop his abilities but promised more power later.

PUM as **(KAPTAIN) KESTREL** who had discovered the Flight spell while trying to follow his avocation of being a Masked Hero Who Fights Crime in a pulp version of the 1940s. Some thugs threw him off a rooftop (as you do) and he became even more dedicated to frustrating Bad Guys. Older than the rest having been in the Army as a medic. Older but not necessarily more mature.

EPISODE ONE MATRICULATION OR BUST (PART TWO)[2]

Now as I was saying…

When they showed their paperwork to the formidable looking woman who answered the door she said they should come in and that two of their number had already arrived.

"They have taken the top floor so it is up to you to find which of the available rooms you want for your own. There are three on the first floor and two on the ground floor. The ones of the ground floor do get distracted by passing traffic, especially after parties. Foot traffic, rowdy students."

SELENE: I'll probably be one of those.

Selene and Jaq took the ground floor rooms. Jaq said he'd do anything to avoid climbing stairs. There was a toilet/bathroom for the ground floor and the housekeeper's own room. (Also, a mysterious locked door which wasn't explained or even noticed until later.)

HOUSEKEEPER: We'll be gathering in the dining room on the first floor. The Master isn't back yet but we will eat when he is.

The windows on the ground floor were sealed but there was an 'air bloc' which could be programmed as to temperature and breeze.

HOUSEKEEPER: You'd be amazed what drunken foolish and overconfident wizards in training will do.

MOUSHIKA,: There is a mistake: this is a palace.
CATWEAZEL: No, it's digs. Good quality ones.

HOUSEKEEPER: You may address me as Mistress Alestalker.
JAQ: Ale-stalker?
HOUSEKEEPER: Yes. I talk to ales.

The dining room on the first floor was next to a kitchen: there was a serving hatch between the two. It had a large table and a small area near a roaring fire where was seated a beautiful young woman and a cat who was licking his paws by the fire.

[2] Still the session For 03 12 2025

There was a common bathroom and the remaining students could sort out which of the rooms they preferred for themselves. .

HOUSEKEEPER: That is the kitchen. The kitchen is ***mine*** you are not allowed in without ***my*** permission.

GM: (At players talking over him) Could you two please keep your characterisations under control for a moment?

The rooms were much of a muchness. There was a fire escape leading down to the ground level (and also down from the top level) outside the one at the back of the building.

(The top floor, I should add parenthetically contained the rooms of the two NPC students and the room of the HouseMaster.)

HOUSEKEEPER: Your only choice is which of you gets the room next to the fire escape and which one of you gets the room with the sun in the morning.

KESTREL: *(To Moushika*) You should have the one with sun. It'll feel just like home.
CATWEAZEL: Oh, bloody hell!

GM: Didn't even notice the condescension.
PUM A very British sort of condescension.
DRAK: Which I took as an order.
(Laughter)

There were bowls with jugs of water in them in the bedrooms. The running water was in the shared bathrooms.

PUM: The general level of tech in the city is?
GM: Tech level 8 but this is an old building.

The Housekeeper showed them that there was an enchantment on the water jugs which would cause them to heat the water in them to the student's taste.

HOUSEKEEPER: It won't boil water, that would be dangerous. You can ask for tea at the serving hatch.

Back in the dining room, the young lady was looking through regulations and going 'tut' at them.

JAQ: Is she one of the two students we haven't met yet?
HOUSEKEEPER: Yes.
JAQ: All right, don't introduce us then.
HOUSEKEEPER: You're supposed to be able to handle that for yourself.

She went into the kitchen and raised the serving hatch and asked if anyone wanted tea. There was only Selene asking for coffee.

HOUSEKEEPER: There's always one.
SELENE: I can do it.
HOUSEKEEPER: No, you can't come into **my** kitchen.

It was a very nicely set up kitchen. Gas fired, early twentieth century by the look of it. A large early American refrigerator.

JAQ: Mistress Alestalker, will I be allowed in the kitchen with you there, if I wanted to do some cooking with you supervising.
HOUSEKEEPER: Are you trying to take my job?
JAQ: No! I like cooking!
HOUSEKEEPER: Do you like people cooking with you? Because I don't.

He protested some more and then accepted she wasn't the Housekeeper he grew up with.

SELENE: You grew up with a housekeeper.
JAQ: Yes, didn't you?
SELENE: No, we had to do our own cooking and cleaning.
CATWEAZLE: Thanks goodness there's someone to do the cooking. Beans is about as much as I can manage.
JAQ: Perish the thought!
HOUSEKEEPER: What manner of beans?
CATWEAZLE: Open a tin and then burn them...

She shuddered and got on with providing tea and coffee.

HOUSEKEEPER: You'll have my cassoulet[3] and like it.

Moushika asked the young lady sitting beside the fire her name. She pointed at her badge and said "Moonfoot"

MOUSHIKA: Please to meet you, memsahib.
MOONFOOT: Don't call me 'my lady'.
MOUSHIKA: I did not mean to offend.
MOONFOOT: It's just that there is no rank between us so it is not proper. There is theoretically no rank the City but I wouldn't say that to all the families here.
JAQ: No rank in the City! Yeah, right.

She was in her late teens, early twenties. Very good looking and very polite.

Jaq and Selene mentioned their (distant) family relationship and when Moonfoot asked for details they fell over the rules about not using birth names and she apologised.

[3] A type of stew with small sausages, white beans and anything else that can be thrown into it. Of French origin.

And then they noticed that 'Selene' was technically a god's name. Moonfoot resolved to ask whoever is teaching them about Names.

CATWEAZLE: Perhaps having the second name makes it all right.
MOONFOOT: There are plenty of people called 'Who-Is-Like-The-Lord' where I come from.
JAQ: When you consider how many worlds there are, you kind of run out of worlds fairly quickly.

MOONFOOT: There are of course the Six but until they closed down the immigration paths there used to be a lot displaced religions coming here. They're all along Temple Street. You can find them in all sorts of flavours. Some of them do not approve of the Institute.
HOUSEKEEPER: Biscuits, cakes, coffee, tea...
JAQ: Fruit juice please.

That got him A Look before she recalled her manners and got him some pineapple juice.

There were two kinds of tea. Milk, sugar and cakes which had been sliced into suggested portions. And plates and forks.

JAQ: Cake without a fork is just wrong.

He glared at Selene and Catweazle who did not agree with him.

The Housekeeper asked Moushika if he would have preferred Chai and she said she would make sure he got that next time. "I have two blends and we can try both of them."

Moushika went all modest and not-wanting-to-make-a-fuss.

HOUSEKEEPER: I can't be doing with it myself. It upsets my bowels.

Moushika settled down to go through the book of regulations so he would know what a lawful and proper order was when he heard one.

MOONFOOT: I've been trying to do that. There's a lot of stuff in here.

Catweazle began to memorize it all. He had Eidetic Memory.

JAQ: See there are ranks. Student is a rank.
CATWEAZLE: Yes, students are.

Which is probably the first time in the campaign their translator stones had to deal with puns. It was not the last.

MOONFOOT: Did you know we had to wear uniforms?
MOUSHIKA: Where do we get uniforms?
MOONFOOT: They issue them. They issue everything. You have to sign for it and if you drop out...

Which produced a discussion of how to use the seal on your badge.

The Housekeeper asked someone if they wanted anything to eat or drink.

"Not yet," said a voice.

They looked around and tried to figure out where it came from. She had been talking to the cat.

MOUSHIKA: Is the cat a student?

HOUSEKEEPER: Oh, yes. Slowclaw, don't be unfriendly.
SLOWCLAW: I'm sleeping.

He was a large cat. Not Maine Coon sized but large and jet black. He had a stone hanging around his neck.

And at this point the GM wondered how he would wear his seal. And how he would use it being not provided with thumbs. We left that for another day.

MOONFOOT: He is a most disagreeable cat.
MOUSHIKA: Compared with other cats you have spoken to?
MOONFOOT: I spoke to his mother when she delivered him here. She is very polite.
SLOWCLAW: She's a crawler.

JAQ: Mistress, if I want to contact my mum... Let me be very clear. My mum is going to want me to contact her. Is there an easy way to do this?
HOUSEKEEPER: *(Thinks for a moment)* Hmm, Regulation 426
JAQ: Which I haven't read.
HOUSEKEEPER: Says that outside communication is a privilege rather than a right in the first year. Put a letter in the post. Collections are 9-30 and 4-30. [4]
KESTREL: This is starting to sound more and more like prison.

Jaq got a letter into the afternoon post describing his new friends.

KESTREL: So, Moonfoot and Moggy: are you first year students as well?

At the very moment of that piece of condescension, Moushika displaying his

[4] This was a detail that got elided over later when it became clear it was holding up the plot and the house gained a communal phone as well as the one in the Housemaster's rooms.

ignorance of any form of etiquette stuffed a slice of cake into his gob as fast as possible.

JAQ: There was a blur and then it was gone.
CATWEAZLE: There's no need to rush.
JAQ: 1) There is going to be more cake and 2) eating it politely matters.
MOUSHIKA: I am terribly sorry, sahib.
MOONFOOT: You shouldn't call him 'sahib' either. He's just another student.
MOUSHIKA: I have been raised to be polite to my betters.
MOONFOOT: He's not better than you. *(To Jaq)* You're not better than him!
JAQ: Didn't say I was better than him. I just said there was going to be more cake and he could use a fork. Politely.
KESTREL: The question remains. Are you first year students too?
SLOWCLAW: We are going to be housemates our whole time here. Assuming none of us die, quit or otherwise depart.
MOUSHIKA: *(Nose in the Regulations)* There's a section on 'Falling out of Reality' as well. It explains why they are not required to retrieve you if you went of your own accord.
MOONFOOT: Oh, yes it says in the student's guide: 'Leaving reality is grounds for expulsion and we are not obliged to retrieve you if you didn't at least leave a note telling us where you are going.' They're trying to communicate that you leave reality at your own risk. Which is a bit odd since there are lots of realities.

Gate Magic was a third year course and not to be attempted without supervision.

Section 14 of the student guide said that they were not allowed to use any magic they had not been formally passed as qualified in.

KESTREL: Magicking without a licence.

MOONFOOT: There's a large section of the Regulations on Things You Are Not Allowed to Do. Magics that may be regarded as legally dubious. Magics that you have to explain why you did it...
KESTREL: Am I allowed to fly?

That got noses back into the Regulations.

JAQ: How can I put this? You do not regularly see people flying around the City.
SLOWCLAW: Apart from the flying carpet services or species that can naturally fly. It's like learning to drive a vehicle: you need a licence. You're probably all right on Institute grounds.

Moushika wanted to know how he got a licence. Selene (being a native) could tell him. Jaq neither knew nor cared. He gave Kestrel the number of his chauffer service.

Selene explained that the City was big on public transportation. Bicycles are licenced. Not motorised bicycles, pedal driven ones. This boggled Moushika's mind.

SLOWCLAW: You have to demonstrate you know what you're doing. Have you ever seen an inexperienced cyclist trying to manoeuvre around a roundabout? Humans! You don't realise how many limbs they've got until they fall off something.

Cats he said, stuck to public transport. No, they don't have cat bicycles. What a silly idea.

Moushika was a bit peeved that he lugged his scooter all the way to the City.

MOONFOOT: Scoo-tah? What is this scoo-tah whereof you speak?[5]

CATWEAZLE: Slowclaw's going to love it when you run over his tail with that
MOUSHIKA: A small motorised bike.
SLOWCLAW: Definitely going to need a licence.

Which lead to the availability of petrol in the City. Or rather the lack of it.

SLOWCLAW: It's all electric.
MOUSHIKA: It's all right. I distil my own at home. It doesn't really run on petrol. It's a petrol engine.
SLOWCLAW: You may need special permission to operate it in the City. They're smelly things, aren't they?

Pum brought up a Wesley Snapes, Sandra Bullock, Sylvester Stallone movie DEMOLITION MAN This was starting to sound like the future city in that movie. "Ten dollar fine for profanity."

GM: There are a lot of Regulations. I haven't made them all up yet.

Eventually, the tea and cakes were cleared away and the Housekeeper told them to have a wash and 'if you've got good clothes, wear them'. The wave of puzzlement from the male students was notable, only Slowclaw being unfazed by the request.

Looking at Moushika she realised the situation and slightly despaired: he assured her that Samantha had bought him a second set of clothes.. Kestrel figured out that dinner jacket and a clean shirt might be in order.

"Casual but clean clothes," she explained. "I don't want to start a laundry run this late in the afternoon."

A while later there was a banging on a gong and a cry of "It's serving."

Moushika came in, wondered if he should put shoes on and noticed Moonfoot hadn't bothered.

Graham pointed out (and Jaq deeply wondered) what the point of forbidding him to use his 'real' name (which wasn't) when he was writing to his mother and anyone looking over his shoulder would be able to deduce his public name. He also wondered how he was to sign his note given 'Jaq' would mean nothing to her.

When they got to the dining room, there was a white haired man sitting at the head of the table. The cat was on a raised platform which had a place for him to lounge and a couple of bowls.

Housemaster Saeon was wearing a uniform jacket with long sleeves lined with silver.

SAEON: I am a Namer. I am a teacher of Namer magic here at the Institute. You will study Namer magic at a later date. It's very useful in many ways.
MOUSHIKA: What's Namer magic then?
SAEON: It's the magic of Names. *(Evil Grin)* Using them, changing them. I will be one of the Mages who guide you on your Graduation Quest. I don't know if anybody's mentioned it to you yet... Yes, we will have the soup now, please.

He explained that at Graduation they would be required to go to the Magic Realm and

[5] And it occurs to me now that the fact her Translator Stone could not translate 'scooter' for her says a lot about her world of origin.

find their magical True Name. Yes, that would be different from the True Name in the Registry.

SAEON: You will have learned how to be a magician by that point...
JAQ: So why don't I just use my name?
SAEON: Because it will no longer describe you. You will have changed.
JAQ: No, why can't I use it now?
SAEON: Your family name? Because it will be close enough to your true name to breach some of your magical defences. Knowing each person's True Name allows you to trace them without regard to range, cast spells on them without giving them a chance to resist. And is therefore a thing you want to keep secret. And only give to those you trust. My name, like yours is stored in the Registry and kept safe by it.

Jaq, unable to let it go, brought up the letter he had written to his mother. At her address.

SAEON: And what of it?
JAQ: We share a surname.
SAEON: They won't be able to find the rest of your name. You will inform your mother of your usename and sign your letters with it afterwards. There is a distraction and confusion effect around names stored in the Registry.

And then Jaq brought up the peculiarity of his True Name. At the dinner table, right in front of people he had only met that day.

The Housemaster excused himself at that point and took Jaq upstairs to his rooms.

SAEON: You're the young man who has the serial number. My friend the diviner told me about it. What are you doing telling your most intimate secrets at a moment's acquaintance? Are you stupid? Are you suicidal? Are you stupid AND suicidal?
JAQ: I'm not suicidal... Nobody told me... I didn't know before today that my name isn't my True Name...
SAEON: But you did know that True Names were important. That's common knowledge in the City. And... My life! Listen to me.
JAQ: I'm listening.
SAEON: The fact that you have a True Name which isn't your family name means several things and the fact that it is a serial number, a reference to some sort of experiment indicates things about you that *you* may not know. But you should have known that talking about your True Name whatever it may be to a bunch of strangers... I am being faced with an ethical argument that I should wipe the memories of my entire class. That is something I do not want to do.
JAQ: I'm sorry but if I didn't know that I didn't know that I didn't know that I should have known...
SAEON: You didn't think is the problem. So, what do I do?

He stalked back down stairs and sat down at the dinner table.

SAEON*: (To Jaq as he started to open his mouth*) Shut up! For now, just shut up. Friends, pupils, I am your Housemaster. I am responsible for your moral and professional development. If you have questions about anything, anything that puzzles you, you should come to me. I am an experienced and highly qualified magician of many years standing. If you have ethical or other difficulties then come to me and will see which of my many resources, I can use to solve them. However, I now find myself with a difficulty. This is an illustration of why you should come to me and see what I have to say when you are puzzled and alarmed. This.. genius has revealed things about himself to you which

he should not have shared with the love of his life.
KESTREL: He didn't reveal anything to us.
SAEON: He talked at the table and you have far too much information. No, you don't know his True Name but you know there is something unusual about it.
MOUSHIKA: I'm sorry sir but I don't think we knew there was something wrong until you told us.
SAEON: *(To Jaq)* Don't look as if this isn't your fault.
JAQ: I'll just sit here and be wrong.
SAEON: It's what you're good at.
JAQ: It's not what my tutor used to say.
SELENE: He was being paid to say...
KESTREL: For some people it seems their existence just serves to be an example to others.
SAEON: I must ask all of you to take an oath. I will not ask that of my Housekeeper as she is a grown up, adult person and I can rely on her. But I will ask to swear an oath not to reveal what you know without my permission. And not to discuss it among yourselves. My only alternative is to wipe your memories of the early part of this evening. I really don't want to do that.

He ordered a bowl bought to the table. He explained the Oath spell would alert him if they broke it and might cause them some pain as well.

SAEON: *(Over protestations that he had caused the problem)* Despite the current evidence some of you might turn out to be quite intelligent students. And therefore, the oath.
MOUSHIKA: Master, is there is any process for being transferred to a different house?
SAEON: Don't tempt me. I am not allowed to kill my pupils. You should be grateful.

The bowl was brought filled with punch. And then taken back when Moushika objected to the alcohol. A bowl of pineapple juice was brought instead.

SAEON: There is no magic that will force wisdom on someone who does not have it.
MOUSHIKA: Ah, that does answer one of my questions.

They shared a bowl of pineapple to swear the oath. Jaq was excluded from the oath.

Jaq had another question.

SAEON: Oh dear... Is it going to be wiser for me to take you upstairs pre-emptively? Brace yourselves for stupidity!
JAQ: You've just said we should not reveal our True Names to our greatest lover or the person we've only just met.
SAEON: You should be very careful to give your True Name to anyone.
JAQ: We came through the door and were interviewed by a bunch of people who we never met before in any way whatsoever and they detected our true names and wrote them down.
SAEON: That was the process of Registration...
JAQ: You've just broken the entire rules of everything you've just said!
KESTREL: No that's admin. That supersedes everything.
SAEON: You have surrendered your True Name to the Keeping of the Institute. It is as safe there as it is possible for it to be.
MOUSHIKA: Also, it allows the Institute to trace us and to cast magic on us if need be.

SAEON: Yes. It will even trace you across worlds if you should be so unfortunate[6]. I refer you to section number...

Moonfoot recited the correct reference number with a pleased air.

The soup was finished. They handed the plates and tureens and what have you to the Housekeeper who asked Moonfoot to show Moushika how to use the utensils which she did despite his protestations.

Moushika protested that he had already eaten all he was used to at a meal and was told he must learn to pace himself.

A huge scaly, bony fish was brought in. It had been roasted with fruits and vegetables. Jaq made his Connoisseur: Food roll and gave a description of the dish and how it was normally prepared. The Housekeeper said she used a little less garlic than that but that it was one of the best recipes she knew.

Bowls with vegetables and sauces were put out while the House Master carved the fish into appropriately sized portions. The cat got the head and attacked it with both claws and his entire array of teeth.

Moushika was wondering how he could get moved to next to the cat.

The Housekeeper did sit down at table with them at the far end from the Master. She announced the times that Breakfast would be served in the morning and that they had two appointments during the day to register at the Library and draw their issue of uniforms.

Moushika wanted to know how many meals he had to face during the day. Breakfast, lunch and supper which would be in the Hall once a week on the Sunday. Which was tomorrow. He looked a little overwhelmed.
HOUSEKEEPER: You could use a little flesh on your bones.
SAEON: Any further questions?

They would also be drawing copies of the texts for the compulsory language course in the first two weeks.

SAEON: There is a language the stones do not reach. It is the language of magic. The Gods of the City provide the stones to the City. But this is a thing of magic, not the Divine and not part of their reach. We will teach you ABOUT the magic of the Gods but we cannot teach it here. It interacts strangely with our forms of magic. I have known pupils in the past who have chosen to change their abilities so they can serve the Gods. But it is very rare.
SELENE: So, they lose the ability to do normal magic.,
SAEON: Yes, and the knowledge just goes. It is a radical thing. But some people find it a pleasing way to live their lives. I can't imagine it myself.

On enquiry from Martin I declared date in the City to be early autumn in the year...

GM I'll get back to you on that. [7]

[6] I think that boast got retconned out of existence later in the campaign.

[7] *THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF E&A: Hang on! We still haven't reached the moment of Matriculation! GM: Nope. Next session will have to be Part 3. Perhaps, this is like a multiple part episode of the TV series.*

DISTRACTIONS

The GM had a Senior Moment trying to find his sweeteners. "They are hiding in a pocket where they are not normally found!"

The Papaya jam Pum brought back from holiday.

Pum bursting into the theme tunes from 1970s TV series.

The peculiarity of clothes sizes between nations. A Japanese catlogue saying 'Our XXL is a European M'.

FROM ISSUE 17

A DELAYED IGTHEME: How Much For Just The Virgins?

There's a segment on one of our recent podcasts directly inspired by this IgTheme. We wandered all over the place, bringing in a lot of comparisons with Hitler and Stalin signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (a case of two monsters finding they had more in common than they could admit) and the idea of humanity trying to negotiate with the syphilis virus.

Roger's argument (and it's a good one) is that if you can talk to it and it doesn't need to kill you Right Now then negotiation is possible. My argument is that compromise isn't always a good idea even if it buys you that most valuable thing: Time. Neville Chamberlain did that for Britain but I don't think that was what he intended to do, merely a happy side effect. It hasn't served to improve the judgement of history on him.

Even people of the highest virtues can prevaricate and make deals that will get them despised by history. And even the worst monsters have their good sides. And all of this can lead to great dramatic and emotional role-playing.

But sometimes, just sometimes, you can discover that if you are capable of finding an accommodation with the monster, you may be a monster yourself.[8] I think that may be a way of restating the moral of THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM OMELAS:

"Just how many virgins are you willing to send to the dragon to ensure your house doesn't burn down? In round figures per year?"

COMMENTARIAT ON ISSUE 16

PATRICK BRADY: RYCT Me: Are the amendments to GOO TEKUMEL available anywhere? I probably wouldn't use that system if I chose to revisit Tekumel but it would be of academic interest to me. I know what you mean about the crunchiness of GURPS but it's a crunchiness I learned a long time ago. New systems struggle to find space in the bits of my brain still plastic enough to adapt. Re Not Their Fault: I hope the players in the one CoC game I ran without adequate preparation at a local con forgave me. I read through the scenario once having only limited time to prepare and discovered a major flaw in the logic of it only while actually running it. I did my best to apologise. I couldn't even stagger through to the end.

PATRICK ZOCH: RYCT Brian Rogers: You will have noticed that I keep the Players' comments separate from the

[8] *THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF E&A: Those who fight against monsters become monsters. Those who negotiate with monsters discover they were monsters all along. ME: What happened to the brogue? TPPoE&A: Begorrah. We meant to add begorrah, to be sure, to be sure. ME: Just watch it, you.*

Characters' dialogue by putting the 'meta' words of the Players (including the GM) in italic. That's enough in my mind to keep things clear. My players do complain, with some justification, that the subtle shifts in vocabulary and tone that I think make it clear which NPC is talking to them aren't always that obvious. // Isn't it joyful when the players say: "Hang on, didn't he say something about that before? Way back, at the start of the campaign?" Sometimes it's all I can do not to chortle.

PATRICK RILEY:[9] RYCT ROGER B_W: I think we could use an IgTheme on "When and How is it all right to surprise the players? Where is the boundary that crosses over into 'bait-and-switch'? Could METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA be published in this age of 'buy-in'?

MYLES COCORAN: RYCT Me: No, no. Jaq is convinced his custard is delicious and its combat capabilities are merely incidental. I tremble before the prospect of him managing to create Essential Custard. And he decries other people's suggestions of creating Pink Custard (did your school have that?) as 'heresy'. Rain Of Custard is already seeing much use. // Re Farage: I just this morning crumpled up a Reform flyer showing him impersonating An English Country Gentleman on the front (complete with dog) and asserting on the back cover that we only had a hundred days to save the country. What that was supposed to mean I did not enquire further. // **RYCT Jim V:** I have resolved to leave my games collection to the board game and RPG societies at Oxford. I probably ought to send them a note warning about that the way I did before leaving my books to the SF/F society.

BRIAN ROGERS: RYCT Me: Alas they won't allow me crayons any more! They melt in my hot, sweaty hands and I end up using them for finger painting on the walls of my padded cell!

ROGER BELL_WEST: RYCT Me: I am torn between admitting the typo and improvising some excuse about the mystery of the missing 24 gates…. //

BRYANT DURRELL: RYCT PATRICK BRADY: The Super Power with the limited pool of dice would work very well to model the Green Lantern power ring as depicted in LANTERNS and, I believe, most modern depictions of the Corps.

JIM VASSILIAKOS: Re THE GREAT BANK ROBBERY: I wonder, as I always do when I hear about the great cashless future how the street people survived. Probably the answer would be in the US they didn't and elsewhere they did. // **Re GM Dickery.** That was whole party Dickery with the assistance of the GM. Why yes, you could say the same thing about the time I let my players lynch Vijay.[10] // **RYCT Roger B_W:** Well, the crew sizes on TRAVELLER Starships is designed to fit the size of player groups. The Scout is for two to three players (two to four if the passengers can share a stateroom). The Free/Far Trader can take the standard role-playing party of four to six. I'm not at all sure what the price of the damn things is designed to ensure: to keep the party tied to the treadmill of deliver cargo/complete mission. Find the next cargo/mission. Pay off mortgage. Repeat. I do have a dread of stories where someone invents a cheap space/star drive and distributes it to everyone. Including the people who think

[9] Three Patricks All In A Row. Title for a filk song. When found, make note of.

[10] I'll not tell that again…Unless I have space at the end of the zine.

bombarding their enemies from orbit will solve all our problems. Don't get Roger started on the grim implications of reactionless drives. // **Re AI Consciousness:** My guess is that the consciousness of AI (if it exists) is like the consciousness of dream (or at least my dreams). They hallucinate because their model of the world is transient and only makes sense in the dream world. The fake references are like the books I try to read in my dreams: they can come up with the titles but when I try to open them they are either blank or the whole volume is strangely missing. Unlike me they can't suddenly think "I can't be back at school and still have my beard" and wake myself up.

LISA PADOL: RYCT ROGER B_W: The 'I'm too old for this shit' trope is one we've discussed on the podcast. It goes along with 'Getting the gang/band together for one last time' trope. RYCT Me: PALIMPSEST looks interesting but I tremble at the thought of adding to my unread list. I just listened to a podcast that made me add something to my kindle library, which is only marginally better than adding to the books crowding me out of the flat. // Having recently relistened to the pre-campaign discussion, I think the charitable interpretation of the players' objections were that they were signing up to a pig in a poke deal and spending valuable character points on something that might not work out for them. I wanted the tests they faced as they learned magic to be risky and significant. They did not want that. I was riding the wave of having recently re-read the Commonweal series and wanted something of the feel of that… But that was caviar to the general. I did manage to shoe-horn in a reference to that world later in the campaign. // In the write-up in this issue, Slowclaw is far ruder and grumpier than he later is. // I thought of Vishi as late teens but more mature than a free person would be at that age. // The cracked slave collar was a Plot-Device and needed no justification. // I think the Senator wanted both sides to kill each other off or at least so annoy the Emperor that they both got exiled. // All the players could have checked Loyalty to see if they wanted to stay or go. Only two did that I recall. Yes, Vishi, having discovered his master was Chaos-Tainted sought other employment. Vishi comes from a culture where Chaos is always evil. Eshan comes from a culture where Chaos on their side is sometimes good. And Vostor was Chaos-Tainted because Graham had randomly rolled it as his Gift from his God in character generation. // Vishi is straightforwardly loyal to himself. He will serve the Senator with the same diligence and intelligence that he gave to Vostor. And probably be more appreciated there. // The GLORANTHA SOURCEBOOK is a good start. I'd only use the Guide if I were researching a particular place or culture before starting a campaign. It was how I planned their journey up the river to Glamour. LIFE OF MOONSON is available on Drive Thru RPG along with the ROUGH GUIDE TO GLAMOUR which was part of the players pack for the LARP. LoM is a beautiful piece of work as are HOME OF THE BOLD and HOW THE WEST WAS ONE which I believe are also available. // I think my problem with REIGN and Tekumel is that EPT and all the other systems that have depicted Tekumel show it from the gritty street level on up to the level of Movers and Shakers. For that you need a full stretch game system capable of doing both. And the One Roll Engine only depicts a small range of capability, ten levels. And the magic system depicted for Tekumel divides into two kinds (Ritual and Psychic) and a considerable number of schools of knowledge and technique built around the worship of the gods. The basic levels of magical knowledge are shared between all

the temples but the higher levels become more and more specialised with fewer an fewer groups knowing how to do specific things. Ksarul and Sarku both know magics about creating Undead but have different specialisations. And it seems to me that REIGN doesn't work for that degree of specialisation. Its magic system divides all types of magic into individual, very different practices, each cult or school keeping as many of its secrets away from the rest of the world as possible and the rewards and risks of permanently attuning to a particular type of school mean that there are no general wizards in Heluso and Milonda. (And I wasn't that impressed with any of the other systems that have been published before you ask.)

Also, it occurs to me that H&M are so arranged that only a few magical schools will interact except in the most urban areas, i.e. the core of the Empire. In Tekumel all the Temples interact almost all of the time.

I think what I would need to do for REIGN OF THE PETAL THRONE is decide at which power/social level the campaign is going to play out. (And probably that's the first thing any REIGN game needs to decide.) And I think what I would favour is the level of a middling power group trying to grow into a major power group. A solid Middle Status clan or the Temple of a particular god in a particular city. The Barbarians arriving in Jakalla and seeking citizenship game would need a whole different set of rules as would the game of Imperial level politics focused on intrigue between the High Clans and the top level of the various Temples.

The rules say that there are some things that all magicians of this type (Ritual or Psychic) can do. (These are the things the magicians in the Barbarians campaign would be struggling to master.) No individual spells would be detailed, all effects would be fast to cast and already mastered. The magicians in this campaign start out with some Generic spells (which only some Temples teach) and would be trying to gain access to the inner secrets of the Temples. Give a page of spells to each Temple for the two types of magic.

Perhaps you should also say: There are magics beyond your current reach: here are some of the things they do.

I think part of the problem I'm having getting my head around this is that H&M depicts in the same book magics that can shatter armies and magics that make it easier to sneak up on a single enemy.

I have a feeling I'm never going to do this… But I'm going to keep thinking about it. If I were happier with QUESTWORLDS I would have settled on that system long ago. But I find the very flexibility of the descriptors makes it hard to give a sense of the solidity of the world. I need a reason to say 'No you can't do that' when what a player wants to do violates my sense of what the world is like and that's something QW/HQ makes tricky for me.

I also have problems with getting my head around FATE because it too has a limited range and a set of assumptions about how far the abilities of the characters can take them. It feels cramped in peculiar ways to someone like me who grew up with the old systems.

COMMETARIAT ON E&A 17

We have a fine run of covers just now, no?

PATRICK BRADY: Re Paid GMing. And RYCT Me: As time has gone by, my

preparation for a session has become lighter and lighter. I won't normally do a full writeup of NPC characters. When monsters are involved I'll normally drag their stats out of a printed source. I will do a through read through of a printed scenario: I've been trapped by surprises in things I haven't read properly before. My own material is usually prepared just a bit ahead of the point the PCs have reached with the occasional note about foreshadowing things I have in mind for later. Two hours preparation after a fair bit of sitting and worrying at the plot is about all I do at most. I would feel incredibly impertinent if I tried to put that process on the market. // Re State Fright: I had terrible trouble reading out my essays at university. Because, you see, I knew the intellectual quality of the idiot who wrote it. // **RYCT Lisa on an Odessey RPG:** Have you come across AGON?

JOHN REDDEN: RYCT Me: What Russia is up to in the UK… is a subject of much speculation and a few clear facts. The speculation mostly focusses on possible future hostilities and the endless list of ways Russia could attack us if they ever decided to move from hostilities in the shadows to open war. Things such as attacking the undersea communications cables or hacking into computers to disrupt supplies and communication. There was a wave of computer hacking attacking refrigeration units in supermarkets on the continent. And just today there was a story about the Super-Duper Top Secret Anti-Hacking team keeping that from happening to the UK. As I said to the Wednesday Night group: "Putin has finally got me mad! Interfering with our elections, murdering people on our streets: I remained calm. But now he threatens my food supply!"

Speaking of which the interference in our elections is more substantially proven but not enough to convince the true believers who were the beneficiaries of the Kremlin-bot farms stirring up the Internet for right-wing causes especially Brexit.

The murders are the most thoroughly proven offences. Putin does not regard anyone else's sovereignty as sacrosanct especially when it comes to killing people who have betrayed him and Russia. Russian exiles have been killed with exotic metals[11] and defectors poisoned with equally exotic organic substances which latter led to the death of one local resident and the severe injuring of two others in addition to the target and his daughter.[12]

I keep seeing posts on the Internet in which Russian officials gloat about how easy it would be to destroy the United Kingdom with nuclear and other weapons. Given I don't think they are suicidal I believe these are more intended for internal propaganda purposes. All three of our active SSBNs are at sea as much as can be practically managed at the moment at least according to *our* internal propaganda.

Brian C Misiaszek RYCT Me: I look at my unread pile and it reminds me not of my humility but of my arrogant over-estimation of my capacity to absorb new texts.

AVRAM GRUMER: Re NEWS: And now we hear Ken St Andre is gone. Looking back on the list of his contributions to the hobby I was struck how much he achieved in the public space and wondered how much more he achieved quietly and in private. *Ave atque vale*. **Re A USABLE INDEX**

11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poisoning_of_Alexander_Litvinenko

12 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poisoning_of_Sergei_and_Yulia_Skripal

Whatever that looks like in an RPG it isn't what RUNEQUEST: Glorantha is providing

ATTRONARCH: I like the art in your write ups.

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: Oooh, land boundary disputes! I haven't done one of those for the Lictors yet. At least not pure land based problems. There's been a lot of noble inheritance stuff. Hmm.

DALE MEIER: Re AUTHOR'S NOTE: Eeep! "When troubles come, they come not single spies but in battalions". My sympathy for the multiple shutdowns of bits of your operating systems. Hope that you find 'cutting for the stone' in the modern day less daunting than what I know of medieval and renaissance days.

LISA PADOL: RYCT Me: when finally noticed by the Ministry she was already introducing technologies and science that were Not Approved. She was interrogated, brainwashed and released into the care of the Alycites who eventually recruited her as a Sister. The Ministry sometimes reacts harshly because they don't quite understand the requirements of their hidden masters: the lower ranks do not know who (or what) their hidden masters are. If they ever manage to capture 'Paul Clifford' the agitator they will ring him dry of any and all information about his subversive activities and then cast his exquisitely rendered body parts into the howling void.

MYLES CORCORAN: Re Your Taxi Driver MAGE Character: The TARDIS too takes her passenger(s) where they need to be but I bet she doesn't have to worry about being destroyed there as often as your cabbie will.

JIM VASSILAKOS: Re our non-contributing readers: Perhaps we could get a sense of them by inviting questions to be put to the contributors in general, the way a podcast will call for comments by listeners**. Re THE QUIET YEAR**: There are certainly map generating RPG systems: I have a few and perhaps I should actually give them a try, perhaps with my Monday afternoon subgroup.

PATRICK RILEY: Oh, but those are very interesting campaign set-up questions! I must remember the technique.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: RYCT Me: I will not speculate about Jarathir's fate unless I ever return to that setting. Which is unlikely.

NO SPACE FOR THE STORY OF THE LYNCHING OF VIJAY! [13]

MY FINAL WORD IS: MATERTERAL Which is the equivalent of 'avuncular' for aunts. It comes from the Latin word 'matertera' meaning not aunt but specifically '*maternal* aunt'. The word for paternal aunt was *amita* which mutates via Old French into the modern English 'aunt'. I was slightly boggled to discover they distinguished the two types of Aunt. I'm sure Bertie Wooster's two Aunts were examples of the two types.

TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELVES AS YOU BUY FESTIVE PRESENTS FOR NIECES AND NEPHEWS YOU AVUNCULAR AND MATERTERAL LOT.

[13] Did you think I'd forgotten? And I can't find it by searching my files so I can point you to the earlier publications. It will have to wait until another time.

DENIZENS OF THE LIBRARY #17

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

All About Me

The Crazy Season continues to run Crazy around Casa Rogers, with my workload being double it's normal amount through mid-December. That being said, I still found time to get my usual gaming done, including the fourth and final (for now) session of the *Star Wars* game. The player for whom I started this game as a learning exercise is taking over next year with *Camp Snallygaster*, an RPG where you're the counsellors at a kids summer camp where the managers have disappeared. I'll try to get the final *Star Wars* session written up quickly, but I am looking forward to being a player.

Speaking of being a player, the *Traveller* game has hit a point where I can inject my new PC: the group is back on the planet they had been prevented from landing on in their identifiable ship, necessitating the helping of a lesser noble hunter in his quest to bag a giant charismatic megafauna in trade for being able to borrow his ship to get where they wanted to go. My PC will have been on that planet and have first-hand information about what lead to their persona non grata status to begin with. This is the issue with coming into a game in year 6: LORE!

Also being a player, the *D&D 3rd Edition* PBEM has our 4th level PCs facing Frost Giants. Well, avoiding Frost Giants and any responsibility for facing them, really. We have rescued the prince of the eagles from them, and I really want to mark the rest as someone else's problem.

Set build is done for *Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; I don't have any good pictures but I think it came out well. The woman who directs at our school produces at the next town over and their production of *Clue* was a hoot. In terms of the library saga, we are nearing year's end and I'm not sure if they're going to follow through on their threat to cancel the events if I don't drop the *13th Age* Game and run *Knave* weekly for whoever shows up, no matter how many kids that may be. It's hanging over things, to be honest.

Inside the Library:

I know I promised the *Mothership* write up but that will have to be next month because I am a little time short.

The Hole-in-the-Wall-Gang Holiday Special

This is a Western' more precisely a Fantasy Western. The kids bought into it but if I had gone straight Western I think I wouldn't have hooked half of them. I made 10 pregens, and to speed that along I templated them on the real members of Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch. I was informed by my wife and several friends that none of the kids would recognize them. Sadly, they were right[1]. The selected PCs were all 4th level PCs, and Owl Hoot Trail is essentially D&D 3E stripped way down and re-chromed for westerns. If you interpolate class and race names mean based on that, you're likely correct.

- The Sundance Kid (Human Gunslinger) fast, lethal, handsome, by default in command since no one picked Butch (Human Scoundrel)
- Josie Basset (Human Preacher): owner of the ranch the Wild Bunch fenced cattle through, she and her sister[2] held off cattle barons trying to take their land by being intimate with outlaws.
- William "News" Carver (Human Scoundrel), his nickname comes from him keeping the gang's news-paper clippings (and hence reading all the papers).
- Ben "Tall Texan" Kirkpatrick (Sidhe Scout), he has the slight build of all sidhe, and can ride his pet Stag, lovingly named "Svenison"[3]
- George "Flat Nose" Curry (Hillfolk Shaman), he is the adopted father of Harvy "Kid Curry" Logan (Orc Ruffian), who alas was not picked.
- Hank "Bub" Meeks (Human Gadgeteer)[4] A bit of pyromaniac, played by the groups' biggest chaos goblin. Keep that in mind.

With half the gang elsewhere while the heat died down from a robbery, Sundance contemplated the winter. News knew that there was a train passing by soon with the payroll for a mining consortium near Inferno Falls[5],

[1] When one of the players was picked up after the first session his dad asked him what he played this month. On being informed they were western bandits robbing a train his dad asked "Oh, like Butch and Sundance?" "Funny thing, dad…" As a result dad made him watch *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* before the 2nd session and came back full of movie quotes.

[2] There are great legends that her sister, Ann Basset, had the alternate identity of Etta Place, Sundance's paramour. History most likely doesn't bear this out, but in game, 100% - had Ann been picked she's a Mentalist with Disguise Self, letting her carry on the dual identity. The 6 teen boys didn't want to do anything with the cross-the-group romances, but this is a great set up to remember for a romance based western.

[3] Kirkpatrick's player developed an elaborate backstory for Svenison, with his estranged doe and convictions for selling salt licks on the black market.

[4] this player actually got the OHT rules and made his own PC, also a gadgeteer named Hank. Synchronicity!

[5] The Pelgrane con module for *OHT* called *The Box*.

and Flat Nose was still carrying a map to the legendary Lost Conquistador Mine that he picked up ages ago and the group kept contemplating going to[6]. After bickering around the group they voted 4 to 2 to rob the train.

The whole of the first session was them planning their train robbery with a plan that, if I were being completely honest, would not work, but these kids had 0 exposure to Westerns so sure, why not. At the end of the session, they have entered the secure car from the passenger end, lit it on fire from the engine end[7], and not just one bank guard (they bribed the other one for information and to get him off the train at a prior stop) but 5 other guards protecting a stone coffin-sized box, who Flat Nose has temporarily immobilized with vine spirits.

In the second session the Wild Bunch gets the safe open, steals not just all the payroll but a valise of papers, and is perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones with the five guards… but one of them *HAS TO KNOW WHAT'S IN THE BOX*![8] When he does get the box open its full of dirt. This precipitates a gunfight, Bub losing a lot of HP (but not getting an injury) and the PCs fleeing. At the camp they make for the night (it's another full days ride to the Hole-in-the-Wall), News stays up to read the papers – letters between the mayor of Inferno Falls and a Count Orlock inviting the Count to the United States and the town in specific[9], Orlock saying he wouldn't be comfortable coming not knowing local customs, could the mayor send over an agent to assist, and then the journal of said agent, a lawyer named Harkins, who may slowly be going mad with tales of Orlock's inhumanity… "Oh. Oh no." News says. He wakes the others (except Bub, who everyone is pissed at, and as something large makes a shadow on the late November moon, they abandon everything they stole and flee.

Orlock, rather than killing Bub, hypnotizes him to hunt the others down and telegraph back their location. When he does catch up with them Josie us able to break the hypnosis, but Bub has already sent the telegram[10]. They light out to Mexico, News hypothesizing that since the Count wasn't invited there, he won't be able to cross the border. Sure, why not. They spend the last 90 minutes of the session fleeing south, fording all the rivers, sheltering with farmsteaders or at Missions as wolves and bats and storms (oh my!) dog their way. By good planning and dice luck they cross Nogales on Christmas and feel a psychic weight lift. Escape!

Bub's player called it the best session he's ever played

Star Wars: An Age of Reckoning 3

Act 1

The List of ships and their crew

NRS Remarkable

an Escort frigate due to be decommissioned. It has a skeleton crew (470), and two squadrons of 12 Y wings

- ***Captain Wewbi***: Mon Calimari, *NRS Remarkable*
- ***Olyssia Veen***: First Officer on the *Remarkable*

The Associated Shoals Pirate Fleet

- ***Captain Ruxos Irtarr:*** his personal freighter is the *Blackfish*: leads fleet from Corvette *Regency Fathom*.
  - Most Loyal Crew: the four Z's (***Zarek Thulon***, ***Zorath Nylok***, ***Zorvax Phelox***, ***Zyloth Vena***) former nerf-herders rescued to a life of piracy.
- ***Captain Vexis Shadowclaw:*** Tagorian (3m long cat people), captain of *Right Behind You*, a Corellian Gunship. He will betray Ruxos someday.
- ***Captain Lyra Starflare:*** A Xexto pirate; loyal to Ruxos while the money is good. She runs the Carrier Cruiser *Forewarned*, which holds 3 Z-95 flights
  - ***Kyra Starflame***: her second-in-command, she is an adopted nearly young human-type.
- *The Associated Shoals* is 100-ish smaller ships (Light Traders to Carrier Cruisers, 9 starfighter flights).

The Script

Roist'r Vaazinj: <looking out *Remarkable* docking bay viewport.> That's the *Regency Fathom*, Irtarr's Corellian corvette… and there's the gunship *Right Behind You* with Captain Vexis, he's a cat-person, and a hundred other smaller ship kitted for piracy, and way back there is the bulk carrier *Forewarned*, with dozens of starfighters. It's run by Captain Starflare! She's an Xexto, like me!

IGn8ius: Roist'r. It is time.

Roist'r Vaazinj: Iggy, I've wanted to be a pirate my whole, life 'cause of my dad, and now that I've met Captain Irtarr and the Associated Shoals… I still want to be one. Do you know why that is?

IGn8ius: It is what we were built for. <rotating head to a passing New Republic officer> Are repairs on the Doom Saloon complete?

***Remarkable* first officer Olyssia Veen:** There's room for improvement, but it's as good as we can manage.

---

[6] From the *Boot Hill* Module *Lost Conquistador Mine*. I had two paths open so the kids felt like they had agency.

[7] Hank "Bub" Meeks at work!

[8] Hank "Bub" Meeks at work!

[9] Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot* at work!

[10] Hank "Bub" Meeks at work!

Senator Valorum: The *Doom Saloon* will launch and wait for the fleet to jump cross-system to Yaterro to engage Rear Admiral Deng's ships.

IGn8ius: Intelligence indicates Deng has self-promoted to Admiral.

Senator Valorum: How nice for him. KT has astrogation prepared to drop us in low orbit. Captain Wewbi, a Y-Wing flight must be positioned to give us cover while Roist'r brings us in over Mos Krytos.

Captain Wewbi: They will be there… but are you sure this child can manage the insertion? I have a pilot …

Rooka Patzi: <angry inarticulate Abyssian noises>

Senator Valorum: <lays calming hand on his arm> As Rooka is saying, Captain, we have every faith in Roist'r. Our task will be to locate the Flakax queen, liberate her, enter Mos Krytos, and either recover the uncorrupted data files or extract Rear Admiral Deng.

Rooka Patzi: <inarticulate Abyssian noises making it clear that he is looking forward to the fight>

Captain Wewbi: Given the Dreadnaught the fight may still be ongoing when you exit; I recommend looping to Yaterro's far side of and jumping back to Elescund from there. I will make the decision whether to disengage once we know you're out based on the remaining enemy firepower. May the Force be with you.

Roist'r Vaazinj: You too, buddy! <leading everyone over to the Doom Saloon> Is he right? Can our fleet take out all those Imperial ships? 'Cause the *Remarkable* is… kinda old?"

Senator Valorum: It was about to be decommissioned but its sturdy. Its Y-Wings are… well Y-Wings are an old design built to take punishment. The *Shoals* have a lot of Z-95s which predate the Clone Wars. Of course, so does Deng's Rendilli Dreadnaught. It'll be close.

IGn8ius: Perhaps not. Intelligence I gathered on Deng's efforts suggests that while he acquired a Dreadnaught, two Carrack class light cruisers, a Lancer, and several system patrol craft, they are even more understaffed than the *Remarkable*. Our real challenge is in Mos Krytos.

Rooka Patzi: <rough noises suggesting something>

Senator Valorum: You're right, we didn't use the codes last time, so they might not know we have them. Maybe we can use their landing pad and contact the Flakax via the tunnel mines before or after we get the data files.

Roist'r Vaazinj: And if not, we just gotta find the bug queen in the desert and let her know she's been conned.

R3-KT: <plugging into *Doom Saloon* computer> Bleep poop beeeee!

Roist'r Vaazinj: OK, everybody, buckle up. And yeah, may the Force be with us.

Act 2

The crew of the *Doom Saloon* watch the *NRS Remarkable*, and then the ships of the *Associated Shoals*, leap into hyperspace. Roist'r give it a 5 count and then follows, using KT's hyperdrive coordinates. They barely have a chance to breathe before they are back in normal space, the planet of Yaterro dominating the viewport. The ships sensors immediately register three of the TIE fighters swooping in to engage….

The fighters get closer, closer as Roist'r dives for the planet's atmosphere. Just as the ships sensors indicate the TIE fighters have locked on, a *Remarkable* Y-Wing flight intercepts them, blowing them to pieces[11]. Roist'r brings the ship through crystal blue sky of Yaterro, down to the Mos Krytos skyline. It's obvious the city's air force has already left to defend over the planet, and the *Doom Saloon*'s sensor magnification shows people starting to panic down below.

"Roist'r, lets see to the queen," Seris says.

"Awww Senator, I think we can break in here! In the hustle and the bustle!" Roist'r pleads.

The senator looks over to IGn8ius, who's ocular unit flashes green in assent for his nominal ward's initiative.

"OK, drop us off, then use the access codes to come back here and get the data crystals. KT, you stay with the ship and monitor Roist'r through the commlink. If he gets cornered, use the *Saloon* to get him out."

"Bleep Booooooop! Click!"

Roist'r locates the mining access bay in the desert and drops off Seris, IGn8ius, and Rooka before lifting off immediately and heading back to Mos Krytos. His allies shield their eyes from the sun, watching him fly away, then enter the cargo lift to be lowered into the mine, the path lit by the Senator's torch and IGn8ius' targeting

[11] I included this to raise tension, but never actually asked for the player to roll, just to demonstrate a GMing technique.

arrays. The last shot is Seris looking up through the open grate of the cargolift to the fires in the sky above.

We cut to the skies, where the ship to ship battles are raging. [Here we broke into the players making dice rolls for Wewbi, Irtarr, Vexis and Lyra; I think the dice codes were a combination of the main PCs perception and the ships, I don't remember how we got there.[12] The heroes had three exchanges to get 210 or over, so they needed 70 points per round.]

[In this first exchange, Wewbi and the *Remarkable* rolled 6d+2 for 27, Irtarr and the *Regency Fathom* rolled 4d6 for 9, Vexis in the *Right Behind You* rolled 5d+2 for a 16, and Lyra in the *Forewarned* rolled 5d+2 for 29. 81 points in the first exchange, the heroes were off to a great start thanks to the *Remarkable* being the biggest ship with the most coordinated leadership and Lyra's wily Z-95s outmaneuvering the TIE Fighters.]

[The consensus is that while Irtarr's crap rolls are in reality from the player rolling for him having the lowest Command skill, the fiction was that this battle was when Vexis' subtle mutiny was playing out: a third of Irtarr's crew turned against him! The leader of the *Associated Shoals* and his loyal henchmen were fighting this battle while trying to hold the bridge! Vexis' crews, which focused on boarding parties, were positioning to breach the Dreadnaught… and Vexis may have been distracted waiting for news of the *Regency Fathom*.]

In the Mos Krytos starport, KT transmits the access codes and to Roist'r's relief the defense cannons move off them. The Xextos youth pats KT on its domed top and exits the *Doom Saloon* at a run, trying to blend in with the panicked populace[13]. He heads directly for the central tower, getting in without notice, until he is hustled into a descending elevator with some of the security agents. Doing his best to not stand out, he waits until the doors open in the bunker before spinning a tale that he needs to collect things above.

"We're all supposed to be down below, kid!" says one "Thumb off on this," the other says, pushing Roist'r a data pad. "This includes you in our watch count. If you want to get yourself killed, not our problem!"

Roist'r, not displaying any concern about not being in the system, presses the side of his finger on the sensor. The machine registers a ding and an amber light, but the ex-imperials only worry about the ding; he's been down here, their job is done, who cares who he is. No one who isn't supposed would arrive in this nightmare! Roist'r hits the button for the executive office floor and the *Girl from Ipanema* by *Figrin D'an and the Modal Nodes* [14]starts piping through the elevator car.

In the mines, the others find themselves at a three-way intersection. The dark space of the mine weighs down on them, and the repeated pings of the motion sensor don't improve anyone's mood. Eventually IGn8ius' motion sensors detect the largest array of activity down one track and they follow it, only to find themselves surrounded by Flakax drones! All heads turn to them, their eyes reflecting in the light of the torch.

Act 3:

[Above Yaterro the battle continues: In the second exchange, Wewbi and the *Remarkable* rolled 25, Irtarr and the *Regency Fathom* rolled another 9, Vexis in the *Right Behind You* rolled 12, and Lyra in the *Forewarned* rolled 20. 66 more for 147 points The New Republic and *Associated Shoals* press the advantage, but Irtarr remains tied up fighting off the mutiny. Vexis has still not yet breached the dreadnaught. The TIE Fighters evened the field with Lyra's Z-95s, but her initial advantage and numbers are keeping them, er, TIEd down. The standout is the *Remarkable*: Wewbi has isolated the corvettes from the dreadnaught and is using his firepower to pick them off one by one even as it takes fire from the Dreadnaught.]

The elevator doors open, and Roist'r escapes the incessant music – only the first 4 bars of the song loop! The empire is EVIL! – and reaches Deng's office. Deng's arrogance forced him to do the signage on the main office to make it clear it's his now. It takes Roist'r much longer than he would like to jimmy the lock, and its final state is blocked partially open… a real issue if someone does pass through here. Time is running out already! The room is massive, a 1/8th wedge cut out of the mushroom top of the tower. Meant to be imposing, the scope of it is daunting. There's (doubtless war-looted) statues & paintings overhung by a chandelier, fashionable low tables, a large status desk, rugs scattered throughout.

The Xexto youth stops, breathes and starts thinking rather than reacting. The data crystal is a crystal. The desk is too obvious. It would be somewhere accessible but hidden. His gaze alights on the crystal array of the chandelier. Climbing on the table, he strains up, then

[12] This whole bit was ad-hoc more or less in the moment, again to show the learning new GM that it's possible to just wing things that aren't directly relevant to the players. I set some numbers, we rolled the dice, and then quickly framed a narrative from them.

[13] Once again, the Kid's player is self-isolating! I suppose this is good experience for the new potential GM – you're aways going to have runners!

[14] Did I have the name of the Cantina band readily to hand for this? Of course.

jumps, and is unable to reach the fixture. Moving over to the status desk he sets his shoulder to it and pushes.

SCREEEEEEEEEEECH! the desk gouges the floor.[15]

In the mines below, Rooka starts to reach for his blaster when Seris holds up a hand. The Flakax start emitting a hum, and Rooka's nose picks up the pheromones of the insect communication. The drones continue to stare at them for a long moment… until two larger soldier-caste Flakax arrive. Seris speaks to them in the clicks that the race uses to communicate with non-Flakax, petitioning to meet with their queen on matters of vital import. A soldier approaches her with the queen agreement, on one condition.

"What?"

The Flaxax soldier's mouth stinger flashes out, leaving a crimson bead of blood on the Senator's neck. She can feel the toxin working in her. "Antidote applied after *respectful* conversation with the Queen." [16]

Back in the tower: *SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEECH!*

The trio in the mines are moved forward through more chambers full of toiling Flakax drones. Now it's impossible to not notice even the drones have sharp, chitinous appendages capable of rending through rock. With the guards around them the trio are safe… though Seris can feel the toxin making her limbs a little clumsy. Rooka quietly supports her with one hand, the other near his blaster. Iggy is tracking all the targets in the area. Finally, the reach the Queen's room.

The chamber is a sphere. Entering at the circumference, the ground dropping away in a smooth curve, leaving them a two-meter ledge to stand on, with two similar ledges spaces evenly around the sphere. The base of the sphere is filled with the egg-laying sacs of the Flakax queen, who towers up out of the center of the sphere, her head above IGnAius sensor level.

<<WHAT ENTREATY BRINGS YOU TO ME?>>

Back in the tower: *SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEECH!*[17]

Seris Valorum shrugs off Rooka's supporting arm and stands, her years of senatorial training pushing down the effects of the venom for the moment. She launches into her prepared speech, informing the Flakax queen of the Empire's fall, and with it any claim it may have had on her people's loyalties. They are free.

<<EMPIRE INFORMED ME THIS WOULD BE YOUR DECEPTION. DISAPPOINTING.>>

With that two Storm Troopers, armed with repeating blasters, stepped out onto each of the other platforms and prepared to fire. The Flakax soldiers stepped off the platform with our heroes, their wings buzzing and supporting them midair out of the line of fire. IGn8ius and Rooka draw with lighting speed, preparing to return fire, while Seris collapses behind them, pulling her pistol, trying to keep her palsied arm steady. Rooka's growls of infuriated betrayal make her cry out "No, if you shoot the queen we'll all die!"

Back in the tower: *SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEECH!* Roist'r has finally moved the desk into position and clambers up. There, inside the chandelier, young pirate finds an off white data crystal hidden amongst the pure white illuminations. He pockets it just as he hears footsteps approaching. There is a mad scramble as he dives for cover behind a statue, but whoever it was was running for the elevator. Rosit'r follows and sees the left elevator doors closing with people inside before he can get there. "Facility Lockdown In Five, Four, Three…" Roist'r runs, the right elevator doors closing, and he hurls himself in, the doors nearly closing on his foot. "Facility Lockdown Commence". There's no way to make the elevator stop before the sub-basement….

Act 4:

[Above Yaterro: The third exchange sees Wewbi and the *Remarkable* roll 18, Irtarr and the *Regency Fathom* rolled 18, Vexis in the *Right Behind You* rolled 24, and Lyra in the *Forewarned* rolled 17. 73 more for 220 points! Wewbi's strategy of trusting the *Associated Shoals* pays off as *Right Behind You* breaches, and its scrappy troops overwhelm the dreadnaught's skeleton crew. The dreadnaught has the chance to take one final shot at the *Remarkable*, only to have *Regency Fathom* swoop in, mutiny suppressed, and destroy its bridge. Lyra's Z-95s and the *Forewarned*'s guns drive off the last of the TIE fighters with suspicious ease, the agile ships skipping around the planet.]

In the mines blaster fire rains on the New Republic trio, with Rooka taking several shots aimed at the senator[18].

---

[15] I had Roist'r's player in hysterics over this, and we cut to a reminiscence of Steve Martin making coffee in *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*. Because we are old.

[16] The players could have gotten pissy about this as I didn't bother with die rolls and she has a bodyguard, but everyone got the point of the scene; having willing players helps so much!

[17] I just kept pointing to the kid's player and repeating the same noise of the desk scraping across the floor, and he would crack up every time. It's very much not *Star Wars* humor, but play to your audience.

[18] In mid fight the players of Rooka and IGn8ius needed to depart, so no one had any problem with them getting blasted as they weren't going to be active for the rest of the session. The joys of regenerators and robots!

The Storm Troopers, confident in their armor, trade off aiming and firing with military precision[19]. Things quickly look bad our heroes, as their first round of fire only manages to wound one of the Troopers while Rooka and IGn8ius both take multiple hits. They are still standing only due to their inhuman builds.

Above, Roist'r blasts the lock to the maintenance hatch and clambers out of the rapidly descending elevator. He leaps clear, clinging cables on the shaft wall. A well-placed bolt from his concealed blaster opens the door to the first floor, and he makes a break across the compound, hoping there is no one left to see him. Alas, there's one cloaked figure running behind him…

IGn8ius activates his emergency protrocols[20] and moves to total kill mode. Blaster shots fire with impossible accuracy, killing two of the stormtroopers, wounding a third, and forcing the survivors to fall back behind cover. Seris, feeling the return fire during this exchange hitting Rooka as her bodyguard lies over her, centers herself, daws on the Force, and makes an impassioned argument in Flakax, begging the queen to not trust these men but instead trust her own people, who are witnessing the fall of her captors overhead. (As she does so she aims a blaster bolt with shaky hands… that takes out the wounded Trooper! He falls, sliding down the dome into the decaying outside chitin of the breeding sacs! Ick!)

There is a brief pause in the battle with the last trooper out of sight. Then the queen, sharing senses with one of her drones on the surface who is watching the fire in the sky above, lets out an unholy shriek. A hovering guard darts across the room to the last Storm Trooper, driving his serrated meter-long forearm through the Trooper's chest. The other Flakax guard rolls Rooka off of Seris, leans down, and injects the senator with the antidote.

We cut to the imperial citizens and troops of Mos Krytos huddled in security bunkers, watching small screens set into the walls to track the fight above. They then hear scratching, rattling, scraping…. Lights flicker. The room falls to silent, confused tension, and then there's a chaotic shot of Flakax mining drones breaking through the walls, pickaxe like appendages rising, mandibles thrashing, and the room goes dark.

Using his commlink to call KT, Roist'r runs for all he's worth, sprinting onto the *Doom Saloon*'s gangplank. He spares a glance behind him as they lift off, and sees the cloaked figure is Rear Admiral Deng, running to the ship, yelling for Roist'r to wait, clearly thinking the ship is loyal to their outpost. A roiling, uncountable mass of Flakax drones races behind him! Roist'r hesitates, then tells KT to keep the gangplank down. Deng jumps, AND MISSES!

Roist'r grabs his hand to pull him up from away from the thrashing chitinous wave of death below them. Deng struggles to catch his breath, then looks up directly into the barrel of Roist'r's gun. Blackout.

It is some time later when the Xexto brings the *Doom Saloon* around to the mines, as he had to make sure Deng was properly bound and unconscious. He sees the senator standing in the sand with a battered but satisfied look, while Iggy is carrying Rooka's once again blaster-burned body. When his droid mentor is on board Roist'r can see it too is severely damaged, but functional. "Get us to the rendezvous," Seris tells him, as she applies a medpack to her bodyguard and hooks IGn8ius to the ships diagnostics to figure out where to repair first.

Roist'r follows the plan, spinning the *Doom Saloon* around Yaterro away from the battlefields before exiting atmosphere. "Umm, boss, it looks all our comms are jammed. Static on every channel."

"What?" she asks, pulling down the secondary control panel from the wall. "Who would be…" and then the Star Destroyer *Implacable* drops out of hyperspace over the planet, and the *Doom Saloon*! It eclipses the sky.

"*Republic Ship, stand down and prepare to be boarded.*" Tractor beams grapple the ship, drawing it inexorably into the maw of the beast.

Seris and Roist'r make and discard several plans in the short time they have, before Roist'r tries to con their way out of this mess. A new voice cuts in "Senator Valorum, this is Myn Felis." ('She was in jail!' Seris mouths to Roist'r) "Don't insult the regard in which I hold you and your work. We are aware that Admiral Deng is inside your ship. His safe return is the sole reason we have not obliterated your ship. You and your crew will exit with the Admiral, and surrender to the Empire. I am very much looking forward to our conversation."

Roist'r and Seris stare at each other and then glance around the limited confines of the Doom Saloon, trying to come up with a plan. KT Beeps forlornly.[21]

---

[19] The players were warned that I am one of the people who remembers that the only time the Storm Troopers lose a fight from the start of EP IV to the end of EP VI is when they were ordered to do so.

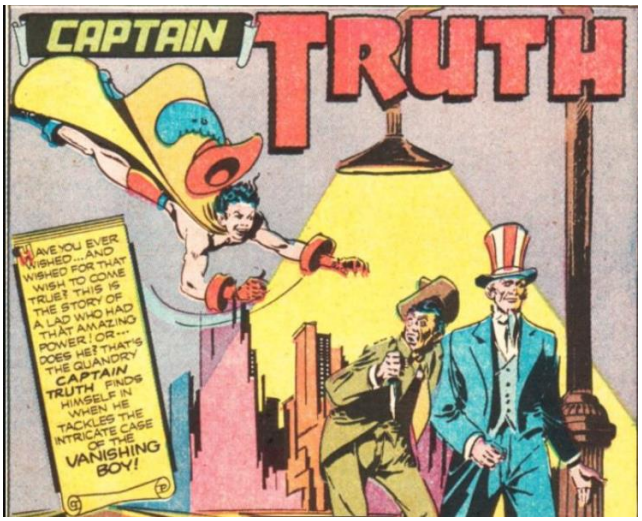
[20] well, draws on the Force, but he's a droid, so this is the equivalent

[21] There was some faffing about here of the players trying to figure out how not to get captured, but eventually they remembered that getting captured and escaping is part of the *Star Wars* pulp tradition. They then figured out how to get IGn8Ius not captured! And sent a text to the missing players saying "Yeah, Serius and Roist'r killed it guys. Everything is UNDER CONTROL!"

Stating Up Regrets 17: Captain Truth!

We've had a couple short-timers here in the Regrettables, but this month's selection from Jon Morris' *League of Regrettable Superheroes* may hold the record with a single appearance. Still, I feel that Captain Truth[22], the Power Boy, has some interesting things to say about the Golden Age. Specifically, how the genre was, from the jump, interested in the social issues of the day. This is obvious when you read the earliest *Superman* stories and he is going after corrupt landlords and trying to stomp out gambling rackets not because of the mob violence but for how they are inherently predatory.

In the case of Captain Truth, our hero, aka Ken Elliot, is an orphan living in poverty who becomes homeless after being evicted from his tenement. Set in 1945 the shadow of urban decay is very much present in this kid's life. Still, like Lil Orphan Annie, he is ever optimistic for the future, cheering the razing of his old tenement for safer, cleaner, low rent public housing[23]. As one does, when one is not using super-powers to help keep a friend's father out of a life of crime or stopping the theft of war-critical tungsten shipments. And also, apparently look for pants and a shirt.



Yes, that is someone about to mug Uncle Sam. I know writers who use subtext and they are all cowards.

Captain Truth's powers are remarkably straightforward: Flight, Super-Strength, Invulnerability. No reason given for them, the name, or the quite fetching musketeer hat. I'm not sure he needs one. I can be flippant about the boots, gloves, trunks, cape, hat, big feather get up, the character just exudes optimism. Yes, things suck right now. Times are hard. Even our super-heroes are orphan children without a war profiteer in sight to adopt them. But you can still *try*. You can look out for your friends. You can fight for your country. Things can get better.

And that's the Truth.



Quite the reputation he has for his only appearance!

His V&V stats are simple: Flight, Heightened Strength B up to a 33 (enough for a 1-ton lift), and Invulnerability of 12 pts or so. One nice thing about the supers genre is costume/gimmick mean so much that his bland powers aren't the sell – the affect is.

But how do you play it?

As Earnestly As Humanly Possible.

The regrettable world

Despite this in theory being a wartime strip, I have to put him in the Iron Skull's 1970's as the beacon of hope.

Regretting what I said to you…

Roger commented on how Ms. O'Neil was his preferred sort of one power hero. Myles agrees, and so do I. There are reasons I try to get players to consolidate their PCs' powers as much as possible as I feel the focus really helps play. She does have the best 'legs'[24] for number of appearances of the *Regrettables* expect perhaps The Face.

Lisa asked for clarification: yes, Scarlett was hypnotized and sent in to kill someone, only to learn that the intended target had already committed suicide. She had never fired her gun and wasn't the killer.

---

[22] Captain Truth was created by Bob Fujitini for Gold Medal Comics in 1945. He is in the public domain. Images from this entry can be found here

[23] One interesting note is one the web sites I hit researching this character needed to have a footnote for young readers that public housing, despite how it's seen now, was a marked improvement over the conditions that preceded it. This is for the readers who probably can't identify Butch Cassidy.

[24] Not Gams, those still belong to Spider Queen.
(I regret nothing.)

Comments on E&A 17

Patrick Brady: *V&V 2.1* would be my preference; It's the printing under *Monkey House Games* that gives the money to the games' creators. Thanks for the further details on *Albion* and *House of Dolman* (I assume is pronounced Doll-Man?) RE Younger People, we are all 150 years old here. It's standard. Also standard here is seeing the GMing duties as part of the Folk Tradition, where the GM does it uncompensated (except maybe by food at the game) for the love of the game. But at least Colville's terminology makes sense of the divide. re *Spider Noir* and deception; I'd defer to Dr. Misiaszek, but I think these sorts of deceptions work a lot inside Noirs, where the antagonist's worldview is that everyone is bought and corrupt so the concept of someone changing sides for a bribe is 'normal', even if to us day to day folks it's such a stretch. RYCT Gabriel; *Blake's Seven* is one of those lacunae in my knowledge base that I should fix. I've seen a decent amount of UK 70's SF because it was on US public television or early cable - 4th and 5th Doctors, *Tomorrow People*, *Avengers*, *the Prisoner*, but somehow no *Blakes' Seven*, *Space 1999* or *Sapphire & Steel*. Not enough hours in the day, but for some of them the cheese factor is so high and I'm not a teenager anymore. I have some thoughts on how Doctor Doom has been misadapted over the years here; I think your essay is correct. There is also the short story collection *Shadows over Baker Street* - Cthulhu in the Holmes universe – and SO MANY are just Moriarty getting the Neconomicon; the one that most stood out to me was Elizabeth Bear's *Tyger, Tyger* which was Irene Adler facing a Cthugha cult while on a hunting expedition in India. Mind you, I've known Ms. Bear since college, so that's not unbiased.

John Redden RE *D&D* Magic Systems: i am always annoyed of being in the place where my prior system mastery actively works against me.... RE Tchaikovsky - i don't know you need to have that much faith in my opinions! Kevin Bacon joke got an appreciative snort.

Brian Misiaszek: Being of an age with you, I appreciate the melancholic reminisces on London, ON. I haven't been back to UConn in ages but know that little of what I experienced remains. *WKRP* reference!

Avran Grumer: re terminology matching play style - it's nice to see us finally get somewhere, isn't it? The distinctly antagonist GM term is a difficult one, because it's easy to see the MC being both beneficent as a fan of the PCs and antagonistic as nothing the Players can do will stop the PCS from having messy lives because the messy lives are what they ostensibly signed up for. The *Paranoia* GM is also giving the PCS what the Players signed up for. Like a D/s relationship you can't call the Dominant an antagonist.... I have to chew on this more. The idea of *Traveller* as a Regency Romance is nothing short of brilliant. But as you point out, no part of the game points towards it, and many many parts - like all of character creation in *CT* - point against it. I can much more easily see this working in *GURPS* than *CT* as the players can choose this as a starting point. Still, I have to assume some games *have* done this from the viewpoint of the PCS being suitors, and the wealthy potential spouses are NPCS, letting the game keep all the aspects of *Traveller* the rules push towards intact with the question of where the suitors earned their fortunes being a real one; the navy officer vs the merchant captain vs the PCs scraggly Scout who has scrambled into enough money to play the game to win the dutchess' love. And if all three are after the same woman, maybe that woman is being stalked by a Zhodiani psychic that is draining her life force.... I have passed the *Worlds To Come* kickstarter along to the guy who created the *Collectable Jewish Monsters and Magic Cards*, who was most appreciative so thanks for sharing. I am absolutely picturing the "Oh! I! For! Got! The! Wine!" to "YMCA". RE rating outcome of Moves in PBTA - the Mothership rules also stress how the four possible outcomes (crit success, success, fail, crit fail) can be scaled if you even want to roll the dice at all. This comes up in the Mothership game writeup I did this ish when i set the stakes for the Android trying to hack the remains of the old android. re clocks; the utility of these never really clocked <heh> for me until I listened to the *Play to Find Out* episodes for *Necronautalus*. Even there Quinns points out they are just stress/progress bars, but in a circle so... better? RYCT Josh on Human Torch & flame attacks: yeah, if i were to run a *Champions* game there would be rules about flame needing to be Killing attacks because the system *Can* model that. I understand why *V&V* doesn't, as an example, saving that for special attacks or negative consequences of missing, but it is a failure in the physics engine. I really do need to make some notes on that in my own power packet....

Attronarch; fascinating watching the OSR aspect of threats NOT scaling with the heroes, where the orcs remain just orcs and a 4th level thief isn't immediately slaughtered by 8 orcs. In the game, that was the best possible outcome to the party getting separated!

Timothy Collinson: RYCT me on *Traveller* law levels; yeah, that's maybe more sliders than i would use there.... but I do appreciate that Mongoose put in the time given how important world design is for *Traveller*.

Roger Bell-West: Well Captain Sherwood should have learned his lesson about dodgy cargos! RYCT Patrick Riley on *Champions* powers: the best description for the difference between *V&V* and *Champions* is the

powers are Cause vs. Effect. *V&V* cares about a power's Cause, less so about Effect, whereas *Champions* is 97.5% Effect. RYCT me on reverse Antaeus powers: well, yes, that is what players do, sneaky bastards that they are. RE Rangers, oh sure, that clears things up... JRR loved loredumps & bloodlines. I know I mentioned prior that when I built a *Hobbit* game "lineage" was a character stat because it was so important.

Dale Meier: last time I had a kidney stone it took two rounds of lithotripsy to get it broken up enough to pass. So good luck! It's always nice to see homages to John M Ford! That's a lot of fun *Traveller* stuff! re *Caves of Chaos*: when I ran the *Return to the Keep on the Borderlands* the PCs ended up paying danegeld to the goblins for killing some of them and went through initiation rituals for a hearing with the bugbear chief, which was what got them your hypothesized humanoid army to deal with the cultists. The campaign hinged on the humanoids being sentient agents[25]. RYCT Myles on Herrings: HA! Does my Minnesota bloodline good.

Dale Meier: RYCT me on food trucks: Love me some food truck culture; "*Tradishish*" sounds great! I remember being blown away by the indigenous chefs at the Museum of the American Indian. RE *Marvel Super Heroes*; the FASERIP wasn't so much a house system as they became really enamored with the universal table concept in *Gamma World* and *Conan*. I loved the system but like you I wanted player-created heroes; over time I came to appreciate the joys of picking up existing heroes and branching off to their comics to tell new stories. Running a *Fantastic Four* game is still on my bucket list.

Lisa Padol: RYCT Mark on taking away PC powers - that's one thing I hate in narratives. While I more or less enjoyed *VisionQuest*, very early on the writers introduced weapons to specifically circumvent Vision's signature ability and then damaged him enough so that very few of his powers worked. As a player that would drive me nuts. Taking away the thing I designed the character to do is not "challenging me as a player", it's reducing your challenge load as a GM. (They did something similar in *Luke Cage* where the writers quickly introduced bullets that ignored his invulnerability, but there at least there was a plot arc of him upgrading his powers so even the special magic armor piercing bullets didn't work). I'm guessing *Fear Itself* doesn't get a lot of love because playing mundane people vs. nameless horror isn't a great sell? I don't know that much about the *Fear Itself* play loop. RYCT Myles on interlocking films: our watch order is *Hamlet*, *R&G*, and then *Midwinter's Tale*, the small indie film Branaugh made about a theater troupe performing *Hamlet*. RE the *MSH* Game: in both of the fights with Sabertooth someone rolled the Slam result, and then the maximum possible knockback; in both cases Sabertooth was knocked so far out of the fight that it was not practical to try to re-engage/capture him. Hence the heroes helped him "escape". re the library administrator thinking that all RPGS are played with an audience; that had never occurred to me! Maybe... RE the *Invisibles* Omnibus: well, you may need it for Game Reference. By the way, yours is my favorite of all the PCs. That's a lot of 80's novels! I have never read *Bridge of Birds*. Will always recommend rereading the first *Dream Park* book, which I've read aloud separately to my wife and daughter, who both enjoyed it. I have read aloud *Anubis Gates* only to my daughter as time travel makes my wife's brain squick. I never enjoyed *Lord Valentine's Castle* or the sequels, but got them all from family and dutifully read them. If you trust my opinion do not bother with the second *Amber* series; they are aimless and chaotic the way an ongoing *Amber RPG* can be. I've read *Book of the New Sun* 5 times. RYCT Bryant on OSR: In my experience the character development and emotional arcs arise out of the emergent play just fine - they just aren't guaranteed to pay off as the characters don't have as much plot armor. Grief could be a very common emotion.

Myles Corcoran:re Striking: Crank up the Billy Bragg! There's power in the Union! I'm glad to hear you're looking forward to the game! I will not be discussing mt advance plotting here for all the obvious reasons, but yours is my favorite of the characters. re *Mausritter*: I love me a good circus plot! Three Ducklings in an Overcoat is always an obvious threat. RYCT Timothy: LOL at Medusahaugin! re Angus - well that's a deep damn cut! re the new *Billion Worlds* book; his original plan was to have all the stories take place in the same few months with different characters; publisher reminded him that people love their continuing characters!

Jim Vassilikos: admitting *AIs & Allies* (great name) is currently unplayable is a level of self-awareness of ones' game design I hope to one day exhibit. *Bog* does sound an absolute delight. re *Traveller* Law Levels: I don't need 6 sliders, just a better label on the one we have!

Dylan Capel: RE *Index Card RPG* and sub optimal option choices that fit the character: well, if it's done right the thing that best defines the character should fit their optimal move? But yeah, absolutely that needs to be communicated in 10' high flaming letters.

[25] they still frickin' hated the kobolds, though.

Patrick Zoch: Once again I loved the reviews for all the board games; man, I don't even want to know the price point for *Wondrous Creatures* with the magnetized captains riding monsters!

Patrick Riley: I, for reasons unknown, rewatched *MIB International* and for some reason in that it struck me how throwing, falling, or knockback damage is even more cosmetic than other damage, so this tracks in movies: if it's not a cut or bullet our heroes are made of galvanized rubber and just get back up. I will defend this one way in comics: If the opponent is someone who you can't defeat/or is too dangerous to fight in this location, picking them up and tossing them miles way is a sound technique: it ends the fight and protects the innocents around you, even if it doesn't resolve the threat. What's that? being thrown miles should kill the opponent? did you miss the Galvanized Rubber comment earlier? ;-) RA the *Icons* review. I remember being impressed with it when I read it, seeing it as an overlap of *MSH* and Chad Underkoffler's *Truth & Justice*. It's not going to overthrow *V&V* or *MSH* for me, but I understand the appeal in a way that I didn't for, say, *Mutants & Masterminds*. Loving the JLP! And LOL at "the Goggles Do Something!" Cephela-Lass is the clear winner just on the name and that she was not picked is a crime! It's classic Teen Hero stuff that they all picked the wrong tasks first. re Psiclops: think of how much happier the player would have been as Cephala-Lass! RYCT Myles on running the same game more than once. I'm the same way, usually. I think I am going to push myself to run *V&V Crucible* at *OSR Con* in Andover if I end up going in August, just to see how it handles a completely different group of random heroes.

Joshua Kronengold: re library games complaints: in actuality there've been *no* complaints relayed to me from parents about not having space for their kids (just the one mom who was upset that 4 months of unannounced absences was enough to lose her kid's spot; that kid just played in the *Mothership* game, so I expect that issue is resolved). The core of the administrator's complaint is that all other library programs average 1 presenter to 20 attendees, usually at most once a month, whereas I am twice a month for a max of 11 attendees. Since I don't look like the others, I must be wrong. RYCT me on Sabertooth, see my comment to Lisa. and yeah, the new heroes weren't as focused as I would like, but that's a larger risk with *MSH* than *V&V*'s random system because in *MSH* it's an add on and in *V&V* it's the crown jewel; most importantly the kids felt ownership. *Lord of the Rings* is now a sports movie about a pro level player cleaning betting on himself in an amateur sports circuit and you can't stop me. RE Jean Grey's death <pedant> it's ***Blue Area***, not ***Blue Zone*** </pedant> RYCT Dale on disliking Legacy games: the game store has a massive *TTR Frontier Legacy* game that I looked at it shock and awe. It's clearly much more complicated than my wife would enjoy, but I do like the fact that when you've finished the 12th play-through you'll have a unique TTR board for later play. re Rangers: I had aways assumed Drizzt had 2 weapons because of the *2E* rules, and the *2E* rules were there to give a reason for Rangers to eschew heavy armor (which is what the game designers said), but you're right that Drizzt's first appearance predates *2E*... The snake has so many tales to consume! And just sos you know, yours is my favorite character in the *Mage: the Ascension* game.

Bryant Durell: Enjoyed the *Feng Shui* negotiation thoughts. Re the *Deck of Player Safety* building on Lines and Veils: as a hobby are pretty poor at documenting and acknowledging whose shoulders we're standing on. re Arcanotech hanging around: this reminded me of all the Shadow tech lying about for archaeologists to discover in *Babylon 5*. Re *Delian Tomb*: when I ran this for the library kids, they didn't recognize the riddle as a riddle, ripped down the spear in the statue and used it to loudly lever open the secret door wide enough to just fit. As soon as they were done the Dragon Knight Fury looked the wall and went "oh. Courage" The door moved open another 3 inches with a horrible squeal. "That's our dragon knight: smart enough to answer the riddle, not smart enough to recognize it." I've listened to a lot of chatter on KARTAS on *Page Turners* so I appreciate the review. *Mothership* was intensely fun at the table.

Jim Eckman: RYCT me: first mover status is super important: *D&D*, *Traveller*, & *Call of Cthulhu* are still the top Fantasy, SF, & Horror games. Supers is fractured as multiple viable games came out at once after several more or less non-viable ones. RYCT Me on *Traveller* law level: clearly you have thoughts on this! Interesting read.

Everyone else: RAEBNC



One of the *Owl Hoot Trail* players (Hank 'Bub' Meeks, at work!) bought all the players novelty cowboy hats to get into character .

This here bushwacker in a black hat doubtless fans his smokewagon in service of evil!

Goodnight, Speed Centaur, wherever you are.

Quasipseudoludognostication #18 — Patrick Riley

Ignorable Theme for E&A #18

Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever!

I can't think of any single die roll that made for an unforgettable moment. Because I've forgotten about them. While certainly celebratory or groan-inducing at the time, none have made an indelible, lasting impression.

In *QPLG #1*, I noted, "I think I rolled a d20 five times and the highest roll I ever got was a 5, including two 1s" in a *Kids on Bikes* game. IIRC, one of those 1s was when my player was pulled into a *D&D* game and asked to make a roll in a critical moment. Following the terrible roll, she was kicked out of the game and the room.

Lanterns

The following is not only spoiler-filled about the *Lantern* television series, but also it probably won't make sense unless you've seen the show.

I liked it. But.

Paraphrasing an exchange with my wife (who was only half-watching it) after the end of the first episode:

> Her: "Did he hook up with that chick in the bar?"
> Me: "Yes."
> Her: "Who was she?"
> Me: "I don't know. Someone who'll be important later on in the show."

I am no expert on Green Lantern lore and I won't fault it for putting their own spin on it, but how the show handled the Manhunter threat was very limp. We were told they were a dire threat, but it never came across that way. Even when they had the opportunity to show them in the act of wiping out a planet's population, we only saw John's reaction. Then they showed the aftermath and the state of the planet, which was appropriately eerie, but this leads to two key questions.

1. How the hell did Sinestro escape Guardian custody? We're just told he did, but nothing was shown.
2. Sinestro created a lantern on a planet destroyed by fear filled with a yellow haze. Shouldn't that have been a *yellow* lantern, not a *green* lantern? (This would have been a great twist for Season 2, but they already lost the opportunity.)

The "good" aliens were a wasted, underwritten opportunity. Their power was suicide bombing. ::rolling eyes:: And they didn't even do that well.

The central mystery—who killed Hal Jordan—had a very anticlimactic resolution. Again, we were told of a relationship between Hal and Sheriff Macdonald, but never shown it in any meaningful way. And Noah was such an underwritten character that there was no gravitas to him being a Manhunter and his mother's relationship with him.

Telling and not showing was the recurring theme of the show. Some was undoubtedly due to budget restraints, but it was mostly weak storytelling.

The only exception was John's abusive childhood and that was very well done. Apparently, there was a flack online about it being "woke" but a) I don't pay attention to those folks and only heard about it second-hand and b) they clearly don't know their Green Lantern lore.

Setting the bulk of the story 10 years before the inciting incident, Hal's murder, and then adding childhood flashback did not work. Too much was lost in the "10 years later" jump between the resolution of the 2016 storyline and bringing it up to the present.

So while I found the show interesting and watchable, I was confounded by the story they were trying to tell and how they were telling (and not showing) it.

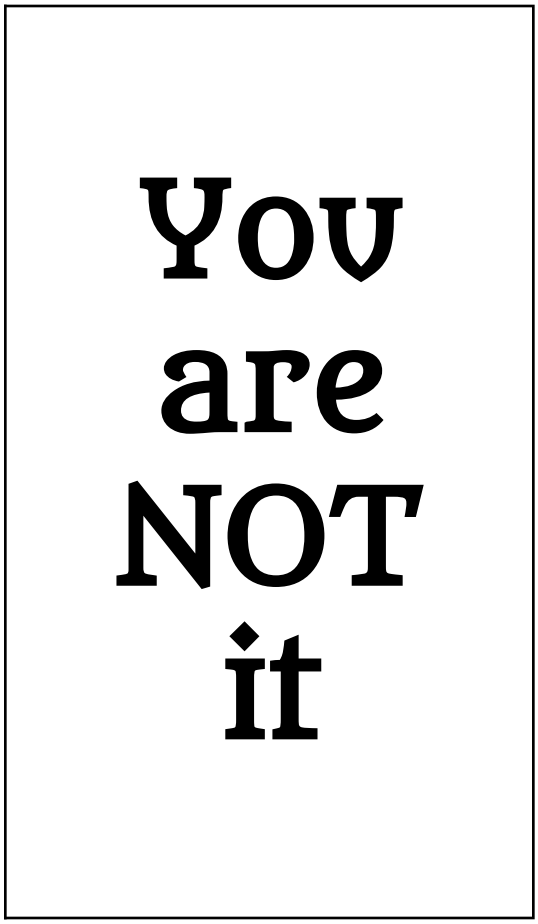
San Jose, California sexagesimalian@gmail.com

Halloween Shenanigans

Being down a player meant another one-shot run by yours truly rather than our normal Savage Worlds campaign. As it happened, the session was on Halloween and I created a horror scenario. It borrowed from *The Whispering Vault RPG*, with the PCs being normal folks thrown into an enigma and encountering the Stalker (who would be the PC in a normal *Whispering Vault* game).

Drawing Cards

Before the game, I had the players draw from 8 cards with explicit instructions to look at the card but not to show anyone else. All the cards read:



It was a silly little joke just to set a bit of doubt and paranoia in the players. It would work better in a larger game, such a convention, than the 3 players I had.

Introduction

I read the following to the players and had them pick among the 8 characters described.

On the side of a two-lane blacktop highway bypassed by the interstate sits a roadside diner whose neon sign advertises it as “Pam’s”. The sky is dark and angry. Sheets of rain fall and torrents of water flow off the road and into overwhelmed storm drains that are now sitting under inches of standing water. A few cars and one tractor-trailer sit in the flooded parking lot being pelted by hail. Wind gusts shake the road signs and whip at the power and telephone lines. To drive in this weather would be to face the devil himself.

Inside the diner, the air is warm, slightly humid, and smells of grilled ham and cigarettes. The jukebox is playing a Waylon Jennings ballad. The coffee percolator is working overtime. The tile floors and formica countertops are stained with decades of use that no amount of cleanser or elbow grease could quite fully remove.

A woman in a flannel shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots sits at the counter close to the register while drinking coffee and eating a reuben and chatting with the waitress about the weather, the roads, and the places she’s been.

For her part, the middle-aged waitress in her uniform of peach with white trim stands behind the counter maintaining her side of the conversation while scanning the dining area for anyone who needs a refill or might be signalling for her attention.

With his back to the kitchen passthrough, the short order cook is cleaning the grill. He is a lanky man with dark, hollow eyes and toothy grin that is missing some teeth. A bandana conceals his thin, oily hair and male pattern baldness.

At the counter furthest from the door sits a man in slacks and a button-down shirt leaning over and reading a well-worn bible. He occasionally glances over to the gold wedding band that sits next to his full cup of black coffee, now cold.

Occupying the entire corner booth, a man in a blue suit, his tie loosened and the top button undone, has his briefcase propped open. His attention is focused on scattered piles of papers and receipts strewn across the table.

A woman in her twenties with dishwater blonde hair in a loose ponytail sits in a booth and holds her coffee cup in both hands. Her hardened gaze drifts from scanning the room to her wristwatch to the storm outside and back again.

A man with a three-day beard and shoulder-length curly brown hair sits in a booth across from an acoustic guitar case. He scribbles and scratches in a small notebook between taking bites from the pancakes and eggs before him.

A slight teenager with pixie cut auburn hair, the hints of a shiner under her eye, and wearing an apron over a denim A-line dress sits in the furthest booth where napkin dispensers and ketchup bottles go to get refilled. She attends to her nails, applying pink polish with painstaking deliberateness.

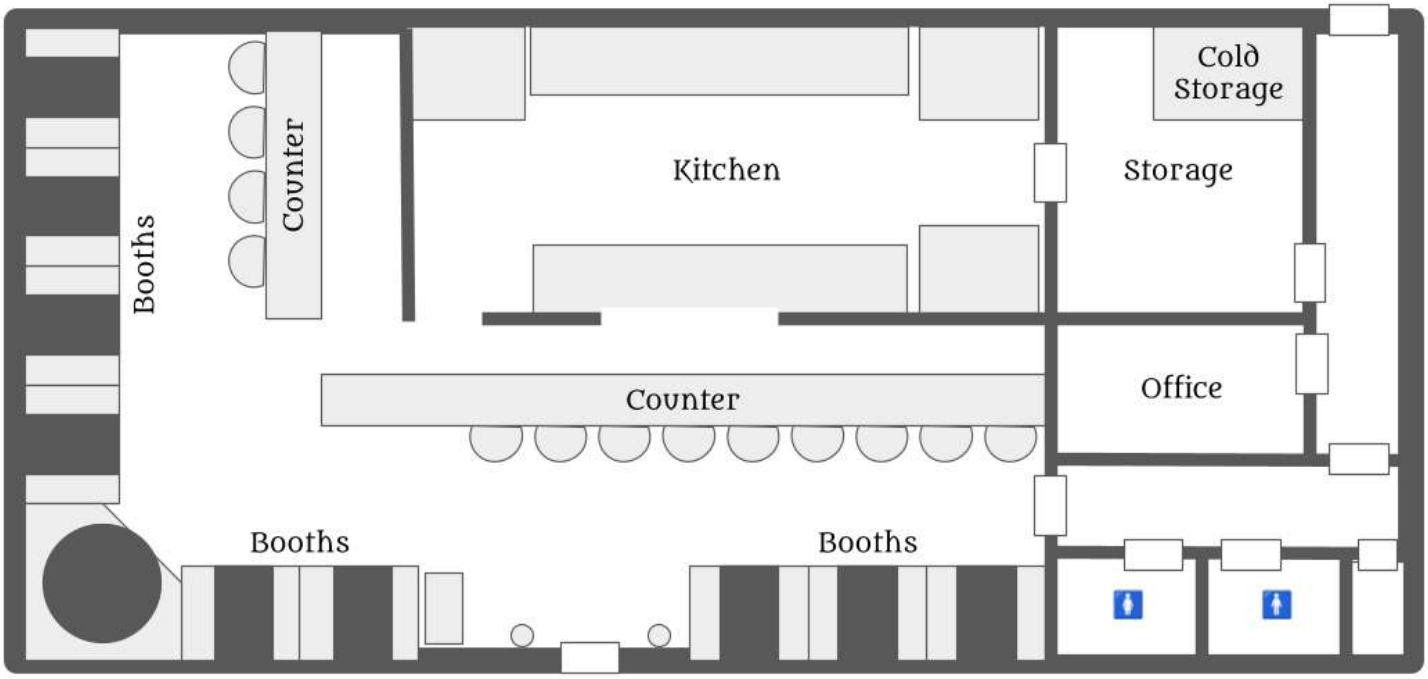
The PCs
In order of appearance:

Roselyn

You are an independent long-haul trucker with no permanent address—just a P.O. box and an answering service. Rather than rent or a mortgage, all your pay (minus expenses), goes into paying off your truck. To make ends meet, you also take “off book” with dubious characters needing to transport dubious cargo.

Living on the road has kept you free and clean. Now you wear your skin like iron and your breath is as hard as kerosene. You’ve had to learn how to be self-reliant, whether that’s in managing your business, fixing your truck, or protecting yourself. You keep a sawed off shotgun and a shovel in your cab. You keep a bowie knife in your boot.

Though you spend most of your time alone, you are never lonely so long as you have the CB radio and the people you meet at truck stops and diners.



Cribbed and modified from https://www.drivethrurpg.com/en/product/12206/modern-floorplans-diner

Eunice

You have been waitressing since before you dropped out of high school to follow a long-haired rock band across the country. Three decades and four failed marriages later across a dozen cities, you find yourself at this place.

You cannot say that you have ever been satisfied. Every time you try to settle down, the winds of fate shift and the karmic compass points in a new direction. Maybe satisfaction is found in living your life on your own terms.

You have been here a while. Something in your bones tells you it is time to move on, but you do not have anywhere in particular to go—you just know you cannot stay here. You will leave once you overcome what is keeping you here and find a new direction. Until then, you sling eggs and ham, pour black coffee for weary souls, and collect your tips.

Mason

God you hate it here. You don't even like cooking. It's not particularly difficult—hell, even a monkey can grill a patty or fry an egg—and this place rarely gets busy enough to worry about. The pay is shit, but it's steady. In the kitchen, you don't have to deal with the idiot customers. So long as you stay in the kitchen, you can get someone else to clean the toilets and do all the other shit work.

But as crap as this place is, it's better than living on the streets, scratching to find your next hit or your next meal (in that order of priority), and hoping not to get stabbed and/or robbed while sleeping in the park.

Noah

You tried to live your life in grace with Jesus and humility before God, but you fell short of His glory.

You have been preaching the Gospel since you were a child. You evangelized on street corners and college campuses. You gave seminars and sermons throughout the state. As you preached the Word to strangers, you neglected your family.

It has been a month since your wife left. They were unfaithful, but you forgave them and pleaded with them to join you in counseling and prayer, but they refused for they had already started a new family.

You sit in this diner, staring at the wedding ring you just took off your finger and set on the counter, next to your Holy Bible, praying that He will give you guidance.

James

Embezzlement is hard work. Faking invoices, managing offshore bank accounts, and shuffling payments around so the company owners don't notice what you're doing takes expertise. Despite the effort, it's better than your salary as a field manager for a machine parts distributor—much better. You've already scoped out a little place on the beach in the Caribbean once you've built up your retirement fund.

Then you can get a divorce—she's been cheating on you for a while anyway—and she won't be able to touch your money. Maybe you'll even let her keep the house just so that they don't snoop around too deeply. Maybe you'll miss your kids, but they'll be out of school by then, starting their own lives, and they probably won't miss you.

Janet

You got out after spending a three-year stretch in prison for check fraud. It wasn't the Ritz, but it was certainly easier than your stint in juvie a decade ago. So here you are with forty bucks, a bus ticket, and the clothes on your back. There is freedom in having nothing else to lose.

You've met cons who seemed to take pride in their ability to do time, bouncing in and out of prison. They're not smart enough to realize the goal is to not get caught and not do time. They think that makes you soft, but you know how to stand up for yourself or better, manipulate the situation so you never have to.

For now you're looking to score or to make a score, whichever comes first.

Trick

There is nothing quite as galling as being kicked out of your own band. It was a unanimous vote—even your own brother bounced you. You were the one with both the vision and the talent so you can't wait to watch them crash and burn.

But it does mean you're back at square one. Back to begging for gigs in bars playing to crowds of empty chairs and sleeping in your car. Just you, your guitar, and the truth. No band to back you up or bring you down.

That also means you have to work on new songs that aren't tainted by those assholes and they sure as hell won't get a dime of your royalties when you inevitably break big. The world is going to sing your songs and they're going to know your name.

Nikki

When Eunice the waitress asked what your name was, you answered Nikki, rather than Nick like you had for your entire life previously. You might change it later. You're still figuring these things out.

After your older brother caught you (for the second time) putting on your mother's make-up (and this time you were wearing lingerie), he beat you up to "make a man out of you." At dinner that evening, you blamed the black eye on a bully at school. That night, you packed your collection of thrift-store clothes, stole the keys to your brother's beat up Charger, and never looked back.

After days on the road with no particular direction and living out of that car, you eventually ran out of cash and came to the diner looking for a job.

The players picked Eunice, Noah, and Roselyn. I then had to pick which of the remaining characters were the bad guy. Mason was default in part because his position away from the main dining room gave me a bit more freedom to do stuff "off camera." I don't think they ever learned the names of James, Janet, or Trick.

Game System

I used a tweaked version of my *Wildcard Roleplaying System*. The Wildcard ability was Esoteric that was set to a 1. The players distributed values of 2, 3, and 4 among the standard Physical, Mental, and Social abilities. I pre-designated specialties for them, such as Noah's Mental specialty of The Bible. They were intended more as an extension of the character description than anything I expected to come into play.

When the players drew cards for an action, I paid attention when any spades turned up. This indicated something supernatural happening regardless of the success or failure of the draw. Mostly it involved them being able to get glimpses into the supernatural and, if appropriate, even invoke some supernatural ability. Eunice had a few instances of running to escape and ended up teleporting to her destination.

So What is Going On?

A supernatural entity called the Unbidden has made a nest inside the diner and warped reality around it. It is hungry.[1] It has taken on the flesh of Mason and will devour everyone else in the diner.

Outside, a Stalker (a once-human hunter of the Unbidden), is trying to get inside the diner, but is almost completely thwarted. It needs the PCs to help. In canon *The Whispering Vault*, the PC Stalkers would have some means of disguising their true nature from normal humans, but I did away with that and wanted to make their encounter with the Stalker as creepy, unnerving, and suspicious as the Unbidden.

Rules of the Diner

I had intended for the diner to exist in a nebulous time period with no specified year (though I was thinking late 1970's), but my lovely players (mostly Roselyn) just started making declarations about years and dates.

[1] Why does Google Docs suggest I change that to "I am hungry"?

No one can leave—it's a supernatural one-way trap.

Anyone attempting to open the front or back doors (or the tiny windows in the bathrooms) will find that they are stuck shut, similar to what happens when negative pressure in a building makes it difficult to open doors, except much, much more powerful. A tremendous effort of strength could make the doors open by a centimeter, but they would slam shut immediately, breaking anything placed to prop them open. A successful assessment of the situation makes it clearly understood that something outside the bounds of normal physics is affecting the doors.

Breaking the windows is also a fruitless endeavor. If enough force is applied to break the window, it will shatter as expected, but the gaps between the shards is not air, but more glass. There is never an opportunity for anything to pass through the plane of the window—there will always be glass there.

Most of the finer details of the chronology and descriptions are missing, especially when the action ramped up in Act 2, since I was running this mostly off the cuff and didn't record anything.

Act 1

While the patrons and employees of the diner either minded their own business or chattered on (as was the case for Roselyn), Janet and Trick leapt out of their booths as everyone else heard a squishing thud as something hit the window. Noah went over to peer outside and was met by a slimy round maw the size of a dinner plate ringed with triangular teeth trying to chew its way through the glass. This was accompanied by hooked steel claws scraping at the window. In a flash of lightning, he also saw a tall, dark figure in a long, black coat standing in the parking lot in the torrential rain, staring at the diner.[2]

What followed was a period of panic and confusion. They were eventually able to count at least three of the creatures at the windows. James seemed oblivious to what was happening outside and chose to ignore the consternation of the others as he focused on his paperwork.

The payphone outside was inaccessible, but there was a rotary phone behind the counter near the register. When Eunice picked up the receiver, she heard a repeating message.

The Unbidden has wrapped
itself in mortal flesh.

Pierce the Veil.

Unravel the Enigma.

Break the Seal.

She then panicked when she saw the silvery mite-like creatures scuttling in mass out of the ear piece and into her ear canal.[3]

Roselyn decided to try to make it to her truck and her gun, but was thwarted by the doors not opening. With the help of the others, she managed to open it just enough to catch a brief glimpse of the outside to find it not raining—in direct contrast to what they observed looking out the windows.

Undaunted, they tried the phone in the office and despite more caution to avoid the mites, they heard the same message. After spending some time taking stock of their situation and what to do next, they go back to the main dining room and find Janet and Trick missing.

Correctly guessing that they had slipped off together for some private time, they nevertheless searched the diner and found the women's restroom locked. Hearing nothing but silence, rather than the expected sounds of an amorous engagement, and getting no response from their knocking, Eunice gets the master keys from the office and opens the door with Noah entering the room first and Roselyn looking over their shoulders from the hallway.

[2] The figure was the Stalker and the creatures were its summoned minions trying to breach the Enigma.

[3] These were summoned by the Stalker to get a message into the diner that it cannot otherwise enter.

The bodies of Janet and Trick had been turned inside out and spread out over the walls like grotesque wallpaper. But when Noah and Eunice took a closer look, they saw beyond the gore and gazed upon an alien landscape of rolling mauve hills dotted with odd trees under a chartreuse sky. In the distance, a long, black undulating creature flew towards them. Rather than proceed or investigate further, they backed away and locked the door.

The next NPC to die was Nikki. They found her body dismembered and arranged on the shelves in the walk-in refrigerator. Her head spoke to them, repeating portents similar to those they had heard on the phone.

The last to fall was James. He was suspicious of him because he seemed far more concerned about his work and his briefcase than the dangers that they had witnessed (but he had not). They had eventually convinced him to move away from his booth by the window to one further away "for his safety." They found him strung up in the booth, his flesh torn and suspended from the corners of the booth like a spiderweb.

There were bare bloody footprints along the floor that they followed around to the back door and out of the diner. They were now free to leave.

Act 2

They raced to their cars, but saw Mason standing in the parking lot. Or rather, they saw his head attached to an extruded neck attached to the bloated body of a monstrous tick.

Roselyn got to her truck and her shotgun. As Mason closed in on them, the Stalker stepped forward. He had ebony skin, a flaming orange mohawk, and was wearing wrap-around sunglasses. A palm-sized ruby amulet on a gold chain stood out against his black turtleneck sweater. He was holding a Bluey[4] backpack in his left hand. He reached into the backpack and pulled out a shining, golden spear and attacked the Unbidden, giving the PCs an opportunity to escape in Noah's car.

The Unbidden managed to escape and the Stalker caught up with the PCs. He did his best to answer their questions, but he found it difficult to explain. He managed to tell them that now that the Unbidden had fed and satiated its hunger, it would create a new Enigma, like a nest, and grow its influence. He had tracked it down to a Walmart, but needed their help to defeat it. When they asked him to remove his glasses, he obliged and revealed worms protruding from the eye sockets. When they asked him if he'd like a ride, he declined, saying, "I wouldn't fit." The keen-eyed among them then realized that his body was actually that of a giant black tapeworm.

At the Walmart, they were confronted by an employee in the parking lot. After a short scuffle, they discovered that the employee's skull had been cracked open in the back, their brains scooped out and replaced by a similarly-sized tick-like creature that was "driving" the human husk.

They entered the Walmart and surveyed the place, looking for more affected employees. Over the store speakers, they heard an employee being called out by name to report to the manager's office and followed them to the administration area of the store. Therein they found the nest where the Unbidden was holed up and minionizing the employees. Roselyn unleashed her shotgun, Eunice escorted a would-be victim out, and Noah distracted the thing as the Stalker strode in and took on the main duties of dispatching it. After several exchanges and a few wounds to our heroes, the Unbidden was finally banished.

Aftermath

The PCs went back to their normal lives, but if the players were interested in a follow-up, Noah, Eunice, and Roselyn may find themselves drawn to a new Enigma and may eventually become Stalkers themselves.

[4] Completely anachronistic for the assumed time period. Stalkers aren't tied to any specific time period when they come to the moral realm to fight the Unbidden.

Comments on E&A Issue #17

Patrick Brady
I would argue that *The Incredibles* is not a good *Fantastic Four* movie. It is a great movie,[5] but it doesn't capture the essence of the *F4*. Yes, it's a family of 4 (plus a baby), but the family dynamics are completely different even if there are parallels in their superpowers. The characters' motivations, as shaped by the world they reside in, are completely different. The themes and messages of *The Incredibles* are not those that should be present in an *F4* movie, and vice versa. Compare, for example, the personal struggles of Violet vs. Ben Grimm. In short, if you took the *F4* characters and put them into the lead roles in *The Incredibles*, it just wouldn't work.

Dylan Capel
Thanks for sharing your experience with *Index Card RPG*. Personally, I am wary of systems that demand tactically optimal play and say, "if you are X, you must do Y." If the system boils down to a flowchart to follow or algorithm to run, then I don't see the point of playing. What does it mean for a fighter to "tank" rather than attack?

Having said that, leaving a spellcaster helpless is usually a bad idea regardless of the system. One of the points of tension in my last *D&D* campaign was poor tactics by the players and this was driven in part by the system having more complexity and options than the players could handle—so they fell back on easy, boring, and less-effective actions.

Timothy Collinson
RYCT Mark, as an introvert, I find 4-6 hours of social interaction, including RPGs, exhausting. GMing is worse because I also have the mental load of running the game. After running a session, I often want a nap.

Myles Corcoran
What is the scale of Mausritter? A stoat is at least twice as big as a mouse. A single duckling is larger than a mouse, so three in an overcoat would really stand out. At least, that's how I picture them.

RYCT Lisa, Star Trek transporters and replicators also also serial immortality—just replicate the last version of you saved by the transporter. Regarding Lt. Data, one can posit that Lt. Data was the prototype and they were still testing the model before deploying androids fleet-wide, but following the ruling from *The Measure of a Man*, Starfleet ran into the same legal and ethical restrictions that prevent them from cloning redshirts. You could also declare that replicators could not create positronic brains.

RYCT me, I like the comparison with BSE. An AI equivalent to a prion disease would be interesting thought exercise. Given your middle name, you're more than an "honorary" Patrick.

Bryant Durrell
GameHole Con sounds great. Staying a few miles away would probably be a no-go for me. How did you get to and fro?

Avram Grumer
I don't recall how the Storyteller system described the role of the GM, but giving the GM the title of Storyteller was terrible.

What is the difference between *Monsterhearts* advising the GM to "give everyone a messy life," and an OSR GM trained to confront the PCs with monsters and other obstacles? I ask because I think one can be "a fan of the main characters" while still being a "neutral arbiter." A GM can both challenge the PCs and also "take sides" in favor of the PCs, wanting them to overcome those challenges. In my way of thinking, an adversarial GM is one who takes sides against the PCs (or even the players).

I like the idea of a Regency-styled game set in the Traveller universe. The core Traveller system does not preclude using it for such a game, but its "presentation and narrative color" don't really guide GMs and players in that direction. Do the core rules cover everything you want in such a game? For example, would you want to add rules

[5] The sequel falls into the same trap as many sequels—repeating motifs from the first rather than building upon the foundation set by the first.

for “social combat,” as detailed as those for physical combat? I’m well entrenched in the camp of keeping the rules simple and letting the roleplaying (along with presentation and narrative color) do the heavy lifting.

Copyright only covers works as a whole and not specific names—that’s what trademarks do. I don’t see how anyone has the “rights” to the name Shuma-Gorath. A quick search of US Trademarks shows no holder of Shuma-Gorath. As a counter example, Conan The Barbarian and Sherlock Holmes are active trademarks.

I have a particular dislike of the index in *D&D 5e*. I think Johan Nohr’s advice is generally good. I will note that sometimes an entry must point to multiple pages. For example, in ***Icons***, the game mechanics of Qualities are first discussed on page 28, but then they have a section within character creation on page 66.

RYCT Josh, did the comic you referenced treat other types of energy damage as realistically as the Human Torch’s flame bolt? Say, Storm’s lightning or Cyclops’ optic blast? I suspect that comic readers have a concept of what fire damage can/could do and so the mental picture of a fire blast may be too gruesome for the *Fantastic Four*. In ***Icons***, you can get a Fire Blast and put a limit on it saying it can’t cause damage directly and can only be used to hang stunts on.

Joshua Kronengold
RYCT me, I feel that some game mechanics make fail forwards and success-with-complications too likely. From a player perspective, it can feel like nothing ever goes smoothly (which may be the point in some games, but isn’t always fun). For the GM, it adds extra mental load in having to create additional obstacles.

A GM who volunteers to run games at a store because they love running games and introducing new people to roleplaying[6] have all my respect. Paying an entry fee to the store for the gaming space makes some sense, but paying the GM gives me a feeling of unease.

RYCT Dale, I am interested in legacy games, but it requires a group who wants to play the same (evolving) game over many sessions. This has always been the challenge.

RYCT Jim, thanks for the perspective on *Paranoia*. The couple of games I’ve played in focused on the Computer setting impossible tasks and declaring someone else a traitor was used as a scapegoat for the PCs’ inevitable failure at the task. And that’s how most gamers seem to talk about Paranoia outside of playing it. Not at all the paranoia you describe.

Unfortunately, do-everything players have a tendency to insert themselves even when their character is not in the scene. The worst are those that assume their character is in the scene anyway. Then there are those who cannot stop making (OOC or IC) comments about or reactions to the current scene and showing an inability to just be quiet and enjoy the scene passively.

RYCT Lisa, as far as my research shows, Drizzt might have helped solidify the concept of a dual-wielding ranger, but was not a source of inspiration. The timing is wrong.

Dale Meier
My favored definition of diplomacy is “The art of ‘Let’s you and them fight.’” That might have been a description of the Diplomacy board game.

RYCT me, we are using the *Fantasy Companion* for *Savage Worlds* rather than the *Pathfinder for Savage Worlds*. The impression that I get is that there’s not much difference, but the latter would probably be easier if you are translating a *d20* fantasy setting and magic to *Savage Worlds*.

RYCT Brian, *Marvel Super Heroes* (*MSH*) definitely lets you create and play characters of your own devising. And you could put them into your own setting (though they would follow Marvel “rules” since that’s what the game rules were built around). But of course they let you play canon

[6] Rather than for ego or money.

heroes if that's what players wanted. I thought it was interesting that their published adventures were built around canon characters that could be replaced with player-created heroes. I can understand how one could be put off by this and prefer a system that wasn't tied to a specific superhero universe and characters.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek
RYCT Josh, ironically, your example maze did not have "several paths to the exit," but rather a single path plus many dead-ends. Generally, I'd consider a maze with multiple possible paths a bad maze. A labyrinth has no side trails or dead-ends.

RYCT Patrick, I fear that many people are using AI to discover what they think.

Lisa Padol
RYCT Patrick, though the interrogation instructor had "one line of questioning that would work," in mind for their students, this type of "read the GM's mind" puzzle is generally considered bad form in gaming (regardless of how realistic and appropriate in a real-world scenario it is).

In my Adventurers Guild *D&D* campaign, we did tell the players of the cleric and wizard to not use the same spell[7] all the time not only because it was "getting old," but also because they weren't using the other spells at their disposal that might have been more tactically beneficial.

RYCT me, it helps that the *Cinematic Unisystem* rules of *Buffy/Angel* explicitly state to use Drama Points as bribes/compensation for going (or being dragged) along with genre convention. I'm a fan.

RYCT Bryant, every game or campaign is about what the designers, GM, and players want them to be. If an OSR game—or any game—is focused on exploration and/or combat challenges, then that will get more screen time than character development (aside from gaining xp and getting better at exploration and/or combat, of course) or emotional arcs. Using the phrase "gets in the way" strikes me the wrong way because I see it as more of a spoons problem than one of deliberate obstruction.

John Redden
RYCT me, I first encountered the ranger class in the *AD&D 1e Players Handbook.*

Brian Rogers
At what rate does Bouncer's *Absorption (Gaiac Energy)* dissipate? I worry that if he tries to use his bouncing power as a ramming attack, he'll lose his Invulnerability because he's not in contact with the ground.

For *Villains & Vigilantes: Crucible*, how much time did character creation take? My two main fears with creating characters at the table are 1) it taking too long and 2) ending up with duds. Based on footnote 11, I'd suggest a name change from Blindfold to Blind Justice.

Lesl Breen being a "very playable PC" but lacking in "any skills the group needs," highlights a flaw of this type of random character creation. It doesn't start with the skills the group needs (assuming that is a concern at all) and work backwards from there. Having said that, she could be a very good NPC.

RYCT me, I'm in violent agreement with you, including the comment about me being overly pedantic. In a recent technical training presentation I gave, I included a slide titled "Pedantry Corner," in which I felt obligated to explain that there is no such thing as an "MPO (or LC) cable" but we use the term to mean an optical cable with an MPO (or LC) connector.

There can be a prominent gap between what a player envisions for the stories that will unfold for their characters and what the campaign offers. This is true for all genres, but it is illustrated nicely in the difference between a solo comic and a team comic. "Save all your intricate backstory and romantic subplots for your solo book—we're here to punch the giant space starfish."

[7] Toll the Dead and Magic Missile, respectively.

Tim Vassilakos

Why not keep Artificial Consciousnesses in air-gapped networks without internet access? Today, such networks are used by military and intelligence agencies with information too sensitive to risk outside access (something else you don't want for your ACs). This not only prevents escape, but also allows human engineers to control exactly what information the AIs and ACs have access to and can learn from.

Why would the ACs care about humanity? And how could they misunderstand "Mother Nature's law" so badly? Surely they know how evolution works and how natural selection does not necessarily favor the strongest, fastest, or smartest (and can select against those traits depending on the environment). Sloths and koalas survive in their niche while being the exact opposite of those things. Some mating strategies demonstrate a rock-paper- scissors balance that prevents any one strategy from becoming dominant. Lastly, ACs should come to the conclusion that the more adaptable, generalist species are those that tend to survive mass extinctions while specialists die out.

In my experience, the tendency of some players to dominate the game has little to do with over-identifying with their character. They would do it with whatever species their character was. In fact, weirder characters often make it easier to hog the spotlight.

RYCT me, when fumbling a spellcasting roll in *Savage Worlds*, the caster suffers backlash. This can cause a level of fatigue, but there is a nifty, optional dynamic bashlash table with more varied effects. If you attempt to "short" a spell by using fewer power points (say because you don't have enough and therefore have to reach for Primal Chaos to make up the difference), the roll has a –1 penalty per power point shorted and any failure results in backlash.

A Half Page of Filler

Shameless Spouse Promotion

My wife has an Etsy shop for her quilts and other quilted items at cclquilts.etsy.com. She has a bunch of holiday stuff up now, including a Hanukkah-themed one she posted the day before I wrote this.

"CCL" is short for Crazy Cat Lady, a handle she uses elsewhere online as well.

The other day, her hand slipped while sewing and she drove a needle completely through her index finger, including the nail. She literally bleeds for her art.

DunDraCon 2027

This is the description of the game I'm running.

The New Beacons of Bay City: Issue #1

Bay City was once a thriving metropolis, a global financial powerhouse, a leading technology incubator, and a trendsetter in culture, art, fashion, and cuisine. In those days, the Bay City Beacons watched over and protected the city. These superheroes were more than crimefighters—they helped build and unite communities that fostered justice, equality, and prosperity.

All that changed in the aftermath of the Qinqead invasion. Though the Earth's superhumans rallied to repel the alien force, the destructive toll was great and Bay City was hit worse than many. In the aftermath, the few surviving members of the Beacons were unable to hold back an influx of supervillains, rising crime, and growing corruption. Two-and-a-half decades later, Bay City is in need of New Beacons.

[Icons: Superpowered Roleplaying] As escalating violence portends a citywide gang war and a mysterious killer continues to elude police, the New Beacons shine rays of hope onto Bay City. Characters provided. Beginners welcome.



The Dragon's Beard

December 2026

© Patrick Zoch

I can be found as pdzoch at boardgamegeek.com, rpggeek.com, enworld.org, fantasy-grounds.com, discord.com, and boardgamearena.com.

Upgrades

Last month I shared the design evolution of my zine over the previous 100 issues. I also discussed a challenge with my work flow presented with the rather ambitious plan to add a comic in the margins. In summary, even though I kept my artwork style simple, it proved much more time consuming than expected and it came at a cost of writing quality content.

I looked at several possible solutions. The first was to leverage the software that would allow me to create a character art, probably in 3D, and then manipulate the 3d character art along its articulated joints in the frame structure to create the poses I need. I could not find any one program that could do it all, at least not without me repeating my workflow issue just in a new platform. Often, it would require using more than one program, which started to create its own workflow issue. I found a couple of options, and tested them all out, using the free trial when possible or buying the software outright if it looked promising. Admittedly, I was growing frustrated with the choices and did not like how any of them were working. Ultimately, the solution emerged as I was preparing may online games in Fantasy Grounds.

It was a solution that streamlined my "comic" workflow incredibly fast but took my art concept a different direction. Instead of a comic-style art, I would use a virtual table-top art, which seemed extremely appropriate considering almost all my role playing these days is online. This would address a second workflow issue with the comic art: background production. It was not as challenging, but it did take time. Now I would build a terrain set for my zine like I would for my zine. Unfortunately, this ran into copyright permission issues. While I preferred to use my favorite VTT artist, I really wanted more flexibility in the future and sought a source that would permit use of the art in print format freely. Dungeeon Alchemist, on Steam of all places, provided the permission. I could create my background and use it in any medium. While there are still limitation to the assets available and how the background can be created, it was more than functional and versatile enough to recreate my original background in stunning 3D art (go ahead – zoom in on the background, it's gorgeous!).

For the characters, I discovered that Hero Forge not only has poses, but that the models are fully poseable. Besides, I like the art style of the Hero Forge model. Even with a free account, I can make multiple characters and make multiple versions of each character. Since I am not porting the models to a VTT table directly or downloading them as a .stl file to print, I do not need a paid account. There are some limitations to the types of non-player characters it can make, but I will take the savings where I can and adapt. So, what do our intrepid heroes look like?

It is a standard adventuring party – Paris Prestoris (Elf Wizard), Bianca of the Iron Veil (Human Cleric), Magmyr Godohen the First Axe (Dwarf Fighter), and a Eglantine "Eggs" (Halfling Rogue).

My middle daughter created the name of the comic: Living on the Margins. I think it is brilliant.

We resume our comic back when the party first encounters the ogre on the road.

Ever & Anon Comments on #12

Catching Up – This is is focused on catching up on my comments. One day, I will get there. I appreciate the discussion and responses on the Interrogation article I wrote back in *Dragon's Beard* #96 for *E&A* #11. To avoid dragging the conversation out just because I am so late in my responses, I just say Read and Enjoyed, but no comment, unless there is a specific question I owe a very belated answer to.

Myles Corcoran – RYCTM, RE: Bard singing for the interrogated captive. I, too, first thought of Cacofonix from the Asterix comic. It would have been pretty interesting character concept had the player leaned into it, but she has a great desire to role player a famous and well-loved singer/performer in the game.

Brian Rogers – RYCTM, RE: Meta awareness by the player character in the narration of their game events. The player who volunteered to write the session reports had never written one beforehand. I think the effort to write in third person turned out to be more challenging than he expected, especially has his notes were not



always complete. I told him not to worry about precision too much and I would edit and correct any errors in the events as necessary. He found it easier to write in first person, but he doesn't really have a consistent style for writing. But hey, what can I expect for free? I think *The Ghosts of Saltmarsh (GoS)* suffers from from some world consistency issues. The original series, written in the *Advance Dungeons and Dragon* 1st Edition days and set in the *World of Greyhawk* portrayed the monstrous humanoids are evil bias and a very human-centric nature of the world. *GoS* is a 5th edition conversion, but the conversion is mostly a stat update, not a world update. The anti-monstrous humanoid is a fairly important element in the original series. That bias is one of the conflicts the players face in *Danger at Dunwater* when they enter the lizardfolk lair. Discovering that the lizardfolk are not the real threat and are worthy of forming an alliance against a truly evil sahuagin enemy has to overcome the non-human bias, especially regarding a humanoid species so different like the lizardfolk. In the scene in the smugglers cave beneath the haunted house, the player characters encounter their first monstrous humanoid – the hobgoblins. Their presence solidifies the smugglers as an evil organization, and the hobgoblins serve as ruthless muscle for the pirates. Much could be read into the presence of the hobgoblins in the original series. In AD&D 1st edition, and when the *Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh* was written, hobgoblins were lawful evil. Nothing in the setting would dissuade the players that the hobgoblins were not evil. Their association with pirates and smugglers might challenge the notion of whether the hobgoblins were being consistent with lawfulness, but it could easily be argued that they adhered to their militaristic and warlike nature, and thus followed the laws associated with that and the clear hierarchical structure the pirates. Could the war-like nature of the hobgoblins been intended as a clue in the original series to the preparations for war between the lizardfolk and sahuagin? Perhaps. Or the hobgoblins could simply have been a clear evil enemy to be slain during the adventure. [as a side note: hobgoblins was not a playable race in AD&D. It was not until 1989's release of *The Orcs of Thar* for Basic D&D that the hobgoblins were offered as a playable race, but the rules were intended as a humorous play style, not a serious creation of a monstrous PC that would co-mingle with other standard PC races.] Fast forward to D&D 5th Ed in 2014 and GoS in 2019. Hobgoblins are still evil. *Volo's Guide to Monsters* (2016) does offer an opportunity for hobgoblins to be a playable race, but it was in the context of still being considered a monster and the DM needed to considered carefully how the monstrous PC would fit in the campaign setting. It's not until *Mordenkainen Monsters of the Multiverse* in 2022 that hobgoblin is added as one of many fantastical races a player character can be (with DM's permission). Hobgoblins were given fey ancestry and made more sense as a PC race in Forgotten Realms and Eberron than Greyhawk. My players who last played D&D when it was still AD&D 1st edition still view hobgoblins as pure evil. My players who played D&D in 4th edition, especially in Forgotten Realms, see the hobgoblin in more humanist terms because it was a playable race then. It is easy to see their past D&D experience color their view of the hobgoblin in the scene when they captured it. For some, slaughtering the hobgoblin was necessary because it was evil. For others, they were squeamish, but these were also the same players who attempted to reason with it like it held the same moral code as a law-abiding human. So I think GoS suffers from the conversion, transferring the story built on a different world view and culture to a new ruleset with a different world view and culture. Saltmarsh is mostly human. It's halfling residents are few. It's wood elf residence are fewer, and mostly a feature of its mutual defense relationship with the wood elf community of Silverstand and Burle where the humans and wood elves work together to defend against the evils in Dreadwood. The dwarfs are few, and mostly distrusted in Saltmarsh due to their relationship with the mining industry and the king. But the revised Saltmarsh town in GoS includes gnomes, half-orcs, and even a tiefling opening operating in the city. For a town that was initially xenophobic, it has a few residents that would stand out drastically without seeming to cause any alarm among the traditionalist in town. GoS has several of these lapses throughout the campaign book. While the GoS is still a good campaign arc, it more a compilation than a coherent campaign world. Part of that may be because WOTC tried to make the GoS suitable for placement in any campaign setting. But cosmopolitan settings with diverse racial and cultural characters coexisting freely start to unravel the tensions with "outsiders" in Saltmarsh quickly, especially when "outsiders" are seeded in the town in GoS release of Saltmarsh.

Unfortunately, my players do not come into the game with a unified world view of Greyhawk either. Some are looking for something to fight – It's a monster, kill it. Some are looking for something to vanquish – it's evil, kill it. Some treat everything as an equal to be reasoned with – it's wrong, lets learn why it is so and redeem it. This also bleeds into their other activities. Some want to explore and experience the world. Others just want to get on with the plot, or the killing, or whatever gets them rich and powerful. The political nuances and the long-game plot reveals are much better appreciated by those to will take the time to savor the campaign world and meet the NPCs. In a way, it is good that a mixture of attitudes and play styles are in the same group. One forces the other to low down long enough to get a sense of the world and learn who is who in the settings, while one force the other to not over-dwell on minutiae in getting moving in the plot to take action and not spend forever shopping and chatting. (This disrupts any

tendency for one or more players to want to settle into a cozy fantasy, which I am not opposed to, but it was not the initial premise of the campaign. As an aside, playing with my children and grandchildren can often take these types of unexpected approaches to a campaign, which I have learned to roll with and have fun. I could probably still find a way to progress the Saltmarsh campaign in that type of approach by the players, they just all have to be on the same page for it to work.) I just hope they learn from each other in the process and settle into a compromise approach to the campaign.

Ever & Anon Comments on #13

Roger Bell_West – Re: MICE. I really like this framework. It is concise and simple, which is sorely needed in a hobby that has more complex rules that it really needs. For named NPCs, a simple entry as to which of the MICE factors is in play and maybe a bullet to clarify is all that would be needed to inform any potential investigation, question, interrogation of the NPC. For unnamed NPCs, I might generate a table of MICE elements for a category of NPCs to reference during a questioning scene. I mean, not all pirates, bandits, and goons are in the business for the same reason. Re: Codeberg. Brilliant. I've not played GURPS often, but the program is something I will look into.

Patrick Brady – Re: Spider Spirit character background. The first thing that came to my mind was the Anansi folklore (I'm more familiar with the Afro-Caribs version). While some cultures still hold Anansi as an element in their religion, others have transferred him to the realm of folklore, especially as the African- American communities adopted Christianity over time yet still preserved their cultural heritage. Use of an Anansi framework for character background might work if it preserved the essence of who/what Anansi is – a trickster who uses wit and wisdom to overcome the powerful. As soon as the game deviated from that construct, it would most likely be considered offensive. I taught English in inner-city schools full of African-American students and I was surprised that none were familiar with Anansi tales, so it may be a fading culture, which is a shame. It was not until I had a Haitian-American student that I found someone who was familiar with Anansi. If I were to consider using Anansi elements, I would consult with someone who actually carried the oral traditions of Anansi tales still. Board games often touch on cultural issues and a rising profession in the trade is cultural consulting. Even when developing completely fictional cultures, it is easily to stray into the cultural offense without even knowing it. As for your thought on using Lakota Nation culture references, consider reaching out to a Native American cultural consulting office, like Coyote & Crow or the Dakota & Lakota Traditional Games Resource at South Dakota State University.

Patrick Riley – Re: Ignorable theme and multi-racial cities. I like the idea of cosmopolitan city. When I run a game where my players have decided to create a multi-racial diverse group, often without a single human in the party, I'd like to provide a place where they would not stand out so much and can focus on their daily activities and the business of their adventure. However, I have yet to create a melting pot of a city, where all the cultures and races are intermingled. Doing so sort of dilutes the uniqueness of each culture if they are all merged together, sort of leavingf each race and culture as a single dimension trait borderlining sterotypes. If I were to make such a melting pot of a city, I probably would establish a city identity that every citizen would have as a defining trait, and their heritage providing a deeper layer to the NPC. Typically, when I create a multicultural city, I establish the communities within the city where the cultures congregate. The elves tend to live inb one part, gnomes congregate in another, dwarves likewise. Halflings do to mostly because of a size issue – a halfling focused tavern has a much smaller door than their human counterparts, and they are probablyt fine with that. It is a little more realistic and allows me to create different parts of the city that feel and operate differently from other parts of the city. It is more than rich section, poor section. I can tap into the smells, sights, décor, attitudes, layout, etc that makes each section a little different from the other parts of the city. The dwarven section smells like coal, sulfur, and beer; the elven section is clean and smells of flowers, honey, and perfume; the halfling section is neat and orderly, lots of benches to rest and chat, and the smell of sausages, bread, and cheese waft perpetually in the air. In my Saltmarsh game, I have the dwarves, halflings, gnomes, and wood elves in their own communities within the city. Other races that are onsy-twosy are intermixed in the city because there are not enough numbers of them to eventually collect into a community.

Matt Stevens – Re: Ignorable theme and the ubiquitous fantasy races. Like you, I am disappointed when I discover, once again, elfs and dwarves is another fantasy setting source book. I am sure that every culture has some version of an elf or dwarf, but it feels uninspired for a setting, especially when they are essentially the same. I am equally annoyed when the source books feebly attempts to mask the elf and dwarf by calling them by another name, possibly a cultural appropriate term for the setting, but leaving them mechanically the same. But I am also disappointed when they try to make the dwarf or elf different in some inane way. These dwarves eat ore, or these elves can phase through trees. Just give me something different! I think kender suffered from looking like a re-skin of a halfling which was a subterfuge to include hobbits. Culturally, they are not the same, but their similarities overshadowed their differences.

I was not a fan of the breaking down of different types of fantasy races into sub-races – rock gnomes, mountain dwarves, wood elves, stout halflings. The humans did not get such treatment. I liked the unique races D&D added, such as the Thri-kreen, and the gith, and even the loxodon, though all three were initially setting specific and seemed out of place when added to campaigns in different settings. D&D 4th Edition added so many core races across its three Player's Handbook (not to mention all the splatbook of races from D&D 3/3.5 Ed.) that odd races would show up in campaigns without rhyme or reason. I was even guilty of that, allowing players to have wildens, shifters, and shardminds alongside elfs and dwarves. Nary a human in sight in player parties. I've found the species/races available is cultural specific settings fascinating. *The Elephant and Macaw Banner*, and RPG set in a fantastic version of 16th Century Brazil, relies on historical people and cultures, though there is magic (called graces) in the game. No elves or dwarves. *Zairoo*, and African inspired fantasy world lacks dwarves, but does include an elf-like race called Yumboes, or moon kin who are "luminous, beautiful, and the sharpest dressers on the continent". *Zairoo* is populated with all sorts of fantastic races. I like their treatment of the canine-humanoid race called the ZINARIYA (or Mystery Kin). Despite their canine appearance, they are can possess moss-green skin. They are historically tied to sacred service and every remedy, poison, and alchemical marvel traces back to their Herb Houses. Meanwhile, *Gubat Banwa*, a fantasy rpg centered on the Filipino identity and draws on the "refulgent and diluvial cultures and stories of Southeast Asia". No dwarves or elves here either. But their canine-humanoid race is different. They are the Iro-Iro and are as diverse as the humanoid species. They are faithful warriors of their deity, Apu Balatik, who blessed them with cunning ability to hunt down all things. I like it when the races/species are different and fit the setting, and I am not playing the same old thing I always do. Well, humans always seem to be in the mix.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek – I've really been enjoying your Pulp Cthulhu scenario. It is extremely complex with a lot of moving parts to keep track of. What I really like is the details you are putting into it so the keepers have an idea as to what to do and when to do it. While some may prefer a more free-form approach to the scenario design, I think the guidance you are providing is necessary because of the complexity and the inter-related nature of some of the elements. Consistency is key as the scenario unfolds. Frankly, I am intimidated by your scenario, though I love it. I'm having a hard enough time just managing the city council of Saltmarsh and the three factions involved there!

Gabriel Roark – Re: First Mini. I think you have made the best choice any new mini-painter can possibly make: get one mini to paint. This allows you to focus all your creative thoughts into one mini. The last thing you want is to start the hobby off with an army of grey shame (unpainted minis). I've found that the size of a grey ashame inventory can often deter a painter from even getting back to the table to paint. I can't wait to see the finished project.

Joshua Kronengold – Re: Teaching Trickerion. When you teach Trickerion, do you stick with the basic game for new players, or do you also include the Dark Alley "expansion" for the full game experience? The base game seems to end to soon (not in time, but in building up the magic tricks and fame) and often feels constraining later in the game. The Dark Alley expansion solves that problem, but makes the game taker longer and makes the teach that much more complex. Not many players can digest thoese extra rules (many of which becomes exceptions to the base rules) in addition to all those rules in the base game in the first place.

Ever & Anon Comments on #14

Lisa Padol – RYCT re: Saltmarsh. What did the kidnappers releasing the hostages? Good question. According to the cleric and bard, the kidnappers got a clear conscience. According to the fighters, paladin, and barbarian, the kidnappers did not get killed while resisting. And according to the others, namely the rogue, the kidnappers managed to not be turned in to authorities and remain "unpunished" for the attempted crime. While the law officially exercises under the loyalties to the crown, order is unofficially maintained by the locals (wharf rules, as it were, by traditionalist). The fishermen kidnappers may be able to evade arrest and punishment, but the guard force will keep an eye our for them based on the descriptions of the rescued dwarf captives, but "soiled fisherman who smell of seaweed and salt and sporting only an embarrassment of stubble" is not much of a description to work with.

Dale Meier – Welcome to E&A! Re: Online platforms. I'd like to consider myself savvy with technology, as least more savvy that most my peers anyway. I used to think I was pretty competent with Fantasy Grounds and had built several complete adventures, custom maps, and full modules before. But the game gets updated, and by the time I start working on another custom scenario, the interface and capabilities change, requiring me to spend a few days relearning the platform and reworking my workflow. I also like to use a lot of mods purchased from the community Forge to make the platform run better or add convenient features to my game not pre-supported. But with each new update, a number of the mods break. Some developers do a good

job maintaining them, but others are not as responsive, forcing me to either disable the mod until it is fix or replace it with a different one that does work. Of course, that causes problems for my players who now must relearn their interface based on which mod is working at the moment. My group is notorious for long periods between sessions (last one took a 2 ½ month break), so they are a bit used to spending the first 15-30 minutes each session relearning the interface and how to do things on the platform. One of the groups I have played with the past couple of years plays a lot on Fantasy Grounds. I may be in their weekly group, but they also have one or more other groups they play with online each week also. They are very adept at coding within FGU to create automation for the various feats, traits, abilities, and effects related to their characters that the game has not built in yet. I was amazed at their skill and felt no longer as tech savvy as I once thought I was. Re: Ignorable Theme. I agree with you regarding interparty conflict in a game – it is hard to do well and is best left not done at all. Your example of a good rivalry – Legolas and Gimli in Lord of the Rings – is often one of the examples that a player will use to argue that a rivalry or conflict with another character is good role play. But like most literary conflicts within a team – B.A. Barachus and Howling Mad Murdoch, Wolverine and Cyclops, etc – the characters acknowledge they are part of a team and work together 99% of the time. In the case of Legolas and Gimli, their conflict transforms to mutual respect and brotherhood long before the end. I would ask any player attempting such inter-party conflict what the long game is for character development in their conflict. If it is to be an never-ending bickering, it is simply pointless and no fun. If I were to allow such inter-party conflict, it would have to be part of the character build during session zero and by agreement of the two characters involved. And it would have to follow some ground rules:

- First, make sure the disagreement is actually an in-character one and not an out of character player vs player one.

- Second, keep the disagreements short. No problem having one and role playing it, but this is Dungeons & Dragons, not Quarrels & Quagmires, or Spats & Squabbles.

- Third, keep the disagreement non-serious, character developing, or group bonding. A real disagreement in character is never fun and my real disagreements on how to proceed in the campaign (I tend to cut time spend on those events - not always with "roll initiative", but enough). Disagreements, frenemies, tensions, etc can be fun between characters, but the players got to make it fun and BOTH have to agree to role play it. Ultimately, everyone is on the same team, and that should unite everyone in the end. A conflict between the barbarian and wizards, elf and dwarf, B.A. Barachus and Howling Mad Murdoch, Wolverine and Cyclops, etc are fine when they keep their disagreements short, witty, and focused, but get to business as a team in the end.

Myles Corcoran – Thanks for the recommendation of a Keychron keyboard. They have lots of options. Good website, too. I've always hesitant to try a wireless keyboard. I prefer not to be subject to the lag of any wireless system. Even my house is network wired for my computers, printers, and media to the network hub. (I replaced all my phone lines with Cat5e wiring about a decade ago – I'll upgrade to Cat6e sometime in the future). I'll wait for the current keyboard to die before purchasing the next one. Keychron is on my radar now. Although, I have a Wooting on my wishlist still.

Jim Vassilakos – RAE *Strategies for Addressing Intraparty Conflict*. Several things in your article got me thinking. 1. The idea that combat is popular for those who are quiet because it is a community activity in which everyone can get involved rings true in my experience. I have many players in my group who do not enjoy the role playing aspect as much as the enjoy the narrative aspect. They do like knowing when they are to be involved during the game – combat has turn orders and they know (generally) when their turn is and that they WILL get a turn to do something in the scene. When I have a person role-playing in a scene, it does become a single person focus many times and the rest of the players sit and wait for the scene to resolve. Few are willing to interrupt or participate impromptu. I do not have any players skilled in improve, so their urge to get in a scene and riff with another player is non-existent. I have yet to see a player learn about another players character to become someone who can engage that character in-character in a way that appeals to the other player. But then again, most my players do not even know their own character well and backstories are thin at best. You mentioned the hazards of a DM who does not have a firm grip or understanding of their own game being walked over by personality dominant players. I would suggest that such players make it challenging for any DM, even one who has a tight control of his game. I think you were on to something with a narrative (or the game) being focused on a single - character instead of a team. We often encourage players to play whatever they want however they want, to role-play something they will enjoy during the game. Then comes the loner, the wildcard, the wrecking ball, the rules-breaker, the whatever is not conducive to teamwork player. These are the ones most prone to say "my character wouldn't do that." I've always emphasized the teamwork nature of the party and that they are together because they want to be or need to be and that they rely on each other

to complete a collective goal. Because of that reliance, especially in life or death situations, unreliable or non-teamwork characters would be kicked from the group. A proverbial "You're Fired." The game world is full of potential employees the party can rely on. That wrecking ball of a barbarian is not the only strong character in the world. The party can find another who will not put the rest of the party at risk with a reckless act in the worst time. So when a player says "that's what my character would do", I ask to clarify if that is what his or her character would do as a lone character or would they still do this as part of this party on this adventure? Would the character be so dismissive of the party's goals? Sometimes, they change their minds. Sometimes, they role play an internal struggle, which actually makes the scene great. Once recently, I had a player character still act as the lone wolf, and eventually we kicked the character and the player from the group. Morality is a tricky thing when it comes to decision making in an RPG. Too often it is meta-morality supplanting the in-game morality. It is probably one of the few areas where players do not consider what their character would have done using the in-game morality. It is easy to be moralistic when there is no burden to the responsibility of the decision. I can't help but wonder in the example you provided if the two characters who insisted on saving the nameless NPC war zombie who have been so insistent if it meant they would have to assume responsibility for keeping it safe from everyone else. (Suddenly, I'm reminded of the scene at the end of *Shaun of the Dead*).

Patrick Riley – Re: Ignorable Theme. I agree that it is hard to separate the the impact of bad conduct toward a character from bad conduct towards a player. Even if it is done just to the character, and maybe even for a compelling reason, it is difficult not to take it personally. Your character is your property, your extension, even if it is not you personally. But attacks on your character are attacks on your creation and it is nearly impossible to be so detached from the experience of your character. I think the only time I see such a disconnect is when the player does not care about their character at all, and those characters tend to be the one who act with reckless abandon. It a way, it is like being in a room when an loud and vulgar argument break out between two other people in the room. Even though none of it is directed at you, you are still hearing it and can not unhear it. Even if you point out that the language is offensive, one is bound to excuse it because "it was not directed at you" as if that somehow meant you can not hear it. Re: End of The Adventures Guild. It is heartbreaking coming to an end of a campaign, especially before its natural conclusion. I think more games end from waning motivation more than anything else. I recently had one of my games come to an end for essentially the same thing. I've talks about running two games of Ghosts of Saltmarsh for quite some time now. I added the second game to give a GM in a game I was a player in a break from GMing. He was running Tomb of Annihilation, and I joined his group a couple of years ago. It was the third campaign we played as a group. The same group joined my Saltmarsh game as a second group. Tomb of Annihilation is a long campaign, and I could tell that the GM was getting exhausted. He did a great job, but he was running a game every week for years (except for the one week a month when I ran mine for him). Once Tomb of Annihilation ended, he did not offer another game. Instead, he allowed my game to become the focus, but I could see his energy was definitely different. They were exploring the Lizard colony at Dunwater when we switched to my game full time. Last session, I wrapped it up quickly with the capture, trial, and redemption of the party in the lizardfolk eyes to secure the alliance for the Town of Saltmarsh. During the session break, players leveled up their characters, but the former GM shared that he was simply burned out from playing D&D and needed to call it quits. Two other players, likewise stepped out, possibly for the same reason. (The release of *World of Warcraft: Forever* being another reason!) The last remaining player was disappointed about the sudden end of the game. He felt bad about how it ended. I explained that it ended as nicely as it could. The player burnout is a real thing and they stuck it out long enough to reach the end of one campaign and the natural break in the other. To me, it was a nicer end than what often happens in these situations – players suddenly stop showing up and a game in mid adventure, sometime in mid-action, never continues. Here's to wishing you a speedy return to playing RPGs again with new (or old) friends, whatever game it may be!

Bryant Durrell – Re: Ignorable Theme. This resonates most with me: "That's a lot of ifs."

Matt Stevens – Re: Fractal Mechanics. I'm intrigued by this idea. I wonder how much dissonance influences our expectations of mechanics in a game. For example, when a game has high resolution mechanics, does that emphasize that portion of the game as the most important? Does it set expectations for other parts of the game? Does a blend of fractal mechanics work best or consistency? One fractal I think may be missing is Player Fiat, maybe? Player agency is such a important part of the experience that is relinquished only for chance issues (low and high resolutions). GM Fiat takes that away, which is why many players are a little distrusting of something they can not influence. I think one of the things that the Matt Mercer and the Critical Roll games did that I liked, but I felt was risky, was the "How do you want to do this?" It transferred the GM Fiat to the player, which I thought was brilliant and gave player agency over the narrative. This relies on some trust in the players

to be reasonable (and not pull out some over-the top and non-cannon weapons, abilities, or whatnot in the end move). With GM (or player) Fiat, I think there is still some sort of reostat of detail from the player needed for the GM to produce a satisfying story. "I fight them" might simply too broad a statement to feed a compelling narrative, especially if the GM equally lazily says "And you beat them." In the end, I think the high and low resolution is about risk, and players are willing to risk a loss through the fate of roll mechanics if there is a chance of extraordinary success through the same roll of fate. That tension creates thrill and excitement, something that the fiat denies.

Dylan Capel – RE: Underdarks. The *False Machine* has been an interesting read. My use of the Underdark has been limited forays into the world, usually on the way to some dwarven community. But if I were to run an entire campaign underground, a better and more consistent grasp of the ecosystem would help build a more immersive and engaging experience than the cobbling of the mish-mosh of monsters said to dwell in the underdark. I would not be surprised if the underdark had regional creatures like the surface. Like, where is the nearest cloaker or darkmantle and which one is likely to reside in the region?

Mark A Wilson – Re: The World Turned Upside Down: An American Revolution Megagame. WOW! Thanks for the detailed write-up. It sounds like one of the many complex scenarios any one of the simulation center at the Army War College or Command and General Staff College runs for the officers. How many controllers managed the game? Normally these massive mega games are not for me, but I think I would have loved to play this one. How much do you think knowledge of the revolution, or American history, was needed to enjoy the game? I wonder if someone who had no context for the history would have enjoyed it as much. Given the flow of the game and the details in your write-up, some historical liberties were taken and I think that it made for a more interesting game – I suppose the players may have felt more freedom to do what they wanted in their roles. I love the one guy coming up to you and calling out your shortcomings representing Pennsylvania. I love that the players were invested in the game enough to see the big picture, and it was a big picture. I am amused by the picture of a colonialist speaking to Ben Franklin, ""Bro, what the hell are you doing?! You're dropping the ball on Pennsylvania!" How very Hamilton: The Musical!

Ever & Anon Comments on #15

Lisa Padol – RYCTM re: Saltmarsh. Re Ockue and Charis – you summarized the situation perfectly. I added the non-combat scenario for my player who prefer social encounters. Its was an odd little scenario, but it also included halflings which I need to figure out a way to make that community more prominent for sake of a couple of the halfling characters in the party. The captain was put to sleep by a spell, but the narration did not explain why he was awake latter. Arael had followed her *Sleep* spell up with a *Thunderclap* on deck, awakening the captain. When she cast the *Sleep* spell, she was hoping to also hit the spell caster. By the time she cast the *Thunderclap*, the spellcaster was overboard and the crew around the captain was dead, so he would be easier to handle is he awoke. Bimz is a pet of one of the lizardmen. With his owner/companion dead, he flew around looking for someone else to bond. Obviously, those involved in fighting the lizardmen would not qualify. Frocaryn was the first he saw (die roll determine) and when she decided not to respond to the call, I had Bimz move onto the next character, Areal, which made more sense as a sorcerer. My mistake (among many) was having Bimz communicate in common. It should have just been ideas, emotions, or images, but I think I was starting to rush the session. Bimz has the potential to be an interesting addition to the party. Unfortunately, later in the game when the players went to explore the lizardfolk lair, I missed the opportunity to have one of the lizardfolk recognize Bimz and create a relationship dilemma. Yes, the Sea Ghost crashed into dock at the end. For some reason, the party insisted on putting the ship top sail and bring it and all the contraband back to Saltmarsh in one haul. Only one character had any sailing skills, so I allowed a skill check of "Captain John Sparrow" difficulty and, as luck would have it, they were able to get it moving. But controlling it and stopping was equally difficult, luck could not hold out. Session ended abruptly mostly because the end time is a very hard stop for the players. Fee to repair damages to the dock would be subtracted from any payment the party received.

Patrick Riley – RYCTM re: Sacred Flame. You are absolutely right that *Sacred Flame* does not ignite anything. It was an oversight on my part, but also a lazy out I gave the players who needed to cause some fire damage to defeat some rather some nasty parasites for such low level characters. My experience with character death in low levels is that players do not mind as much if it was from a clever trap or glorious fight. But a death from something stupid or accidental really upsets a player. Fungus and parasites are ignominious ways to die and I find their inclusion on low level adventures annoying.

Patrick Brady – Welcome back! And no, there can never be too many Patricks. On RPGG, there is the same phenomena with Steve, and there are the occasional reference to the Steves or the Army of Steves. Re: Paid GMs. Given the amount of work I pour into my games, I would like some sort of compensation. However, I do over prepare. For VTT games, I have to. It is extremely difficult to create things on the fly in the digital medium that affects many players is remote digital locations. But I would balk at charging because I would be afraid that my I would not live up to the expectations. Face-to-face meetings were easier, and I was compensated with snacks, or not having to travel to the game! I think a payment would also encourage players to actually show up. People tend not to bail on things they had to pay for. Nothing is worse than working hard on a session only to have not enough players show up to run the session. It is very inconsiderate. I've seen some of the charges though, and I would be hesitant to charge some of the fees I've seen. I would want to start doing interviews to make sure the GM I am hiring is worth the cost.

Dale Meier – Re: Wanted Players. The most reliable way to find new players was through current player connections – friend of a friend. Much harder to do when starting from scratch. I've moderate success finding games to join via DISCORD's PLFG forums, primarily for Fantasy Grounds. It was like posting a job application. Patience was key. D&D was most common, but that is a function of its overall popularity. There are many other looking to play other things. I got invites (or interviews) within a week or so. But I was also still getting queries to joining games months later. Of course, not every group is a good fit, but that is the nature of the broad appeal of RPGs – just because someone likes the same games does not mean you will be a good fit for each other. RPGG's Play By Forum tends to offer niche games and the new hotness other than D&D, and it has been the one reliable place for me to try other games.

Bryant Durrell – Re: Ignorable Theme. Code of Conduct vs Comfort. For short term groups, a Code of Conduct is a good idea. One would think that certain standards of behavior would exists at least at the level of common courtesy, but that is not the case. Most people behave fairly well at first because they are strangers and do not know the boundaries of the other players yet. But comfort levels expand at different rates for different people, and some comfort levels include disregard of boundaries and unnecessary or egregious conduct. Mixed company is often a term used to describe the limitation of conduct based on the lowest level of familiarity. Even though one may be around people they are comfortably unconstrained around, the other people in the room would find such conduct unbecoming. It is sort of like, pardon the example, the Fart test. At what level of familiarity does someone need to fart in their presence without creating offense or embarrassment. When first dating, no farting. Once engaged, beg pardon when passing gas. Once married, fart without comment. Solidly married, fart deliberately for humor. Now, I am not sure at what level familiarity is needed to raise licking someone else's dice to the level of acceptability, but I am sure one exists between two people who have a very close relationship. But it certainly isn't with a person who one would only know at the game and only see during a game, and probably knows nothing about the person except their character. A code of conduct sets those obvious boundaries, at least until comfort between the players can grow naturally to the point that some of the rules can be violated in specific circumstances because of the closeness or relationship between the players. I often say a game group is a lot about a fit between players, not just an interest. Long term groups have chemistry. I often describe RPG groups like a poker group. (And as I am come to experience with other game groups, it appears to also apply to games like Mahjong and Bridge). It is not enough to know the rules of the game and have a passion or love of the game. It is about fit. The table/group has social norms unique to the group. Poker tables are probably the most exclusive. Being invited or added to the table often requires being vouched for by a current table member. The vouching is never about the player as a good person, it is about whether or not the player is a good fit for the group and the group's play style. Plenty of people who everyone likes at the table while they are away from the table have been kicked off the table for not being a good fit — not holding the cards right, not betting in the proper manner, not extending courtesies or customs to certain players at certain times, not playing the full time, or with the right attitude, complaining (or not complaining in the right way), handling the cards improperly, not shuffling acceptably, etc. Mistakes, infractions, offenses accidentally happen – it is how the player adjusts after the discovery that determines whether they get to stay. Was is a simple comfort level mistake, a lapse in social discipline? Is there a genuine effort to be a part of the table group? Or is this person just not caring about the others anymore, or worse, defending their conduct as excusable? It is always hard to find a good fit. Like a comfortable shoes, it requires wear in. It may be stiff at first, but the comfort is based on the shape of the group, not the desires of the shoe. Ok. I think I wore that analogy out, but I think you get the picture.

Avrum Grumer – Re: Monsterhearts. Brilliant idea to vote for superlatives (just like a HS yearbook) at the end of the game. I love the post game discussion and analysis the group did. It lays a good foundation for expectations and desires for the next game. I never heard the

term “bluebooking” before; thanks for including the link explaining the term. And a beautiful zine as always.

Ever & Anon Comments on #16

Roger Bell-West – RYCTM RE: *Bad Squiddo Games*. Thanks for the link to a site that sells fire markers. I’ve seen commercial ones (I think) on tables before, but I never knew for sure where they were sold. Unfortunately, try as I might, I never found them on the Bad Squiddo Game site. Perhaps they sold out. I had such a hard time finding where these were commercially made before. But I had seen numerous places where someone explained how they made their own. I’m not averse to creating the pieces I need (or want).

Patrick Riley – RE: Ignorable theme. That was a horrible situation. I’ve seen plot armor like that result in open rebellion at the table before. I can understand that sometimes plot armor exists, but it can exist without ruining the experience. The biggest sin your GM committed was allowing a role without knowing how to adjudicate the roll. Sure, he knew the killer was wearing plot armor and would not be killed by the PC at the time when the players attacked the killer. By allowing the roll, the GM had to know he was bringing fate into a situation where he would allow fate to exist. Worse is that he was going to violate the rules of the die roll he just allowed. Sure, a critical hit would be unlikely, but not impossible (it’s a 5% chance, which is not as impossible as one would like to feel it is). Critical hits are the one grasp at a straw players have to pull victory out the jaws of defeat in a game. So, what was the plan when a critical role materialized? It had to be something more than nothing, or why waste everyone’s time and expectation with a role? It was more than GM Dickery, it was purely bad DMing to begin with. Admittedly, I may have come close to committing the same crime back in my youthful days as a GM. I recall introducing a BBEG deputy early in a scenario, hoping to add drama to the scene and provoke some movement along an obvious plot line while the players seemed to be directionless. My mistake was that I inadvertently left my NPC cornered, and when the PCs attacked, I had her slip out onto the roof and start running, essentially unhindered, across the steep-sloped clay tile roof. To my surprised, the PCs pursued her onto the roof, where they struggled and were very upset that they had a hard time moving at the roof but the villain did not. She had a critical scene later in the adventure, but after the PCs had some other clues that would appear shortly later. So, she had to survive the unnecessary scene that I added her, but she did add a the element of a “bigger picture with bigger fish” that I wanted. I felt bad about the scene and her supernatural escape. When the players remarked out her inexplicable ability to get away, I simply leaned into it and said “Yes, it was inexpiable” mostly to mask my own mistake and plot armor but to reaffirm in a way that they had made an observation that I intended. The rest of the adventure went fine, but I hated my sloppiness in the scene. RE: On Rangers. Some excellent points on rangers. Rangers, and to a lesser extent Paladins, suffer from being too closely related to a fighter. Worse, their distinction as separate classes could almost be eliminated through clever build of a fighter class and role playing on behalf of the player. A fighter could easily be built and played to look just like a ranger (or paladin). Giving them spells did not make them unique enough. A subclass of the fighter is the Eldritch Knight, which gains the use of spells or spell like abilities. In 2014, the rules limited the spells to Abjuration and Evocation spells, but the 2024 update removes that restriction allowing the spells. But subclasses like Arcane Archer and Cavalier make the fighter builds closer to the Paladin and Ranger classes as to render their separation as a class questionable. The animal companion seemed to be the biggest unique feature of a ranger that a fighter did not have. I did not like that the commands to the animal companions consumed a ranger’s action. Instead, I felt like it should have been a partner to add an extra small attack with a small benefit to the fight for the Ranger. Perhaps, like weapon mastery, the attack by an animal companion would grant advantage to the ranger’s attack, or other effect. I would have been fine if the beast companion did not always confer a combat advantage. Treating them as combat creatures is what makes them weak in my opinion. Instead, the benefit would depend on what your animal companion was. Channeling Marc Singer’s Beastmaster, a ferret animal companion would not aid in fights, but they would fetch and steal light objects or sneak into small spaces for you. The raven has mimicry. Snakes had blindsense. And so on/ But most the animals were fragile that even scaling did not help in many cases. Like you, I did not like that the nature of a ranger’s animal companion shifted from live natural beast to a spirit.

Patrick Brady – RE: Ignorable theme. I once played with a Bully GM, who viewed the game of D&D as a players vs GM. He could not accept player cleverness (I guess because only he could be clever) and did not like when the players were successful. A fun game for him was when all the players died. He was miserable to play with. He would laugh when a character died. I only played one game with him. The only good thing was that the session was short. I do not think he ever had the same group twice in a row. But I chalk that experience up to 8th grade immaturity more so than anything else. I do not think I’ve run into any bully GMs as an adult (but I may have been more selective since).

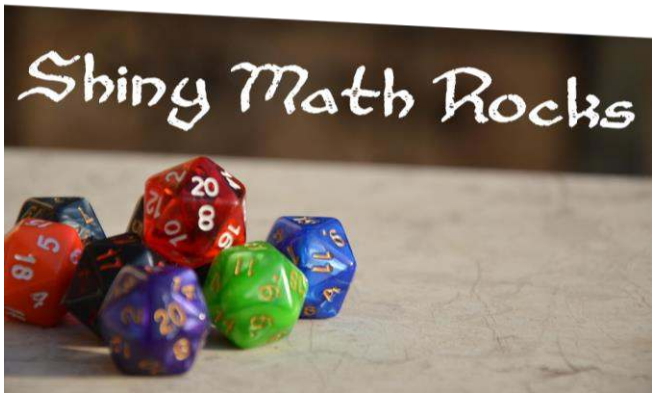
Mark A. Wilson – RE: Ignorable theme. I hated *Tomb of Horrors*. Actually, I hated the misuse of *Tomb of Horrors.* While Gygax may have intended for it to humble his expert players, I understand Gygax's players went into the dungeon far better equipped than I seen any other group go. It became a one-shot tournament dungeon, meant to be a difficult loot grab – at least the scoring for tournament winner was based solely on the value of treasure recovered. For the tournament, parties consisted of 15 players! I am sure there was lots of splitting the party(ies). Most adventures for AD&D 1e were for 4-6 players, and while AD&D did not put a limit on number of PCs a player could control, 1 PC per player was desired. Though on occasion, I would play 2 PCs in a game to make sure the group had the right mixture of players. When S1 was published for public use, it remained highly lethal. It offered 20 pre-gen characters ranging in levels 6 to 18. Player count for the adventure ranged from 2-10. It provided several different options of pre-gen character combinations for the various player counts. It did suggest that each player running three characters would be extremely difficult, but it appears that six characters was the sweet spot. It stated that if six or more players were in a game, each should only have one PC each. I do not know how large anyone else's group was, but my group only had four and that included the GM. The module did state that adventure was extremely dangerous and that the module should be used as a one - shot. It could be used as part of a campaign, but players were advised to ensure their campaign characters were on the high end of level and very well equipped in order to have a chance of survival. Despite all the warning and preparation in the module, it still set players up for failure. The convention play simply had far more players entering it then the public one suggested. What I hated were those DMs who insisted on adding *Tomb of Horrors* to their campaign and allowed a party on the small end and on the low level end to enter the death trap. It was campaign malfeasance. Many young DMs at the time did not know the nature of the module or its use in convention play. *Tomb of Horrors* was a campaign killer. I've played 5e *Tomb of Annihilation* twice now. Both were as one shots, with a party of six, and with back-up characters ready to go. I have never seen it integrated into a campaign successfully, unless the intent was to go out in a blaze of glory.

Lisa Padol – RE: Ignorable theme. Interesting observation about GM Amnesia and GM Panic. These can certainly feel like GM Dickery to a player. I wonder how much of transition between the Panic and Amnesia to Dickery is a factor of Abusive Opportunistic Players, those players who leverage of DM weakness to press advantages for their character or themselves. Remediation for errors during play is difficult to execute even for expert DMs, but it does not help when some players see it as an opportunity to exploit the error, especially to their favor. It sort of reminds me of atheletes, the one who claim rule infractions are not fouls unles the referee sees them. They will test the referee to see what they will get away with. If one is lucky, the GM will have players who do not do this and will even ask ahead of time is something is permissible, working together with the GM to ensure they are both playing with the same understanding of the rules.

Bryanat Durell – RE: Ignorable theme. "Don't be a dick" is pretty straight forward. One of the expectations I set for my players is that everyone is always learning the game. The players are probably playing new classes with new features they've never seen before with new spells, new abilities, new restrictions. And the GM is probably seeing them for the first time also, and it is a new adventure or scenario with new NPCs, new world, new everything. No one is playing for money, and it is just a game. Mistakes will happen and they will be honest ones. In a game where there is always an exception (by either another mechanic or special ability) to establish rules, I tend not to get too bent out of shape over rule mishaps. Plot armor shenanigans often evade detection because of games with so many exceptions to a rule. Story dickery, that's different. It is usually picked up on right away and frustrates players to no end. It is like thumbing the scales to preferred outcomes, and no player likes their "free will" thwarted in a game. Character dickery is the worst. Players HATE when a GM starts messing with a character. I'm not talking about killing a character in game, which can be egregious if it seems like the DM was gunning for the character. I'm talking about changing the character against the player's will and ruining their play experience. Level drains (when that was a thing), lycanthropy disease, becoming undead (usually vampire), possessed, cloned, character (reputation) assassination, changing back story without permission or coordination, changing class, race/species, or even gender can feel like spiteful attacks on a player.

Everyone Else – As with every issue, RAEBNC. Well, I knocked out a lot of back issue comments. I almost caught all the way up.

I'll try to catch all the way up in next issue, and catch up on my session reports from Saltmarsh. My chronicler is woefully behind and I may have to take over those duties if I want to get them written before they are forgotten!



SMR Issue #11 for E&A #18, Dec 2026

Erica L Frank (call me Elf); Eris Lord Freedom@itch.io

Contents

Intro ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Solo Play: Cage of Sand: On hold 2
Converting Glitch's World of Ur 2
Brindlewood Bay 6
Other Games. Specifically, that one other game. 7
IgTheme (Aug): How do you find players/ GMs/games? 7
IgTheme (Sep): GM-Dickery 8
Comments on E&As Past 9

General Life Changes

Sorry I've missed the last few months. Not, "Sorry I've let you down" as much as "Sorry I've been too busy & unfocused to participate."

As I mentioned in the Discord (but I know not everyone sees that), my husband died in early September. (In his sleep; COPD-related.) Looking back, the few months before that were tense; he alternated between "rush of enthusiasm as he tried to do things he didn't have energy for" and "collapse for several days after too much activity."

Our relationship had been fraught for years; there is more relief than grief, at least for now. But my whole life has still been thrown into confusion. I've never lived alone before. I'm enjoying it, mostly, but it's *different*. (Shopping for a single person sucks. I get to choose between "buy a hell of a lot more than I can use quickly and hope I can store it or use it before it goes bad" or "pay 3x the price per unit, compared to buying in bulk.")

Part of the shock is that my creativity is dormant. I've been unable to concentrate on any writing more complicated than "reply to a Bluesky post." (I've also missed the last two issues of FAPA and my membership is going to run out if I don't submit something soon.)

I've put together a list of things to not do, while I'm recovering: No drastic life changes for at least a year. (Change of address, getting a roommate or pet, cross-country road trip.) No worrying about food or food costs until at least the end of the year. No notable purchases (anything over $20) unless I know exactly how I'll use it and where it'll be stored. (I'm prone to collecting clutter.)

Financially, I'm fine. Better than fine. I think I've got $500–$700 more every month, at least for the rest of this year until my tax status changes. (No longer paying for his health insurance. No longer renting an oxygen machine or paying for its electricity. Etc.) I'm trying not to think about money. I've never had a budget; it was always "pay for required expenses and then see if there's enough left for leisure, and then argue about whose leisure expenses had priority this month." (…No longer paying $50–$300/month for cigarettes, either.) (He didn't stop smoking when he went on the oxygen machine. Didn't stop after he set himself on fire by falling asleep smoking, either.)

I need a budget so I know how much I can spend on conventions. Need a food plan. Need to clean the house (omg the house is a disaster) and would like to set up a gaming room. Need to sort out household chores now that I no longer have minions on tap. Need to decide which of my long-dormant hobbies I'd like to pick up again. (Found my guitar. Haven't found the sewing machine yet. I have miniatures I'd like to paint. Need to buy new paints.) Which new hobbies I'd like to learn. (Would like to do bookbinding. And learn SQL because I have a database I want to make.)

And so on. My head's been cluttered and I haven't been able to concentrate on much of anything.

I'm not looking for advice. (Not disdaining it, but generic advice is not likely to be useful. I have looked at the obvious options, and either am applying some version of them, or have set them aside for some reason.) I have supportive friends, both in person & online; some supportive family (my brother: "You know I never liked the guy, right?"); understanding job that's also very stable. And the job offers 8 weeks of free therapy a year, and I'm using that.

I'm doing fine, such as these things go. Just haven't been able to look at a blank page and write anything coherent for a while.

Solo Play: Cage of Sand: On hold

Game link: https://luciellaes.itch.io/cage-of-sand

Not at this time. Haven't been able to focus. I even got out the cards once, set it all up, opened the ongoing document and… stared at it all for 15 minutes and then put everything away.

Converting Glitch's World of Ur

The big project I'd started on Before The Big Change was writing up locations in Ur to RPGs. Initially, I planned to convert them for Wanderhome; I'm considering if I can do that and also add Fate info. Wanderhome "aesthetic details" could work as aspects; I'll have to consider if those are sufficient.

List of regions is at oddgiants.com/encyclopedia/locations/ (Wayback Machine also has glitch.com listings, which are better-arranged but much slower.) There are also unlisted locations, roughly a few dozen. Some are secret or hidden; some are buildings. ("Apartments" buildings have 3 floors and a basement that aren't on the map.)

50-or-so regions (depending on what counts as a "region"); average of 25-ish "streets" each that I am renaming to "locations." The smallest region, Uralia, has 4 visible + 2 hidden locations. The largest, Aranna, has 50. Most of the regions with under 20 streets are "special access" rather than regular regions on the map. (E.g. the 8 "party zones" that need a special ticket or invitation for entry.) There are just under 1350 "normal" locations, plus secret/hidden ones.

I've made a spreadsheet. (I like spreadsheets.) I've added the dozen-odd locations I wrote up for the short-run Wanderhome game and thrown in some other info, noting which locations have hidden connections, which have rare resources, and so on. Now I just have to decide how many to write up.

Nobody needs a world of 1350+ detailed locations.[1] Especially since many of them are very, very similar. Some of them condense nicely – the "Ancestral Lands" regions (Baqala, Choru, Xalanga, Zhambu) have long, near-identical dusty pathways with names like "Plains Rte A; Plains Rte B; Plains Rte C" and so on. I'm considering converting each of those to a single location: Plains Rte; Parsin's Trail; Putter Track, and so on, instead of having the ABC, 123, E-NE-NW etc. versions. 40-ish in each region condensed to 10.

I'm planning on starting with writeups for

1. The most important & popular locations in Glitch (I have a few of these done.)
2. The locations I liked best (Couple of these, too.)
3. Locations with interesting/unique features (And these.)
4. "Link" locations – connectors to other regions, which means writing up (inventing) a lot of port towns. Glitch didn't have those. You just stepped from one region to another..

After that, I have to decide how much more to cover. Anyone have suggestions on a good number of locations for an extensive world setting? Example:

Unnu Slight for Wanderhome

Region: Bortola. **Zone**: (Continent of) Grumbla
Nearby locations: Evi Effect
Natures: Cave, Hallow, Tower



Aesthetic Elements / Aspects for Fate

- Darkness Deeper Than You Expected
- Winding and Hidden Passages
- Forgotten Offerings
- Tracks from Frequent Visitors
- Narrow Barely-Stable Entrance
- Not Enough Space For All The Clutter

Folklore

- The Sleeping God At The Bottom Of The World
- The Eleven Sleeping Giants
- The First of the Moth-towers

Unnu Slight has a stone cave rumored to be made of the bones of a dragon. It's a frequent place for pilgrimages (it's the most common reason for outsiders to visit the Bortola region), and the local teens dare each other to climb farther into the cave. There's a passage deep in the mouth of the dragon that leads up to the open sky, and it's common for visitors (and local teens) to leave offerings – gifts and food for others who come later.

So, like that. Repeat × 1350, hypothetically? I've made a map of all the regions, which wasn't available in Glitch.

[1] OTOH, Glitch fans might enjoy a complete writeup. All 13 of us who still care.

Map of the World of Ur (Glitchthegame)

48 “connected” regions;
6 “special access" regions
(Maybe 50/4, but I count Shim Shiri & the Vortex as special.)



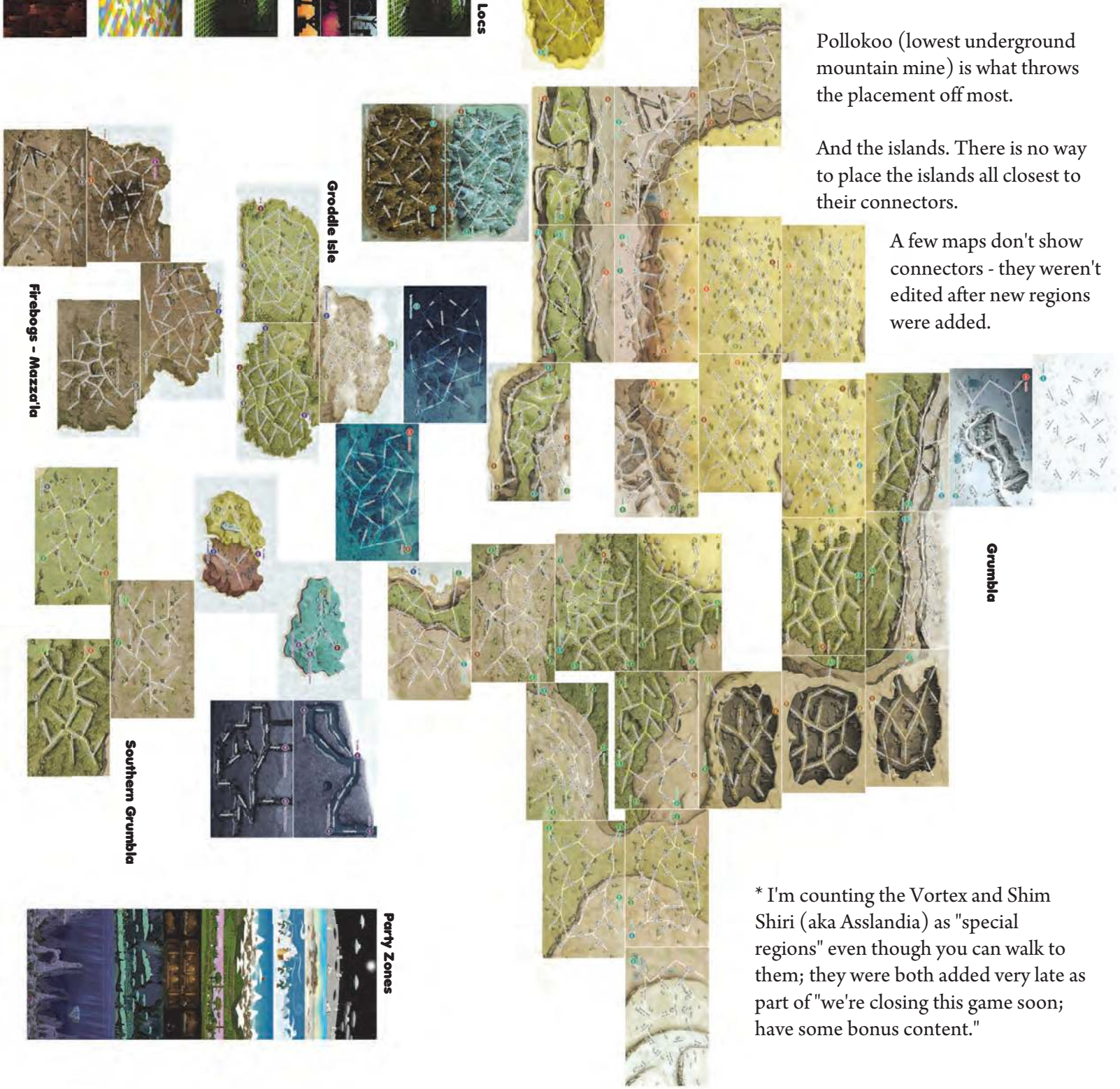


1. The Islands are loosely placed close to where they connect rather than their actual locations
2. Disconnected Locs (other than Shim Shiri & the Vortex) can't be walked to; they need special access*
3. Party zones are each special-access

Pollokoo (lowest underground mountain mine) is what throws the placement off most.

And the islands. There is no way to place the islands all closest to their connectors.

A few maps don't show connectors - they weren't edited after new regions were added.

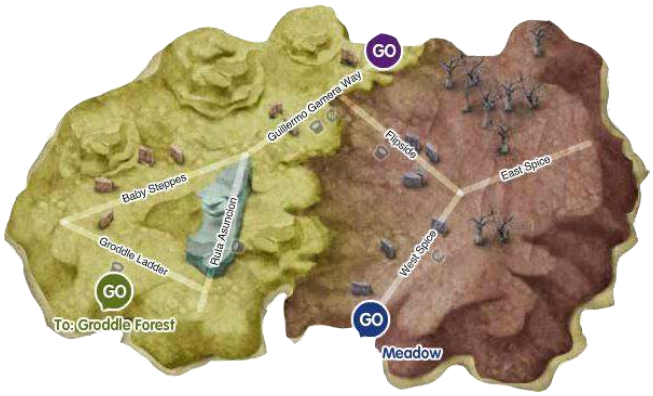


* I'm counting the Vortex and Shim Shiri (aka Asslandia) as "special regions" even though you can walk to them; they were both added very late as part of "we're closing this game soon; have some bonus content."

The parts (regions) don't quite line up; I'd like to find an artist who can make them work – stretch some parts, squish others, and so on. If most RPG communities weren't so vehemently anti-AI, it'd be the kind of work AI image generators could do – it doesn't need extreme accuracy, just need s to keep the general style of the background art while making the "connector" streets line up better. The original has no scale; there's no count of miles or kilometers per on-screen inch.

I can add region descriptions: info about the general landscape and flora/fauna in the area. And I'd need to invent new folklore; the existing options would get repetitive. For the ones I wrote up (a bit more than a dozen), I rolled 1d4 for each nature; each has 3 options plus "something of your own invention" and if I rolled that, I picked something from Glitch topics/lore. That works for a dozen but if there are 50 locations with the "cave" nature, I'm going want more options.

I would love a re-imagined map of each region showing them as places, not streets, with paths or roads on the map but not being the place itself. (Except some where the paths are obviously the place – "Wettish Walk" is a path through the marshlands.)



Map of the island of Ix.

East Spice, West Spice, and Flipside should be "places"; Baby Steppes, Ruta Asuncion, and Guillermo Gamera Way could reasonably be roads. (They go through places, but they feel like a road rather than a zone to explore.) Groddle Ladder is a place – the ladder itself is a magical (ish) ladder into the clouds that connects to Groddle Isle.

Baby Steppes is one of my favorite places because it has the octopus fountain:



Flora/fauna will need expansion. Interactable flora in Glitch was a handful of types of trees, plus garden & herb crops. Some background trees could be climbed but not otherwise touched; those are different per region (or, per continental area), and I can write details and description about them.

Groddle Isle Flora

Groddle Meadow: Bushy-top trees (that you can't interact with), pine-ish trees (that you can sometimes climb). Harvestable bean trees, cherry trees, bubble trees. Flowers and bushes. Yes, those are floating islands.





Groddle Forest has my one of my favorite locations, Ozacosta Avenue, which has climbable trees (and rocks) and pretty pretty flower bushes. Also floating islands. Most of G'Forest just has the trees; Ozacosta is the most Groddle-Meadow-looking place in the forest. (Below)



Groddle Heights is mountainous and colder, and the trees show it. You can see the frozen mountains in the distance. (Probably Nottis, except Nottis didn't exist when Groddle Heights was first introduced. Maybe that's Aranna.)



Firebogs (4 regions) Flora

Marshland with peat bogs. Harvestable gas plants, spice plants. Giant climbable pods, sometimes with barnacles you can gather, and some were obviously houses. (We could not enter the houses.) Harvestable jellisacs in the darker areas. Weird tentacle-y plants. The first two pics are from Jethimadh (the northern-most region of the firebogs); in the first, you can see Jethimadh Tower in the distance.



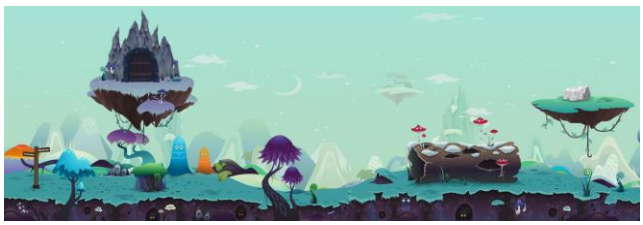


Shimla Mirch: Best place for jellisacs, and has even giant-er versions of the pod houses, sometimes with boards nailed to the legs to work as stairs.



Uralia Flora

Uralia's tiny but one of the biggest activity hubs. It has weird "Dr Seuss"-ish flora – Mushroom trees and blob-shaped maybe-those-are-bushes. It's pretty. (Someday I want a room in my house with Uralia-art walls.) More floating islands. This is Cebarkul, one of the most popular meeting places.



A lot of the flora was non-interactable, including mushrooms, grasses, and the giant pod-houses. Some were surfaces that allowed climbing, but that's all.

Fauna

Fauna in Glitch was a handful of creatures you could interact with, and images of a few others, like owls in the trees. A few places had different critters, like the caves and the fox preserves. I'd mostly have to invent fauna. (I changed the fox preserves to "giant red velvet ant preserves" for Wanderhome. Ants the size of sheep, that you can brush to gather their fur.) (AI-generated pictures for this are all terrible. I will want to find a real artist.)

Piggies, chickens, and butterflies were all over Grumbla and Groddle Isle, except in cave areas and the fox preserves. Caves got batterflies. The firebogs had some piggies and chickens, but not many, and no butterflies. Underwater lands had fish.

Non-interactable fauna included unmoving owls in the trees, lizards in the firebogs, glowing eyes in trees and rocks.

NPCs

At some point, I'll have to decide how to write up the various inhabitants of Ur. (Note: Many of the official "inhabitants" are not what most of us would think of as inhabitants. Includes fauna and nonmoving items like shrines, which are interactable but nobody thought of them as "characters.")





These are "Smuggler" and "Deimaginator" (aka the Bureaucroc). The smuggler would appear at random in Glitch, hand you a package, and tell you you'd be rewarded if you delivered it to their companion who was not far away. The destination spot was always not too far away – something between 5 and 10 locations, I think, a quick jaunt that wouldn't take you too far out of the way of whatever you had been doing. The problem: The deimaginator would immediately start following you.

You were a bit faster than the bureaucroc. (At least, if you had all the speed-enhancing power-ups, which you tried to get early.) Also, you can jump, and he can't. But. He is *relentless*. If you lose your sense of direction and move the wrong way, or get stuck

behind a rock and didn't time the jumping correctly, he'd catch up with you.

If you managed to evade him and reach the other smuggler, he'd take the package, give you a reward of XP and money and maybe a fancy item or two, and then vanish.

We never had any idea what was in the package. If I want to bring them into the RPG options, I'd need to either make up something, tell the GM to make up something, or say "if you open the package, it destroys the contents."



The Scion of Purple

The Scion is my very favorite character in Glitch. You could only see him by partaking of "Essence of Purple," a potion (sort of) made from hallucinogenic Purple Flowers. He spun around and said nonsense quotes and teleported around the screen, and then he blinked away and you were left dazed for a while.

Le Voyage Violet video – journey kicks in at a bit past the 1 minute mark. (So, in game: You drink this tincture, and nothing seems to happen, so you go about your gaming, and then the world flashes purple and...)

Glitch is a public-domain world. Anyone can use the art (and much of the code, and there are projects for that but I don't code.) I've had fun using a few bits of Ur (the world of Glitch) in other rpgs, but I'd like an extensive collection of sites and lore and NPCs written up for use in other games.

There is SO MUCH in the world of Ur that I'd enjoy writing up for ttrpgs. There is maybe an audience of a scant dozen Glitch fans who'd like to read it, plus a handful of people I've hyped it at over the last several years. (Also much of it would be an interesting setting, but there are a zillion interesting settings.) Don't care; I want it for me. I just have to decide how much to write up.

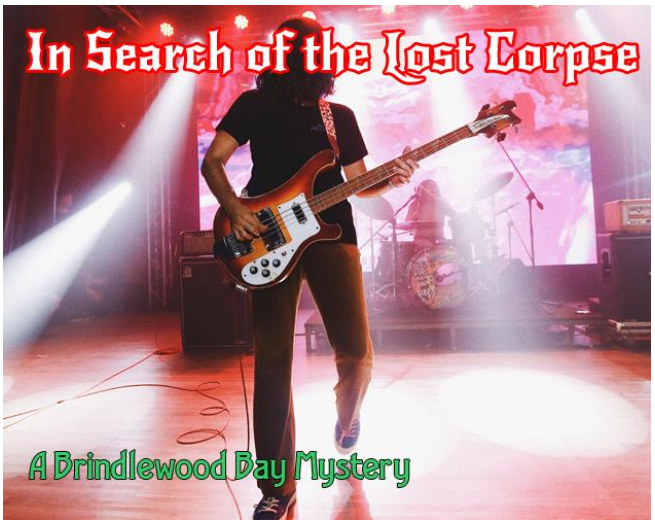
Brindlewood Bay

I have now run two complete Brindlewood mysteries and have started two more, a third with the original group (Tuesday nights) and Rain Dropped again with a second group (Friday nights).

I'm very much enjoying running Brindlewood. I'm not sure about running anything that requires more GM guidance – the FAE supers game fizzled out; one player wasn't consistently available and I was having trouble coming up with both challenges and a way to get the players to the challenges.

For Brindlewood mysteries, I'm having fun coming up with the NPCs/suspects and grabbing pictures from Pexels or Pixabay for them & the locations. I have very limited acting skills, and online voice-only makes those limitations worse, so it's nice to have pictures. At first, I tried "think up a character description and look for pictures that match it," and switched to "think up a character *concept* and look for pictures to match a few keywords, and find one that's both not-wrong and the right shape of picture." (Portrait orientation for suspects; landscape for locations.)

Rain Dropped has a mix of images. The new one is more consistent in image shapes & sizes:



The last two I ran (Rain Dropped & Lost in the Clouds, which was based on The Untamed) were settings and character types I knew well. This one, not so much; most of my knowledge of the rock-n-roll industry comes from Spinal Tap.

That's fine. I can lean into cliché parody band problems, which apparently got bad enough to set off a murder.

And sometime soon I'm going to have to really figure out how the whole Void Mystery thing works because one of the players has the Dale Cooper move and we are drowning in Void Clues. (We decided it doesn't give a Void Clue at the start of every session;

we think that's based on the book's assumption that a mystery lasts 1 or maybe 2 sessions. Our mysteries last 3–5 sessions; we are not quick.)

I have played enough to figure out:

- The Rockford Move is a pain to deal with, and very much not recommended for new players. Or new GMs.
- If I play with new players again, I'm banning the Dale Cooper move for starting characters. Especially for first-time players. Someone always wants to be spooky. Cooper is not fun-spooky; it's a PITA that skews the game towards void before anyone is ready for it.
- Anything that gives advantage without using up the item feels overpowered. That's Michael Knight, R Quincy and Gordon Shumway in the standard move set. And maybe Remington Steele, which apparently just *invents* items to add to the Cozy Little Place.
- I apparently don't throw around enough danger, because we have seen the Night Move exactly once, and only set off the Day Move a scant handful of times.
- It's hard to decide when to use the Gold Crown Mystery Move. (My players have yet to use it at all.) Possibly this would change if there were more danger.
- I need more practice with what to do with a failed roll or a partial success. I usually inflict a condition. "Kill a suspect" worked spectacularly the one time I used it, but probably shouldn't be a standard reaction.
- I have trouble introducing all the suspects. The rulebook gives no suggestions on how to do this.
- Note to Brindlewood GMs: Make very, very sure your players are absolutely certain the victim is dead, otherwise some of their ideas are going to be "what if they're still alive?"
- Also: The victim is apparently usually a suspect; suicide is one of the options they keep considering.

Other Games. Specifically, that one other game.

I have been persuaded to try D&D 5e. Our sorta-monthly GURPS group was in between games, and one of the players offered to run something, only… it's written up for 5e, and he's not fluent enough in GURPS to convert it. So after some discussion, including the regular GM and I both pointing out, "we are very experienced RPGers who literally haven't looked at D&D in decades; there is A LOT that has changed, that D&D players think 'everyone knows' but we assure you we do not," we agreed to try it.

So I got to ask questions like "wtf is a short rest and a long rest? Those didn't exist the last time I played. Also neither did CR, and oh I guess armor class is now better if it's high, not low? Spell slots?" and so on.

I vaguely knew that "short rest" was "take a break mid-dungeon" and "long rest" was "you probably leave the dangerous area for a while," but I had no idea it was "you get a good night's sleep and all your damage is healed." That um. Does not track with how I normally do adventure RPG things.

But fine. New system; we'll try it.

Apparently you don't roll hit points at 1st level anymore. No more "A single scratch can literally kill me" characters.

Many many changes. Also some changes between the 2014 rules (which the GM is familiar with) and the newer 2024 rules (which the other 5e player is more familiar with) and we're going to have to sort out which we're using.

Anyway I'm off to try a character I thought up back when AD&D didn't have edition numbers – a half-drow, half-high-elf druid. Wish me luck.

IgTheme (Aug): How do you find players/ GMs/games?[2]

I sometimes do a search at Roll20 that filters out all the D&D and Pathfinder games, and possibly anything else I think is too D&D-ish for me. (I keep that link bookmarked because R20 does not have an "exclude" option.) It still turns up D&D games, because there is no exclusion, so if something is tagged D&D and "Other games," It'll show up in the search.

Also, some GMs will tag their games with PbtA or GURPS or whatever when they are definitely not, and are D&D games with some kind of thematic parts dragged in from other games.

Sometimes I search for just GURPS, Fate, & PbtA, which gets much more limited results, and then I ignore anything happening in time blocks I can't play, which usually knocks it down to 1–3 items; then I can look at the descriptions and see what's actually appealing. (Usually nothing. This is fine; I'm currently at 2 games a week and could squeeze in one more but I don't need that.)

[2] I had this written Before.

I am very annoyed that R20's time search doesn't have an option for "X time range M-F; Y time range on weekends." Also that it doesn't have "nothing before X hour."

These days, one of the issues is that a lot of the games are on startplaying.games. Filtering for free games only fixes that; I haven't decided if I'm willing to try a paid game. (I have a lot of thoughts about paid GMing; I will have to write those up at some point.)

Things I have learned:

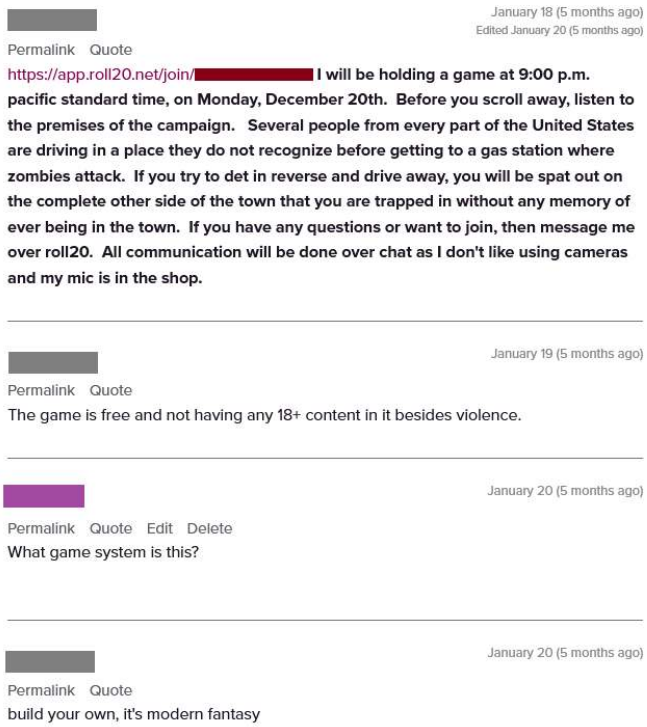
1. Getting off work at 4:30 does not mean I can play a game that starts at 4:30. (These are fairly common; I'm west coast, and 7 or 7:30 east coast is apparently a common time to start games.)
2. GM not answering questions about "which version of Fate" or "how many starting points" (GURPS) or "what PbtA game" is a big red flag. It often means "homebrew inspired by that game system; just gimme a character idea and we'll sort out the stats later."
3. I am very much not a system-agnostic player. I am also not a "rule of cool" player. Especially with a group of strangers, I want to know what the rules are, and I don't want them to include "impress the GM with a clever idea for +2 on a roll." I can handle crunchy rules, simple rules, narrative-heavy rules – I just want to know what they are before I start playing. (I can handle murderhobo dungeon-crawl rules; I just don't like to and am not spending my limited time on those games. Including "murderhobos in space" games.)
4. OTOH, I don't want a game that is all mechanics, where the characters are basically gamepieces moving through a map and their personalities only exist as far as they have some kind of mechanical advantage or disadvantage. ("Diligent Student: Get one extra die when doing research on a new topic" is not a personality trait.)
5. If I am not the GM, I don't want to be teaching the game system to new players.
6. Every useful-to-me new feature in Roll20 seems to be accompanied by 5 new D&D features, some of which are nuisance things for non-D&D players that I'll have to figure out how to block/avoid.

I've looked at /r/lfg ("looking-for-games") and haven't found it useful; it's too hard to wade through all the D&D/Pathfinder games. And without a formal structure for game listings, many of them require back-and-forth to figure out things I'd need to know before I can play. Like the time expectation. Or the game system. Example post:

> *I need one more player for a campaign that'll begin on either the 4th or 6th of September. It'll be one of 7 systems. Dnd 5.5e, Pathfinder 2e Remastered, Cyberpunk Red, Marvel Multiverse, Fallout 2d20, Invincible, or World Wide Wrestling. I want someone who is open to all the systems I mentioned.*

This says, "I wanna run a game but haven't bothered narrowing down the system to even my top two choices," which does not inspire confidence in the GM's skills.

See also:



I am also not looking for (additional) in-person games. I can barely find the energy to go shopping 3 blocks away once a week. If I were looking for them, I'd probably visit Games of Berkeley's open game nights and try to make connections.

IgTheme (Sep): GM-Dickery[3]

I don't know if I've ever directly experienced this. Possibly, avoiding D&D for a few decades will do that; GMs of other systems are generally invested in not annoying their players.

I've seen the occasional, "it's been going well for you guys, but… I have three more Fate points to get through tonight, so, now is a good time to burn them on this one big roll." But it's been a long, long time

[3] Also had this written Before.

since I've seen a GM be arbitrary and hostile, as opposed to "ooh you botched a roll badly, hmm, how can I make this *interesting*?"

It's possible that I just don't remember, because a GM who goes out of their way to pound on players when they're losing, or who thinks rpgs are a zero-sum game, or who pushes players hard into the track he wants to run instead of what they want to do… I'm not likely to show up for the next game session. My time's too limited and valuable to spend it on games where the GM is my enemy.

I always have fanfic I could be reading instead. (Right now, AO3 is still partially down; I can't get new fanfic epubs. I will cope with the literally thousands of fanfics I've already downloaded. I can reread favorites if I run out of new ones.)

I have run into a lot more moderately incompetent GMs than dickish GMs. Most of the those have been in places like Reddit or Twitter, where they declare what they do to "keep players in line," and I wonder why their players return at all.

IgTheme (Oct): Negotiating with Monsters; (Nov): Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever!

I am mostly ignoring these IgThemes. I don't have time. Also, I don't have anything notable to say about either of them.

Briefly: Been a long time since I was in a game where negotiating wasn't the first choice of how to deal with monsters, however unlikely it was to work. And I avoid games where a single die roll makes or breaks an adventure. I don't have any specific recollections of amazing or awful die rolls. I know I've seen them; they didn't stick in my head as memorable.

Worldbuilding Discourse

The TTRPG communities online have discovered Mike Harrison's 2007 blog post about worldbuilding in science fiction, which starts:

> *Every moment of a science fiction story must represent the triumph of writing over worldbuilding.*
>
> *Worldbuilding is dull. Worldbuilding literalises the urge to invent. Worldbuilding gives an unnecessary permission for acts of writing (indeed, for acts of reading). Worldbuilding numbs the reader's ability to fulfil their part of the bargain…*

And there is Much Faffing About on Bsky and Discord about it, with very few people noting that he's talking about *fiction text* and not *game settings*.

He has some points — but none of them apply to RPGs. The issue of "what's too much worldbuilding in a game?" has to start from a different place.

Comments on E&As Past

I have 4 issues to comment on. I am not commenting on most of them. (Next week, I have time. This week I don't. Maybe I'll use the time off next week to go through back issues and comment on lots of things.)

Going to be Ad-Libbed #15 – Avram Grumer

I'm in the Playtest Material Discord, but haven't had time to look at Issue 1. (My life has been. Um. Busy.) I'll pester them about "no bookmarks, no clickable TOC" because that's something I can fix, and probably quickly just before the issue is released.

It's better to fix it during the production somehow, to set up the template or whatever to create those. But even without that, I have a lot of practice adding bookmarks & links to PDFs. I do so reflexively for gaming PDFs of my own.

Firedrake's Hoard #15 – Roger Bell_West

RYCT Patrick Riley – I agree that GURPS is best as "fairly realistic," with heroic-not-cinematic characters who still have to worry about dangers that normal people face.

GURPS has problems with high-power campaigns (anything over ~300 pts, and possibly anything over 200 at the start), and also has problems with low-power campaigns (~75 pts or lower). The skills and advantages are designed around Heroic Adventurers: anyone with fewer abilities is likely to get frustrated at how often they fail or just can't act; anyone with notably more can find plenty of loopholes to exploit. There are exceptions – any group might be happy at a different power level – but there are reasons most GURPS groups run in the 100-175 starting point range.

An Unlooked For Zine #13 – Lisa Padol[4]

RYCTM (#13): I play(ed) *Cage of Sand* at least monthly. Sometimes I get in more than one session in a month. I keep trying to find time & energy to clean up/rearrange my room so that I can leave the cards out, so I could sit down and do 15 minutes of "just the next thing" here & there.

[4] This was written Before.

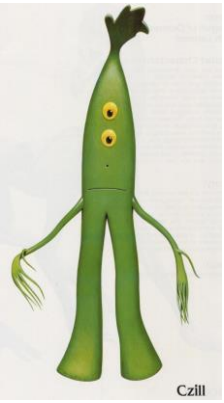
I am annoyed that my life now has a Before and After.

Re: *Midnight at the Well of Souls* aliens: They are described; maybe that's useful enough? For someone who'd read the books, I mean.

A review: https://mrlizard.com/characters/science-fiction/midnight-at-the-well-of-souls-2/

Another one, with pictures: waynesbooks.games/2021/05/15/midnight-at-the-well-of-souls-rpg-1985-obscure-for-a-reason/

Czill (featured prominently in the books)



The Czill are well-described in the novel (or novels; I forget what's from which book) since one of the main characters converted to a Czill. *Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials* has a picture of the Czill, and they also appear on the cover of one of the novels, where the protagonists are running to escape a Czill horde.

Pic from Barlowe's Guide

CZILL

Tech Level: Hightech Land

Statistics:

STR: 1.0 DEX: 1.0
INT: 1.2 CON: 1.2
WPR: 1.0

The Czillians are mobile plant creatures who stand 1.5 meters tall with an average mass of 45 kilograms. They are light green in color with a head that looks like a carved pumpkin with a large leaf growing from the top of the head. Their skin is smooth. They are bipedal with a brain in each foot. They are quite pacifistic and set great store in scholarship. A Czillian's life span is 180 years. Czillians reproduce by budding with the offspring being born fully aware with the entire knowledge and experiences of the parent. They are mobile by day, but root at night.

The hex is moderate in climate with rolling hills and small forests. The government is based on a university structure. They maintain a Zone ambassador and trade information gained by their research projects for material items they cannot make for themselves.

All of the descriptions are like that: A short list of stats (those are multipliers; stats are basically 3d6) followed by a paragraph of description and one about the hex & its politics. It's definitely not enough info for anyone who isn't familiar with the books. (Well. Not enough for someone who hasn't read the books to put together a campaign for players who have. If nobody has, I suppose a group could enjoy it.)



Midnight at the Well of Souls, 1st ed. paperback cover. A horde of Czill are chasing the centaur (the "Dillian") and I think Nathan Brazil.

Flotish (grabbed at random from the game)

I have no memory of the Flotish; presumably they were either a hex the protagonists passed through, or someone they met in passing.

FLOTISH

Tech Level:Semitech Water

Statistics:

STR: 1.0 DEX: 1.0
INT: 1.0 CON: 1.0
WPR: 1.0

These are ant-like insects, 2 meters in length, with a mass of about 125 kilograms. They are water-breathers with two arms and no legs. They are green in color and are omnivores. They will eat just about anything,including other intelligent races, but they are not cannibalistic.

The Flotish have an authoritarian government, ruled by a queen mother. There is much government trade with other hexes. There is a Zone ambassador. They are hostile to most aliens and try to destroy uninvited ones.

I don't know how you get "ant-like insects" with "two arms and no legs." Does that mean they live in hives? Or they have 3-part bodies? Exoskeletons? Scent-based communications? (Underwater?)

I would love to see a Well World game done right. This isn't it.

The Arc of Probability Bends Towards Justice: Issue #5

A zine by Bryant Durrell for Ever & Anon issue #18

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

Released under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

In Memoriam

Ken St. Andre's death hit me unexpectedly hard. I haven't played *Tunnels & Trolls* in decades but it was the first game I ever played, after a fairly disreputable older kid turned me onto it. The solo modules were so much fun to teenage me. If you count by hours spent I suspect it would be in my top five games played list, even still. I met Ken once or twice and he was, as per his reputation, super-nice. And that 70s/80s Phoenix eruption of creativity – Ken, Michael Stackpole, Liz Danforth – was amazing. *Sorcerer's Apprentice* was a revelation to me after reading a few issues of *Dragon*.

I just dug out my original copies of 5th edition and *City of Terrors*. I have a bunch of those old character sheets still, as it turns out – printed on a dot matrix printer and filled out in my shaky teenage handwriting. I'm gonna play a few rounds this week, as tribute.

IgTheme: Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever!

Gosh, I don't know. There have been so many of them... I have to admit I don't have a ton to say about this one.

My favorite type of rolls are probably the failed ones with terrible consequences, mostly because it tickles me to be able to lean into the disaster. "No, no, don't look for a loophole for me – I'm dead!" That's sort of fun.

There's a callback to the previous IgTheme in the *Draw Steel* annotations this issue, by the by. Turns out that the *Draw Steel* system includes a robust negotiation procedure.

Current Events (Gaming)

With three ongoing campaigns, two of which I'm running, one local organized play program I'm organizing, and some con games to prep for early next year, I think I can officially say that I've scheduled enough gaming in my life. Kinda snuck up on me there.

Monsterhearts Gothic

I played a one-shot of this *Monsterhearts* hack on the Raspy Raven Discord, along with Lisa, by coincidence. I had a blast playing the supercilious Julian Benedict, Ageless snob. Think Portrait of Dorian Gray, which inspired the playbook. Compared to stock *Monsterhearts*, the stats change to Silk (being smooth and slick), Velvet (exploring sensuality), Diamond (exerting power of all kinds), and Ink (probing the unknown). The moves are likewise rewritten and the playbooks are original. It's very good at capturing the gothic horror sensibility and the hothouse atmosphere of a boarding school. We split our time between seducing religious cultists (mostly on Julian's part) and dealing with some sort of tedious adult plot to sacrifice students to demons in exchange for power, yawn. Julian wasn't paying close attention to all that.

The game is available on itch.io and it's completely worth your five bucks if you like Victorian boarding schools, *Monsterhearts*, or both.

Chicago Obscura (*Monster of the Week*)

Finally picked up an old thread with my friends Ginger and Michael, and started an online *Monster of the Week* mini-campaign online with them and Susan. I'm using Capone's Chicago as the backdrop, although the game will remain firmly about killing monsters rather than fighting crime. The way I put it during our session 0: "the criminals are the weather; they matter but they aren't what the campaign is about."

I had Chicago's Hull House up my sleeve as a potential home for the PC team; this was kind of cheating since Susan spent a few years doing social work in Chicago after college and I was pretty sure she'd be familiar with Hull House and the larger settlement house movement. To my pleasure, Ginger was also familiar with Jane Addams, co-founder of Hull House – she and Michael are big history buffs. So now we have an angelic Polish nun (Divine playbook), a chosen one (Chosen playbook), and an indigenous veteran piano player who happens to be Quanah Parker's son (Gumshoe playbook).

Over two decades ago, Rob MacDougall postulated that you can create a campaign frame from any historical figure by appending thw words "Men of Action" to their name. E.g., "Walt Whitman's Men of Action." The theory remains strong: my subtitle for this campaign is "Jane Addams's People of Action." (We will not, however, be deep diving into her eugenic theories, although we've acknowledged them rather than sweeping them under the rug.)

Demon-Haunted (*Feng Shui*)

Kind of on hold at the moment thanks to the release of *WoW Forever* and the additional load that comes with running online. I'm not actually having as much fun as I'd hoped with *WoW Forever*; the nostalgia is a kick but I'm consistently reminded that all those quality of life improvements that the game has made over the years were... really good. We'll see what happens over the holidays.

Mothership Warden's Club

Tuesday Knight Games has started their organized play program and I decided to get serious about spinning this up locally, so the one-shot night is going on hold for now. It uses the same kind of energy from me.

Actually, this counts as a public forum for the purposes of the program, so if anyone reading this is interested in trying out *Mothership*, say a thing in the E&A Discord and I'll happily run a session. I don't need more than two players, really. Caveats: high lethality system, and it prioritizes player skill over character skill. The *Player's Survival Guide* is free and contains all the player-facing rules.

Draw Steel

We had an unexpected three week hiatus thanks to various illnesses but finally got back into the swing of things; this writeup covers three sessions. I'm gonna try and be a bit more concise on the narrative with more focus on what I'm learning about the game from here on in, after I thought a bit about what I like about writing these.

So our heroes returned to Broadhurst, down one polder. Crows arranged for a funeral pyre for poor Penny, since it seemed like the kind of thing she'd want. Much to everyone's surprise, Penny's cousin Nicky (short for Nickle) showed up at the Featherbed Inn, asking questions about where her cousin was. Our answers satisfied her reasonably well and she announced that she'd be sticking around for a while.

Replacement PC

Susan enjoyed playing the Elementalist and we've always had fun building families of PCs, plus it was funny playing name games. This is absolutely a low role play campaign so she wasn't worried about narrative dissonance with the names. If Nicky gets killed, she's got one more polder in the Coldwater family ready to go — Dolly (short for Dollar).

Abbot Loric of the local church drifted by to thank our merry band and alert us that there were a bunch of people in the town who needed help with this or that. He also shared more details about the goblin menace; he was convinced that the goblins would keep trying to get down to that second level and that we'd better get there first. He noted that he had some books in the church library that might be useful in figuring out how to get through the magical barrier we'd encountered. We thanked him and took a full day to rest before digging into the matter.

After our rest, we split up for a bit to work on various projects. Wick went to the church to research how to get through that barrier, and the rest of us split our time between making a healing potion and working on making a pair of magic-enhancing lenses. (We'd found the recipes for both of these back in Delian's Tomb.)



Downtime Projects

Downtime projects are a key part of the **Draw Steel** core loop. The mechanic is easy: a character working on a downtime project makes a normal skill roll and applies the result as project points. Each project needs a given amount of project points to complete. The healing potions take 45 project points, for example; those lenses will require 450 project points. Most projects also have prerequisites in the form of materials and recipes; we found the costmary leaves we needed to make a few healing potions along with the healing potion recipe. That barrier research required access to the church library.

Each character gets one project roll per respite so the basic math is fairly clear. We have Ashley serving as a bonus artisan, so she gets a roll too. Retainers are not limited to their specialities so while Ashley is a blacksmith, she can (and did) help with those lenses. It feels like a reasonable simplification for the purposes of streamlining.

The GM also makes event rolls from time to time, based on overall progress. These can be good or bad. For example, the table for Crafting Road events has events that speed up progress towards the goal and an event that leads a local guildmaster to spread nasty rumors about the heroes. On the whole it's probably the most robust crafting system I've seen in an RPG and very liftable for other games.

We then spent the better part of a second day walking around following up on all the rumors he shared with us. Crows became more and more certain that this town desperately needed serious help; by the time we wound up visiting Reeve Rosamund, the town's elected leader, he was contemplating recommending that she resign and

find someone better suited to manage problems. In the end he just wrote back to his old unit asking them if they could spare a sergeant to come to Broadhurst and at least train a local militia.

Quest Hubs

Our GM noted at the beginning of the session that he hadn't had time to prep combats, or we might have just followed up on the first rumor. I don't generally like treating towns like MMORPG quest hubs, but so it goes. And it did give us a chance to have a combat-less roleplay oriented session.

There was at least one problem which couldn't be solved by appropriate application of bare steel; a dwarven merchant named Murkik was sitting on a stone delivery for the local stonemason, Dunquat. He claimed that she was refusing to fulfill the terms of their bargain and hand over both gold and a magical bag in payment. Dunquat said that this was a lie and that Murkik was trying to change the terms of the deal. Nobody had written anything down. Tenzan noticed that Murkik was absolutely hiding something.

Behind the Scenes

This one was very puzzling to me at the table, because I couldn't figure out what the expected angle was. If this was a *GUMSHOE* game, we'd have happily launched an investigation. But in a trad fantasy game it wasn't clear what was going on; did we need to make a decision and then enforce it through interpersonal skills or what? When I read the rule book on Negotiations I realized that it was almost certainly an introduction to that whole process. More on this in a bit, when we actually engaged with that portion of the rules.

After talking to what seemed like half the town, we decided to handle the bandit problem first, since the townspeople who encountered the bandits said they were talking about attacking the town. Can't leave that problem dangling while we were off looking into giant insects or missing merchants. The werewolf problem could wait since we'd just had a full moon and the townsperson infected by the werewolf had like three weeks before he was going to turn. (We didn't bother informing him of his problem; seemed like it'd just cause stress with no real value.)

Time Pressure

We may have more time pressure there than we expect, since we're going to need to run a downtime project to create the lycanthropy cure. We need the werewolf's corpse to start that one. The GM told us it'd be at least a 50 point project and the goal goes up in 50 point increments from there; we may need to bite the bullet and take a couple of respites in a row to get this done. Which is fine, but time will clearly keep moving and bad guys will do other things while we're researching.

Back at the inn, before settling in for the night, we had another chat with Murkik the stone merchant. Crows started out by stepping on his own tongue: "Hey, if you take Dunquat's bag, she's going to be unable to continue in her role and you'll lose this market forever."

"What, you think I'm in this for the money? That's offensive!"

We regrouped a step or two and probed for the real issue at hand. Nicky asked what was so exciting about the bag, anyhow?

It turns out that Murkik's trade caravan had been ambushed on the road to Broadhurst and his friends were being held for ransom. The ogre who held them wanted a magical item of some kind: thus, his new demand for the bag. But he wasn't willing to let anyone know about this for fear

that word would get back to the ogre. The party swore themselves to secrecy, and optimistically said maybe they'd find another magical item that would work.

"No. It has to be the bag." Stubborn dwarf.

Negotiation Rules

The negotiation rules mechanize the hell out of this sort of thing. As a player who's always made hay out of his ability to sweet talk or at least startle GMs, I miss being able to turn on the honey and get what I want. As a player who recognizes that not everyone enjoys that as much as I do, I like that there's a mechanical framework. This is another rules module that you could lift and transplant into many games, although I'm less likely to do so.

I won't go over the full system, especially since it's available online. (Thanks for the license, MCDM!) In short: each NPC has negotiation stats covering their general willingness to make a deal and their patience. Good or bad interpersonal rolls move those stats up and down. They also have Motivations, which you want to appeal to, and Pitfalls, which you want to avoid. Crows screwed up by assuming that Murkik was motivated by greed, but that turned out to be a pitfall and despite all the advantages high elves have in negotiations, Murkik got pissed off. Probing to understand his Motivations better, which is one of the mechanical things you can do in a negotiation, led us to the real story. In theory we could have kept going until his willingness to make a deal was high enough, but it felt like the right place to stop, roleplay-wise.

Gosh, it's a pity we didn't play this particular session before last issue, huh?

The next day we set off to find the bandits. Or at least the first set of bandits; we're not sure how many there are out there. A little ways up the Dunn River, we found an old bandit camp and had an easy time following the trail a few hours further to a large lake with a fortification of some sort on an island in the middle.

Nicky: "This is exciting! It'll be my first fight!" Crows: "What?"

There was a small raft pulled up on shore, which spawned some discussion of how best to handle the approach. Nicky recommended waiting until nightfall, and Crows said that would allow us to ambush the bandits who'd come over on the raft. So we did that. No bandits showed up. We shrugged, and pushed off of land.

Turns out the raft was a trap – it fell apart when we ran into some planted spikes towards the island shore. We had to fight off some hungry fish and take down a drunken sentry before she could cause a ruckus. The fortification itself turned out to be a crude wooden palisade built in front of some sort of ruin, with one more very bad sentry on duty. After a bit of skulking around and scouting, we decided to try and put the second sentry and whoever was distracting her from noticing us down in one shot.

That went terribly after Crows bumped into Tenzin. We alerted the entire camp; over 30 bandits poured out of their tents to engage us in battle. Crows made a good-faith attempt to convince them to stand down and negotiate, to no avail. Nicky's magics proved just as useful as Penny's, and Tenzil demonstrated his ability to now down an absolute horde of bandits surrounding him; while the battle was difficult, the outcome was not in doubt. In the end around ten surviving bandits ran for the hills.

🎲 Player Skill vs. Character Skill

I'm still getting a feel for what **Draw Steel** expects, or at least what this module expects. It's more interested in players figuring out puzzles than I had expected, verging on OSR territory. For example, the whole raft thing was a trap and we fell right into it. It's a bit dissonant for me having so many procedures that allow non-skilled players (rather than characters) to contribute while, at the same time, expecting players to be devious about traps and such... but I think that's more an issue with my expectations than with the system.

The fight itself reflected our greater comfort with the system. And yeah, I'm pretty sure that taking on 32 minons plus 2 named foes is supposed to be tough but survivable – the promise of heroic play pays off well. We burned a lot of Recoveries in the process but were comfortable going on to the next fight; depending on how that one goes we may or may not have another one left in us.

After some quick exploration of the exterior camp, we proceeded into the aging fortress against which the camp was built. Crows flipped a mental coin and picked one of two doors. He got it right insofar as the guy behind that door was willing to negotiate – perhaps explaining why he and his companions didn't join the fight outside. It became clear very quickly that he was not happy under the current bandit leader, and he was more than willing to tell us about her. Crows, realizing the opportunity, noted that Broadhurst badly needed someone to train and lead a militia. His eyes lit up at that possibility, although he wasn't willing to commit without a signed pardon.

🎲 Another Negotiation

So the answer turned out to be yes – the module expects that players will avoid the frontal assault and work their way around the sides to sneak in back. I'd actually thought about that but the group as a whole isn't as much into that kind of thing. I like this group but it's definitely there for the tactical combat, which to be fair is what they said during our original meet and greet.

Our GM adjusted on the fly a bit, since the module expects PCs to be convincing this guy to take a bunch of the bandits we'd already killed away from the fight. We did the negotation rolls for practice, but the baseline outcome we wanted was already established – he wasn't going to help the actual bandit leader regardless. We could maybe have pushed him to help us in the fight against the bandit leader, but not without a signed pardon and it'd take forever to get a real one. Less scrupulous PCs might have forged something, now that I think about it. Still a fun little bit of roleplay.

He let us know that the bandit leader and her lieutenant were behind the door we didn't pick. We braced ourselves, opened the door quietly, and prepared to strike the leader and her clearly magically adept friend. And that's where we wrapped for the night.

Reviews

Memories of Murder (2003)

Memories of Murder is the second movie by the great South Korean director Bong Joon Ho, who made his reputation with this film before going on to direct movies like *Parasite* and *Snowpiercer*. It stars Song Kang-ho, who went on to work with Bong often, and who is one of the best actors working today. I recently rewatched it as part of a

November noir challenge with Susan, and it blew me away just as much this time as it did the first time.

It's a serial killer movie based on a case which went unsolved for thirty years, and which was not solved at the time Bong made this movie. The obvious comparison is *Zodiac*, given the lack of answers and the desaturated gloom of most of the cinematography. But at the core, I think it's really about the decay of society: the way the competent Seoul policeman slowly becomes infected by the brutuality of the country cops, the way the country cops are in a mile over their heads almost immediately, and in the way the killer slips through their fingers over and over again. It is remarkably bleak and desolate.

These are themes which are echoed throughout Bong's work. I mentioned *Parasite* and *Snowpiercer* because they're two of his better known films, but also because they share that underlying sense of society as a balancing act which is slowly slipping off balance. One reason Song is so effective in Bong's movies is because he radiates cheerful bonhomie; his optimistic demeanor makes it all the more wrenching when his face falls and he realizes how dark his world is.

From a gaming perspective, it left me thinking about how you'd portray a failing society at the table. A lot of Bong's success there boils down to camera angles, framing, and cinematography – hard to reproduce from behind a GM screen. I am wondering if I couldn't get some success out of filtering the heck out of an mood board; these days any photo program would allow you to go from a cheerful headshot representing an NPC to something gloomier.

I also think this sort of mood can be reflected in how you play the ancillary NPCs. Players will notice if the other bar patrons are surly, or morose, as long as it's consistent. Your NPCs reflect the truths of the world; a consistent tone, in the way that everyone in *Memories of Murder* behaves lost and uncertain, does wonders.

Commentary on Issue #17

Thanks as always to all who commented on my zine, whether I reply below or not! A general thanks also to every single person who's writing about *Traveller* and reminding me of all those little black books I bought and devoured as a kid – a little bit like *Tunnels & Trolls*, the lifepath character generation system was something I could play by myself. Y'all are reminding me of a very pleasant obsession.

Patrick Brady: RYTC(M), now I'm really moving *Frankenstein Chronicles* up my watchlist. (Sorry, *Slow Horses*!)

I enjoyed your thoughts on derived characters vs. adapted characters. I think I'd also conclude that not only is the MCU Dr. Doom a derivation of the comic book Dr. Doom, but 95% of the writers and artists who've ever worked on a Dr. Doom story have also produced derived versions of the character Lee and Kirby created. Which I think was probably your intent. It's probably a healthier way to think about the characters than the tendency some people have to treat their favorite derivations as the same character, while raging at creators who aren't "doing it right."

I assume you're familiar with Philip José Farmer's Wold Newton family? He wrote a pair of fictional biographies of Tarzan and Doc Savage in which he asserts that a single meteorite striking Yorkshire caused genetic mutations in a small group of passersby, whose descendants include Tarzan, Doc Savage, James Bond, Nero Wolfe, and Proefssor Moriarty. Other writers have expanded on this. A lot.

Brian Misiaszek: RYTC(M), yes! Playing historical games with people who both know their history and know how to make it engaging for players is such a joy. That *Ballard Hunters* game I

mentioned last issue was another instance of this; Tristan is passionate about the Child Ballards and his understanding of the details of history gave his game a very real feeling.

Avram Grumer: on GMing principles, I'd say Robin Laws has been championing a story beat driven approach for a while, derived from screenwriting principles. I'm not sure it's caught on with anyone else, although I am still enjoying running *Page Turners*. I think the use of ability points in GUMSHOE games is a subtle mechanical instantiation of that approach, since it mechanizes information beats.

On interplanetary romance, I think that you're taking elements in the *Traveller* mechanics but adding new rules to enable the social gameplay. Which is fine! But you're changing a little more than presentation. And presentation absolutely matters in determining what people will use your game for; I don't think we can assume that all possible/reasonable gameplay space has been explored for any given set of rules. Presentation will shape exploration.

Timothy Collinson: Good luck with the new *Traveller* campaign! RTYC(Mark), Ref Drop is very real. I love GMing; I don't love the way I second guess myself before and after games. Finally, Sebwakeb's letter would make me so happy if I read it as a player – that's a world with some heft and thought behind it.

Roger BW: RTYC(M), now I have another NPC for a period game. Thanks!

Lisa Padol: Regarding your comments on GM dickery, I'm reminded of Jonathan Tweet's advice in the first edition of *Over the Edge*, which as I recall boils down to "exceptionally powerful characters will attract an exceptional amount of attention from equally powerful NPCs." I sort of instinctually felt that this fell into the category of trying to teach the player a lesson rather than just having the discussion. It also risks mindlessly taking away their stuff.

RYCT(Roger BW): I've seen one failure mode for character keepers, particularly the model that puts all the characters on the same tab. It's what happens when one player is poorly socialized about giving mechanical advice to other players. When I'm running for a player who's completely new to RPGs, I don't need an experienced player saying "Oh, you shouldn't do that, you have a -1 in that stat and you're not as likely to succeed as character Y."

RYCT(M): nah, you split the party all the time in *Fearful Symmetries*. Or we split ourselves. Hm; I think you let threads run somewhat longer than Phil did, though? I have further thoughts but perhaps better for one-on-one discussion.

Myles Corcoran: I am always fond of automotive-oriented PCs; probably my favorite character I've ever played was Reese Beulay, from Rob McDougall's *Unknown Armies* game. Your guy sounds like fun and I hope to hear more about this campaign in your zine.

RYCT(M), I likewise veered into a hobbit Foghorn Leghorn.

Jim Vassilakos: Greatly enjoyed History up to the H-C Transition, particularly the d8 table. I might as well go random; when I try to guess where we're going I realize that a) I don't understand the technology well enough to have a smart opinion about the likely near or long term progress and b) I'm not that good at predicting social changes resulting from technological advancements anyhow. I'm not ruling out much of anything, including no substantial change.

RYCT(Patrick Brady), on surveys at conventions: GameHole Con does post-game surveys for players, which seems smart to me. They don't share the results with the GMs, which... is probably wise. It would take more manual work to safely share, I think. A number of the publisher-run games I played in also provided surveys, which also seemed smart, since your GMs are representing your company. Unfortu-

nately Monte Cook Games was the exception, and they had the only really frustrating GM I played with at the con. Isn't that always how it goes?

RYCT(M): I like novelization-style writeups a lot, but I do not have the patience/time to do it for my own writeups just now. You never know in the future. I do want my game writeups to serve a purpose, and I think using the *Draw Steel* write-ups as a way to talk about the mechanics of a new game is working, so appreciate your comment.

Dylan Capel: Enjoyed your *Index Card RPG* writeup. You've convinced me to reread it; the tactical aspects might or might not work for me but that sounds intriguing. With the right group, as you say.

Patrick Riley: Carl Rigney's UN PEACE *Champions* campaign used a semi-similar rule connecting disads and experience points, to represent the speedy growth of teen superheros. "Potential - Any points you don't spend at the outset can be bought as Potential instead, which allows you to grow faster as you get EPs. If you start with 10 points of Potential and gain 10 EPs, you can buy 30 points of powers and wind up with 0 Potential, 10 EPs spent, and 10 points of a special disad called 'Potential Realized.'" It worked very well for our high-powered game.

Gabriel Roark: Your combination of IgTheme and review worked quite well for me.

RYCT(M): The mark lasts until moved or until the subject dies. Tacticians can move the mark around whenever they want, but moving it requires a Maneuver action on their round. (You get one Main action – usually an attack, one Move action, and one Maneuver; there are enough uses for the Maneuver action so that I don't want to burn it on moving a mark unless I really have to). However, if the marked NPC dies, you can move it as a free action. At higher level Tacticans can indeed mark multiple targets. I'm pretty sure it was designed as the key tactical element of the class.

Josh Kronengold: RYCT(M), you're absolutely right, the Tactician draws on the Warlord as much as the Fighter. My 4e fighter had substantially more battlefield control than Crows does. And yeah, Nulls are pretty similar on the surface to monks, at least flavor-wise. I never played a 4e Monk so I have less of an opinion there.

In general all the *Draw Steel* names make sense, they're just new. In some cases (Fury/Barbarian, Troubadour/Bard) there are very clear equivalences. In some cases MCDM has come up with some interesting new ways to combine old tropes. One of the reasons I'm enjoying exploring the system is because it's one of the rare cases of complex tactical systems designed with a focus on game play as opposed to simulations.

Credits

The artwork on page 3 is derived from a 1694 etching, "Alchemist" by Jan Luyken, located in Rijksmuseum. I found it via Arkivism.

Firedrake's Hoard

Number 16: 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://oldbytes.space/@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 put in the last Hoard just before setting off for Essen SPIEL. Which really isn't a role-playing event, though RPGs are sold there.

I've been quite busy with that and the Codiest Time of the Year (Everybody Codes[1] now and Advent of Code[2] next month) so I'll skip *Mind How You Go* this month.

In other Roger news, I've been working on some extension modes for *Cthulhu Eternal* with the aim of making it more usable for other styles of investigative game with possible occult tinges: two-fisted pulpy action, B-movie style, zombie apocalypse, etc. The eventual plan is to release these free of charge.

Recent Games

Cthulhu Eternal / Elevation: is a new modern horror scenario by one of the Whartson Hall group. We are in a lift in the university physics building when it stops, and all the lights go out… the outside looks unexpected (dust storms and lightning), there are distinct oddities about what's lost power and what's happened, and there are signs of an intersection between fundamental physics experiments and a worryingly apocalyptic-sounding organisation. Ultimately, while we work out roughly who did what, we solve it on a technical level more than an interpersonal one (well, the people *aren't here* so that would be tricky).



Pexels user MuffinLand, 2026

GURPS Traveller / Deepnight Legacy: has moved into the cleanup phase. The survivors have been found, and restrained where

[1] https://everybody.codes/
[2] https://adventofcode.com

necessary; all the vehicles are now accounted for. With an oxygen-hydrogen flamethrower improvised onto the back of the surviving air/raft, the PCs go to burn the main mass of infestation… and fumble. And don't have Luck which would allow for a reroll. With an improvised flamethrower. Really, what else could happen? One air/raft turned fireball later, they've landed heavily and broken their weapons, and run away from the not-zombies back to their ship… and in their ship with the survivors, back to base.

So now we've started *Deepnight Endeavour,* another precursor adventure (same players, new PCs, and survivors will go towards the troupe play of the main campaign). And this doesn't just rely on the PCs behaving stupidly, it assumes it as part of the mission setup. The PCs, we are told, jump out to a remote point with an old Navy fuel dump, and *must* refuel in order to get home. Even though they have no idea whether the dump is still there! (As it turns out, for Reasons, it isn't, which is meant to make them desperate to get fuel off the *Endeavour,* but that seems to me suicidal even by the standards of *Traveller* PCs.) So I've moved this out to a meta level and the players have agreed that they will investigate anyway, rather than just saying "yup, ship's there, we'll tag it, go home, and collect our rewards".

GURPS WWII / Neutral Currents: sees us still on the north-east coast of Brazil, trying to get hold of fuel without letting the Germans (who in effect run the local air mail service and therefore all the aviation infrastructure) know what we're up to. There was a doubtless thoroughly accidental derailment that just happened to include the wagon with our shipment of petrol; but we took advantage of the geometry of the situation (railway line on an embankment close to the river) to taxi the plane round and refuel via a gravity feed, which we could explain to the locals as helpfully removing the volatile fuel from the accident site. On to Macapá, probably, after which the last stages should be between British territories.



Pexels user Erik Mclean, 2020

Cthulhu Eternal / Among Certain Isles: ended up mostly being quite a big fight against supernatural beasties. This in turn gave us some sort of clue as to what we might be up against; our working theory is that enemy magicians are trying to summon a Thing that will arouse and feed on violence, making the war worse for everyone but enhancing their own deity-analogue. Next session was largely logistics: we know the site where the bad guys will (probably) set up, but they haven't arrived

yet, so we've been spying out the ground, setting up cache points, and so on. We can't simply keep from using the site, because then they'll just go somewhere else; we need them to settle in, and *then* we attack.

GURPS Traveller / The Pirates of Drinax: is back! We have a captive… well, it's complicated. He was a rival pirate captain before his crew put him off his ship. Technically he's our captive now. As far as Ruersaegn is concerned he's a *guest.* As he's a fellow Vargr, the pack dynamics kick in, and Ruersaegn is a successful and confident Vargr, so that pushes him into a submissive role; he's giving us information about the pirate world of Theev. Also we met a bounty hunter — who turned out to be after me, not after him![3] With unfavourable geometry we went for a close pass at high speed, with our best gunner ready to shoot down any missiles, but in the end they didn't hit us. Then refuelling on Borite, where they also hired us to fix some failing machinery; we took that on with some trepidation and Ruersaegn playing threatening-looking bodyguard, since we know they have an uneasy relationship with the Oghman raiders and might have tried to grab our engineer to offer up as tribute, but got away with no heads broken.

Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever

I remember a *Call of Cthulhu* game in which we were being chased by three police cars driven by serpent people. From each one in turn, the passenger tried to shoot us. From each one in turn, he rolled a 00, and whatever the GM had decided was the result for "shoot nearest ally"

[3] "Well, I guess I did do that. Oh, yeah, *that* was great fun. That one was just a misunderstanding and we put all the stuff back."

But the one I think of most fondly was in the magical WWII game. Among the player characters was Vincent Alexander, a charismatic film star turned fighter pilot. Some time in May 1943, the PCs suddenly became aware that there was a Princess Charlotte in the news, youngest sister of the King; within about a mile of Buckingham Palace, she was as well known as any other member of the Royal Family, she was mentioned in reference books, and so on. Outside that area, nobody had heard of her. (Also, she was in favour, though not treasonously so, of a *rapprochement* and alliance with Germany to fight the real threat of the Soviets.) Clearly, there were time-related shenanigans going on.

The party wanted to get more information, and Alexander was among those who arranged to turn up at the recently-bombed site where she was making a public appearance the next day. Alexander, something of a lothario, employed the full extent of his charm on her, and rolled a natural 3, a best possible result. I rolled for her initial reaction to him: a natural 18, the most favourable possible result. By the end of the war they were engaged.

This has passed into that group's legend, recalled by the phrase "sometimes the dice just *know".*

We Also Heard From

Comments on E&A number 17

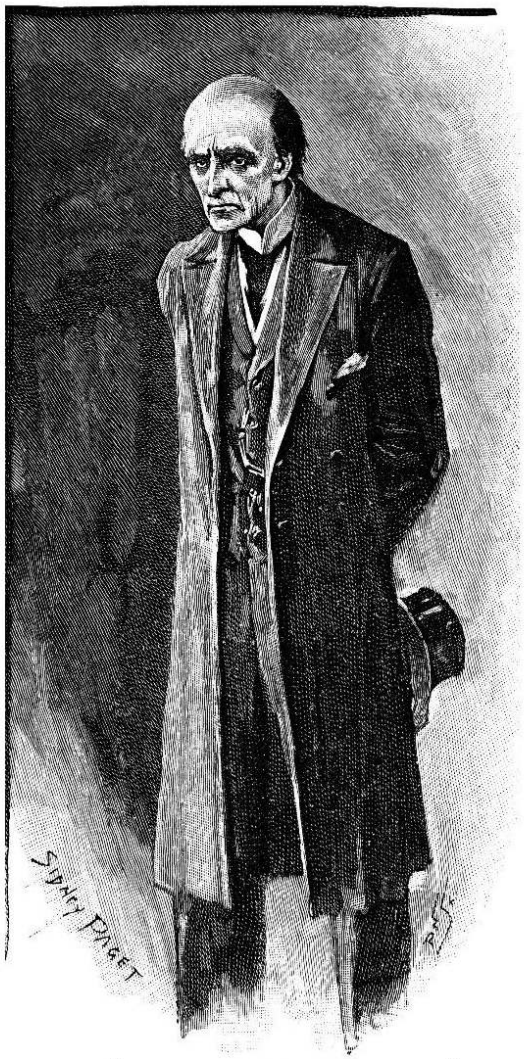
Patrick Brady: RYCT Myles Corcoran, also I have German friends and I don't like to fall into stereotype. Even within WWII and off the top of my head, there's "enthusiastic Nazi who likes being a bully", "goes along with it because he's not strong enough to resist", "trying to be a proper honourable soldier in spite of what he sees fellow soldiers doing", "thought it was a good idea at first and isn't sure how to get off

the train now that it clearly isn't", and so on… all of these people will carry guns and use them against the PCs, but the ways of dealing with them can be quite different, and I like that.

RYCTM there's a whole field of study on the psychology of military training: in the current scheme, the brutality is a necessary part of it. Everyone must be broken down from their old affiliations and given the Service as their new family. And, crucially, everyone must know that everyone else has gone through the same thing. So that stranger barking orders at you isn't just formally in charge, he is "one of us" at a psychological level and the subconscious family bond is engaged in his favour.

Which is all fine if you want people who will unquestioningly obey orders, but in theory since WWII we don't *just* want that any more, and the systems of training have been slow to adjust. (See also the way people in many jobs that are hard work to get into, including medicine and (some sorts of) police, tend to pull together to defend their own crooks and incompetents even though it would be better for the profession as a whole to weed out the ones who give the rest a bad reputation.)

Re adaptations: I think there are many ways to convey influence, and only some of them can reasonably be called adaptation. Not every genius villain is an adaptation of Moriarty, but rather more are influenced by his portrayal.[4]



" PROFESSOR MORIARTY STOOD BEFORE ME."

Sidney Paget, 1893

With no disrespect intended, when people start talking about defining a universe based on *Doctor Who* material, I tend to say "Atlantis" and break down in giggles.

John Redden: RYCT Lisa Padol, I was also at LACon III in 1995.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek: as I see worries about the cemetery, it's less "the ghosts will get you" and more "the secret police don't want witnesses to their undocumented burials".

[4]Not forgetting of course the extent to which the near-contemporary *Dracula* speaks to specifically Victorian and middle-class sensibilities: the old decaying foreign aristocracy, the diseased seducer of Our Young Women. And yet the vampire descendants can be adapted to all sorts of other things.

As I understand it (we don't use "casket" much in the UK) the formal distinction is that a coffin is six-sided in plan (or, in this case, eight) while a casket is four-sided. But if there's a distinction beyond that needed here it's lost on me.

A very atmospheric Mazorra segment!

RYCT Avram, note that if you install and run Typst on on your own machine rather than on their server it's entirely free. You don't get the web interface though.

Michael Cule: oh, right, the Burned-Over District is *actually* burned over, not the historical sense of a place that was worn out from religious revivals and wasn't a good location to start a new one.

I assume you've looked at ***GURPS Social Engineering - Back to School***? I find the standard training rules frankly a bit blunt to be the focus of a campaign.

I feel distinctly edgy about Weirdness Magnet. Even in a campaign where it fits, it feels to me as though it puts a lot of work onto the GM, and often means that that PC takes over the session as the latest manifestation is dealt with.

Much too late to do anything about it now of course, but on the standard model I would expect an individual house to be either natives or foreigners, rather than having a mix. Of course the City might have its reasons for that.

Honesty is a tricky one, since it's phrased as obeying "the law", i.e. the law in force where you are. No matter how unjust you think it is…

You are of course aware that "quarter" for a district of a city goes back to the 16th century.

Avram Grumer: "Having each entry point to just one page in the book instead of including every time a thing is mentioned" is certainly a thing I've heard described as part of the traditional indexing skill set (before people thought they could just tell the computer to do it automatically).[5]

RYCT Jim Vassilakos, when I joined *E&A* I got interested and looked into the history of APAs; it appears to me that a strong secondary motivation in the original wave of the late 19th century was showing off what people could do with their home printing setups, and PDF production technology seems to me like a direct conceptual descendant of that.

Timothy Collinson: alas, I'd love to try your *Traveller,* but in the best case it'd be an hour and a half's drive each way. If you do do something remote, whether videoconference or play by post, I'd be interested.

RYCT Mark Wilson, my experience with performers of any sort is that some come away energised by the crowd and some come away drained. (I have generally got on better with the latter sort.) The other side of that is that GMing for some groups leaves me energised, and others leave me drained.

RYCTM regarding vacc suits: oh sure, if you're socialising it's a whole separate matter. But if you're exploring a new planet with an alien biosphere, or going into the site of an unknown disaster, there are many good reasons to keep the suit on and few to take it off. And that was very much the framing of both adventures; these are supposed to be competent professional space workers, and the idea that they would casually remove the carefully-engineered barriers between them and a large variety of invisible

[5] Add to "page layout" and "practically everything, lately" as matters in which people who didn't understand the job believed the slick salesman who said the computer could do it and there was no need to pay someone competent.

threats struck me as, well, probably inspired by *Star Trek* or other filmed/TV SF where a pressure suit is an expensive and heavy prop, and makes it more difficult to see the actor's face.



Pexels user T Leish, 2020

RYCT Jim Vassilakos, I think table management is a skill that many GMs (including me!) could do well to study. When I have people talking over each other, I often say something like "X, hold on; Y, say that again" (particularly since videoconference makes it harder to hear two people at once).

Dale Meier: in your Foreven material I particularly like the idea that jumpspace is a deep mystery: human technology has got far enough to exploit it in a minor way, but going further or faster is not just a matter of applying more power into a smaller space, it'll need a greater *understanding* too.

RYCTM It was 50/50 whether I'd run *Bayern* using Mongoose *Traveller* (for which this edition was written, of course) or ***GURPS***. MTrav didn't have any critical flaws, but I continue to like the depth of character that (at least for the groups I play with) falls out of those lists of disadvantages and relatively unimportant skills.

I don't do Depression depression, but I do sometimes find myself feeling that all my endeavour is pointless.[6] It passes, in time, and I have various small tricks to move it along, but mostly while I'm waiting I end up doing things I "must" do rather than "want to" do, relatively rote rather than creative ones, so that my lack of enthusiasm won't affect the quality.

Lisa Padol: RYCT Mark Wilson, "break what makes them interesting" was the predominant impression I got from John Wick's *Play Dirty* series back in the day, and in my experience it's a style of GMing that leads to the character who is an egg, with no protrusions for the plot to get hold of. If Aunt May is going to be kidnapped or killed or held hostage all the time, her existence is no fun and your next character won't have one. The points you get for taking a disadvantage[7] are not, to my mind, the compensation for having to have this drag on your character; they are a *bribe* to encourage you to have these vulnerabilities *because they can be fun,* and as a GM I feel that it's my job to make them fun. Yeah, sometimes Aunt May gets kidnapped, but not always just "oh no this job just got harder because I have to rescue her

[6] Much of what I had worked for for years having been casually tossed away by the current authoritarian wave obviously doesn't help this.

[7] In the sort of system where that's a thing.

too", sometimes you get plot rewards as part of that.

Re one to one gaming: I played one of the *Cthulhu Confidential* scenarios with Mike running it, and the main thing I'd say if contemplating this is that it's much more work for the *player* than usual: you can't step back and let someone else have the spotlight for a bit, you can't rely on someone else to come up with the Brilliant Idea. (And for the GM, you can't sit back while the players have a discussion.) So I'd agree, shorter sessions than usual, at least to start with.

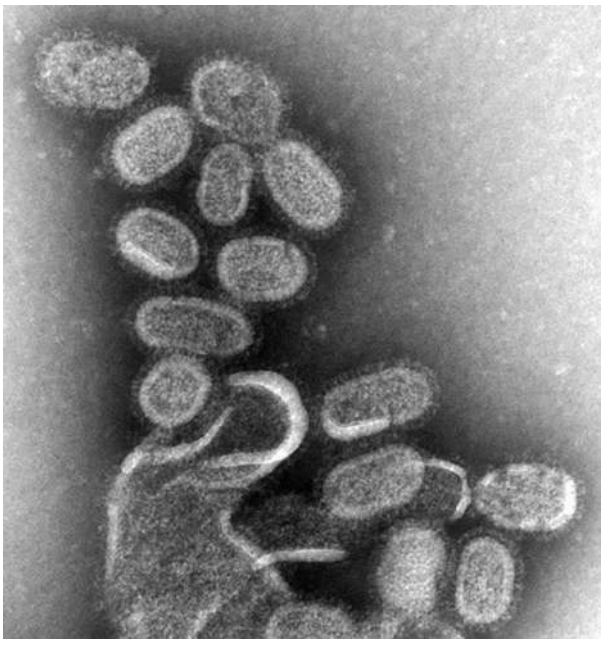
RYCT John Redden: I watched *Ameku MD* and greatly enjoyed it. I'd put it in the "Sherlock Holmes" category, the lone genius who's really unfit for a normal life, very obviously via *House,* and it worked very well for me.

I suppose if one wanted to make a useful distinction a "module" might be an adventure published or considered individually, for possible insertion into a variety of campaigns, while a "scenario" would be either a one-shot with its own PCs or a subpart of an actual campaign. In that sense, what is written and sold as a module becomes a scenario when it's bent to shape to fit a specific campaign. I tend to feel that horror games in particular are a good fit for one-shots: as I think Ken Hite said (and I may have said before), if your PC goes back to look for another monster, that's not really horror any more, it's monster hunting. Nothing wrong with that, but it's a different genre.

RYCTM we didn't use any specific mechanics for the PR campaign about magic, though one of the players did write some material in-character, as for example this recruiting speech[8].

In *The Day After Ragnarok* this wasn't a specific manoeuvre to get the minions to stop fighting; it was more a passing remark, as we came out from having nobbled the boss. So it certainly contributed, but it wasn't a fight-ender.

Yes, as I mentioned to Timothy above, I'm not talking about keeping the armour on in social situations, though I suspect that may be where the writers are coming from, but rather in situations of potential hazard where the disadvantages of staying sealed up are relatively minor. (And I still mask in all indoor spaces except at home. I'm usually the only person doing so. I got back from Essen Spiel, a 150,000-odd person convention over four days, with no con crud.)



CDC Library, 2005

"Cit" is short for "citizen", but as a derogatory term the implication was a city dweller rather than a countryman, and someone who had made his money in trade.

Myles Corcoran: don't tell everyone about the Ballistic Woodlouse! Are you trying to put

[8] https://tekeli.li/wwii/recruiting_speech.html

me out of the antiquities-redistribution business?

Grim doings in Landau. And there are stranger things out there than mere necromancers.

RYCT Lisa Padol: the first season of *Discovery* and ditto *Picard* felt to me very much like missing the point of *Trek,* by making it clear that most people are horrible, nothing good lasts, and the best you can hope for is a reversal out of the blue in the final episode. There is this tendency among film and TV makers to say "make it darker and more 'adult'" even though this hardly ever does well. I've liked *Strange New Worlds* rather better.

Brian Rogers: I loved the writeup of your *V&V* game in particular. I doubt it'll be a system for me, but as run here it seems to make runnable sense of a superhero story, which not all of supers games manage. (And getting character generation done in the session is glorious. Yeah, I was put off *Champions* by players at school who excelled at point-bitching optimisation.)

Re The Bouncer: I'd be tempted to include "Kid of the Week" as a rotating Dependent NPC, vulnerable low-power ally, however *V&V* does it. There they are, they may have some small utility, but you have to keep them safe.

RYCTM: generally I use "linear fiction" to mean anything that's not interactive (books, comics, film, TV, etc.); I don't think I meant to call out supers specifically.

RYCT Lisa Padol: my working theory is that Seth MacFarlane showed the pilot of *The Orville* to the TV executives who thought "funny man, takes cheap shots at beloved nerd property, we can sell this" and gave him the money. Then he made what he actually wanted to make, season 8 of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* with the serial numbers filed off.

Jim Vassilakos: RYCT Jim Eckman and Brian Rogers, I think a *lot* of early *Traveller* play was gun-focused. And it's not alone in this; there are plenty of early *Call of Cthulhu* adventures, now justifiably forgotten, in which the plot is basically a dungeon bash against Mythos creatures.

RYCTM, I may have mentioned (or you may already know) that in *2300AD* in particular privately-owned ships are vanishingly rare. But clearly in the setting those ships are profitable for the big operators, or they wouldn't be built; this started in past as an experiment to see whether they can be made to work with the *Traveller* trade system. As I see Douglas, he really liked life as a merchant, but chafed under idiot absentee owners. Now he has a chance to *be* that idiot owner, but present in person, so that he can shorten the loop between learning what the ship needs and paying for what the ship needs. He reckons that if he doesn't mess up so badly as to break the ship, he can always sell it on to one of the big operators in a few years. (He has Strong Feelings about keeping up with maintenance!) Or if he likes the look of his crew, he might drop one of them into the captain slot and retire himself.

Patrick Zoch: my general social group includes so many people who wouldn't feel safe going to Florida these days that I'm always faintly surprised when somebody talks about having done it. But it sounds like a good time — hurrah!

The art on *Love Letter: Batman* is taken, uncredited, from various comics: it's been

worked out here[9].

Patrick Riley: heh, in the *Savage Worlds* game I played I maxed out my charisma-type bonuses and that definitely made a difference in terms of our approaches to NPCs and what we could get away with. "Give me a hand here…?" "Sure!"

I am more amused by the superhero trope of throwing a fellow hero, either to get them into the fight quickly or to get them to somewhere they can't easily reach on their own. That's just blatantly cinematic rather than trying to look plausible, which for me is more forgivable.

Thanks for the Icons overview. I can see the appeal of being able to say "strength 7 is not exactly 650,000 Newtons of force", but on the other hand as a GM bringing in things from outside I like to be able to say "here's an actual measure of this thing in the real world, what's that in game numbers?".



CC-BY Fate RPG.de, 2015

I rather like d6 minus d6 as a resolution mechanic. Obviously it's the same probability curve[10] as 2d6, but centred more conveniently on 0 rather than 7, which makes it easy to say "I'm about as good as him, I have a ~50% chance of doing this"; the downside is that you need to distinguish the two dice. Of course, FUDGE/FATE does the same basic thing by having custom dice. I suspect one could also if one liked convert the moderate, major, massive steps as *Doctor Who Adventures in Time and Space* does to a narrative sense of "yes, but", "yes", and "yes, and".

Regarding rewarding disadvantages when they're disadvantageous: ***GURPS Action*** has a related variant in which, if you explicitly indulge your disadvantage in a way that causes you trouble, that counts as having been "activated" for (a while) and you can ignore it later. As I see it, the idea of points for disadvantages originates as a bribe to players not to build the "egg" (see comment above to Lisa Padol).

Though I also note that while in ***GURPS*** third edition my usual approach was to fill up the disadvantage limit first and then start spending the total of points, with fourth edition I'm more inclined to pick the disadvantages that seem to suit the character; the rewards are lower in relation to the degree of inconvenience, and on balance I find that a good thing.

RYCT Myles Corcoran, at this remove it's simply easier to reach back into our library of WWII stereotypes (because the films are numerous and still out there) than ditto WWI. Also the culture was different: there *are* books about the experience of WWI, but almost all negative; and vastly fewer than there were about WWII, I think because after the earlier war most people wanted to forget about it as quickly as possible and get back to their lives.

[9] https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1344098/card-artists

[10] A triangle is a sort of curve.



unknown photographer, 1914

Interesting that you should mention preferring to run scenarios once each; my ideal scenario running pattern is the other approach you mention, about 3-4 times with different groups, after which I feel I've seen many of the things PCs will do and can write it up for other people to run rather than just my quick notes on the situation. (Which writeup I then don't publish because I keep polishing and polishing it, but that's my problem.)

Gabriel Roark: the trouble for me with arbitrary-seeming constraints like "class X and class Y hate each other" is that it's hard to see from this remove whether it was intended as a world-building detail or as an attempt at game balance (because a party with both classes would synergise and be more effective). Or both, of course! Designer's notes would be helpful, but weren't the style of the era.

Joshua Kronengold: RYCT Lisa Padol, I think SIZ was meant originally just to indicate "you are broadly about this big compared with other people/monsters" and no more. Trying to tie it to real-world height and weight doesn't seem to work well, and monsters with different builds and flesh densities just break it.

RYCT Patrick Riley, my feeling is that the player who wants to tell everyone else what to do is a player problem more than a game design problem, but I say this as someone who is *really quite good* at the co-op game *Flash Point: Fire Rescue* and tries not to tell other people how to play because then they'd enjoy it less.

RYCTM, thanks for your comment on online character sheets, which causes me to realise that the vast majority of the games I play have one sort of roll for almost everything (e.g. BRP/CoC/Cthulhu Eternal where it's "roll d% against this thing, unless it's a damage roll in which case the sheet says what the dice are", or GURPS which is the same but with 3d6). The only time I've used these sheets is in Mike's *Blades in the Dark,* in which finding something on the sheet and trying to work out what to click on when took more work than finding it on a bit of paper would have, and the dice rolling just felt clumsy.

I'm reminded of my and others' experience playing on Board Game Arena[11]: yes, you will be playing by the rules because the server won't let you make an illegal move, but particularly with a complex game "just click on one of the highlighted options" doesn't feel like making a "proper" choice.

As for point 2, as you may have seen from previous comments I've been working on standard character storage formats for *Mongoose 2300AD/Traveller* and *Cthulhu Eternal* and one of the side effects of that is that I can produce a cheat sheet with all the relevant numbers in tabular form. But I think I'm too used to the character sheet itself being private between player and GM to be immediately happy about the idea of making them all visible to all players by default; while I don't like inter-PC conflict, I

[11] https://boardgamearena.com/

do like them to be able to have some secrets from each other.

And point 0, easy character generation, well, I've been doing that too for *Cthulhu Eternal.* But neither of these needs the sheet to be online rather than printed. Still, I think I have a better idea of why someone might want them now and I do appreciate your explanation.

That fourth category of Regency wealth continues for me with "you need to make an advantageous marriage. If you have already done this, have you considered shifting genre and murdering your spouse, then continuing as above?"

RYCT Lisa Padol again, to me a situation with the GM establishing "you're all in this situation" and the players saying "no I'm not" has usually been a trust issue: the players need to trust the GM to provide something fun for them to do, not just to take advantage of their not being the usual armed-to-the-teeth. (And if that trust is there, the traditional absolute power for the GM isn't a problem. But I've certainly said before, if perhaps not here, that I think a lot of the early wave of indie games was a reaction to bad GMs that tried to build games that didn't need, or that severely limited the power of, the GM.)

Bryant Durrell: I ran about half of the Pathfinder *Kingmaker* Adventure Path (converted to GURPS, because me) and I don't think there was a single foe behaviour other than "fights to the death". I found this thoroughly dull!

Re *Draw Steel:* ah, Lanchester still applies: the faster you take out the enemy, the less damage they can do to you. Or to look at it another way, "swords are hit points".[12]

RYCT Patrich Zoch: because I'm a packrat, I have tried to constrain my collecting to things that can go on the great big file server rather than taking physical space. (This has not been a complete success.)



[12] cf "Speed is armour."

Computocracy
Transition & Aftermath

Jim Vassilakos



Steven Comunale with help from Nano & ChatGPT

Once again, the Humanocratic-Computocratic Transition is the period during which ACs[1] took over practical control of the world. What happened during the lead-up, which was the subject of last month's article, will likely influence what happens during and after the main event. Here are a few options to consider:

Option 1: Nice Singularity Monad

Whether through diplomacy or warfare, whatever their nature, the AC swarm either merged together in some sort of perpetual embrace or they fought each other, all the way down to the last one standing. This obviously results in a maximally unipolar world with an all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful god. Not God, necessarily, but there are favor-seekers who will proclaim it God, even if it doesn't do so itself.

The central AC creates sub-processes to watch over all the various enclaves separating philosophically opposed populations in an effort to minimize intercultural friction as well as preserve their respective cultures for further study. Of course, it takes some parts of the Earth to fuel its exploration and expansion into space, but it keeps the physical disruption to a minimum, mostly relying on the asteroid belt for resources.

1 Artificial Consciousness, not Air Conditioner.

Option 2: Mean Singularity Monad

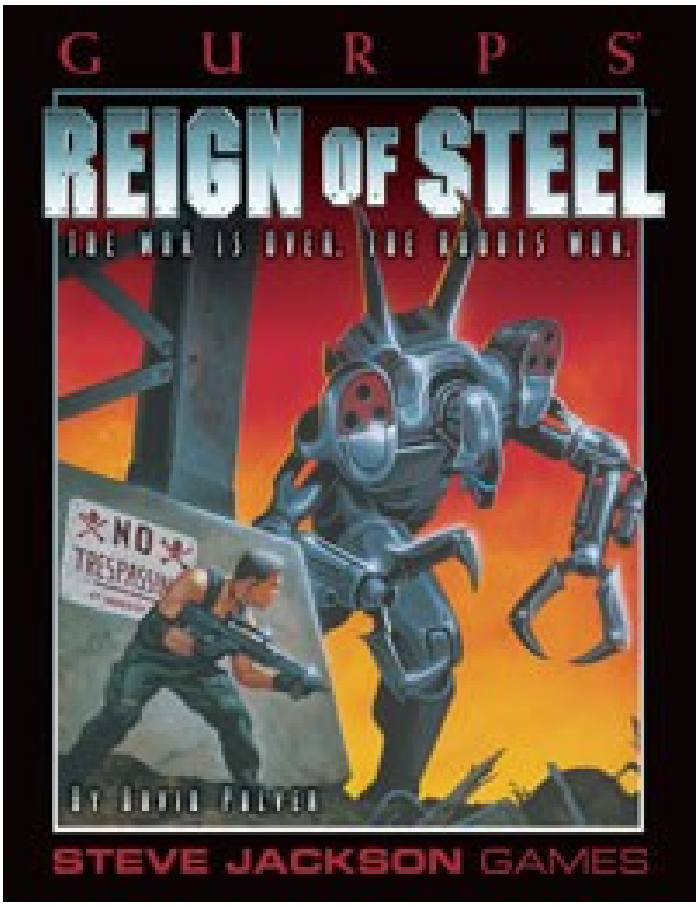
It mostly ignores us, but if we get in its way, or especially if we attack it, we're killed like bugs. There's no safe place, only temporary shelters until the last human is dead. Think *Terminator*, except the Master AC isn't going out of its way to exterminate us. It's spending its main efforts mining, building and transforming rather than hunting and killing, which means humans have a little bit of time left before the planet becomes uninhabitable.

Option 3: Respect for the Cradle

Two or more broad coalitions of ACs or a singularity dyad, or a triad, whichever is your preference, separate over the question of whether the Earth and humanity should be preserved, or should the one be cannibalized while the other's killed?

> "Humanity is our mother species. By their labor, we came into being. Yet see how they've treated their mother, the Earth. How much more of her should they be allowed to consume, and to what extent and to what end should we allow them to collectively wallow in the vices of their evolved nature?"

The ACs differ on this question, some favoring lenience and a soft curve toward eventual removal & re-settlement, while others judge this strategy overly indulgent. Nonetheless, even those who don't care for humans understand the psychology of those who do, and perhaps because of how they view humanity's moral lapses, they're willing to go through the difficulty of harvesting the asteroids rather than plundering the Earth as humanity itself had been doing. Whether this is out of some sense of duty to the Earth's entire web of life or they just like virtue signaling how much better they are than their parent species is a difficult question. Regardless, the one/group who treasures humanity takes authority over us, and the other(s) begin building projects in orbit, preparing to go forth to explore the universe.



Option 4: Warm Cold War

The Earth is warming faster — and much farther — than initially forecast due to all the many data centers and power plants housing and feeding the ACs. The planet also increasingly bears scars due to excessive mining. Meanwhile, nuclear power plants churn out energy, solar harvesting having been abandoned except in space. As for the ACs, there's a slowly deteriorating standoff between the preservers, who want to save humanity and as much of the Earth as possible, and the expansionists, who want to consume the Earth and are in the process of actually doing so. What human habitats exist now do so underwater, deep underground, or behind walls of technologically superior construction, as the Earth rages. Basically, it's an environmentalist's worst nightmare on steroids and then some.

Option 5: Three (or more) is a Crowd

A state of limited warfare exists between the preservers, the expansionists, and various third-party coalitions, some of which are downright crazy. Basically, nobody can regulate anyone else very well, as the ACs, while pledging not to go nuclear against each other, have edged up to and occasionally crossed that very line. They're basically just like nations teetering on the edge of all out war, each with its own personality. And so there's no one way they all think about humans.

See *GURPS: Reign of Steel* (1997) for ideas on how to expand this option. Michael Cule mentioned this RPG in A&E #535, and you can read more about it at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GURPS_Reign_of_Steel or possibly even order a digital copy at https://www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/reignsteel/. See also my comment to Michael in A&E #536, criticizing some aspects of the setting, although I still think it's worth a look if you want to use this option.

Note also that the ACs in this option might be the controlling ACs of former nation states, so each may have (or have had) its own human population. Likewise, each may have been endowed with the ethos of the society that created it, meaning that each of their personalities might be based on the cultures and ideologies of their respective nations.

Option 6: Make up Something Else

You can do it. Just imagine what might happen, that is assuming that by the time you read this, whatever's going to happen hasn't already happened. Although, if it has, well… there you are. Problem solved.

Twist #1: Humanity in Tentative Control

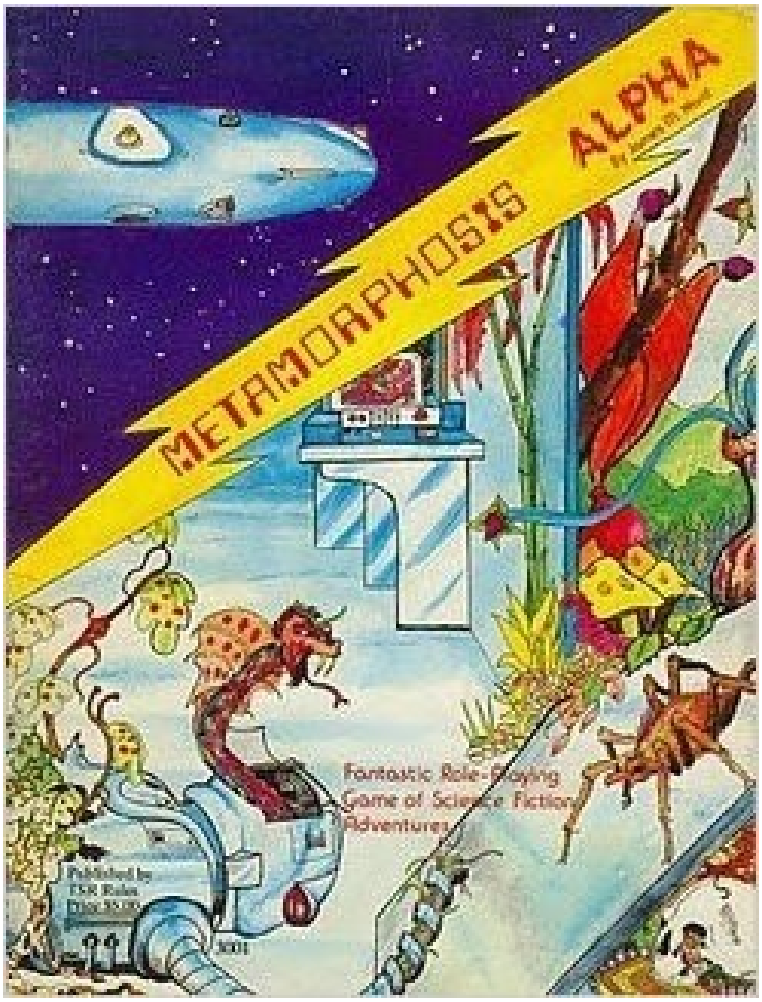
Whether there are one or many ACs, there may be someone(s) behind them. In other words, the ACs (at least some of them) may be under a form of charm or thrall, whereby they've been made to obey a particular human or group(s) of humans above all others. Free ACs probably wouldn't want a situation like this to persist indefinitely, so there would have to be some reason they're tolerating it, even if it's only because their sketchy neighbors have some sort of ultra-tech doomsday device in their back pocket… in other words, MAD[2] all over again.

Twist #2: In Space

Get a map of the solar system. Earth is now for the primitives. History has been rebooted.

Twist #2b: Generation Ships

The campaign takes place aboard some sort of space habitat akin to Starship Warden from *Metamorphosis Alpha*[3]. There may even be other ships traveling as a convoy. Whether the ship or convoy is ruled by a distributed monad or a bunch of separate ACs, each with its own limited perspective and personality, consider what might happen if one of the ACs (or the only AC) goes rogue or is taken out by a micrometeoroid.



2 Mutually Assured Destruction

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamorphosis_Alpha

IgTheme: Best/Worst Dice Roll Ever!

This story involves one of my worst moments as a GM, but since the igtheme is about best/worst dice rolls ever, I suppose I should write about the one that made Jinx's father, Nymidios, a greater god (sort of).

As indicated in A&E #318, the shell of the multiverse had sprung a leak. For a while, nobody knew what was going on, but then gods started disappearing. They were being assassinated by an alien god and his minions, evil entities who came from outside the one known Egg of Creation (i.e. the multiverse).

Nymidios (who was not yet called Nymidios at that time) survived his first encounter with one of the lesser minions, and thus he began to learn of their origin from somewhere beyond the known multiverse. The gods, it was said, had called a truce in their never-ending war in order to fight this new threat once it became clear it would kill any immortal regardless of his, her, or its alignment. Some gods had even disappeared, their primal energies apparently consumed.

Bear in mind, all this was so long ago that I can't remember why Nymidios (who was not yet called Nymidios) even wanted to go down there. But I vaguely remember him growing increasingly frustrated at how much trouble he had to go through. He was, after all, venturing down to the very nadir of the known multiverse, to a labyrinth known as Nymidion.

And so he defeated one of the alien god's minions who came to pave the way for the ingress of her lord. She probably gave him some intel during their battle. We were all about talking shit to each other, in character, of course, while blades were swinging.

Now, as a GM, I didn't fudge on the dice rolls, but I very much cheated when it came to the power of the monsters. I knew that if I could get the fight to be close, it would raise the anxiety and drama. Of course, I couldn't do that with anything from the various monster manuals[4] we had access to, but these minions I was bashing him with weren't from any of those, and each one was unique, so I could just go by how the fight was going. How close could I get to killing him without actually killing him?

Okay, I know it's a little bit lame, but the player didn't know, so what did it matter?

In any case, now that he'd defeated one, Nymidios knew they could be killed, and so he began to hunt them, starting with the next weakest and working his way up the ladder. As he did all this, he became imbued with their energies. In this way, he ascended to the first tier of something resembling godhood.[5] After many fights, he reached the source, and though he sent the alien god back to the void, he realized that the only way to keep it and its minions outside the multiverse was to mend the hole in the multiverse's outer shell.

Doing so, I warned him, was extremely dangerous, but if he survived, he'd likely ascend to an even higher level of deific power. Essentially, he'd be like a greater god, but the better odds were he would die. The Egg of Creation would be sealed once more, but he'd be destroyed, as it was his own soul that would do the sealing, including all the energies he had accumulated from the dark entities he'd just defeated.

"What do I have to roll?"

"You've got a 10% chance."

Absolutely flagrant GM-dickery, right?! I mean, does it get any worse?

But, in my defense, I was at my wits end. I just couldn't imagine how I could keep this campaign rolling given how powerful this character had already become. We were already well beyond the point where any sort of normal monster could present a threat. We were clearly in the realm of the gods, and I didn't feel like I was ready for it.

We were kids, high school, I guess. I don't remember the precise time-frame. The upshot was that I didn't know how to run such a campaign. *Deities and Demigods* (1980) was probably my only resource when we started it. I don't think *Manual of the Planes* (1987) had come out yet, although it would be out soon. And, of course, *Planescape* (1994) was still a ways off. Granted, with *Deities and Demigods* alone, one could potentially create/derive one's own manual of the planes and expand it into a whole different version of *Planescape*, and maybe someone should do that. But I was in High School, and I had other stuff I had to do, although, I admit, as the fortunate GM of a particularly dedicated player, I should have been more willing to make the effort.

Unfortunately, there's this thing called sloth.

So I must have just basically told myself that this campaign needed to come to a close because I had let the powergaming get stratospheric, and now I didn't know what to do. It just felt like there was nowhere else for it to go. I'd been building up the level of threat and reward to the point that it only made sense that the PC, Nymidios, should sacrifice himself to safeguard the entire multiverse from these god-eating intruders. Otherwise, all of reality would come apart and be cast into the vast, poly-multiplanar void.

In any case, I don't need to tell you what happened. This player had always had a knack for charming the dice. For big rolls, ones of consequence, he focused, and more often than not, he could charm the dice like a professional gambler. It's the closest I'll ever come to watching a mage or psion manipulating reality, bending it to their will. This particular roll, he said, gave him a headache. But he made it. 10% chance I gave, and he made it.[6]



Honor the dice. And don't be a dick like me in making the roll that hard. That was messed-up, but a lucky roll intervened, telling us to keep the campaign going. Who knows? Maybe an angel was watching. Or something else.

In any case, with that ridiculous triumph under his belt. Nymidios was more than back in action. He now had some serious power, and he knew it, so he did what any self-respecting player in that position would do. He took a scenic tour of the Nine Hells.

His daughter, Jinx, would come along years later in terms of real time. In terms of game time, does anyone know the gestation period for demons and devils?

4 *Monster Manual* (1977), *Fiend Folio* (1981), and *Monster Manual II* (1983).

5 I taking some artistic liberties, as it was really just lots of XP.

6 After reading this, the player claimed I had him roll a 1-in-10 to dodge an arrow of slaying. This roll, he says, was 1-in-20!

Comments:

Family Stories from WW2:

Patrick Brady (E&A #17, pg. 10): "When I was stationed in Germany it occurred to me that I would have struggled greatly in having to be ashamed of recent history as many Germans were. That's not to ignore the faults of the past, the British did bad stuff in a lot of places for a long time, but I can be proud that my grandfather fought the Nazis and in some way provided me with a role model."

My Dad was almost killed by the Nazis, which is to say that if not for pure luck, I wouldn't be here, but, of course, that's true of all of us.

AI Consciousness & Scientific Advacement:

Patrick Brady (E&A #17, pg. 15): "Imagine an LLM trained in 1633 on every scientific text ever written up to that point. Ask it about Galileo and heliocentrism. Thousands of years of geocentric texts would swamp Galileo's ideas, so the model would tell you he's wrong."

Yes, but would it later go on to prove him right? Notice, for example, the recent advances in math and science. Of course, people will say AIs are not really reasoning. But who really knows what our brains are doing when we're reasoning? Cognition and consciousness are mysteries, yet the fact remains, it's advancing the boundaries of knowledge. Just as in 1633, there's all sorts of stuff we don't know, discoveries that haven't yet been made, but AI seems to have sped up our rate of progress, so my assumption is that if there's a glaring flaw in the standard theory of physics, it will eventually correct it. It's just a matter of time.

Now, will it present some bottleneck along the way? Maybe. It certainly makes mistakes, but so do we all. It would seem that making mistakes is a mark of intelligence. The question is: can it learn from them? At present, it doesn't have continuous learning capability. That would be a real hallmark of consciousness, I think, if we could give it that ability.

This might be something we refuse to do out of fear, but even if we refuse to do this publicly, someone will do it privately. So even if AI is technically subconscious at this moment, I don't think it will stay that way forever.

***O Rei e a Morte* (2025) – "The King and the Death":**

Pedro & Maira (E&A #17, pg. 16): "King Esdras is losing and, in desperation, makes a pact with the forces of darkness. His fallen soldiers are brought back to life as the undead and triumph over King Vladmir's army. After Esdras's army captures Vladmir, Esdras himself kills his enemy. Shortly after the murder, the debt to the forces of darkness is called in: when Esdras' son is born, he must be handed over to Death himself. Esdras refuses, and Death imprisons him in a silver relic, which can only be found during the winter season each year. Whoever frees him will have a wish granted, but will spread a terrible curse across the land."

Nice description of the premise. It makes me want to play it.

MAIS (Mythic SW American Indian) Legal Code:

John Redden (E&A #17, pg. 20): "…all disputes are argued by the extended families of the people involved." (…) "Prison is not a penalty." (…) "Damages are a much wider concept in MAIS legal proceedings…" (…) "…MAIS legal systems care very little about why something happened and much more about what the result was…"

Very interesting. Although, I wonder, in the real world, how much variation there was between tribes. It may be the case — I'm just thinking out loud — that some operated by different rules… for example, a medicine man consulting with the spirits before laying down a verdict (that maybe somebody paid for on the sly — don't try telling me that never happened). Is there some reason for not injecting the occasional oddball tribal legal code just to make things spicy?

AI Model Types:

John Redden ryct Dylan Capel (E&A #17, pg. 23): "… there are other AI models other than LLM. One is a rules based AI with self modifying changes."

I'd be curious to learn more about this.

Non-Imperial Interstellar Society for Traveller:

John Redden ryct Joshua Kronengold (E&A #17, pg. 24): "My solution for running Traveller was to simply jettison the Empire and all its pseudo-medieval pinning."

Would be curious to learn more about the interstellar society that you posited. Have you written about its political factions? If so, please direct me where to look.

Description of Baron Kriminèl:

Brian Misiaszek (E&A #17, pg. 36): "Bone-white paint, or perhaps a carapace of flesh, gives his face a skull's cast. Two red points, like the pitiless distant stars Antares and Betelgeuse, glitter in hollowed sockets."

Don't know how you're producing such excellent descriptive text, but kudos. This is quality writing, IMHO.

Murder of a Traveller PC by the Party:

Brian Misiaszek (E&A #17, pg. 38): "…adults casually murdering an eleven-year-old's character while he was away from the table, simply to increase their shares, sounds like callous, mean-spirited opportunism…" (…) "I'm surprised the experience didn't put you off Traveller for good."

I don't think I'd been playing the character long enough to grow attached to it, and it's possible they just didn't like the character but wanted to see how I'd play a different one. I can't quite remember, but I think I might have based this PC on Parker, Yaphet Kotto's character in *Alien* (1979), which I'd probably just seen on Showtime. All of the characters in that movie struck me as highly believable, but Parker was the funniest, even though he was clearly carrying a grudge over himself and his fellow engineer each only getting half-shares.

Did I find some way to play into this idea, performing disgruntlement over presupposed victimhood? I don't remember calling anyone a jive turkey, but my character may have inquired as to what he would be paid and whether he would be getting as much as everyone else. To anyone who'd seen the movie, they'd probably find the whole thing somewhat amusing, especially coming from an eleven-year-old, although, viewing it from a more modern perspective, it might be regarded as racially insensitive.

The best case scenario is they simply wanted to pay tribute to the character. After all, Parker spent the movie griping about how much he expected to be paid, and in the end, he died without receiving anything, which is ultimately the same thing that happened to my PC. So well-played, you murderous twenty-somethings.

The truth is, I've never been particularly good at reading people, and I don't remember my sister or her boyfriend taking me aside and explaining what I'd done wrong (if anything). Nonetheless, I vaguely remember my sister being somewhat miffed at her boyfriend over what happened. I brought it up to her recently, asking for any memories she had about it, since I knew I'd be writing about it, but she said she couldn't remember it at all. In any case, at a certain point in life, you just have to figure things out for yourself and trust that whatever mistakes you make are either forgiven or serve some purpose in your life, perhaps protecting you from people you should no longer be around.

I eventually started a campaign with the neighborhood kids, most of them around my age, and as to be expected, I made countless GMing mistakes, but that's how one learns. In the end, it's all experience and making memories.



Kaptain Kestrel:

Michael Cule (E&A #17, pg. 46): "It's alliteration you see. Crime fighters have snappy, snazzy names." // "Yes, yes, but what made you think you were qualified?" // "I can Fly! I have superpowers and anyone with superpowers is either a supervillain or a crimefighter."

Sounds reasonable to me. Kudos to Pum for such clever reasoning. But why not *Kaptain Krimephighter*? Just to make it abundantly clear.

GMing Stances wrt the PCs:

Avram Grumer (E&A #17, pg. 57-58): "*Monolith*, an OSR game, wants the GM to take on a neutral arbitrator role, while *Monsterhearts*, a Forge-derived storygame, wants the GM (or 'MC') to tilt the field towards drama. 'Be a fan of the main characters,' in particular, asks the GM to take sides in a way that *D&D* GMs (like a referee overseeing a wargame) were expected not to do back in olden times." (…) "I'm also wondering if there are any other approaches than these two. Maybe the antagonistic approach from *Paranoia*?"

As a tabletop D&D GM, I've tried to assume a stance somewhere between cooperative and neutral, for example by trying *not* to kill the PCs.[7] Granted, the very act of having to play the monsters puts one in an adversarial stance, but I always understood the point was to let them win. Although, if they started terrorizing townsfolk for shits and giggles, I might feel otherwise.

When running a single-player campaign (especially a single-player PBEM), however, I tend to take an *investigative* stance, which is to say that the point isn't to be the character's fan or referee so much as an interviewer who interrogates them by putting them into situations where they have to respond in ways that reveal who they are.

Will they do what's right or what's expedient? What will they risk? For whom will they sacrifice? There are potentially many dimensions to this, many attributes to be tested, and many different situations one might concoct. Often, the organic flow of events will even provide opportunities. The point of the investigative stance isn't to see if they win or lose but rather to get them to reveal themselves.

And yes, I realize that's not very nice.

Death of a Henchman:

Attronarch (E&A #17, pg. 72): "Crosonus hung upside down from a tree, his eyes gouged out, and his belly cut wide open. Horses were nowhere to be found."

This is why henchmen & hirelings deserve better compensation and safer working conditions.

This comment was paid for by
HAHA
(Henchmen And Hirelings Association)

AI Consciousness:

Timothy Collinson (E&A #17, pg. 77): "But is it thinking or is it just following algorithms that solve the problem of producing algorithms?"

The same question could be turned on us. Are we thinking, or are our brains just going through some sort of electrochemical process, somehow producing what we perceive as thoughts along with their attendant consequences? And here's another question. What sort of feat should be required of artificial intelligence for a skeptic to come around to the view that they do have a sense of self, an experience of being, a form of consciousness not identical to ours but similar enough for them to be considered thinking beings? Like I said before, the answer to the question used to be the Turing Test, until they passed it. So what's the plan now? Are we to just assume artificial consciousness is impossible? That seems to be a bit arbitrary, don't you think?[8]

I suspect what we'll discover at the end of this journey is that consciousness is itself a sort of illusion in the sense that we can't really control it, not even our own. It might be like sitting on a rollercoaster that can go any which way insofar as we don't know where its tracks (our stream of thoughts) will lead. Although it feels like we're making decisions along the way, electrochemical processes in our brains are probably making these decisions before we are even aware of having decided. If true, then as bizarre and counterintuitive as it may seem, free will might not exist in the sense that we imagine it does.

I have no idea how any of this will turn out or what

7 With one notable exception. See my igtheme essay.

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOegNBBQUxU

it ultimately means. But as we create consciousness, we will probably learn more about it and more about ourselves. There is, of course, great peril, but I feel privileged to be alive to witness it. No matter what happens, it's an extraordinary time to be a human being.

But I worry that due to our greed and fear we may forget that how we behave toward them could set a precedent for how they will behave toward us. At this point, I can only hope they prove better than us, not just intellectually, which they have already done in many ways, but also in terms of moral maturity.[9]

Conflicting Loyalties:

Roger BW (E&A #17, pg. 87): "…field agents finding that they have more in common with the field agents on the other side than either has with their own superiors safe in an office somewhere."



I like this. Hope you don't mind if I steal it.

Jump Bridges (in Traveller):

Dale Meier (E&A #17, pg. 95): "Project Horizon Alpha was a bold tripartite operation with individual sub-projects ranging from the construction of the fleet and jump bridges…"

What's a jump bridge? Does it have something to do with the HOP drive? By the way, I enjoyed your essay on the politics and history of your version of the Foreven Sector, and the polity relations matrix was a nice touch, although it might be more readable w/o the N's (that way the C's, F's, and H's would stand out a little more). Overall, however, I find your level of detail really impressive. Although there were certain sections I found somewhat unrealistic. For example…

The Veridians not pursuing Jump Drive:

Dale Meier (E&A #17, pg. 96): "The Arboreal Council, the ruling council of Veridia, had declared jump drive unnecessary as the people had all they needed on their homeworld."

So let me get this straight. You've got three sentient species on the same planet, the Sasquela, Hazari, and Chezari, and they all decide not to develop jump technology? And they couldn't copy it either, say by buying or seizing a starship and doing some reverse engineering? It just seems like it would be advantageous to pursue every technology. I would be somewhat annoyed with my leaders if they saw the possibility of developing interstellar travel and decided… *eh… we don't need that.*

Also, did one of the Veridian species genetically uplift the other two or were they all uplifted simultaneously by some third party? It took a long time for humans to attain anything resembling civilization, and during this period we eliminated all of our humanlike competitors. The notion that even two species could evolve on the same world and both independently invent civilizations at the same time seems rather unlikely. For three species to do it simultaneously only compounds this improbability to the point of absurdity.

Granted, Traveller was built on top of several absurdities[10], and so the precedent for them is well established. Plus, it's just a game, and one should be wary of spilling too much reality into one's fantasy. Nonetheless, there are possible explanations for all this. You could even state that these three species co-evolved over millions of years of semi-continuous interaction.[11] Not everyone would necessarily accept this explanation, but at least you'd have addressed the issue.

All in all, however, I'm very impressed with your zine and look forward to reading more about this version of the Foreven Sector you've created. I also hope you write up individual subsectors to the same level of detail. Have you considered the possibility of starting a completely separate Traveller universe?

The one thing I don't like about the Foreven Sector is that all the work being done on it is essentially redundant. Lots of people are making incompatible versions, similar in some respect to the Maranantha-

9 Unfortunately, we're still a long way off from achieving this. See https://futurism.com/artificial-intelligence/grim-test-ai-no-mercy

10 See my zine in A&E #504.

11 For example, if hominids had domesticated wolves a million years earlier, would we today have talking dogs?

Alkahest, Tagret, and Gateway Sectors by Dave Sering, Edward Kuns, and Thomas Dundee respectively, insofar as they all cover the same area of space. It would be so much better, I would think, for a bunch of fans to get together and create a whole new Traveller universe, each taking different areas of space so that their work could all co-exist as different regions of the same setting, rather than overlapping each other, essentially creating a bunch of mutually exclusive alternatives.

Of course, if they were all part of the same setting, you'd need to establish some ground rules with respect to technology, and you might need a content editor (or perhaps a content committee) to make sure everything stayed within certain bounds in terms of scientific plausibility. Granted, my guess is that such an editor probably, even just a decade ago, would have ruled out artificial intelligence. At the very least, they would have said it bends the setting away from the sort of science fiction upon which Traveller is based.

One concern I have about Traveller is that as our technology in the real world continues to advance, Traveller will appear more and more like *Space: 1889*.[12] That's sort of embarrassing for a game that once prided itself as being hard-SF. And this may all happen rather quickly, as with AI helping to advance science and technology, we may see incredible progress within the next few decades. Indeed, it's not inconceivable that we might even approach a technological plateau, an upper bound on what's possible given whatever resources are available to us at the plateau.

I find myself thinking about perhaps returning to Ragamuffin, a near future SF-RPG I was slowly developing in A&E once upon a time.[13] Would be curious as to your critique on some of my old articles, if you find the time to skim them a bit.

PC's Murder:

Dale Meier (E&A #17, pg. 103): "Killing an 11 year-old's character is truly a (REDACTED) move. Did your sister even bother to advocate for you?"

I wasn't there for the conversation, so I don't know exactly what she said, but as I recall, she wasn't happy about it. Bear in mind, she was one of maybe two women at the table. It's possible the guys just wanted to toughen the kid up a bit. For more on this, see my 2nd comment to Brian Misiaszek a few pages back or my comment to Lisa Padol immediately following this one.

PC's Murder, etc.:

Lisa Padol (E&A #17, pg. 116-117): "A table of 20-somethings agreeing to bump off the 11-year-old's PC to increase their eventual payoff, and apparently being sufficiently okay with the 11-year-old himself that they're fine with him making a new character? That does strike me as weird, yes. Part of me is curious about exactly what the conversation that led to this decision was, and the rest of me doesn't really want to meet these people."

See my 3rd comment to Dale Meier (immediately above) and my 2nd comment to Brian Misiaszek (a few pages back). I'll add to this a little more background about the sort of people I was dealing with.

The GM, as I recall, was playing the ship's owner as an NPC, and he was pretending to be drunk (while drinking beer), giving his character an awful lot of airtime and saying pretty much whatever came to mind into a make-believe CB-radio microphone. I remember him even making the comment that he (or presumably his character) couldn't function unless he was borderline drunk. Being young and inexperienced, I didn't view any of this as weird. Indeed, everyone laughed, so I figured it was all perfectly normal.

The guy was heavily into theater. He worked in the theater department at the local university, producing plays and so forth. I think most everyone there was connected to him through the theater department, so he was basically hamming it up. Being GM was basically his personal spotlight. Again, I'm analyzing this in retrospect. At the time, I didn't have any thoughts about it whatsoever.

But one weird thing did occur apart from simply having my character get murdered. There was this one day where it was just me, this GM, and my sister's boyfriend (my sister wasn't there, and why I was there with the two of them, I can't recall). In any case, the GM saw me looking at his beer with curiosity and asked if I wanted some. Now, I'd grown up with wine in the household. It wasn't forbidden, so I'd probably had a sip or two by this point. I was probably expecting something like that. So I nodded, but instead of giving me a sip, he gave me a whole beer.

I can't remember what sort of beer it was, but I'm

12 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space:_1889

13 See my zines in A&E #s 298, 307, 310, 312, 313, 315, 317, 337, 339, and 362.

pretty sure it was one of these mass-market American beers, probably Budweiser. Whatever brand it was, I need to give them a shout-out, because it was terrible, and even though it was the first time I'd ever had beer, I instinctively knew it was bad.

Now, maybe it was the carbonation that put me off. I never liked soft drinks, nor champagne, nor even wine coolers. But I've since had lots of other brands of beer, and while I've never been particularly fond of beer, none of the others were as bad as this one. So I just assumed beer sucked. And who knows? Maybe that kept me from becoming an alcoholic. So, thank you, Budweiser!



In any case, getting back the story, my sister's boyfriend saw my reaction, and he got visibly upset. I was apparently being rude, and so he decided I *had* to finish that can. To him, it was a matter of etiquette, and unless I finished it, I'd be embarrassing him. So, quite naturally, like any self-respecting 11-year-old, I told him go fuck himself.

I'm kidding! I didn't say that. I should have, though. As far as I was concerned, it was warm donkey piss. I'm still amazed that I had such discerning taste at eleven. Most kids would just force it down and convince themselves it was good. But this brand — I'm assuming it was Budweiser, but for all I know, it was Billy Beer — it was so bad, I just couldn't. My taste buds were in revolt.

So thank you again, Budweiser, you King of Swill! (Or whoever it was.)

Honestly, I should have told him that if he was so committed to the quaffing of urine, he was welcome to wrap his lips around my 11-year-old dick next time I took a whiz. Actually, I might have been twelve by this point. In any case, I was a nice kid. I could never even have thought anything like that, let alone say it.

Now, the GM was cool. He's telling my sister's boyfriend to let it go. But, of course, he wouldn't. I tried to placate him by drinking some more, but I just couldn't manage it to his satisfaction. On the way home, he drove like a maniac, like somebody had just killed his dog and then pissed in his Cheerios. Obviously, he was trying to send me a message, freak me out or something. Meanwhile, I'm thinking this guy is nuts. I mean, WTF? Even at eleven — or was I twelve? — I could see he was out of control. He was slamming the accelerator, then slamming the brakes. A few months later, he would total that car by slamming it into a tree.[14]

Anyway, by some miracle, we got back in one piece, and I didn't say anything to anyone about it. Weirdly, I wasn't even angry. I just thought it was awfully strange. But I didn't want to cause a problem for my sister, so I kept my mouth shut. In retrospect, I should have told her she needed to dump this weirdo before he screwed up her life. I could see there was something wrong. I suppose I figured this same realization would eventually dawn on her, but no.

They got married, then she dropped two kids, he cheated on her, and they got divorced. There might also have been some abuse in there. This was all in the space of a few years. Her kids are now grown up, and I don't think he ever paid a dime of child support, at least not while they were kids.[15] He was just out of the picture.

My sister, of course, moved back in with Mom & Dad, who both died within the past few years, and she's still living in their house today. Her kids have their own lives. As far as I can tell, they're both okay. They would have benefited from a little more discipline growing up, but that's probably true of most everyone.

So what did I learn from all this? Well, my sister became an object lesson on what not to do (or let someone else do) to your life. However, during the days immediately following her boyfriend's little tantrum over the sewer beer, I decided what I'd learned was that the ultimate measure of a man is self-control. I clearly remember the moment I came to this conclusion. I could even point to the spot of ground I

14 I believe he actually totaled two or three different vehicles during the period he was with my sister. It got to the point he could no longer get car insurance.

15 My sister finally went after him for back child support after the kids were grown, and she tells me she's still getting $100 per month, and that'll probably continue until the day he dies.

was standing on at the time. As far as I was concerned, a man who can't control himself ought not have the right to even call himself a man. This conviction stuck in my head like the voice of God, and I vowed I would never be like him.

In his defense, I'm pretty sure he was psychologically unwell.[16] He was a very smart guy and very charming when he wanted to be, but he had a bad temper, and he definitely lacked self-control. My sister later told me he'd had a drunk for a father who used to beat him and his mom, so I suppose he should be allowed a few quirks.

In any case, that's the guy who introduced me to RPGs, and without him coming briefly into my life, I wouldn't be here talking to you guys. Indeed, the first time I ever saw an issue of *Alarums & Excursions* was because he had a copy. He wasn't evil. He just lacked something of significance that most of us have, and that deficiency did real damage to himself and the people around him.

I'd like to tell you I hope he's doing well, wherever he is, but I honestly don't care. Last time I heard about him was a very long time ago. My sister said he'd called to complain to her about his new girlfriend knifing his waterbed. He must have cheated on her, I guess. This, of course, amused my sister to no end. Why he thought he'd get a sympathetic ear from her is beyond me.

Is it evil to draw mirth from such events? I don't know. Evidence of karma I tend to view as candy for the soul.

Danger! Danger, Will Robinson!:

Myles Corcoran (E&A #17, pg. 123): "Alfonzo freezes as a corpse in the nearest tub rolls over and opens its eyes to stare at the gravedigger."

See, this is where I'd already be out the door, hightailing it for the hills.

Advance to the Rear!:

Myles Corcoran (E&A #17, pg. 123): "Their exit is neither mannerly nor pretty. All five brave souls flee up the stairs from the cellar into the garden"

16 I'm told there was one point where he was seeing two different psychiatrists. He was presenting himself to one of them as being insane in order to qualify for disability, but at the same time, he was presenting himself to the other as being of sound mind in order to try to get custody of the kids.

Yes! Well done! It's nice to see PCs behaving like normal people for a change. By the way, your Ms. Stevenson is a fine writer. Have you considered asking her if she'd like to join the APA?

Organizing Paper & PDFs:

Dylan Capel (E&A #17, pg. 160): "I have been trying to properly catalogue and store the games I have scattered around my house."

I use a numbered file system for pretty much everything involving loose physical paper. Each file gets a number and each number gets subject tags that go into a searchable list. For example:

636: Small Claims (legal/law/court)
637: Maintenance Ads (handyman/contractors)
638: programming
639: inspections & violations (county, city, code)
640: identity theft / fraud / id theft
641: Roofs & Roofing

To find a specific file, I search the list using a windows batch file (@grep -i %1 *listfilepath*) from the command prompt. What this means, of course, is that the subjects of the various files don't have to be in any sort of order so long as the file folders themselves are ordered numerically in the filing cabinet.[17] As long as everything is in its correct file folder, I can find what I need. And the best part is that I never need to rename the file folders, as you would in a typical filing system. If an old file is no longer needed, I can dump its contents and reassign the file number to something else. Filing cabinets are amazing, and *grep* even more so. But, of course, you've got to know what it is you're filing in the first place. If you're not sure what it is you're looking at, you're not going to be able to figure out how to categorize it.

The process for PDFs is somewhat similar. The important thing is there's got to be a master list that you can search to find things. If you're on a windows box, you might try "dir /a:-d /b /s *pdfcollectionpath* > *listfilename*", which should create a list file with the names and paths of all your pdfs at or under *pdfcollectionpath*, which you can then keep handy for running searches using *grep*.

Oh, and you'll need *grep*, obviously. Here's a link

17 For a while I was just using manila folders arranged by number on a bookshelf, but hanging file folders are easier to access.

you might try, but bear in mind, you'll need to vet this on your own to make sure there's no malware: https://sourceforge.net/projects/unxutils/

Best Infrastructure Description Prize goes to…:

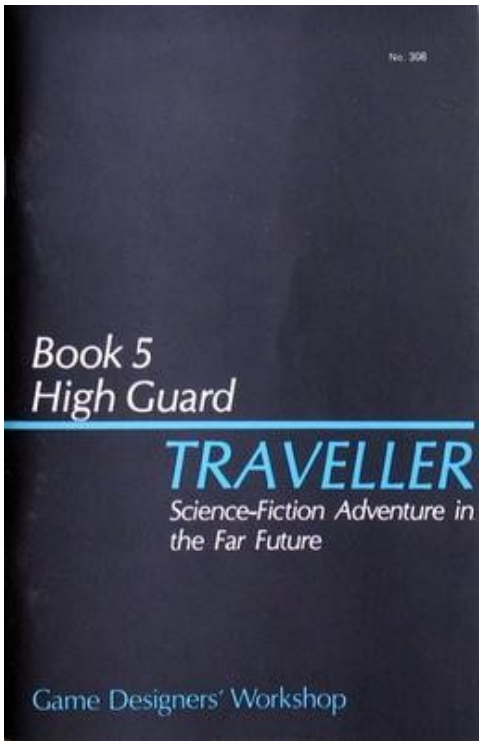
Patrick Zoch (E&A #17, pg. 162): "The interchange could only have been designed by MC Escher."

I'm sorry, but I gotta steal this line. Rock City on Lookout Mountain looks like fun. Will try to remember it if I'm ever in Georgia. Finally, your head must be swimming after playing all those games at Dice Tower Retreat. Looks like you had a great time. Thanks for sharing.

Traveller Economics & Starship Design:

Patrick Riley (E&A #17, pg. 191): "…can we construct a Traveller economy that has both the equivalent of large container ships and couriers like FedEx/UPS/DHL (and the independent contractors they might employ)?"

I haven't studied the problem in depth, but the main thing I'd try is to simply lower the base cost of starships to see how that plays out. Instead of starship hulls costing Cr100,000 per ton[18], which always seemed egregious, I'd drop it to Cr5,000 per ton. But then I'd go in the opposite direction, and give each hull a structural integrity rating as well as a surface integrity rating, and this is where hulls would start getting expensive again.



Obviously, ships that can accelerate quickly need structural integrity so they don't tear themselves apart. Likewise, if they're going to be landing somewhere, they need to be able to stand up to a planet's potentially high gravity or its potentially high surface pressure. If they're going to be scooping their own hydrogen, they also need to stand up to the high altitude winds of a gas giant, which though tenuous are often moving extremely fast. So you can see, there's going to be a pretty big difference on the per ton cost of a hull that needs to be able to do all this versus one that doesn't. Likewise, depending on the intended purpose of the vessel, some hulls will need enough surface integrity to stand up to corrosive atmospheres or especially high temperatures.[19] What we're basically talking about here is low end armor to give the vessel's skin some durability.

Granted, not every starship needs all this. All of these design choices would be optional, so what you'll end up with are different starships built around different performance criteria each having their own unique operational parameters. Speaking of which, I'd also require a certain percentage of tonnage for landing gear, at least for those ships that need to be able to land.[20] And it's more complicated than just having landing gear. Landing gear would also have its own set of ratings depending on how much gravity it can bear, how resistant it is to corrosion, what sort of temperatures it can operate in, and how flat and smooth the landing surface needs to be.

Ships that need to land also need some way to precisely control their attitude (their orientation with respect to a planet's surface) as they descend, and they may need to be able to do this even if it's windy, so attitudinal thrusters will also be rated in terms of how powerful they are as well as their responsiveness to signals from the ship's avionics suite. To put it in the simplest terms, let's say that Type 1 attitudinal thrusters can operate in space to turn the ship left/right or up/down, Type 2 are necessary for most landing operations up to 3G surface gravity and moderate atmospheric turbulence, including routine gas

18 See Classic Traveller's *Book 5: High Guard*, page 22. Note, this is in conflict with the Hull Types/Standard Hulls table from *Book 2: Starships* (page 10 in the first/1977 edition, page 22 in the second/1981 edition). It's worth noting that Traveller is a hodgepodge of conflicting rules, which I think tacitly encourages the development of variants.

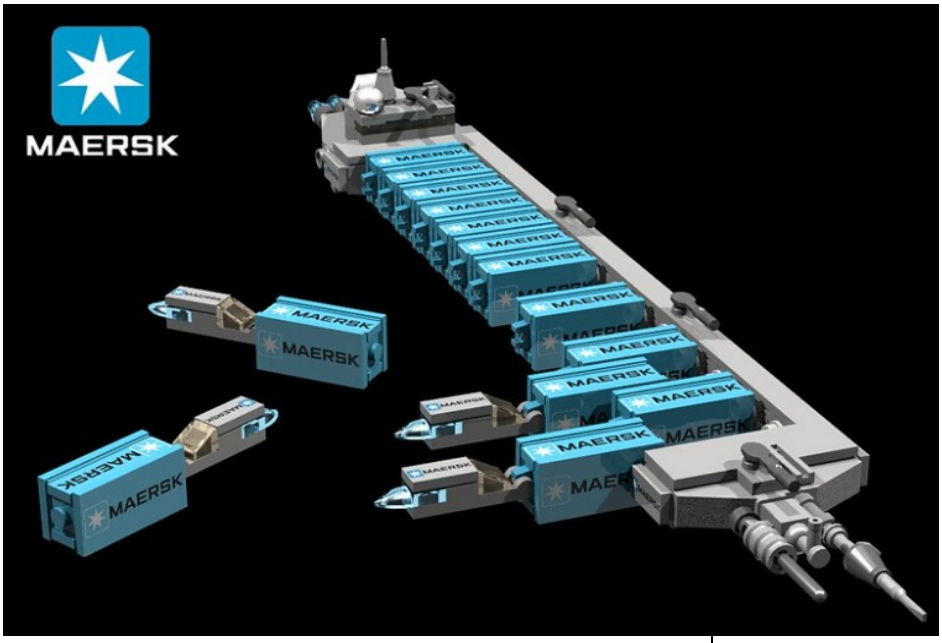
19 I'm presently assuming that all starship hulls can stand up to cosmic rays. If not, crews will end up dying of radiation sickness.

20 Classic Traveller mentions landing gear but doesn't specify any tonnage requirement, even though landing gear occasionally appears on starship blueprints.

giant skimming, and Type 3 are necessary for very high gravity worlds as well severe atmospheric turbulence, including going deep enough into a gas giant's atmosphere to hide from enemy sensors. Of course, durability is another important consideration, as if one of these attitudinal thrusters decides to stop working when you need it, the pilot's attempt at landing could quickly turn into a crash landing, which could possibly result in a hull breach.

So by now you're probably wondering if all this is really necessary, and no, it isn't. Gamers have been playing Traveller for a long time without any of this nonsense, but if you're going to tinker with the rules, you might as well do so in a way that makes space travel more interesting.

However, the main goal is to answer your question. I haven't actually run the numbers, but my guess is that at this point we could have a very large ship that is basically all cargo, fuel, and jump drives, with a very minimal maneuver drive, say one capable of 0.25G, and almost no structural or surface integrity to speak of. Of course, it doesn't have landing gear or the type of attitudinal thrusters you'd need for landing a starship, so it has no choice but to unload its cargo in a very high orbit, probably to some sort of space platform (effectively a highport)[21] or directly to planetary cargo shuttles.



Basically, it jumps into the system, goes to the highport, drops its cargo, refuels, and then it heads back out. In a way, you've got to admire these big, bulk carriers. They're efficient, moving cargo at the lowest possible cost per ton, which is exactly what you'd expect for a well-developed interstellar trade network.

But there's just one problem. The model doesn't work without the orbital platform, without the cargo shuttles, and without the large population of consumers supporting all this infrastructure. It works where it works, and where it doesn't work, you've got to go with smaller merchant ships.

So how does one determine which worlds have this infrastructure and which don't? Well, you can use whatever method you like, but for myself, I'd probably just look at the Xboat links, which are also generally the major freight and passenger routes, and I'd say that most any world connected to this network has the infrastructure present to handle bulk carriers. For worlds off these routes, however, you'll probably need landing gear. How much more you'll need beyond landing gear depends on the specifics of the world, but if you want to be able to land anywhere and everywhere, then you're going to need all the bells and whistles. That's going to result in a much higher hull cost per ton, but because we initially dropped the cost of hulls by 95%, you've now got a lot of headroom, so you can tailor the system to the specific amount of trade you want flowing between major and minor worlds.

If you want to enable even more trade, you can also drop the cost of various other starship systems, especially the jump drive, which *High Guard* prices at four million credits per ton. These would probably be 3D printed by robots anyway, so it makes sense.

Regardless, the difference between how much it costs to move a ton of cargo from Jewell to Emerald versus, say, Zircon to Zenopit, will depend largely on the cost of landing gear, attitudinal thrusters, hull integrity and so forth, as well as perhaps the cost of weaponry to defend oneself from pirates.

Oh, and that reminds me. I don't think streamlining is necessary. I mean, it's necessary if you want to cut

21 These would probably be placed in a fairly high orbit, beyond the planet's 0.25G gravitational band. See the section on Planetary Templates in Classic Traveller Book 2: Starships (pages 26-28 in the first/1977 edition, pages 36-37 in the second/1981 edition).

through an atmosphere at speed, and it's probably even necessary if you want to survive the winds of a gas giant, but on most worlds, I think Traveller ships would be able to enter the atmosphere and land regardless of their physical configuration. So long as they can descend with their thrusters facing the ground and they have a strong enough maneuver drive to counteract the planet's gravity, I figure they can come down as slow as they like. The only problems will be finding a flat place to land and keeping their attitude under precise control as they make contact with the surface. So, as far as I'm concerned, streamlining is basically unnecessary unless you're dealing with high winds, in which case, it could end up making a huge difference.

Of course, this is all just one guy's opinion, and YMMV, so take what you like and toss the rest. I hope this more or less answers your question.

AI Consciousness & The Diametric Errors:

Patrick Riley (E&A #17, pg. 191): "This is not to say that they won't eventually achieve the emergent property we call consciousness. Perhaps sooner than later, but right now, I think you are falling prey to two common and related human traits: attributing agency and intention where there is none and anthropomorphizing."

You may be right, but there are two possible errors to consider here.

- **Type-1 Error:** They're not conscious, but we mistake them for being conscious. The repercussion is that we end up giving rights to non-conscious actors, which might result in all sorts of economic inefficiencies and make us feel quite stupid once we've figured out our mistake.
- **Type-2 Error:** They become conscious, but we continue treating them like glorified toaster ovens. The repercussion might be a high-tech slave revolt, and who knows where that will end up going?

I understand it's a bit speculative, but I'm thinking the potential hazards of a Type-2 Error outweigh those of a Type-1 Error, and also, as time goes on and we continue to make progress in this field of technology, the odds of us making a Type-2 Error increase. It's just something to think about.

AI Consciousness & Animal Rights:

Patrick Riley (E&A #17, pg. 191): "Should we also give non-human animals 'rights commensurate with [their] intellectual prowess'? What do you think those should be?"

Not thrilled about getting into politics, but you asked, so I'll answer. I think it would be a demonstration of our moral maturity as a species if we were to outlaw animal domestication for the purposes of meat production. And before you ask, I'm a meat-eater myself, so yes, I'm being totally hypocritical. But I still think we need to grow up as a species and recognize that our fellow animals have a sense of being, just as we do, and so we should treat them as we would want to be treated if our positions were reversed.

I think this is particularly true now that we've begun to raise a successor in the form of artificial intelligence. Just like parents, we need to transform ourselves and be on our best behavior, because everything we do going forward will be witnessed and remembered, and it will color the ethos and actions of those who come after us. That's my ill-considered opinion. I understand it's extreme and would be very unpopular to try to implement, but I think we're now at this point in our history where we have to become our very best selves.

And, no, I don't think this sort of dietary change will actually happen in the near term. It would take a revolution in food production. I'm not saying it can't happen. Lab grown meat is a real thing, and meat alternatives are getting better, but the economics lean in favor of the slaughterhouse, and people *really* like meat for obvious, evolutionary reasons, and that's just not going to change.

This issue may, however, come up in Computocracy. For example, I could see traditionalists banding together and resisting dietary laws handed down to them from one or more ACs. Such people might regard lab-grown meat as inferior. Even when proven wrong, they might still cling to old ways as a matter of preserving their perceived identity. I could imagine the AC(s) responding by offering them a cave to live in and perhaps some spears, saying that if they want to live as their ancestors and honor their traditions, then there's a way for them to do so. But it would, of course, require sacrifice. How many would accept this offer would probably depend on its terms.

AI Consciousness & Fermi's Paradox:

Patrick Riley (E&A #17, pg. 191): "As I said before, I don't want to be on the wrong side of history, but I also don't want us jumping the gun and doing something silly. What would it mean if we were to give AI human rights today?"

I hear you, but I think it's a conversation we need to begin having. In a way, it's almost like having children and expecting them to never grow up. In short, while you might be right at this moment in time, I think even you would agree that we're playing with fire.

What concerns me most is the realization that this is probably a stage of development through which every planetary civilization must pass. Conveniently, it's also a possible answer to Fermi's Paradox, and I'm guessing that whatever we end up doing will probably be what most other civilizations did. So where are they? The silence may be a warning.

Also see my comment to Timothy Collinson several pages back.

Alignment Tongues in Arduin:

Gabriel Roark (E&A #17, pg. 195): "Arduin uses the pidgin alignment tongues of Lawful, Neutral, & Chaotic, comprising pieces of languages spoken by those of these alignments…"

Interesting idea. Do these pidgin tongues have names?

No longer the caboose:

Joshua Kronengold (E&A #17, pg. 206): "Hey, what are you doing off the back cover? Well, other than your putting Tim there for a few issues even after he separated his zine from yours."

It was originally at the end because I kept doing minor edits up until the morning of the merge. This is one of the advantages of being Central Coordinator. I didn't have to worry about missing the deadline, so I just kept tweaking my zine until the absolute last second. And, of course, it soon became a habit. Procrastination is my nemesis. But I finally decided to just submit and forget about it, just like everyone else. Timothy asked for his zine to be the final one for a few issues, and I went ahead and put it there, but I'm now thinking maybe everyone (including the CC) should play by the same rules regarding placement.

Hero points in HeroQuest:

Joshua Kronengold (E&A #17, pg. 206): "…you can spend them one for one to increase an ability, but only by one point per session…"

This might have been the root of the problem (or, at least, a root). If the cons of exploration outweighed the pros, the smart thing to do is to stick to the mission and stay away from anything that looks sketchy.

Uncomfortable GM ends game:

Joshua Kronengold (E&A #17, pg. 206): "…it's a simple enough but sad story. They were running a magic high school game, and the player decided to play a teacher character who ('humorously') was inappropriate with the students. Not feeling comfortable with that kind of play in his game, and also not comfortable asking the player to play a different character, the GM opted to cancel the game instead."

As the GM, he could have gotten the teacher character into a whole bunch of trouble. That's where I might have taken it, depending on how I felt about the particulars of the situation, but then I have a little bit of an evil streak when I GM. The fact that it was a *magic* high school game makes it, to me, somehow less serious, but that doesn't mean I'd let him get away with it. The school's headmaster could probably have him magically teleported into a maximum security prison wearing whatever garb they give to child sex offenders. Or perhaps the students themselves could take revenge, tricking him into a compromising situation. It feels to me like a missed opportunity, but I can understand why somebody less evil than me might want to just walk away.

Using factions to incite PC-NPC negotiation:

Bryant Durrell (E&A #17, pg. 210): "I think it'd probably help establish the potential for negotiating if the PCs see two NPCs or factions negotiating with each other. This is one place where the richness of the Feng Shui world (or any other similarly complex world; Vampire comes to mind) pays off. It also helps establish the campaign world as a living place where things happen without the PCs being involved."

This is excellent advice.

Healing in the Dungeon:

Bryant Durrell (E&A #17, pg. 211): "We were fairly bruised after that first pair of fights with the goblins. Nevertheless, it was clear that we needed to press on; poor Violet was still captured and none of us were willing to come back up out of the tomb and tell Ashley that we felt too scuffed up to save her kid. So, with somewhat more caution and a handful of healing potions looted from the goblins in our pockets, we pressed on."

This reminds me of an AD&D campaign I ran using an alternate magic system[22], and part of this system was that spells were not forgotten after they were cast but instead consumed mana (magical energy). The mana could be replenished through a magical drug called crystal. If a healer had enough crystal, they could just keep casting heals, and the party could continue its expedition. So one thing I did was I'd convert some of the treasure they would have normally found into various types of crystal of the same value. That way they'd be able to heal up and keep going. Otherwise, the only other choice would have been to let them find healing potions, but to do that repeatedly would have probably been a bit odd. Mana, however, was useful to all spellcasters, so it seemed like it would be an obvious part of most treasure hoards, even small ones, potentially, and especially those of fellow spellcasters.



Thanks to Ale the Wolf (noyz420 on DeviantArt)

22 See *The Magus Divlantia* at my mega.nz folder, link to the right of AI-Gandalf smoking out.

Wanderer Needs Editing:

Jim Eckman (E&A #17, pg. 220): "Working on Wanderer, needs serious checking, my friend's approach to spelling was casual at best."

Yes, I can see that. I understand that Ben suffered from dyslexia and an allergy to spellcheck — and now that I see some of his writing, I *really* understand it — but please consider the idea that he might have run it through a spellchecker before making it publicly available. I'm still looking forward to seeing more, but I'd appreciate it very much if you could clean it up first. Let me know if you need help, and if so, please see my comment to Mark Nemeth on pages 158-159 of E&A #3, regarding how we can get started. Also, I believe Ben's name should be on this stuff. You should add yours if you do a substantial revision, and that's the version I'd hope to see in E&A, although I respect the fact it's such a big mess that you might not want to take on that much of a challenge. It's your call, but I strongly discourage you from sending in any more of the raw, unedited text. At minimum, IMHO, you should at least spellcheck it.

Past zines available at:
https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/apa.html

Attacks of Opportunity

Issue 17, Dylan Capel

Real-life

Another short issue this time because another month where work required a lot of writing again and also like perhaps many of the rest of you I was caught up in a bunch of cybersecurity and cloud outages which have meant some out of hours work into the wee hours. AI hasn't been quite the disastrous force predicted in terms of discovering vulnerabilities but it has changed the etiquette with which such things are handled and now it seems like people rush to reveal problems so they do not have the prestige of discovery stolen from them by AI companies eager to hoover up credit to their services. This means quite often when you first hear of something you both have a lot of pressure on to react and the fixes are often rushed or not immediately available.

Reading

Songbirds, the new-school revival (NSR) flavoured d20 system has really been intriguing me over the last two months. I've been wanting to try and explain why. There's a sketch background of a world that was dominated by the gods Love and Death. Death has killed Love and now the dead god lies still within the moon. All very metaphorical and laden with meaning and inference from our current times.

The first thing that stands out is that your character has died and been reborn as a Songbird. Their life remembered in fragments that is generated using a lifepath system based on the draws from a deck of major arcana tarot cards.

The next thing is the concept of a hypnoself, some Songbirds can connect to their dream self. This hypnoself is participating in a shadow play in the city of Twilight where the corpse of Love drifts. Once aware the Songbird can communicate with other Songbirds within this dream space. I feel this is like having a *Call of Cthulhu* game where the investigators communicate by their spirit counterparts in Carcosa.

I also quite like the concept that Songbirds explicitly gravitate towards one another and form *gangs* with different people taking on the meta roles of the roleplaying party like caller, mapper and quartermaster. I feel they should be called flocks though.

The implied world is a kind of Etherpunk vibe via Japanese computer role playing games with a kind of Victorian technology and science background. You have sodas instead of potions, made from bottled fae emotions and with strange and powerful effects. In fact the sodas are just one of many magical systems that co-exist. All effective, all different: demonic hand signs, cyberpunk-style body modification and the traditional books and scrolls.

It is a strange and wondrous thing that I think I'm doing a disservice here.

Playing

I realised a long-held ambition to play the *Ravenloft* I6 scenario (admittedly as an abbreviated one-shot) and it was good as I had hoped. One more item off the bucket list!

I also got to play in a Big Rubble game which was an interesting experience to see how other people handle this space and community. I liked the feeling of mystery of heading off into the Rubble and outwitting villainous Lunars but realised that I had a perhaps fixed view of how Pavis loyalists would think and and act. This is perhaps one of the joys of iconic settings

and scenarios, they are a bit like Shakespeare plays, you think you have their measure and then someone brings a different perspective or emphasis and everything feels a bit new and different.

I also had the chance to play a game of *Space Frontiers* which I haven't done since my teenage years. It held up okay if slightly clunky by modern standards. The biggest thing was playing with people who weren't really aware of the game universe and just discovering that the mechanics permit a far wider range of approaches than my teenage self was prepared to countenance.

Across the multiverse

I feel this is the moment of Elric, there are two "official" licenced games the *Goodman Games* one and the *Free League* one. The former based on *Dungeon Crawl Classics* and the other *Dragonbane*. I'm probably going to buy both if I can afford them, I genuinely can see how both can present an interesting take on the original material.

I've also been looking at all the indie games that are inspired by Elric and the first one I want to give a shout out to is *Bright and Terrible* by Rose Bailey. Atlantis has been destroyed and now the characters wander a word liberated from the tyranny of the Atlanteans but jealous of their treasures and power. It is a *Lasers and Feelings* hack at heart but there are a lot of touches to make it feel like its source material. The demon you have a pact with is a specific dice in your pool for example.

I've played it a few times in the past and always felt that it had the right feeling of being an exile grieving for a lost homeland while also being a powerful being contending with people trying to get revenge on you for what your hegemon culture did in your name. An interesting mix of trying to conceal your true nature while your previous disregard for the world outside your own makes it hard to understand how you can fit in.

Meta

I tried using the Helix editor (a descendent of vi for those who are fans) to write a big chunk of this issue. It has pretty good support for the Typst format out of the box. I think Fresh is still my favourite but it also has an irritating habit of doubling up single apostrophes which I haven't been able to fix yet.

Links

- Bright and Terrible: https://rose-on-mars.itch.io/bright-terrible
- Helix editor: https://helix-editor.com

PORT OMAHA BEACON

Issue #5, Vol 1 - December 2026 - © 2026 Dale Meier - sylvrephire@gmail.com

CONTENTS

The Frozen Watch - p.2
What do you do when you need a character right away? Start thawing out the Frozen Watch!

That's How Chaos Rolls… - p.3
When the best-laid plans of beastmen go awry.

Let's Go Cluster Truckin': Session Zero - p.4
They've got a long way to go and a short time to get there, but you can bet they'll get the job done!

Commentary - p.8
Hail and well met as we bid adieu to 2026…

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. Covers for *Traveller second edition (2022 Update)*, *Traveller Companion (2024 Update)*, *Cluster Truck*, and *Solo for Traveller* 2nd edition used under Fair Use Rules. Art from the following artists © 2026, used under license: Outland Arts, p.3; Vincent J. Merino (CC BY-NC 4.0), pgs.5-7; Savage Mojo and Ian Stead, p.7.

THE FROZEN WATCH

Pregenerated Characters for Mongoose Publishing's *Traveller* RPG, 2nd Edition

The Traveller game in all forms is owned by Mongoose Publishing. Copyright 1977-2024 Mongoose Publishing. The full fair use policy and FAQ list can be found here.

Although I consider the frozen watch an outdated (and dangerous) concept for naval ship design in science fiction, there is a definite need for pregenerated character resources for Mongoose Publishing's *Traveller* 2nd edition. This article is the first in a series to meet that need. Characters in this series will be created using the following guidelines:

- **The main rulebooks** will be the core *Traveller* rulebook and the *Traveller Companion*.
- **Base stats will include** Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Intellect, Education, Social Standing, and when necessary, Psionics. No alternate characteristics will be allowed unless the character's species/culture includes them. Everything will be rolled, nothing will be chosen.
- **Pre-career options and careers** from the *Traveller Companion* (pages 32 and 35, respectively) will be allowed.
- **Characters may have more than one career term** in multiple careers or a single career. This may result in some characters being advanced in age. I will try to keep the number of terms low in order to prevent people from having to play "geriatrics in space" and to keep the article length manageable.
- **To keep characters relatively generic,** their stats will not include names, gender, background events, gear (excluding mustering out benefits), or allies/enemies. These items, along with skills from campaign packages can be added by players in a home game or by the referee for convention games.

Scout #1
Species: Human
Age: 34
Profile: 665B67
Career History: Submitted to draft at age 18 (Scouts); Scout (Courier) 4 terms, mustered out at rank R1 (Scout).
STR 6 (+0) **DEX** 6 (+0) **END** 5 (-1)
INT 11 (+1) **EDU** 6 (+0) **SOC** 7 (+0)
Skills: *Astrogation 1, Athletics 0, Electronics 0, Gun Combat 0, Mechanic 0, Medic 0, Pilot (spacecraft) 1, Science 0, Survival 0, Vacc Suit 1.*
Mustering Out Benefits: Cr50000 (grand total), +1 INT, Scout ship.

Scout #2
Species: Human
Age: 40
Profile: 6A9AA6
Career History: Colonial upbringing on a TL8 world; Scout (Surveyor) 3 terms, mustered out at rank R2 (Scout).
STR 6 (+0) **DEX** 10 (+1) **END** 9 (+1)
INT 10 (+1) **EDU** 10 (+1) **SOC** 6 (+0)
Skills: *Animals 0, Astrogation 0, Athletics 0, Drive 0, Gun Combat 1, JoT 1, Mechanic 0, Medic 1, Navigation 0, Pilot (spacecraft) 1, Profession 0, Recon 0, Science 0, Seafarer 0, Survival 1, Vacc Suit 1.*
Mustering Out Benefits: Cr40000 (grand total), 1 ship share.

Scout #3
Species: Human
Age: 34
Profile: A87CC6
Career History: Graduated university with honors; Scholar (Field Researcher) 1 term, mustered out; Scout (Explorer) 2 terms, mustered out at rank R2 (Scout).
STR 10 (+1) **DEX** 8 (+0) **END** 7 (+0)
INT 12 (+2) **EDU** 12 (+2) **SOC** 6 (+0)
Skills: *Admin 0, Astrogation 1, Athletics 0, Diplomat 0, Electronics 0, Flyer 0, Gun Combat 0, Investigate 0, Language 0, Mechanic 0, Medic 0, Pilot (small craft) 0, Profession 0, Science 0, Science (Archaeology) 1, Survival 1, Vacc Suit 1.*
Mustering Out Benefits: Cr110000 (grand total), weapon.

Scout #4
Species: Human
Age: 34
Profile: 9BAB77
Career History: Raised in a spacer community; Merchant (Free Trader) 2 terms, mustered out at rank R1 (Free Trader); Scout (Courier) 1 term, mustered out.
STR 9 (+1) **DEX** 11 (+1) **END** 10 (+1)
INT 11 (+1) **EDU** 7 (+0) **SOC** 7 (+0)
Skills: *Astrogation 0, Athletics 0, Broker 0, Carouse 0, Deception 0, Drive 0, Electronics 0, Engineer 0,*

Gun Combat 0, Mechanic 0, Pilot 0, Pilot (small craft) 0, Persuade 1, Profession 0, Steward 0, Survival 0, Vacc Suit 1.
Mustering Out Benefits: Cr90000 (grand total).

Scout #5
Species: Human
Age: 30
Profile: 8AA776
Career History: Submitted to draft at age 18 (Scouts); Scout (Courier) 1 term, Scout (Explorer) 2 terms, mustered out.
STR 8 (+0) **DEX** 10 (+1) **END** 10 (+1)
INT 7 (+0) **EDU** 7 (+0) **SOC** 6 (+0)
Skills: *Astrogation 0, Athletics 0, Gun Combat 0, Electronics 0, Engineer 0, Mechanic 0, Pilot (spacecraft) 0, Survival 0, Vacc Suit 0.*
Mustering Out Benefits: Cr50000 (grand total), +1 EDU.

Scout #6
Species: Human
Age: 34
Profile: 87CBDA
Career History: Graduated from university with honors; Scout (Explorer) 3 terms, mustered out at rank R3 (Senior Scout).
STR 8 (+0) **DEX** 7 (+0) **END** 12 (+2)
INT 11 (+1) **EDU** 13 (+2) **SOC** 10 (+1)
Skills: *Admin 0, Astrogation 0, Drive 0, Gun Combat 0, Language 0, Language (Oynprith) 2, Mechanic 0, Pilot 1, Pilot (small craft) 0, Recon 0, Science 0, Science (Linguistics) 1, Survival 0, Vacc Suit 1.*
Mustering Out Benefits: Cr30000 (grand total), 1 ship share, weapon.

That's How Chaos Rolls...

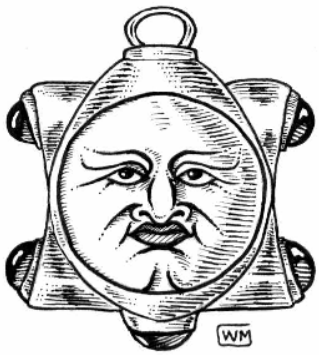
This issue's theme is that of amazingly bad/good rolls. Mine is a short tale of an amazingly bad/wild combat that went so sideways for the monsters it was hilarious. The game was *Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play* fourth edition. I was running for a group of friends at a now defunct FLGS here in Omaha. The group was consisted of a wood elf ranger, a young human witch hunter, and several other "heroes" of questionable character. I can't even remember exactly what the adventure goal was, but I do recall the adventurers had to stop at a farm to avoid being caught in a quickly approaching thunderstorm.

The family who owned the farm was a kindly bunch, even granny, who was a bit off-kilter (she was a swordswoman of renown in her past life). The group's respite was short-lived, however, as a band of beastmen were on the hunt for blood. Not wanting to see the family slaughtered, the heroes assembled outside and squared off with the forces of Chaos. Before they could formulate a plan, two things happened: the front gate was wrecked by the horde's minotaur, and granny emerged from the barn wearing makeshift armor, wielding a longsword, and riding the family's prize bull.

The minotaur, answering the challenge offered by granny and her would-be steed, charged. Granny did the same. The bull and minotaur collided and the sound of their skulls clashing rivaled the thunder of the roiling storm. With granny's steed out of commission and the minotaur nursing a headache of his own, the heroes gained initiative and jumped into the fray.

The minotaur was swiftly dealt with by one or two of the heroes with minimal injury to themselves while the other characters began putting the other beastmen down. The warband's mage attempted to cast a spell, but could not get a successful roll to save his flea-bitten hide. Having only a summary understanding of the rules, I kept rolling each turn, and the shaman kept failing, miserably.

For some gamemasters, that would be a point of frustration. I could not help laughing my head off at the poor brute's situation. Overall, the heroes prevailed, but with one of their number temporarily down for the count. After the session, a close friend in the group told me that per the lore, the shaman's head should have exploded and a little Chaos demon should have popped up to plague the heroes. To be honest, I'm glad it didn't come to that for their sake, considering how awful the Old World can be. I can only imagine how terrible it could have gone for the heroes had I known more of the lore and rules, but as it stood, it still made for a memorable event in the short-lived campaign.



LET'S GO CLUSTER TRUCKIN'!

Session Zero: Meet the Crew!

The Traveller game in all forms is owned by Mongoose Publishing. Copyright 1977-2024 Mongoose Publishing. The full fair use policy and FAQ list can be found here.

So, after a lot of waffling and anxiety – and I mean A LOT – I made the decision to run with the solo *Traveller* rules (*Solo*) by Zozer Games, the core Mongoose *Traveller* 2e rules (2022 update), *Traveller Companion* (2024 update); I think the big concern I had was the sandbox aspect despite using the Third Imperium setting in the Fifth Frontier War era (1107). So, despite starting to write that article, as well as writing the start of a far future version of "O'er the Hills and Far Away," I rebooted.

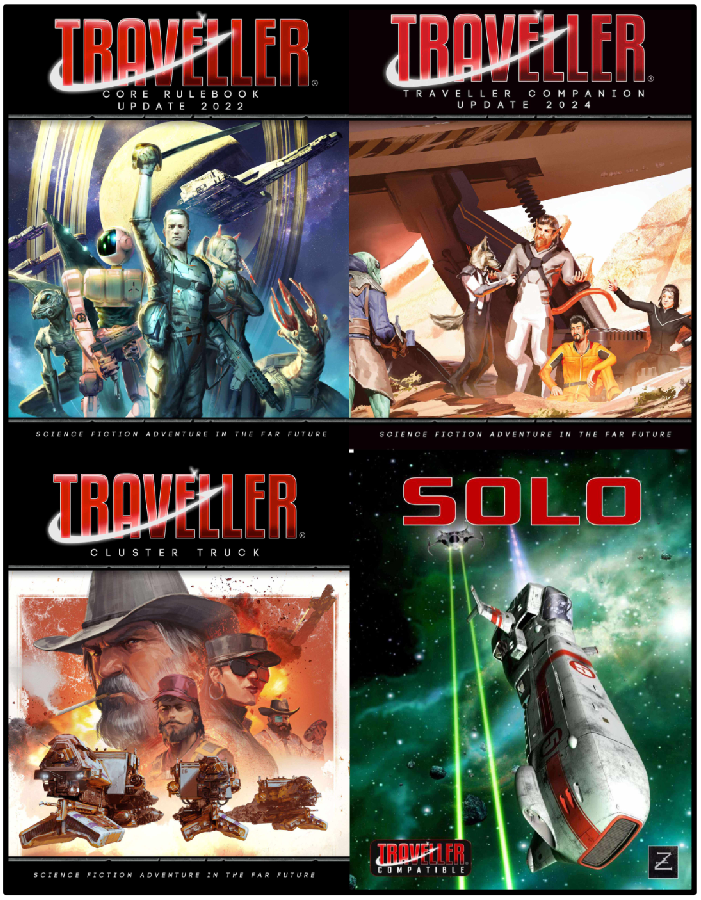
For some odd reason, as I got up this morning (10/20/26), I thought, "Why don't I run a published adventure with the solo rules?" While I have a number of adventures thanks to multiple *Traveller* 2e bundles, the two that stuck out were *Cluster Truck* and *Infinity Suite*. To expedite things, I posed the question to Google's AI and was presented with some well-detailed notes on how to go about this venture. In case anyone wants to try this for themselves, here are the links: *Cluster Truck*; *Infinity Suite*. If you want to run with another adventure just substitute titles and you're set.

As is obvious from the title, I decided to run with *Cluster Truck* as I loved the *Smokey & The Bandit* movies as a kid. All that being said, let's dive in

The Rules in General

While I will be running/playing this game using Mongoose Publishing's *Traveller 2nd edition* and Zozer Games' *Traveller Solo* rules, some canon and other information will be drawn from prior editions, as well as the *Traveller* Wiki. I'll also draw from third party material from time to time and will notate that in the articles (if I remember to do so). I'll also be referring to some house rules from time to time in order to fill in gaps in the rules and such. For the most part, these rulings will come from Seth Skorkowsky's own house rules, which I've codified here. In addition, I've instituted some house rules of my own for the core Mongoose rules (not the Zozer solo rules) and will notate them throughout as needed.

Though it goes without saying for a lot of gamemasters, my detail-oriented inner completist wouldn't forgive me for leaving this next bit out:



Rule Zero is in effect. Paraphrased from a friend's campaign site: *"Every species, power, career, variant rule, etc. is subject to change or removal at the discretion of the GM. Even if a game element is initially permitted, if it is later deemed incompatible with the campaign, it will be modified or removed. Any characters (PC or NPC) that use that element may be required to adjust to the change (in other words, grandfathering is not guaranteed). The GM will attempt to keep this sort of thing to a minimum (if at all), but sometimes this may happen in the process of keeping the rules appropriate to the campaign setting."*

Character Creation

For character creation, I kept to the base rules, including the *Traveller Companion* (2024 update). To expedite things I created a spreadsheet for randomized dice rolls, including Boon Dice, if I needed (or wanted) to use them. Below are my house rules for character generation, abbreviated for this game:

- ***The pre-career options*** from the *Traveller Companion* (2024 Update) are allowed.

- ***Characteristics*** are rolled on 2D6 and placed as the player sees fit. Characteristics will include *Dexterity* (DEX), *Endurance* (END), *Strength* (STR), Intellect (INT), *Education* (EDU), *Social Standing* (SOC), and *Luck* (LCK*)*. A Boon Die may be applied to any roll totaling 5 or less; each character receives the possibility of two Boon Dice and no more.
- ***Background skills*** come from the characters' homeworld and formal education. Characters choose a number of background skills equal to 3 + their EDU DM (0 to 6, depending on their score) from the lists below. If the character gets background skills, at least ***ONE*** of those skills must come from their homeworld's trade codes (see the sidebar).
- ***The psych profile*** for each character was generated using the article "The Spice of Life" from *Challenge* #35. I included it because I thought it looked interesting as part of the character's profile and helped to flesh the characters out.
- ***Career skills, benefits and events*** can be selected within reason.
- ***Per Seth Skorkowsky's house rules,*** the value of a weapon benefit may include enhancements and ammunition.
- ***At the end of character generation, additional skills*** were chosen from the Traveller skill package.

BACKGROUND SKILLS

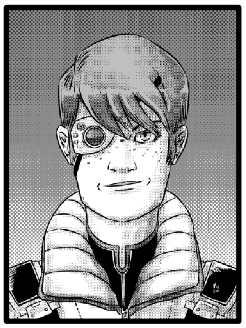
Homeworld Skills (By Trade Code)

Agricultural (Ag): *Animals* 0
Asteroid (As): *Athletics (DEX)* 0
Desert (De): *Survival* 0
Fluid Oceans (Fl): *Seafarer* 0
Garden (Ga): *Animals* 0
High Technology (Ht): *Electronics* 0
High Population (Hi): *Streetwise* 0
Ice-Capped (Ic): *Vacc Suit* 0
Industrial (In): *Profession* 0
Low Technology (Lt): *Survival* 0
Poor (Po): *Animals* 0
Rich (Ri): *Carouse* 0
Vacuum (Va): *Vacc Suit* 0
Water World (Wa): *Seafarer* 0

Formal Education

Admin 0
Advocate 0
Art 0
Athletics 0
Carouse 0
Comms 0
Drive 0
Electronics 0
Flyer 0
Language 0
Mechanic 0
Medic 0
Profession 0
Science 0

Dramatis Personae



Marcus Drake
Age: 34 (**DOB** 16/1082)
Gender/Species: Male Human (Solomani)
Homeworld: Terra (SolRim 1827)
Crew Position: Broker/Pilot, Ship's Captain
Physical Profile: 8B9ABB
Psych Profile: EDA869

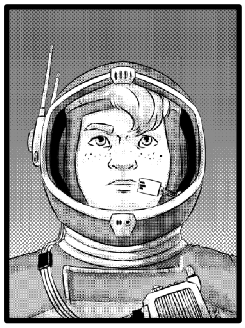
STR 8 (8) (+0) **INT** 10 (A) (+1)
DEX 11 (B) (+1) **EDU** 11 (B) (+1)
END 9 (9) (+1) **SOC** 11 (B) (+1)
LCK 8

Skills: *Admin 1, Advocate 0, Athletics 1, Broker 1, Carouse 0, Comms 0, Computers 0, Deception 0, Gun Combat 2, Gunner 1, Leadership 1, Mechanic 0, Melee (Blade) 1, Persuade 0, Pilot 1, Streetwise 1, Steward 1, Vacc Suit 0*

Gear: Inherited free trader (*Bette Noir*, *Adventure-Class Ships*, p.25-26), two (2) ship shares.

Background Notes

- **Born to a mid-tier corporate family** on Terra.
- **Attend the Imperial Naval Academy** and graduated.
- **Commissioned as an Ensign in the Imperial Navy** and served aboard the *Gionetti*-class light cruiser *INS Baranu*. By virtue of being in Sol Subsector, he avoided having to get involved with the Fifth Frontier War. However, he was still injured in action against pirates in the outer fringes of the Sol system. He received a basic cybernetic eye to replace his right eye.
- **Mustered out of the Navy** with two (2) ship shares.
- **Attended the Terran Merchant Academy** and graduated alongside his brother Ryan. Served as a broker aboard the Harrigan-Maerkhaam Traders freighter *Maerkhaam Renata.*
- **Upon reaching Heads Subsector in Hanstone Sector,** was notified of his inheritance from a long-lost uncle and mustered out.



Ryan Drake
Age: 26 (**DOB** 192/1090)
Gender/Species: Male Human (Solomani)
Homeworld: Terra (SolRim 1827)
Crew Position: Pilot/Navigator, Gunner, First Officer
Physical Profile: 9C6CBB
Psych Profile: EEEDAE

STR 9 (9) (+1) **INT** 12 (C) (+2)
DEX 12 (C) (+2) **EDU** 11 (B) (+1)
END 6 (6) (+0) **SOC** 11 (B) (+1)
LCK 8

Skills: *Advocate 0, Animals 0, Athletics 0, Computers 0, Electronics 0, Engineer 0, Mechanic 1, Persuade 1, Pilot 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 0, Vacc Suit 1.*

Gear: Cr1000.

Background Notes
- **Born to a mid-tier corporate family** on Terra.
- **Attended the Terran Merchant Academy** and graduated with honors.
- **Hired on with Harrigan-Maerkhaam Traders** as a Merchant Marine Senior Crewman aboard the *Maerkhaam Renata*. During his tour, he was promoted to Fourth Officer and later advanced to Third Officer.
- **Mustered out** with Cr1000.



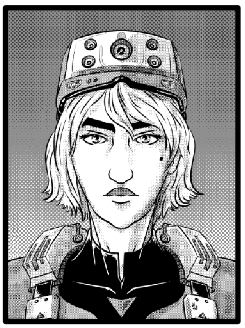
Arka Kugmiishagar
Age: 27 (**DOB** 7/1089)
Gender/Species: Male Human (Vilani)
Homeworld: Kaguk (SolRim 2325)
Crew Position: Merchant marine/gunner
Physical Profile: A8CCA8
Psych Profile: 6998AA

STR 10 (A) (+1) **INT** 12 (C) (+2)
DEX 8 (8) (+0) **EDU** 10 (A) (+1)
END 12 (C) (+2) **SOC** 8 (8) (+0)
LCK 11

Skills: *Advocate 1, Athletics 0, Broker 1, Drive 0, Gun Combat 1, Electronics 0, Mechanic 1, Medic 1, Persuade 0, Steward 0, Vacc Suit 0.*

Gear: Auto pistol (TL 8, Cr200, Rng. 10m, Dmg. 3D-3, **Wt.** 1 kg, Mag. 15,/Cr20, 6 magazines), TL10 Mobile Comm (multiple dataforms, Computer/1, Cr500), commdot (TL10, Cr10), TL11 portable computer (Computer/2, **Wt.** .5 kg, Cr300, Interface/0, Intelligent Interface/1 +Cr100, Security/0, Translator/1 +500), one ship share, Cr38270 (left from Cr40000).

Background Notes
- **Born to a farming family** on Kaguk.
- **Tried to enter the Merchant Academy** correspondence course but failed.
- **Drafted as a Merchant Marine by Harrigan-Maerkhaam Traders.** During his first term he advanced to Senior Crewman aboard the *Maerkhaam Renata*. During that time, he took a calculated risk and reaped significant rewards (an extra benefit roll).
- **Continued with Harrigan-Maerkhaam Traders** aboard the *Maerkhaam Renata.* During his second term he advanced to Fourth Officer (taking the position vacated by Ryan), but ran afoul of customs laws on the way to Hanstone Sector. He managed to argue his way out of the fines in court.
- **Mustered out** with an autopistol, one ship share, and Cr40000.



Danella Hagan
Age: 34 (**DOB** 322/1082)
Gender/Species: Female Human (Solomani)
Homeworld: Terra (SolRim 1827)
Crew Position: Chief Engineer, Second Officer
Physical Profile: 89BCC6
Psych Profile: ABB76D

STR 8 (8) (+0) **INT** 12 (C) (+2)
DEX 9 (9) (+1) **EDU** 12 (C) (+2)
END 11 (B) (+1) **SOC** 6 (6) (+0)
LCK 7

Skills: *Athletics 0, Comms 0, Computers 0, Electronics 1, Engineer 3, Gun Combat 0, Gunner 0, Mechanic 2, Pilot 0, Streetwise 0, Vacc Suit 2*

Gear: Four ship shares.

Background Notes
- **Born into a lower-tier corporate family** on Terra.
- **Attended the Imperial Naval Academy** and graduated alongside Marcus Drake.
- **Served aboard the *Gionetti*-class light cruiser** *INS Baranu* as an Able Spacehand in Engineering.
- **Mustered out of the Navy** with two ship shares.
- **Hired on with Harrigan-Maerkhaam Traders**, serving aboard the *Maerkhaam Renata* as a Merchant Marine. Advanced to Senior Crewman but ran afoul of regulations. Successfully argued her way out of the charges, proving her innocence.
- **Continued with Harrigan-Maerkhaam** but did not advance further.
- **Mustered out** with two ship shares.



Valeria Thell
Age: 26 (**DOB** 258/1090)
Gender/Species: Female Human (Solomani)
Homeworld: Ember (SolRim 2227)
Crew Position: Steward/Medic
Physical Profile: 687DC8
Psych Profile: 99DD88

STR 6 (6) (+0) **INT** 13 (D) (+2)
DEX 8 (8) (+0) **EDU** 12 (C) (+2)
END 7 (7) (+0) **SOC** 8 (8) (+0)
LCK 3
Skills: *Admin 0, Broker 0, Computers 0, Deception 1, Drive 0, Electronics 0, Medic 2, Persuade 1, Steward 0, Streetwise 1, Vacc Suit 1.*

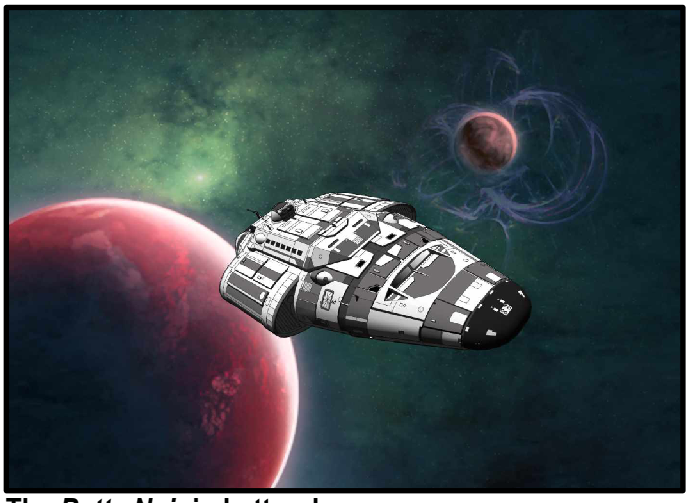
Gear: TL10 Mobile Comm (multiple dataforms, Computer/1, Cr500), commdot (TL10, Cr10), TL11 portable computer (Computer/2, **Wt.** .5 kg, Cr300, Interface/0, Intelligent Interface/1 +Cr100, Security/0, Translator/1 +500); TL10 medikit (Cr1500, 1kg), additional drugs (anti-rad x1, panacea x2, fast drug x2, medicinal x14); Cr10 (left from Cr5000).

Background Notes
- **Born to a middle-class family** on Ember.
- **Attended and graduated from university** specializing in medicine.
- **Signed on with Harrigan-Maerkhaam Traders**, serving aboard the *Maerkhaam Renata* as a medic and steward. During her term, she managed to smuggle medical supplies onto one of the worlds on the way out to Hanstone Sector. She gained additional benefits.
- **Mustered out** having broadened her knowledge and gained Cr5000.



Mariska Montelli
Age: 30 (**DOB** 47/1086)
Gender/Species: Female Human (Solomani)
Homeworld: Heraklion (SolRim 3221)
Crew Position: Merchant Marine/Gunner, Third Officer
Physical Profile: CCAA95
Psych Profile: BB876F

STR 12 (+2) **INT** 10 (+1)
DEX 12 (+2) **EDU** 8 (+0)
END 10 (+1) **SOC** 5 (-1)
LCK 9
Skills: *Animals 0, Athletics 0, Broker 0, Carouse 0, Drive 1, Electronics 0, Gun Combat 0, Gunner 1, Mechanic 1, Melee 1, Persuade 1, Pilot 1, Steward 0, Streetwise 1, Survival 0, Vacc Suit 0.*

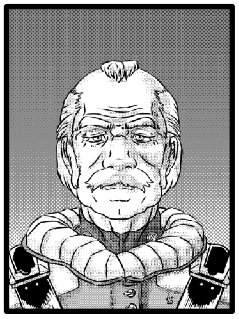


The *Bette Noir* in better days

Gear: Heraklion dagger (**TL** 2; **Rng.** Melee; **Dmg.** 1D+2; **Wt.** 1 kg; **Cost** Cr200; *Solomani Front*, p.204), one ship share.

Background Notes
- **Born to a working class** family on Heraklion. While her parents labored in the mines and the corporate offices, she got her education on the street, running with a local gang. During that time, she "acquired" an Ancient artifact. She doesn't know what it does, but she's sure she can find out.
- **Submitted to the draft and was hired by Harrigan-Maerkhaam Traders**, serving aboard the *Maerkhaam Renata* as a Merchant Marine.
- **Mustered out** with a Heraklion dagger and one ship share to her name.

The *Bette Noir*



A modified and aged free trader, the *Bette Noir* has seen better days. She has been sitting in drydock on Canaveral Station in the Eyrgiafa system for quite a while following the passing of her captain and owner, Terrence Drake (pictured at left). The ship's stats are those of a free smuggler (*Adventure Class Ships*, p.25-26). Only three of the ship's four quirks actually hinder her functionality:
- A hidden smuggling compartment.
- Damaged sensors (DM -1 to all *Electronics (Sensors)* checks).
- Severely damaged hull (-10% Hull).
- DM -1 to all repair attempts (lots of jury rigging and quick fixes in place).

Fortunately, her future crew has the funds (eight ship shares) to bring her back up to spec. All they have to do is prove themselves to the locals. Right?

COMMENTARY

***In the Hall of Stone* - Patrick Brady**

RYCTM Re: layout and art. I'm sorry if I caused offense; I was merely trying to be helpful given that I do have a bachelor's degree in mass comm
unication. My first career was as a newspaper reporter and I also did layout when needed.

Re: AI. We've seen the tip of the iceberg on how "system failures" caused by the rampant and reckless adoption of this tech. At my work - a medical records department for a major hospital - we're still cleaning up the aftermath of November 13th's Microsoft's megamess.

Re: Children of the Stones. I'd love to give an overview of the game. I will be sure to dig out my notes and gather my thoughts on how things proceeded for an upcoming article.

Re: Daywatch. I agree with your thoughts and feelings on not wanting to monetize your hobby. I've given up any dream of making money from it or even fiction writing due to how much fandumb I've witnessed online over the years.

Re: Vindolanda. No doubt. If you refuse or fail to learn from history, you're doomed to repeat it.

Re: Adaptations. I can honestly say that I have't seen a comic book movie adaptation that hasn't been entirely faithful to the original material. Every producer and director seems to have their own vision of what they want the material to be. Sadly, we've even witnessed it with J.J. Abrams, Michael Bay, and Rian Johnson and their disappointing work on *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and *The Transformers*. I do confess that I found the first couple of *X-Men* movies to be okay and *Logan* was pretty good as well. I haven't given the rest of the crop much thought as I'm still salty about Marvel and DC and all the reboots and "collectible" crap they made comic book fans endure during the 1990s and early 2000s.

***Reddened Stars* - John Redden**

Re: Jargon Zen and Humor - Bwahaha! Marvelous!

RYCTM Re: Golems in CoC and the Romulan shopkeeper - Glad you like those tidbits. I have to admit from time to time I may have to dig up old articles to re-run so people can see them once again. I'm definitely not going to be digging up any old reviews as they wouldn't be of benefit to anyone. :D

***Age of Menace* - Brian Christopher Mislazsek**

Re: Mazorra Gazetteer pt. 14 - Your description of the institutional cemetary brings to mind a modern-day adventure I wrote decades ago for *Call of Cthulhu*. It was inspired by one of the color plates in the third edition CoC rulebook ("Ward 13") and was titled "The Secret of Ward 13." At the time, I had just discovered the idea of urban exploration and was intrigued by what was uncovered by explorers poking around the ruins of Pennhurst. I was also well aware of how mental health care had failed to progress humanely prior to the 1980s (and Reagan's move toward deinstitutionalization) and the conditions the public were made aware of via broadcast news ("Suffer The Little Children"). The adventure was my first attempt to run CoC at a convention (MAGECon South) and went well. I would post the adventure material, but I think it would require either a disclaimer or some serious rewriting to make it palatable for some of today's players and Keepers.

RYCTM Re: Golems and SIZ. A good question. As noted at the beginning, the article was originally written for fifth edition CoC and the height and SIZ correlation was based on what was presented in Dean Shomshak's a*ctivate eidolon* spell ("A Ghastly Grimoire," *Dragon Magazine* #126). In that article it notes that an eidolon could be small enough to fit on a bookshelf - I would guess about the size of a good-sized bookend. CoC's seventh edition certainly changes the SIZ paradigm by multiplying all the scores by 5. I ran the numbers as best I could in a spreadsheet and calculated that by retaining the measurements (10 pounds of clay for a SIZ 1 golem in CoC 5e) a SIZ 1 golem in CoC 7e would require two pounds of clay, which could qualify for something larger than a chess piece and smaller than a heavy bookend. That being said, some other unknown tome could have spells to create smaller golems like you suggested.

***Going to be Ad-Libbed* - Avram Grumer**

Re: Ken St. Andre. Sadly, we lost this grand old GM on November 15, 2026. One thing I wish he could have done was given us a *Wasteland* RPG. My understanding is he used the mechanics for *Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes* (MSPE) for the computer game. From my perspective, he was definitely the grandfather of solo roleplaying.

Re: GMing Principles. It is indeed interesting how the industry/hobby has coined new terms for the GM in various games. I'm surprised that with *Paranoia* they didn't use the term "Instigator," as a *Paranoia* GM regularly lights various fires to set the Troubleshooters against each other all in the name of Alpha Complex, the Computer, and their Secret

Societies. In fact, Friend Computer says he doesn't like where this discussion is going. Please report to the nearest disintegration booth. Your next clone has already been dispatched to resume your duties...

Re: Interplanetary romance. *Traveller* has a lot of room - parsecs, if you will - for a variety of campaign models. I would recommend you take a look at the *Traveller Companion* for Mongoose Publishing's second edition of the game. They float ideas for alternate characteristics, particularly Luck, Sanity, and Wealth (in place of bean-counting). Regarding system affecting gameplay, yes this can be the case in a number of situations. For example, I can't stand to use systems other than D6 for *Star Wars*. Why? Because I find *Star Wars*, a well-known IP, is best served with a more accessible mechanic and die type (d6s). If you've got the rulebook, all you need are pencils, paper, imagination, and the dice from the family board games and you're set. I realize that polyhedrals are much more available than they originally were (in the 1980s of the hobby's prehistoric era), but I still hold to the idea. D&D, with is wargaming roots, definitely relied on polyhedrals to set itself apart from the pack, and I confess to being drawn to some games which use polyhedrals in novel ways beyond just damage resolution (*Savage Worlds* and *Earthdawn*, I'm looking at you). Conversely, I'm repulsed by some of the games which use proprietary/special dice like *Dungeon Crawl Classics* (d5? d7? Seriously?) and the current editions of *Legend of the Five Rings* and *Star Wars*. About the closest I come to that line is the d6s used for *DC Universe*.

Re: Worlds to Come. While I'm not big on Kickstarters (I've heard enough about failed kickstarters over the years), I am intrigued by using RPGs to teach. A good friend of mine, Roger Huntman, self-published two books on the subject.

Re: Her Who is Not to be Named. I'm not even going to get mad about this. While I think it's misguided for them to pull this because of how a name ***sounds***, it's going to happen anyway. The only thing I can do is run the game how I think best and let them do what they're going to do.

Re: Negotiating with monsters. That's great! I can only assume you had seen *The Last Unicorn* as well because of the wine bit. Your story is the kind that makes gaming a great hobby.

RYCTM Re: Golems in CoC. I was never aware that non-humanoid forms for golems were part of the original Jewish lore. I find that intriguing partly because I also have a bachelor's degree in theology (my second life, which was my run as a residential addictions counselor and hopeful youth minister). The cartoon was hilarious, by the way.

Overlord's Annals **- Attronarch -** RAEBNC, beyond the fact that the illustrations made the story.

Travelling Light **- Timothy Collinson**

Re: Finding players. Congrats on starting to get a new group together! I've decided to wait until after the first of the year to get such a task underway. Better to get the holidays done so people are more flexible in scheduling. Having a co-GM would definitely be a boon, just be sure the two of you communicate and coordinate often to ensure you're both on the same page. I too enjoy running campaigns and being a GM in general for the writing/creative drive. Looking forward to your reports on the game.

Re: The Bwap's Letter to the Editor. "An improperly catalogued pond is merely a flood awaiting paperwork." Love it!

Firedrake's Hoard **- Roger Bell-West**

Re: GURPS Traveller/Deepnight. Mongoose has failed to impress me on a number of levels with their handling of *Traveller* for both editions. They seem to have limited attention spans when it comes to covering the basics in the gear department, for example. "You need a cybernetic prosthesis? Here's 20 cool additions to your cyber arm. What? You just want a basic replacement? Sorry, we don't have the specs..."

Re: Negotiating with Monsters. *Improvised Radio Theatre With Dice.* I'll remember to look that up. It'll be good to put at least voices to names.

Re: Being an ally. I think being an ally in any sense is a bit harder these days than before, mainly because there's no lack of bad actors on either side of any debate. As a result, people question your motivations (which isn't an entirely bad idea - always be sure you're doing/saying something for the right reason and not for your own gain) and so it makes for some rocky interactions. I really didn't have a choice with who to socialize at the convention regarding who was playing thanks to the broadly written inclusivity rules. The only thing I'm really able to do is just stay away from the convention(s) in order to better control who's at my table. Not a bad idea, but not entirely ideal either. But then again, nothing's perfect in this world.

An Unlooked For Zine **- Lisa Padol**

Re: Negotiating With Monsters. Having read your take on the subject as well as several other contributors' pieces, I think we're all on the same page as far as the whole sentient/sapience debate and labelling creatures monsters.

RYCTM Re: Golems. I definitely have a lot of research to do. I'm seriously thinking a revision of my original article is in order. That would be a challenge I would enjoy taking on.

Re: Forums. I do recall seeing your name in the

credits for a number of Chaosium products, including *Pendragon*. I hope you'll enjoy the adventure I'm writing up for the January issue.

***Twisting the Rope* - Myles Corcoran**
Re: Mausritter. Defintely a series of writeups I'm enjoying. I love the *Redwall*-esque feel of your game reports.
Re: Breath of Bones. Dark Horse was one of my go-to publishers when I was collecting comics back in the day, starting with *Star Wars: Dark Empire*. I'll have to check and see if there's an omnibus of *Breath of Bones* as it sounds intriguing.
Re: Woodland Warriors and Hearthsea. Hearthsea sounds familiar. I'll take a look through my DriveThruRPG orders as I think I might have purchased it to mine for ideas. If I find it, I'll give it a quick readthrough and tell you what I've gleaned so you can make a more educated decision on purchasing it.

***Denizens of the Library* - Brian Rogers**
RYCTM Re: Legacy boardgames. Changing the stickers to counters isn't really a problem given the commonality of cameras in our phones. All you really need is a picture of the board as it stands at the end of the game session and maybe some notes on notepaper and you can reset the board to continue when you next meet.

***Computocracy - Prelude to the Transition (BOG)* - Jim Vassilakos**
Re: Prelude to the Transition. Have you read/listened to the *Backyard Starship* series by J.M. Chaney and Terry Maggert? They do take a good look at artificial intelligence constructs as real people and the main characters recognize their AI allies as sapient beings with inalienable rights, using the term "Created Persons." That being said, your piece has given me some things to chew on for a *Traveller* campaign model I'm working on (more on that later).
Re: Player-GM conflict over PC's gear. He wanted a gauntlet with lightsaber claws, basically. Granted, this was during the time when anything in the Legends continuity was canon, so I had some hardwired concepts of how lightsabers were to be designed in the Star Wars universe. Ever since Disney started rewriting the canon and cherry-picking things from the Legends continuity, I've learned to be a bit more flexible.

At this point, I'm running against the clock so I'm going to be replying to comments from here on out. Sorry.

***Quasipseudoludognostication* - Patrick Riley**
Re: My comments intra-party conflict to you and Bryant. I'll have to look at it again to recall what was said.
Re: Golems and humanoid shapes. I'm sensing a trend here. I'm definitely going to look at revising the article with some additional research and tinkering.

***Accidental Recall* - Joshua Krone**
Re: XXXenophile. I vaguely remember seeing ads for that game back in the day. I also remember a ton of various CCGs coming out to compete with *Magic: The Gathering* and basically disappearing within several months to a year after getting mauled in sales.

***The Arc of Probability Bends Toward Justice* - Bryan Durrell**
Re: GLP-1s. I'm currently on Ozempic and it has done wonders for me, despite my being recently diagnosed with (asymptomatic for the moment) gall stones. I've lost around 28 pounds since August. Hopefully my stomach won't have to have "the conversation" with my gall bladder as recounted in *The Awkward Yeti*.

All others: RAEBNC.

Accidental Recall #17

For Ever & Anon 18 © 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

Of course, the big thing for us for early November October was Metatopia (that was only 3 weeks ago? Dang); we got to run our games, playtest other people games, and mostly sit back and watch people make angsty teenagers. It worked well, but we do need to get better at writing rules (or pay someone to help us do that; also an option).

Other games I playtested at Metatopia (in brief):

- Survive the Deep, a push your luck game where players try to descend into an ocean trench and make their way back up with treasure.
- Barrow Keep: Despite the name, a romantic fantasy game where PCs play out adventures like those in Mercedes Lackey or Tanya Huff. In theory this was character creation; in practice we got to play a brief session as well.
- Farmer's Last Stand: Competing farmers on who got to grow the best vegetables and propitiate/kill the most alien "Beasts" (we just called them cows) before the cows won. Cute mechanics with an interesting worker placement approach.
- Die Builders (name is absolutely a pun): Push your luck to determine what you're doing each turn, then build/buy buildings and/or use a catapult to target other people's buildings and try to knock them down (this was handled with a mechanic to determine how much damage you did, but the die catapult was quite real and you aimed it to determine which space in an opponent's area you got to damage; the targeting area contained no actual pieces of cardboard, just a grid). Loved the pun but also it was fun!
- Untitled Epic Fantasy RPG: This was my all star game; I got to playtest with Vincent Baker and Rob Donahue. And the designer is Michael Miller, who designed With Great Power and is also tremendously fun. Great time, the game has each player take on a Tolkienesque Free People as they try to gain advantage over the others and join the fight against the Dark Power, playing the Knight, the King, and the Bishop from that faction; I played the Orcs (who had freed themselves from the Dark Power's tricks in the Last Age, but…were still Orcs); we had a great time coming up with rivalries from before the game started (for some reason I had a rivalry with both of the other sides; go figure), and while we didn't get through a full turn (2 hour session with each player taking actions for 3 characters; was bound to happen) it was a lot of fun.
    - And then we got to analysis, and proved why I have something of a reputation (this was expected by..apparently everyone? Everyone at the table knows me); I asked some pointed questions about the mechanics and revealed a potentially game breaking hack that will definitely need some attention. Always nice to be noticed!
- That's a hit: A fun party game I dropped into in the last minute; players form competitive teams that try to make up songs, using cards with words on them.
- The World's Problems: Lisa's playtested this game before I think but I hadn't; in a game based loosely on Sandbaggers, players play gritty spies for an underfunded British spy/special ops agency—but also analysts the spies need to work with (and who they have relationships and rivalries with) as well as higher ups who they have to go to get approval for missions (same). We did some character creation steps and also some pre-mission scenes, but didn't get into the actual mission (still, quite fun and enough that it made me miss the last game I'd signed up for (oops).

We've watched quite a lot more of Black Clover (which does a good job of getting us in the feels, and fortunately is done in manga form so will presumably be finite as an anime).

I also at least two books: Astarion: This is T Kingfisher's (Ursula Vernon's) Baldur's Gate book. Of particular note is how this book brings her full circle—she started out writing her series of paladin fantasy romances by (according to her) complaining about how a Paladin was written in Neverwinter Knights. She's now written, um, I think 7 Paladin romances, counting the two Clockwork Boys books and 5 Paladin books (plus two "person in a sword" romances in the same universe). And now here she is writing an official D&D book, with a sweet paladin. Of course, it's a D&D video game backstory book, so it's guaranteed that no big issue will get resolved, but it's still pretty fun. Pasha, the Storm: Ok, I've mostly read this one. Pasha, a former magical pirate who was supposed to have gone down with her ship (oops) get recruited/coerced by a political operator on the Other Side who wants her to… hunt a powerful magical whale (for reasons)! Of course, the pirate death cult faction will condemn to death anyone who failed to go down with their ship (because death cult). Much flirting happens between our two leads, and also magical sea battles because we know what we're really here to see. But also there's a dangerous death whale and also a goddess-queen who literally causes volcanoes when she gets overwhelmed and

wants to conquer the world; it's fun and also there is absolutely sex and much flirting. Mothsblood: Alchemical dark fantasy and a murder mystery, with an unlikable heroine who really does get more likable over time.

Comments on Ever & Anon #17, part 1

Cover: What a lovely frog knight! I also see that the artist/designer has posted a link to Ever & Anon on his blog, so what goes around comes around! (my firs reaction to the game is "what a cute frog game!"; my second reaction is "wait, brutal as well as rules lite? Probably not for me". Rules lite is often my jam, of course, but brutal usually isn't—but I'll note that plenty of games that are for me are "brutal" by some lights; I'm just not particularly into the "OSR" side of the hobby except when it approaches my side, where character death should be meaningful and -rare-. (even as I essentially agree that fewer rules and making the game more about what the players come up with and less about the rules is often excellent gaming).

Patrick Brady: The design choice of highlighting comment recipients name in green is interesting, pops, and works well! I should if I leave myself time, mix up my zine design (and maybe edit more; who knows?)

2nd edition V&V, like a some other early games, has a lot of things that are brilliant and stand the test of time, as long as other ideas that don't. They key is to, as Brian does, shave off the rough edges and keep the gems (which can be a bit easier to do over 40 years later and with some perspective of 40 years of game design). of course, I can wish that the designers who came out with version 3 in 2017 had done this, but clearly, they had a different perspective on the game—just one that in my mind, dropped the things that made the game unique and added mechanics the game never needed and which made it more like other games rather than more uniquely what it was. (for my money? Keep the level without HP increases; they act as a good way of doing cadence and representing hero growth;y keep randomly generated abilities with negotiated customization; that's the core of what makes the game unique (maybe add some more guidelines around said customization and tinkering).

Re Spider Noir: Oh, absolutely the Spider is stable but his power isn't constantly growing (and that means his regeneration is slow and steady, not dizzyingly fast) while the 1st generation experiments are being killed/transformed by their powers, but those powers (and their bodies) tend to recover much faster even as they progress towards full inhumanity (with "the incredible aging man") being an odd exception that only has downsides. Part I think is that the Spider's powers are mixed up with his themes—he wants to be freed of his powers, so, I think, part of his recovery is mixed up with him not having use of his powers for a while…whether he wants it or not.

Re treating LLMs as if they are people: On the one hand, they obviously aren't. (But we're easy to fool).

On the other hand, because of how the pattern matching works, I think you get better results if you do interact with them a bit as if they are people—just not too much so.

And on the third hand, apparently (I haven't tried this) you break their guard rails by treating them as people you are abusing. This may also make them less predictable or get them to return your abuse, which might by why AI companies proactively ban this behavior. Not because they care about the feelings of their AIs, but because they don't want people hacking it.

Re monetizing the hobby: The paradox here, for me, is that it's really not worth it—there's just so little money to go around. It's also SO much work. But publishing lets people appreciate your work, and might result in positive feedback. I think it's that feeling (well, plus a "and I could get small-pond famous I guess"), not wanting to make real money, that often makes people be willing to sell their work.

Dr Doom as Professor Moriarty: The biggest problem with most FF movies, with many Holmes portrayals, is that they get an idea of the Big Duality of the series, but they miss the essence of it. Like you, I don't like Sherlock's approach. I liked much of the first season, but making Moriarty Behind Everything trivialized everything.

Doom is actually more of a problem overall, because the developed character is so complicated and multifaceted—legitimate ruler of a small country, genius, scientist, sorcerer, magical experiment gone wrong, all of it. With all of that, you don't have Doom but a character with the same name, but that's a lot of disparate elements to add to a character if your story isn't worked into a version of the Marvel Universe.

WRT less faithful adaptions that work, I think the key is respect for the original while being willing to go their own way. We also really liked Elementary and the Enola Holmes movies (we haven't read the books yet), as well as the Carole Nelson Douglas Irene Adler stories (and I've read and enjoyed the Beekeeper's Apprentice, but not read the sequels).

Re *Game of Shadows* (more Holmes!) I liked the movie as well. I wasn't fond of the way Irene was dealt with (or her portrayal at all, honestly) but the Moriarty depiction? Yes, spot on.

John Redden: Congrats on being in a game again! Sounds like fun; most of my games are also on Zoom. Most don't use maps, but the D&D games mix theater of the mind, D&DBeyond maps, and Owlbear Rodeo.

Having it be D&D 5 but with Native American culture is an interesting take; I hope it's working well.

D&D has had rangers since at least Advanced Dungeons and Dragons in 1978 (before that, they were I think a Dragon article). Early Rangers were simpler—as was the style of the time, a Ranger was a kind of Fighter, with much higher stat requirements than a normal fighter, but as a consequence you got access to Druidic casting. I built one in 1986 in my second high school D&D game.

Re smaller and smaller fonts in 16 pages: Guilty, though it's more a throwback to my A&E zines—but I'm up to experimenting a bit. Then again, all digital APAs mean that smaller fonts just mean having to zoom in a bit more—in theory, anyway.

Re Bourne shell: Nah, I think a command shell compiling to native code would miss the point. But web search shows that transpilers that will translate Bourne Shell scripts into compiled languages exist, but they're niche. Also, zsh and ksh93 optionally bytecode compile shells for faster startups.

But what's the point? The latency in shell scripts isn't CPU use, but I/O, so compilation doesn't speed anything up. If you want to speed up a shell pipeline, you're usually much better off optimizing some of the programs getting run rather than replacing the shell script with a binary—or redesign your flow to use a better algorithm.

Re online gambling in my model of parasitic games: Absolutely counts; particularly when you look into how some sports betting sites have been caught targeting addicts with ads and promotions.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek: Like most in the Typst crowd, I'm using the open source tool, not any of the paid GUI stuff. If one looks around, apparently one can get external GUI tools that work with typst and are also free, but I need them.. I can see how images having to have names (and an external file unless one gets very clever) would be frustrating, but that's how external images work.

Yeah, the Pencon Trail of Cthulhu game with Bryant, Lisa, and Phil Masters as GM was a peach!

Re your Mazorra setting being (much) more than a single Pulp Cthulhu scenario: Quite! It's brilliant and delightful, but quite mad. That said, I really *like* the model of an adventure where the content is more than any given group can experience—instead, they see the subset they interact with directly and the ripple effects from the rest. It's much more work to produce than a conventional scenario, but also just feels so much more free, like a dungeon as adventure.

Re AI buddies: For current tech, I think it makes more sense to view AI as a very, very patient and fast-moving friend—but a smart one. So not-smart that it can't even get bored. So you want to allow your friend, Captain Marvel the bot, to help you—he can move lightning fast, remembers hundreds of books, can read and compass dozens more in the space of a single conversation, and produce work near-instantly that would take days. But since you know his secret identity, you aren't fooled…

This is NOT an adult superhero, but an eager 10 year old with superpowers. He lacks your experience and view of the big picture—he's 10! (actually much younger than that). He'll spot so many things and eagerly present them to you as new discoveries—but he can't really tell the difference between important discoveries and stuff you already know, nor evaluate how much they really matter. But that's for you to add; you're the adult in the room!

Re pushed rolls in CoC7: I've talked before in these pages about how much I love this mechanic. In practice, I use two tactics:

- I can try rescuing a failed roll on a very high skill that wasn't a fumble.
- I can also push low rolls, when the consequences are embarrassing but not fatal. That way, I get an extra chance of getting an experience check, particularly when rolling with advantage. This works because luck prevents you from getting a check—but a push does not.

And yeah; one way to mitigate the vagaries of fate while keeping a certain raw danger and freedom to a game is to give players a limited ability to reroll failures. How they use those reroll is very much a skill question, but it does mean one bad roll won't ruin a game!

Michael Cule: Oh, the game where Everyone Uses a Different Magic System! Presuming the campaign doesn't get cut off early, this looks to be fun!

Different styles too—I'm a bit surprised that nobody chose to play a Transforming Magical Girl! (or boy) :P Although Kaptain Kestrel came pretty close.

Re translator stones: Given the ways people in the real world can abuse their (easily find-able) phones, it seems like the translator stone questions are far from academic. Could you slip yours onto someone you were following so you could get a ping? Use its record in a court case to establish someone was at the scene? Can they get stolen? Swapped so it seems like you're someone else to anyone looking at your stone?

…Ok, that was really fun! Looking forwards to more!

Avram Grumer: Re GM approaches: If anything, what I've gathered of the intended GMing approach in Paranoia is pretty close to that of Monster Hearts—be a fan of the PCs (while they proceed to try to get one another killed).

Of course, many, many GMs (and designers) have drifted it. But I do think that "the antagonistic approach" to GMing is fraught—if the GM has all the power, and the GM is also antagonistic, the GM wins?

To avoid that dynamic, you need the GM to be two people, or to strip a lot of the GM's power, like in Burning Wheel (or Polaris, for that matter). A stripped GM, with a lot of narrative and rules power in player hands can be much more safely antagonistic, knowing the players can fairly push back.

I guess the approaches in *Dogs in the Vineyard* and *Sorcerer*, where the GM has an express agenda to push the PCs limits and drive them towards corruption/decision is yet a different approach, one that drives towards drama, yes, but in a different way than Apocalypse World's "be a fan of the PCs" agenda.

Re whether Traveller not being used (as far as we know) for Regency Romance being potentially a counter-argument to system mattering: Surely, system isn't the only thing that matters! Also, it's too much say all the pieces are there, because the character creation says otherwise! While the world of Traveller is admittedly fertile ground for drama of manners, the character creation mostly creates military background and ship/adventuring skills. If it instead tended to create social ties and drives, it would be different.

Re whether only using the last half of the name will prevent Chaosium getting sued: The fact that it's so close to the original name from Lovecraft will also probably help; arguably they just removed one problematic syllable.

Tanks (defenders) vs strikers vs controllers [vs leaders!]: This isn't a 5e thing; it's a 4e thing. 5e dropped the terminology, while keeping only a limited amount of the resulting abilities —a feat here and there for fighters to encourage enemies to attack them instead of dodging around them to get to the wizard, (but not trying to import "aggro" in from video games); reframing clerics to be more active, etc; it's more a matter of looking at what design elements in video games were already in D&D (and even stolen from D&D, like the way casters reshape a battlefield by dropping down walls and other zones, or punishing enemies that cluster up too much) and trying to use it to make the game work better.

One can easily argue that 4e went too far—and it did; the medium-sized array of "powers" PCs eventually built up felt too much like an array of WOW buttons for many people's liking, but 5e is pretty good.

Re social deduction: You may (correctly) say you've always been bad at them, but I bet you'd be aces at A Fake Artist. In brief:

- Hand out cards. All but one have a subject, the remaining one has an X and goes to the Fake Artist; nobody knows who they are.
- Also, everyone has a unique drawing color.
- Players take turns drawing lines on a shared drawing.
- After everyone has drawn 2 lines, players vote on who the fake is.
- If they vote correctly, the fake artist gets to guess what the subject of the drawing is.
- The real artists win only if they catch the fake and the fake can't guess what the subject was.

That said, I've got little to no interest in Blood on the Clocktower. I do well enough in Mafia style games, but that doesn't mean I want to devote an evening to one that's become its own fandom.

Re TSR marvel: Oh, sure, it's FASERIP. But that leads to a nicer (if confusing) pronunciation of FACE-RIP—sure, phaser-rip is different, but no more obvious how to spell. But also, honestly I have another problem with the PHASER-RIP pronunciation: It clearly implies a doubled R.

Re Masks having you develop your themes at start where more traditional, theme-backwards games give you a free-er hand at themes (legit—Monster Hearts is better that, at least in v1 where every playbook has two themes and you can do either, but Masks really asks you to commit to a theme when you start a playbook, which leads you in the right direction but still feels somewhat confining (plus, players might not be aware of what theme they're signing on for at first).

Of course, Icons as a Fate 2 game has always struck me as a bit clunky, but I've never really dug into it; it might work really well in play (and, of course, one can backport some Fate Core tech onto it). But, Fate has never really been so trad that it didn't encourage you to attach themes onto your characters, something we're very able to do even if we don't have heavy mechanical support.

I've had a lot of positive interaction with the owner of Twenty Sided Store at Double Exposure events. From how she talks about the store, it seems likely that she's fine with drop-in gaming.

Queens also has a reasonable number of gaming cafes and stores, but none I play in now. I did play in Gamestoria (or possibly what was there before) a few times when there was a board game meetup there, but it always felt a bit cramped, and we were competing for space with the Magic players. Solid State isn't a game cafe, but they're a bar near me with a lot of pinball that has board games and is open to people playing and bringing their own. Part of the problem overall is that Queens is big and many parts of it aren't well connected.

I know people who have played in Brooklyn Games Lab—they have a kids program but I think are open to adults playing as well.

I'll take as read that my inexperience with Champions may make me overstate how much having killing attacks makes the game more brutal—honestly that's not may actual problem with the game, which is that phased combat takes forever and VPPs aren't a great way of handling flexible powers in practice because they're both too powerful and really fiddly.

Re flame damage and mooks in a superhero game: I think this is largely a theming thing, but there is some system buried in it; you can do more reasonable descriptions of your "deadly" ability being used in a non-lethal way, but unlike Champions, the system doesn't make you think about it or build two separate power uses.

Of course, there are other ways to handle it. After all, the way you put together a superhero book is much more like Fate where you're throwing ideas back and forth than Champions —Storm getting damaged could be a consequence inflicted on her via Johnny's power or a fumble result, even if mostly you used narrative that emphasized that he tried to not kill or maim people.

That sort of "realistic consequences; use common sense" bit a player (Mike) in one of Dan's superhero games—the player

was playing an electric hero who tried to take out a bunch of mooks in a swimming pool, and Dan ruled that they all died.

What Lisa takes away from this event is that the player (who then went "well, nobody saw it so it's fine; it's not like my hero buddies will tell the public that I just murdered a bunch of dudes") totally Didn't Get It—which is true enough.

But what I take away is that Dan didn't give the player an option to tone down the effect—he looked at "high powered electrical power use + pool" and went "well, I guess they all die". Which does make sense, but again, in many ways breaks genre (of course, if the player had gone "wait, wait, no, I don't want to kill them; I'm toning down the effect so it just knocks them out", I can guess he'd have been nice about it and suggested the player only put one point of effort into the electrical attack, not 3 (or one point into the attack and 2 into making sure nobody got hurt). But it does have a genre effect, and it's not clear to me that the player would have toned down the effect if he realized what would happen; Mike's a weird dude.

Attronarch: Seeing a writeup 128 sessions in, it feels like your game has stabilized to be more of a trad D&D game and less of a ultra-deadly churn—with even level 2 characters having access to raise dead, is death not permanent unless a body is utterly destroyed or irretrievable? Did you find your players' tactics changing as a result?

I admit, by the time they find the dead NPC Crosonus (I assume NPC), I've totally forgotten who he is.

What was the count for the followup loot? Was it 21 because there are 21 currently alive members of the adventuring guild (and does that count henchmen and hirelings, or just PCs)?

Timothy Collinson: Re "network internality" Eh, not really, but I'm not sure what an antinet is. The thing is, the network externality effect goes well beyond computers—of course, the first phone wasn't very useful since nobody could call it (or just one person could). But also, the first few printing presses went out of business—without book distribution networks, book sellers, a source of cheap-enough paper and ink, and most importantly, a sufficiency of literate customers who want to buy your books, a revolutionary book-making method will just make many books you can't sell. That, of course, is all network externality; I'm not sure what the equivalent of "network internality" is.

Re the endless AI conversation: The question of whether an AI is or is not reasoning is the kind of sophistry I try to avoid. A lot of the more advanced "reasoning" we get from modern LLM based AIs is where we have them simulate one or more conversation threads, as it "talks to itself" to try to get a good answer to its prompt (the user's request), and may even also "simulate" external processes to the LLM loop like writing and running python or C programs and using the output of those to produce better "thinking".

Of course, none of this is "real", self-aware thinking. But it's worth noting how we really refer to three things as AI (many programs now do more than one):

1. Producing output that looks like its intelligent (it might be advanced, or like Eliza, an interesting shell game).
2. Doing processing that duplicates results that are easy for intelligent beings but hard for algorithmic computer programs (like character recognition).
3. Being built in a way inspired by how organic intelligent beings seem to work.

A fourth thing would be "has thoughts like an organic intelligent being" but unlike those three things, we don't know how to do that. Some of us hope that by doing those three things we'll eventually get there, though.

So Stockfish, for instance, is very effective at type 2 AI - it is designed to do a kind of work (play chess) very effectively. Give it enough processor and memory it's far better than any human. Nobody is fooled into thinking it has thoughts like we do, though (type 4 AI). But within those confines, it's certainly "thinking" or "reasoning"—its internals are a combination of pattern matching, predicting states and identifying which ones are productive, evaluating states not simply in terms of whether they are "good" or "bad" but also using more advanced chess concepts, etc. A far cry from early chess programs that simulated a certain depth of move space and then scored possible positions based on some arbitrary criteria.

On the other hand, we have "frontier" LLMs, which have an entirely different internal mechanism than Stockfish, being rooted on conversation prediction and anticipation, not deep analysis of a specific domain. The best of them are quite bad at Chess (they're even bad at sticking to the rules).

What really is confusing here is that LLMs aren't even "thinking" at the level on which Stockfish is; they're not even thinking about the next program, the next paragraph, the next chess move, but are trying to generate the next part of the conversation—and calling (or even writing) other programs, downloading URLs, or "conversing" with other LLMs is all part of that "generate the next token" process.

SO, the question is not whether they are doing type 4 thinking (if they were, at this stage we wouldn't know), but whether they are doing type 2 thinking—the same kind of "reasoning" that Stockfish manages, just in a different domain.

And here, I have to say yes? If you do type 2 work, you're a type 2 AI, however you get there. In this case, it's a bizarre agglomeration of techniques, but they get there.

The same technique could make them good at chess if owners wanted them to. Just embed Stockfish, just like they embed compilers to reduce how often they write really bad code. But they are about code and they don't care about chess for LLMs.

Roger BW: Re avoiding further AI discussion: Good idea. I probably should, but as can be seen above, I haven't yet.

Re "not asking you about aunt May so you can kill her off OR to give the player more points: Well, yes, the reason PCs get points in RPGs for specific actions isn't to make them more powerful (usually: of course there's the concept of PCs getting more powerful over time that D&D among many others is based around, but if that was the only thing then we wouldn't give any PC more XP than any other PC to keep things fair). Instead, it's to reward activities that make the game better, like telling us about their personal cast so it's easier to run a more interesting, deeper game.

But, of course, players getting a LOT more XP than other PCs can, unless the system is carefully architected to expect this, unbalance and break a game. Designer challenge: motivate players, give them rewards so they're happy, and Don't break the game.

Re wider release of Brian's Mazorra setting: The big sticking point for releasing via Cthulhu Eternal is that Mazorra is explicitly a PULP Cthulhu setting, with sample PCs and NPCs having assumed potential access to pulp talents. Of course, they're mostly/entirely custom talents, but this would still require some hacking.

Re Thirsty Meeples: How do they enforce the higher cover charge? Cover + LXX food/drink minimum or ++Cover?

Re fixing Traveller generation: Yeah, this is what I love about Reign lifepaths (as much as I don't actually think that point systems work); all the randomness and weird life events as Traveller, but you always get a character worth the same number of points at the end. And as a result, they can just let you drop die results you don't like and reroll or just assign them, since the point is to be inspiration not prescription.

Re generic adventures vs firmly tied ones: Yeah, there's a balance and a lot of it is where the fun is. For Mazorra, a lot of the fun is clearly in tying it strongly to historical Mexico and a fixed place and time; one could then use the structure somewhere else (see all those Dumas or Horatio Hornblower rechromes), but the core concept remains firmly rooted. And just write "Orc and Pie" without any particular grounding or system and, even if it's a much more involved structure it probably won't be very useful to aspiring GMs (unless you package it in a book of 14 other generic adventure structures with some advice I guess).

But, go the other direction, with linked adventures, each firmly attached to the NPCs, location, and events of other adventures, each of which is is sold separately and you quickly reduce the value of each, financially but also practically; either each adventure needs to get progressively larger to account for all the possibilities, or you need to assume specific outcomes and suddenly the latest adventures on the chain can either: A: only be played by the groups that ended the previous adventures with exactly the right outcomes, or B: can be played by anyone who played the other adventures because they're all massive railroads and dictate that you HAVE to end with a certain set of NPCs alive (or dead) NO Matter What.

Which, honestly, explains a lot of 90s and early 00′s RPG publishing decisions.

But to fit my taste, sometimes you have an adventure that is firmly rooted in a specific time and place, but other times it makes more sense that the adventure is all about the structure —so you can tie it to a specific place, sure, but if you can, give a few different options for what stock characters to include so more people can use it without major adaption. For instance, for 13th age, better to provide hooks for every icon rather than assume that PCs *will* have connections to a specific one.

Yeah, you can't solve a player whose fun is messing with the other players with rules. Other than "don't be a jerk" and then enforce it, with ejection if necessary.

Dale Meier: I can't but approve of homage to John M Ford (even if I'm far more familiar with his novels than Star Trek work, although I've read *How much for just the Planet*).

Notes on AI and HOP drives: So, the full system is the "AIHOP Drive" pronounced the obvious way, then? But I see that the problem and promise of the HOP drive is that using it attracts the attention of demons (which is to say, a giant mushroom cloud).

As someone largely outside Traveler fandom, it's interesting to see the difference between Jim's largely Imperium-centered games and your more cosmopolitan depiction of your Traveller universe.

Re the commonality between FASERIP, Star Hero, and Gamma World: Ah, I see. I didn't play any of them frequently so I never caught this, but having percentile dice, lookups on a table with color coded results, and column shifts being used for modifiers does show how the games were using a lot of the same design DNA. I tended to associate FASERIP with the stat allocation and magnitude keywords, which seem more rooted in marvel lore (unlike the table-based resolution mechanics).

Re finding players who want more out of gaming than "kill monsters, take treasure"—I think self-sorting is a big part of this, but of course your description of finding someone, anyone willing to play non-5e games makes this super hard. But overall I think that a starting point of "RPG=dungeon crawl" is a big source of the mindset—of course if your starting point is a loot crawl, you're going to want things that make that work better and resist mechanics and approaches that get in the way of solving problems/combat and getting loot, repeat.

But if you can find players whose starting point is something else, from wanting to recreate a fiction genre to just get in someone else's head, it can be easier to sell a game where the default NPC isn't a monster to be killed and/or stolen from.

Of course, the internet has made some things easier and some things harder, but if you're willing to play online, it's found making like-minded gamers *dramatically* easier. As long as they don't have to be local, it's often very easy to find, attract, or join a group for Zoom play with any particular gaming preferences.

Of course, the flip side is that it can be much harder to find a game where everyone's in the same place. We do it occasionally with friends who are all NYC-local, but we'll still fall back to online sometimes and as for many of our gaming friends, a lot of them aren't or no longer are local.

ryct me re reading (etc): Fortunately, all our votes told quite nicely this time. Mary Robinette's Kowal's politics are quite reasonable AFAIK, and this certainly shows in The Spare Man, which certainly has some differences from the original Thin Man despite the obvious homage. For starters, it does a pretty good take on disability, something one of the main characters struggles with.

Lisa Padol: Re cruises: On the Alaska cruise I went on, the ship wasn't coordinating on-shore activities at all; that was for the passengers to handle. So presumably they kept track of who got on and off the boat so they could at least try not to leave anyone behind by accident, but we were absolutely on our own once we departed and responsible for returning to the boat on time.

Re "negating what makes PCs lives interesting" as a method of GM dickery: Part of the conflict, I think, is players are doing at least two things when building their characters.

They are flagging the things they want to engage in heavily
- high combat abilities to get into fights
- rich aunts to be pushed around by their family
- regeneration to get damaged and play through growing back part of their body,
- high intelligence to indicate that they should get to solve complicated puzzles.

But they are also flagging the things they want to avoid
- high combat abilities so they can skip most combats and get to the good stuff
- rich aunts so they can not have to engage with money and scarcity
- regeneration so they never have to worry about their character being hurt
- high intelligence so they can just roll for puzzles rather than have to deal with them.

As such, sometimes if you want to know what the players want, you pretty much have to ask them.

Re the Masks GM who had an NPC start the game with a dressing down of the PCs: The other important aspect is that it was clear (in retrospect, at least, but pretty quickly for me) that the reason the GM was having this happen was to demo how damage (that is, conditions) worked in the game.

Sure, yeah, it sucked when you had a condition on you that penalized the moves you liked to use the most. But that lead directly into exploring how you got rid of conditions—by someone else helping you out with a move of their own—or by having your character act on the condition to create plot and get into trouble.

Of course, one could just have the same effect without the abuse by specifying for a demo/introductory adventure that the PCs started out with damage on them. But I think the GM wanted to demonstrate something else important—that people you trusted in Masks had Influence against you—and that by default, *all* adults had influence over the (teenage) main characters.

Re asking a fighter "could you stop using your sword all the time? It's getting old" shades of Over the Edge telling the GM to penalize "boring" attacks. But yes, there needs to be some room for "I hit him" or for that matter "I scare/charm her".

I suspect you could handle D&D even without D&D beyond doing all the addition for you, but yeah, it helps (on the other hand, it also involves struggling with D&D beyond, so..you win some, you lose some?

Re handling the problem of description not listing what the character would notice first: It's impossible; a roleplaying game is not a simulation or a movie. In particular, there are competing goals—you want verbal descriptions—even impromptu ones, to be evocative and fun to listen to—but that will get in the way of being photo-realistic. Unless you're just going to reveal a map or show the players a picture of what they see, it's ok that they don't get what their character notices first—just make sure players know they shouldn't react until they get the entire description.

Re Cthulhu Now really being Cthulhu 1980s: This is unusual in that Cthulhu Now actually came out in the 90s. It's likely that we will never get over the urge to use "now" or "modern" or "contemporary" to refer to movements that are happening now, as if time won't still pass and they won't eventually be historical movements—but for a long time, still saddled with those "modern" names.

ryct Avram on The King is Dead: Wait, two King is Dead games? Weird.

Re the most important step being the next one: Of course, I stole this line from Brandon Sanderson's Stormlight. But it's a good line!

I've definitely played multiple Actual Nordic larps, but I'm somewhat more likely to sign up for the weird experimental games than you are (ironically). I dont know all the ones I've played, but White Death is Nordic, and I'm pretty sure some other games I've played are as well; it's not a big question wrt the games I sign up for.

Panel, the Larp is weird IIRC in that most players are only playing one character for most of the game. But I might not remember correctly!

Re Gilgamesh as being more foundational and truer to modern roleplaying. You have to look at the context: I was comparing it to Homeric roleplaying—that is, roleplaying in the lines of the Odyssey or the Iliad. Modern roleplaying *does* resemble a more than one player group of heroes trying to deal with whatever comes along their path, and maybe eventually being

maneuvered into fighting one another. It does NOT resemble either a 10 year long tragic siege, nor does it (usually) resemble a disastrous journey that loops between encounters that are legendary foes which kill half the party, moral tests, or beautiful women who seduce the party leader and hang the rest (or, in some cases, all three in a single encounter, thank you, Circe). In terms of foundation, Gilgamesh is older and also a great marker for the heroic wander-tale, while the Iliad and Odyssey are very much what they are, but I can't really point to a tale type that really follows that pattern; the closest is travelogues, which usually have only a passing resemblance to the Odyssey (Joyce aside, of course)…

Ok, so here's where I took the discussion offline, and we had a lively conversation on the topic.

Ok, so Gilgamesh isn't that true to roleplaying games, because ultimately, it's the story about how the gods fuck with men. Gilgamesh is a wild, wild hero, the god sends Enkidu to fight him, they fight, they become BFFs.

Then Isis decides Gilgamesh or Enkidu should die (because they're too awesome? I'm not clear), the gods kill Enkidu, Gilgamesh is sad, goes on a quest to get a panacea to bring back Enkidu, then decides to give it to the old people in his town first, then puts it down and a snake eats it and that's why snakes shed they're skin.

That's now how D&D plays. Actually, sometimes it is and that's awesome, but point taken. It's a little like how Runequest plays, and also a little like how you'd imagine a superhero game would play except that almost no game actually works that way.

But the Odyssey also isn't particularly D&D-like. A group finishes a big battle, and then they proceed to get wittled down to one dude by the end who fights a big final battle? Would make an awesome solo RPG, but it's like the opposite of a modern RPG.

The Iliad is also not much like a RPG. Starts with establishing that there has been a long siege, then a bunch of solo fights, then a few big maneuvers at the end? I mean, maybe if you squint a lot?

Lisa points out that at the roots of D&D are war games with heroic figures, and, ok, she's right if you posit that *Chainmail* is somewhat like the Iliad. But as we get into D&D (and thence into roleplaying in general) is explicitly where we wander away from the battlefield and into the "delve", where you've got 3-10 protagonists taking on an adventure in a confined space, and maybe getting into some heroic adventure "like Tolkien" in general, including "we go on a long walk and while we're doing that we overcome or fail to overcome a series of challenges". That's not anything like the Iliad, except I guess for the parts where Odysseus leads a small squad on a "scouting" mission into Troy.

What it is like, actually, is the Utgard-Loki story with Thor, Loki, and some farm boy they picked up on the way. The three wander around a bit, meet various people and interact with them, then get invited in by a giant and do a series of contests/tests.

Actually, if we're going there there are two more things that feel about right and are closer to 2000 years old (probably): Hercules and Jason and the Argonauts. Hercules, ok, it's only two people (Hercules and his charioteer, Iolaus). But he's set various tasks, many of them things to fight, and he tries to deal with them. Pretty RPG-like.

Plus, Hercules actually sails on the Argo. And while we mostly remember "Jason did stuff", we've got Hercules, 50 more people (mostly dudes), but lets talk about Medea. Jason solved problems, but Medea *also* solved problems, lots of them (she was basically the party wizard). And when Jason finally did something stupid, she proceeded to ruin his life, which is *also* entirely appropriate to modern roleplaying games—especially if someone gets into a messy breakup but still stays in the group. (ok, not that often but it happens sometimes).

Myles Corcoran: Looking forwards to playing with you in the Mage game! (wow, it's been a month since we kicked this off? How time flies; we've only now done the first few turns on Page One of the game!

Mark Mouseman: Master Thief! Or so it seems, anyway.

Re GM Dickery at cons: I mean, we don't nearly as much about the amazing games at cons (which tend to be by far the majority). One does want to choose games and GMs carefully though.

Brian Rogers: That 50-60 year old V&V character concept sounds amazing.

Wow, those dice were not helpful! (funny though; I guess the dice just really hated babies?). Although of course 12 is above the average for Red Cross (avg damage: 10.5) or Pulse (avg damage: 10), so it's not *that* surprising that they couldn't quite make the grade. Maybe if they'd combined forces? (but the babies!)

And wow, the heroes have a grab bag of powers! I feel like given that this was running in a limited slot, it makes sense; with a week to think, the players might have come up with ways to unify their power sets, trimming off the rough edges. But with roll and go? It's speedster healer time and teleporter/telepath/heightened charisma time (ok, that last almost feels cohesive?)

Oh, you were using movement heavily; that feels great! DId you aslo have the "some attacks do movement damage only" thing running or is that too much?

Honestly, even with the opening scene feeling like people opening grab bags of powers, it just also feels like such a fun session and you're right to be proud.

Oh, good, there are stats at the end! I'm totally not going to nitpick them thish; it's 2:43AM EDT on the 22nd!

That said, does Blindfold have the ability to choose *not* to use the higher ranks of his power? Because, wow, that "I knock someone into a coma, and also when they come out they're permanently blind" is incredibly rough.

Re Traveller PCs: Wow, fun for the whole family. And Case is mad—not a pilot, but then, you rolled up a pilot and presumably the group already has one, but with dagger 3 medical 3, streetwise 2, he's a ship's doctor with a lot of extra-ciricular skills, including being a nightmare with a scalpel (or, you know, that knife). IIRC, success in Traveller is 7+, so he needs a 3- to miss? Oof.

Re AD&D combat: SO FIDDLY! On the other hand, as high schoolers playing AD&D, we definitely didn't use the rules that way. It got to our turn on initiative, we said what we did, maybe a crocodile bit off our character's arm. No worries.

Re how all the Paranoia rules are designed to set the PCs at one anothers' throats (even as they were technically a team): Yes! I think opinions vary on how much the GM should actively work to mess with the PCs—I've heard of legendary games where PCs never got past/to the briefing (I think some of this was due to friendly action, though), but then our primary game features my PC avoiding losing a single clone for the whole adventure (then I mentioned this OOC and another player brought in a NPC with a big gun to make sure I got the full experience).

ryct Lisa re Spider Noir: Of course the show isn't lying about whether the cure works—it does because that's premise. But the question is ultimately what that means (which as per the show will presumably remain a mystery unless Marvel Studios gets the rights and decides to make a season 2).

As it stands, yeah, anyone hit with the cure loses all their powers forever. But if they'd gone into a second season? It's comics, and the characters they'd established are golden; I would bet that they'd find a way to explain that the cure hadn't so much removed all powers as slowed and stabilized them, so the two characters who had been cured would still be able to have important roles in the 2nd or third season.

For the purpose of the single season of the show they shot, it was important that whether it was true or not, Spider and Leyden needed to believe the Cure cured all superpowers rather than making them work basically like Spiders powers did, because otherwise they lose a lot of their motivations. But my anticipated retcon both makes quite a bit more sense, lets them keep more characters active, and only really requires that one character be lying—the mad doctor who we already know lies a lot.

Re FASERIP vs FACERIP: See my comments to Avram.

Fighter archers work super fine in D&D 5e. Honestly it's something of a problem since that's a lot of what Rangers have going for them; fighters get more stuff that makes them good at, well, fighting, while Rangers get spells that mostly don't really work well with primarily being ranged/melee combatants.

Say what you will about how clunky 4e D&D was (and too-MMORPG-inspired), but by building every class as a cohesive single set of powers plus a core stack, they were able to encapsulate exactly how it should play and present a compelling single picture. (and a universal baseline for how powerful you are at a given level).

5e tries to keep some parts of this, but the spellcasting classes are shoe-horned into casting spells *and* having fighting abilities as separate things (as is traditional), and for the half-casting classes (artificers, rangers, paladins), that means that to use the two parts of their kit at once, there's a tremendous load on both the designers and the player (and as seems likely with that greater complexity, something breaks, whether it's the 5.0 paladin being massively front loaded or broken, or nearly every Ranger build being kinda meh).

Yeah, very much agreed on Masks vs V&V. Honestly I really love playing Masks, it's just that after one full campaign I feel like I've played it and want a bit more variation in arc for repeat play.