



HYDE

EVER
&
ANON

Issue #2
August
2025

Ever & Anon 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" x 11" (portrait). Maximum zine length is 16 pages. Maximum length for fiction (other than campaign reports) is 6 pages. Discussion of contemporary politics is discouraged but permitted with a maximum length for political content set at 2 pages. AI-generated artwork is allowed, but AI-generated text is not. If you want to use an AI to help you edit your zine, you may do so. All artwork must be attributed to its creator, whether human or AI, unless it is in the public domain. When you submit your zine to Ever & Anon, you are granting the APA a perpetual, non-exclusive right to publish your zine in a single issue of the APA, meaning that you retain the copyright to your work, and so you can publish it elsewhere, but you cannot force Ever & Anon to unpublish your zine once it has been published.

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

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

Issue #3 – August 21st: What is your playing style or what do you look for in an RPG session?

Issue #4 – September 21st: What are your favorite RPGs to play, run, or just read?

Issue #5 – October 21st: What media (novels, film, anime, etc.) have inspired you vis-à-vis RPGs?

Issue #6 – November 21st: Game conventions: the good, the bad, and the weird.

Issue #7 – December 21st: The dumbest/silliest/craziest things the players ever did.

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 #2 (version #1) – August 2025

Table of Contents

Front Cover: “Hair Metal Cleric Meets His Maker” – Mitch Hyde (Visit Mitch’s Gaming Blog at https://dreadlordgames.com/)	1
Front Page	2
Table of Contents	3
What is This?	4
Reddened Stars #0 – John Redden	5
Denizens of the Library #1 – Brian Rogers	17
Quasipseudoludognostication #2 – Patrick Riley	22
Bugbears & Ballyhoo #41 – Gabriel Roark	30
Twisting the Rope #2 – Myles Corcoran	34
Overlord’s Annals (v4n6) – Attronarch	39
Back to Brazilian Gamebooks, Pt 8 – Panhoca da Silva & Zucolotto	49
A Rhodomontadulous Promenade #2 – George Phillies	52
The Seedling #49 – Mark Nemeth	59
Attacks of Opportunity #1 – Dylan Capel	67
The Phoenix Nest #2 – Michael Cule	69
De Ludis Elficis Fictis – Pum	78
The Dragon’s Beard #87 – Patrick Zoch	79
Ronin Engineer – Jim Eckman	82
Engines & Emulators #2 – Heath Row	85
Bumblng Through Dungeons #2 – Mark A. Wilson	92
Royal Harvest Festival Apophenia, Expurgated Version* – Clark Timmins	94
Accidental Recall #1 – Joshua Kronengold	102
An Unlooked For Zine #1 – Lisa Padol	108
Age of Menace #239 – Brian Christopher Misiaszek	115
Traveller PBEM: Plankwell, Ch 47 – Vassilakos, Collinson, and Rader	143

*To request the unexpurgated version, email Clark at first name <underscore> last name <at> hotmail.com

The IgTheme for this issue of E&A is the same as it would have been for A&E #595: *Do you stat and equip your intelligent and powerful villains who are going to defeat the inferior “heroes”? Why or why not? Does doing or not doing this influence how you run the session/campaign?*

Abbreviations & Acronyms You Need to Know:

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

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 others zines. When you see *Mitch Hyde: blah-blah-blah...*, if there are no quotes around the *blah-blah-blah*, that's probably a comment to Mitch Hyde.

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://attonarch.com/goodbye-to-alarums-and-excursions-apa>

4 <https://www.facebook.com/Reinhagen/posts/pfbid0nXr6bkZU8V28t2xMHvq5CKgpTGfLX35yU3VBAjuwTgQps8gX9CZDcbHZFc5VpYn6l>

John Redden



Reddened Stars number 0
(E ka hoku o ula`ula`ole)

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

Web sites:
johntredde.com
southkonafarms.com
johnreddenauthor.com

Other e-mail:
southkonafarms@gmail.com

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

310.418.1550 mobile

808.328.2328 land line

Mix Natter And Anti-Natter

Regardance

I Read "The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory." by Tim Alberta. I found the book to be interesting and a very detailed examination the political involvement of Christian fundamentalist evangelists in the Southern Baptist Convention. The author considers himself an evangelist. The book is a detailed social history. The pivotal point of the book for the Southern Baptist Convention is the unqualified support for Donald Trump and the Republican Party as a sin idolatry.

The next book I read is Starter Villain by John Scalzi. I love this book. But of course I have number of cats. The short story at the end of the main book is fantastic.

The presentation of Murder on the Orient Express at the Aloha Theater, in Kainalua was excellent. The actor who played Hercule Poirot was outstanding.

Translation State by Ann Leckie is a Hugo finalist. I was mildly amused by the book. At times I thought the dialog between the main characters is a bit repetitive. Maybe I would like this read better if I had read her previous books like the Imperial Radch trilogy.

We are watching Andor, 2nd season. I'm getting a Star Wars fix. More on this season later.

Invasion

While I was running an errand, I.C.E. agents invaded my farm. The front gate was open. There were four of them in an unmarked SUV. They did not have uniforms on and did not have a search warrant. They were caught by a neighbor just as they were exiting. Needless to say, this act really pissed me off. The gate now is typically locked. Do any farmers want them here? No faux-king way (Trump).

Winter Mini-Con

06-08 June, 2025 we gathered in San Mateo. Like last year we held it at Paul and Mandy's house. Chris, Donald attended, along with David who ran Horror on the Orient Express. Our regular gamers, Sarah and Joshua were on trip outside of the country. I ran Reconstructing Planets. Based on the short story (sort of) published in the final A&E.

Reconstructing Planets

Your characters are part of an elite terra-forming crew on the starship TF-1.

Your crew is currently in the last stage of terra-forming Holocono-4. The nine large scale floating islands are in the upper atmosphere of Holocono-4. Modifications and stabilization are the final step to complete the terra-forming project. It should take 21 Days to complete the Holocono-4 project.

The next project will either arrive from Central on a quantum stream message or you can return to our home base planet orbiting the beautiful red star, Loanui.

The command complex in the Jupiter's moons can send quantum messages using entanglement faster than the speed of light. The current starships travel close to the speed of light. The leader at Central that tracks the progress of TF-1 is Bill Spaterson. He spends most of his time in cryogenics, but on a scheduled basis, is woken up or woken by a high priority message.

The current start date is 2467 CE.

Two crew members are currently awake. The other four are asleep in cryogenics.

Skills

Geoengineering

Deliberate large-scale manipulation of a planet's natural systems like oceans, soils and atmosphere.

Ecosystemics

A scientific understanding of an entire planetary ecosystem.

Planetary Engineering

The deliberate modification of a planetary system as a whole.

Bio Exo Chemistry

Knowledge of the effect on living organisms of a change in planetary ecology.

Starship Engineering

Knowledge of starship internals and externals including cryogenics.

Astrophysics

Knowledge of the physical nature of celestial bodies and the subsequent application of the laws and theories of physics.

Close Quarters Psychology

The applied psychology of a small group living in closed quarters for several hundred years.

Out Ship Operations

Control of robotic AI modification of a starship to space suit operations.

Cross Training

Training of some form in all of the other skills.

The 6 crew members completed the mission.

Stats

Size

Strength (-1 when coming out of cryogenics)

Dexterity (-1 when coming out of cryogenics)

Constitution

Intelligence

Status (like social ability, charisma, respect by others, leadership)

Players and their characters

Donald: Bett
Mandy: Jose
Chris: Jackson
Paul: Cora
David: Banga
GM: Norette

I used the same procedure for skill selections that I used last year. The five players rolled dice to determine selection order. There were six characters, so the last character was mine. The order goes from first to last, with last picking two times. From there it goes in reverse order, with first picking two skills. And the order continues as before.

Skill Selections

Jose: Geoengineering 90

Cora: Geoengineering 85

Jackson: Geoengineering 80

Cora: Ecosystemics 95

Jackson: Ecosystemics 90

Banga: Ecosystemics 85

Jackson: Planetary Engineering 90

Bett: Planetary Engineering 85

Jose: Bio Exo Chemistry 85

Norette (GM): Bio Exo Chemistry 80

Banga: Starship Engineering 85

Jose: Starship Engineering 80

Banga: Astrophysics 95

Jose: Astrophysics 90

Cora: Astrophysics 85

Norette (GM): Astrophysics 80

Norette (GM): Close Quarters Psychology 95

Banga: Close Quarters Psychology 90

Norette (GM): Out Ship Operations 85

Bett: Out Ship Operations 80

(All): Cross Training (automatic) 75

In a number of ways, this was something of a railroaded adventure. Mostly, it followed the script of the short story. However, there were interesting additions. The packets of water designated for dead Earth, contain cooled sodium. There is the proposed use of e-coli bacteria, which would eat the carbon in Earth's atmosphere. There are a number of solutions discussed with Central in the Jupiter system (where most of humanity now resides). The altering of Earth's orbit and rotation is proposed. Another one is a megaton dust bomb projectory. While on the way (7 years near the speed of light) to Central, Jupiter and when the crew of the TF-1 arrives, a number of simulations are investigated.

TF-1 arrives at Central. There are met by their manager Bill Spaterson. After some R&R, serious discussions follow. The group has a proposition. Add a "trailer" the starship TF-1. This trailer houses a small factory which can produce selective elements that can be injected selectively into Earth's atmosphere after analysis of current results. Central affect of this idea is possible due to the massive production capability of the Jupiter-Saturn home system.

TF-1 heads towards Earth with trailer in tow. All goes well until a "smoky dragon" engineering roll (00). Given other high successes, the mission continues, even after successfully disintegrating a asteroid collision originating in the vicinity of Mars that threatens the packets of hydration to rebuild Earth. TF-1 can continue to their next project.

Horror on the Orient Express

David ran this adventure which turned out to be an entire COC module. It is basic COC. It was a module he bought a number of years ago. I didn't pay attention to the quirks in the module.

Saturday we start with 4 players each having 2 characters, with only the first one in play. The second is there if the first one dies or goes insane.

Donald: Chance Wentworth, private eye (first character)
Alan Schoen (from Berlin), engineer
Paul: Marin Ballici, language professor (first character)
Ignacio Fermis, musician/day laborer
John: Guy Disante (from Paris), fashion designer (first character)
Sandy Crowlly (from London) investment coordinator
Chris: Octavia Sanders (on the train) jewel thief (first character)
Sean McGinnis, dilettante

Mandy's character did not join the game until Sunday, after my BRP driven game.

The game starts in London with a lecture from Dr. Smith. He is about 54 years old. Players remember him from previous COC scenarios, but not the characters.

First characters hear about a haunting from Dr. Smith. He says it is a haunting where an entity appears and reappears. The entity is semi-transparent. There is a random instantiation of each haunting instance. A solid apparition has not been observed.

This entire presentation is observed by a mustached man which then disappears. Reporting of a similar phenomenon appears in the Scoop. A questionable tabloid. There is a rumor that Marcyat Mehmet died three times. A professors home burns under suspicious circumstances. Dr. Smith disappears and his man servant, Bedos, is found dead. A envelope appears under Guys door at his hotel room. The other PCs are all at this hotel. The envelope is from Dr. Smith, it has his new address in the dumps of London. The instructions... "make sure no one follows you".

Guy makes his way to the address and knocks on the door. Dr Smith answers the door. The side of his face is burned. He addresses Guy in a rasping voice. "Statue of evil, great power. Pieces of the statue are spread around, Italy, Venice, Serbia, Belgrade Museum. The statue can only be destroyed in Istanbul. I was attacked by Turkish madmen."

Then money is received to provide passage on the Orient Express. Next a cracking sound erupts into a blaze around Dr. Smith. A fire entity engulfs the room. Guy is able to escape. This leads to a meeting with Inspector Fleming of Scotland Yard. He speaks of the three bodies discovered with the same name. All three had telegrams with instructions "meet me, M". All three were killed with different types of dismemberment.

The inspector is able to provide the shipping address that was found on the three bodies. The group arrives at the address, knows the shipping is ran by an old Turk. The building is closed. The party peeks into the window and

discovers many occult items. It is a brick building, so to break in they investigators break a glass window. In a book there are a number encounters recorded. They originate from Turkey or London. There is a toy train set which is delivered to Henry Stanley. Briefly a man appears and then disappears in smoke. Next a written record is discovered from the London Train Spotters Association. A train set was purchased by Dartforth from Randolph Akris, who we find out is a cultist and murderer, who fled on the Liverpool Express. There are notes on the Hermatic Order of the Golden Dawn and the Silver Twilight. There is also a book, Famous British Occults describing how Randolph and sons died.

Henry Stanley is officially dead. Mrs Atkins is the keeper of the death room. For some reason, the entry cost to the room is six pence. Henry purchased a new toy train set. The party has access to the train set. Mrs Atkins tells the group, "if you find him, I want my rent".

After the model train travels 21 revolutions around the circular track, the four investigators find themselves on a full sized train full of dead passengers. The train is identical to one that was destined for Liverpool, but crashed killing all aboard. Somehow the investigators escape the train after some loss of sanity.

Before the trip to Paris there is research activity at library in London. There scrolls of interest are in Topcapi, Istanbul. Reading the scrolls written on human skin causes a loss of sanity. The librarian then demands that the investigators depart and this section is closed.

At this point the investigators have extensive information on the Orient Express. They catch a train that where the investigators have first class tickets that will taken to a ferry and connect to the Orient Express in Calais.

Guy suggests that the investigators visit the Bibilotech National in Paris. The investigators are searching for the origins of the Simulacrum. There is evidence that more information can be found in prerevolutionary documents. In the Bibilotech National. But the material is in storage. Within the storage collection, the investigators find the diary of the members of Queen Antoinette's court. There is a summary describing a feast of lasciviousness and debauchery. We find information on Foyssi Malon Shaken. It leads to a villa that was owned by the count who was part of Antoinette's court. The villa is a cesspool of hell. We burn down the villa. The count screams and yells and then locks himself in the basement. From here the investigators visit a nearby insane asylum which was established in 1631. The current director of the asylum died a week before the investigators arrived. Try to get an investigator into the asylum? The proposal is rejected. This sojourn is all an attempt to locate information on pieces of the evil statue.



From Foyssi the investigators hire a car to drive us 28 kilometers near northeast Paris, to a villa near Versailles and the Seine. We arrive at Lafayette Court which is at the edge of town. The villa has massive crumbled walls. The villa has two stories, with a light on the first floor. The town doctor, Christen, also lives here with his wife Veronique, with facial scars and a little girl with a damaged arm. There are drawings of this old house. There is an old cellar. The investigators realize this after looking at the old drawings. They also find mention of a trace of the simulacrum in Switzerland associated with the name Edgar Wellington. Veronique cooks chicken for dinner. While eating, the little girl screams. She says there is a boogie man peeking through the window.

Each of the investigators has a place to sleep in the two story house. The next morning the little girl takes the investigators to an old oak tree near the house. She tells the investigators there is something here at the root base. Maybe this is where the entrance to the old cellar can be exposed. The investigators commence digging. We discover an old steel door after descending a staircase. After the dinner that day, we use electric torches to light the area. Guy opens the door (roll against STR). The passage leads to a five way junction, similar to a hand. There are a number of rooms, each with a prison cell and a skeleton. There are devices seemingly used for torture. In another room there is a faint glow., with vines growing through the skeletons.

The investigators hire a team of architects to rework the entire underground site. The scars on Veronique face and the damage to the child's arm all vanish when the architects and construction crew finish their work.

The Orient Express departs Paris at 12:00 PM from Paris. All the investigators have 1st class tickets. (All the investigators have very high credit ratings and an abundance of \$\$.) The investigators meet an operator soprano, who invites the group to her performance in Milan Italy. A gift of roses is given to the soprano. Chance, (PC) orders a beer, breaking the orientation of fancy wine and champagne. The train stops at Laussane, where Wellington lives. The plan is to meet at a fancy restaurant. The Italian opera star sings at the opera house at 12:00 AM. We acquire front row seats for the performance. In the mean time, Chance gains the equivalent of \$5000.00 gambling.

Marin notices a man aimlessly walking as he stares at the countryside. He then yells "ya called me, I came".

We now have the address of Wellington's shop. When we arrive at Milan. We are invited to Wellington's for tea. When arriving at Milan we meet up with Wellington. We ask him about a particular scroll. He tells us it was previously owned by Raul Malon. The scroll is in a bank vault. It is written in Turkish and Arabic. Next to 7-30 Club on the train. The subject of the previously mentioned duke keeps coming up. Guy heads to the library. He finds a cult mythos book by Colton. It turns out to be very powerful. It is the life story of Maximilian.

Edgar, Mandy's character reads a diary of Maximilian. The result is he takes an available drug that causes sleep and dreaming. His spirit is suspended a dream world. Meanwhile a blank scroll is found underneath the bed. Blank? A series of hallucinations follow with visits to Wellington's shop, flying lions, travel through a wasteland, no shadows, and finally a rush towards the center. There is Wellington and the duke. Wellington is silent. Edgar asks "where is the scroll?" Wellington disappears into death. Edgar wakes up from the drug introduced dream with all the imagines.

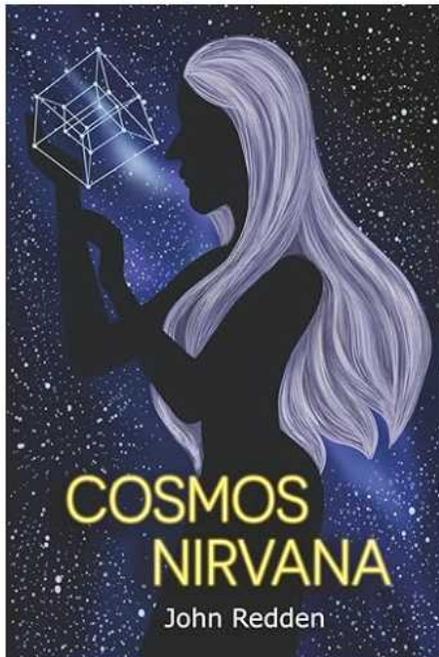
The train will arrive in Milan in 10 hours. Now in the dining car. Now Sean and Marin are reading the *blank* scroll. The author lived in Constantinople (Istanbul) in the year 1201, it concerns the *skinless one*. Sitting at a table near the group is an individual looks exactly the previously met count. He says "give the scroll or die". Chance attempts to pistol whip the *duke*(?). Sean is in a sword duel with the *duke*. He his wounded. The conductor brings the train doctor.

The Orient Express arrives at Milan ½ hour late. Due to thew previous incidents in the dining car, there are two armed guards outside Chance's quarters. Of the *Death Card* scrolls we have the first one. Guy, from

experiences in dreamland, now has completely black skin except for completely white eyes. He finds a clothier and now has a white and silver suit. Katrina, the opera singer has been abducted. There is a hush across the city. The investigators decide to head to the main cathedral in Milan. There is a weeping woman there. Also there is a chameleon consuming dead moths.

The game stops here. David said he would continue with Horror on the Orient Express next mini-con. This game is meant to be a campaign and couldn't be completed in two days. If this run seemed complex... It is.

I wrote a science fiction novel. If you are curious, see johnreddenauthor.com for a synopsis and overview of Cosmos Nirvana.



Prior to the Spring mini-con, we spent close to three weeks in Norway. After exploring Bergen, the second largest city in Norway for three days, we sailed on a smaller tour ship through the fjords.

The primary purpose of the ship is for tourists. It would stop and locals would enter and exit the ship. The ship's secondary purpose is commuting for locals. The ship made over fifty stops, many in the middle of the night or in the wee hours of the morning. The ship's tertiary purpose was to pickup and deliver mail.

There are many small lighthouses on sharp little islands warning vessels of the danger in the water. The vikings must have been tremendous sailors to navigate these waters.

We hit some really rough waters, with wind and high waves. I was on the 9th deck and due to the rough weather, the elevators were shut down. I needed to get to our room on the 4th deck. I called my wife, but she didn't answer with her smart phone turned off. I waited an hour and decided to take the stairs. I was very careful and took one stair at a time with my right foot, keeping my left hand on the rail. I eventually made it to the 4th deck and our room. When I took my shoe and sock off my right foot, I had completely dislodged the callous off my right toe. The next day, it was red and had dead hanging off of it. We wrapped it and took care of the big toe the best we could. Two days later, we had a port stop for 2 1/2 hours. The ship called a taxi and it took me to a hospital with an emergency room. An attendant guided me in and I took off my shoe and sock. In walks an attractive very Nordic blond woman, that didn't look a minute over 25 years old. In good English she says "I'm your doctor". She performed surgery for 45 minutes.

The monetary charge is the equivalent of \$30.00 (USA). Later in the Kailua Kona, the podiatrist I have been working with for a number of years told me she performed an excellent job.

I have a number of beautiful images from Norway. I will post a few. For more see Lisa's one-off zine.



Who am I? Some of you know. I started writing for A&E in 1982. I only contributed a few articles in the first few months. I loathed cutting stencils for a Gestetner mimeograph. Later zines in the 1990's were named "Duck! Here it Comes". There were a number write-ups of "Ducks and Dragons". You can blame Nicolai Shapiro for getting me involved in zine writing. I did write a zine for The Lords of Chaos, but it was never published. Also I wrote a few zines for the Wild Hunt.

Sum Comments

Self, I was confused by all the emails associated to Ever and Anon. Now I have the groove. Unfortunately, Barry left out part of my zine for the 3rd to last A&E, all of it for 2nd to last A&E and as a separate web site entry for the last A&E. Barry simply doesn't have the organizational skills that Lee did. I wrote a zine for Lisa's one-off totally dedicated to Lee. The sad part is my monthly games using her scenarios is gone. The only FRP game in my future is with the NoCal gaming group, one time a year. *sigh*

George Phillies, it is a pleasure reading your excellent writing. We hope to see you next month.

Tiffanie Gray, the visual reminds me of Norway.

Attronarc, Mitch Hyde, Gabriel Roark and Mark Nameth. I enjoy reading

your AD&D5 write-ups. I don't have much to add in terms of the game system, since I haven't played it for a longtime.

Attronarc, your zine has an excellent format as usual. The art work varies, but I'm glad it is there.

Marc Wilson, writing on a train, even with a key board, can be tricky.

Mitch Hyde, I like the idea of player write-ups.

Gabriel Roark, excellent group startup advice. That is a clean book keeping table for the players and characters.

Michael Cule, Oh! You are devious as ever.

Patrick Riley, I've had four unscheduled vacations previously in my career. View the unscheduled vacation as an opportunity. I loved HawaiiCon. Gone, :(I won't get on an airplane to go to a gaming con.

Miles Corcoran, re Mausritter game. I enjoyed the writeup. Can a Mausritter scenario meet up with Bunnies and Burrows?

Heath Row, I move from Culver City to Hawai`i and you move from Culver City to Portugal. There you have it.

Mark Nameth, A Complete Unknown really hit home for me. I used to have all those Bob Dylan albums from the 1960s, acoustical and electric.//. For Grammar and spelling I like ProWritingAid. But I don't use it often for E&A zines. (I'm something of a lazy butt.)

Patrick Zoch, Excellent 5 Traits definition.

Brian Misiaszek, I enjoyed the Cuban history vignettes. I also gave a thoughtful read of pulp heroes struggling against fascism. The theme is appropriate for the current situation in the USA.

Plankwell Campaign, re religion in the cosmos. In my mind the best proof of *God*, is the consistency of physics of the universe, even for chaos effects. I continue to enjoy the write-ups.

DENIZENS OF THE LIBRARY #1

A 'zine for Ever & Anon, copyright 2025 by Brian Rogers

All About Me

I'm Brian Rogers, and previously I wrote the 'zine *Subplot Kudzu* for *Alarums & Excursions* for 221 issues, ending 6 years ago. I had contemplated rejoining this year before Lee made her decision to close the cocktail party. Grateful to everyone for setting up the new bar and hope to be able to stay for a while. I'm here almost exclusively for TTRPG games & related entertainment.

Some personal changes: time's arrow continues with my 54th birthday looming this month. I've been working on getting into shape and will be taking my first 5k before this sees print. (This may be a posthumous entry, we'll see). My eldest has finished her first year at Salve Regina in Newport (she picked a damn pretty campus), while my younger is in his special needs extended school year in the space between middle school and high school. I'm still working at the same place, and also doing contract work for non-profits looking for help with their compensation strategies (if you know anyone...). My lovely wife is still with me for reasons unknown.

Why Denizens?

I've been using *Subplot Kudzu* as my gaming identity since I started A&E at the turn of the millennium, but with the new APA I felt a new name was called for. The bulk of my gaming is DMing for kids at the town library and one campaign is *Denizens of the Library*; I felt that would be suitable as much of my content will be reflective of those games. Playing with 12-18 year olds with limited game experience has been an education for me as a GM as well as an absolute hoot. (Also, the name has, as Carnforth Greville once said, "the requisite amount of mystery and glamor.")

The *Denizens of the Library* is a 13th Age game where the PCs are off-books Imperial operatives, who receive the occasional book recommendation that sends them to one of the myriad tiny chambers of the capital's library where they can have a private conversation with their patron who has some space in imperial intelligence. My version of 13th Ages Dragon Empire is heavily inspired by Steven Brust's *Khaavren Sequence*, but I am using it more or less as presented in the core book since I want it to be as accessible as possible to the players, who can take the core book out of the library.

This was where I started at the library, but you'll see later that I have moved on to various other things....

Annals of the Night Chalice

I am also running a bi-monthly *Swords of the Serpentine* game called *Annals of the Night Chalice*. My friend Bec – who I used to game with all the damn time before kids and life and moves – told me she really missed playing, and I eventually cobbled together a group with her, her husband Dave, my cousin Sarah (who I also gamed a lot with in college) and her husband Scott. Dave knew Scott and Sarah professionally, and their house was happily positioned midway between mine and Dave & Bec's.

If you're not familiar with *Swords of the Serpentine*, it is the Gumshoe system's design for highly investigative urban fantasy games. I was part of the very early playtest for it at Metatopia, and then again in the official playtest, and while it didn't work for my then groups it was a perfect fit for this one, especially since they all signed on to my campaign premise:

The Night Chalice is a thieves' guild of considerable status in Eversink. At least, they had considerable status. No one knows why Patch the Daring, the Night Chalice's leader, made a bad gamble associating with the sorcerer Prepins of the Five Eyes. Now all but 4 members of the Night Chalice are dead. Does that mean the Guild has to give up its territory, or is this the ultimate opportunity for advancement?

This has been great for me both in their slow unravelling of the core mystery (which has roots deep in the guild's history) and their trying to protect and rebuild the Night Chalice's status. I have wanted a actual honest to St. Cuthbert 'running a Thieves' Guild' game for decades and this is it. So much fun.

Menagerie

Finally, I'm playing in a *De&D 3E* PBEM that may have the record for longest turn gap: turn 105 was November 2011, turn 106 was March 2025. Menagerie is a D&D 3.0 game (yes, 3.0, not 3.5) at 4th level. At the moment the Company of the Crowned Owl (3 original members and 2 new ones) are investigating why the annual dwarvish caravan from the high mines has not passed through our isolated village: its passage is the economic and social high point of the year, and finding the mine entrance abandoned after an attack has us...concerned.

It's a straight up 'kids from small town become local heroes' campaign with wilderness, urban and dungeon bits You can expect some conversation there, where I make spicy comments that 3E is really pretty good.

Stating up Regrets 1: The Eye

A few years back my elder kiddo got me a copy of Jon Morris' *League of Regrettable Superheroes* and I've been low key obsessed with some of the more bizarre Golden Age heroes. Since I'm not currently running a supers game I'm going to indulge myself with looking at how I could stat, and more importantly play/run, some of them.

The first is **The Eye**. Who is just a floating Eye. Not an eyeball of the Starlin 70's cosmic but... well, here....¹



The Eye's origins are unknown. It is an agent of good, appearing to people in danger to a) rescue them from harm/imprisonment and b) get them to act agents in the Eye's schemes to bring the evil-doers to either conventional judgement or to turn their rage on each other.

It has displayed intangibility, invisibility, varying sizes, vast intelligence/awareness, telekinesis, and the ability to fire rays of heat that either melt or vaporize objects but I don't think are ever aimed at people. The Eye seems to need agents to carry out its innocent protecting agenda. So how to make this playable in my preferred system? Let's say I'm making a *Villains & Vigilantes 2E* PC in the classic style, where the PC is based on me.

All my physical stats are OK, 'tween 9 and 11, and my INT and CHA are in the 12-15 range, so, say, 13 each.

Out of the gate we need Astral Projection: I ain't really a giant eyeball, but my astral form is! The Astral Projection power doesn't say that you can make your astral form look different than you, it doesn't say you *can't*, and if it *always* looks like a giant eye I think weirdness balances anonymity. Since an astral form can project thoughts to communicate, is intangible, can be visible or invisible, and if I'm already messing with the appearance being able to make it the size of a normal eyeball to a human again doesn't feel like a stretch, we are halfway home.

Now add Heightened Intelligence B, at about +20 (a high but not uncommon roll, taking my INT to 33), and toss in a career of Religion/Mysticism (origin: bought an ancient spiritual text at a house clean out). Again, as a GM I don't feel like that's a heavy lift. I don't see the need to add Heightened Senses: as the Eye I could easily investigate my targets astrally to learn their plans, and I want to keep this as stripped down as possible.

¹ A public domain image of [Frank Thomas' Golden Age](#) comic book character, The Eye, detail from Keen Detective Funnies #21, Jun, 1940

Next: Telekinesis, which in *V&V* is a weak power in terms of lift/speed to start (obviously modeled on pre-Phoenix Marvel Girl) but is on the Psionics table and makes a simple add with lots of versatility.

Then one roll on the Innate Powers table to get Flame Powers. I seriously wondered if this was Disintegration Ray, but enough sources said it was heat, and the Eye can be writhed with flame. So Flame Powers it is.

Now, this could be it, and it's an eminently reasonable PC for something that people see as having vast power: lots of it is high intelligence and misdirection. No one knows I have a 1-hour limit in my astral form, no one knows the Eye even has a human body somewhere. Why would I ever reveal that?

There is one other thing: in later stories The Eye works repeatedly with lawyer/investigator Jack Barrister. As I am a fan of decentralized power, lets use one of my regular tricks and have Jack be a modification the Pet power (also on the Psionics table) as an Agent, and keep a Low Self-Control weakness: only use Flame Powers in astral form and it can't be a direct attack. Pet/Agent always attacks at 4th level, can be as powerful as the player and GM agree, and is controlled by the player. Now I, as the Eye, have a full-time two-fisted pulp PI as my primary operative that I-as-player control when the Eye can't be present.

Yes, but how do you play it?

I would love this in a solo game (though Gumshoe might be a better system): the GM introduces people in trouble and I as the Eye (with Jack's help) get to unravel what that is, find the full nature of the threats, and move to save them as if it were *Leverage* or *Mission: Impossible*. I'm never there, the Eye can't directly attack, Jack is skilled but not super, and I need to convince the NPCs to listen to the Eye and take steps to save themselves.

If it's not a solo game, drop Jack as a power and have the Eye be the surveillance/mastermind PC in a group the other PCs as agents: I can easily fill either of those roles with just lots of supernatural chroming. Maybe I'm the only supernatural element in the game, maybe not².

If it's instead a straight up classic supers game, The Eye becomes either Thunderbolt to Jack as Jonny Thunder – the supernatural backup to the otherwise normal guy on the Justice Society – or the Phantom Stranger analogue to the Justice League, arriving to reveal grim warnings and give supernatural support – and drop Jack from the team stories. Honestly, I think this sounds pretty neat.

² This ends up close to Fleming & Von Eeden's 80's DC Comic *Thriller*, where an astral Agent Thriller uses her "Seven Seconds" to save the world.

Inside the Library

It took me years to get things set up with the town library to be able to run a D&D club. It wasn't from lack of interest on their part, but a lack of understanding: the staff had at best heard of it or seen people playing it and just knew people – mostly kids – were asking for it. Still, patience is my only virtue. We started in the summer of 2023, and things became much easier with the hiring of a new teen librarian who is also a gamer in 2024. She has been an outstanding partner in all of this, and now we're up to 17 kids showing interest for next school year.

If I made any error early on it was, when first having the choice of system, went with *13th Age* over *Knave* for the first games. (I was not going to run 5E – I got the starter set and PHB in 2014 and bounced off – especially not with 6th edition looming.) Don't misconstrue: I adore *13th Age* and it's worked great over the last 2 years, but it's not ideal for large numbers of players who can be inconsistent in their attendance the way that *Knave* can. But *13th Age* offers a play experience much closer to *5E* than *Knave* does, so maybe it was the right call, for all that having to constantly on-board new players in a game with that higher degree of crunch.

Eventually I got smart enough to a) ask for a cap on new players and b) to split the kids into two groups player on alternating weeks. This let me put the more mature kids in one group and the younger chaos goblins in the other. Until you have tried running games for kids age 12-16 you don't realize how huge the maturity gulf is between 12 and 14. They are almost different species. That let me tailor the experience for the two groups and everyone, including me, had more fun. Group A was embroiled in political conspiracies in the imperial capital with lots of note-taking and nested mysteries, while Group B went off chasing thieves guilds in a somewhat linear series of small dungeons leading to an evil cult. I tied the two together: Group B's cult was responsible for Group A's conspiracy, so when in the summer of 2024 hit and I had to re-merge the groups to get enough players each week given the kids schedules everyone could pick up the plot.

I had this simple plan for session 1 breaking PC creation down into scenes: the intro only needs stats/race/class and sets up the longer plot, and then scene by scene I'd ask about backgrounds, one unique things (OUT), and icon relationships until everything was done. In the end that took 3 weeks and players joined mid-way... yeah.... It's proof that the 'pick 1 from each category at each step' from *5E* can be really helpful for new players, even if *13th Age* is so much more versatile. Some people really love and need the flowcharts to help them get going, even if some, say, my daughter, kicks against them hard.

My players all agreed to have an icon relationship with the Emperor – I gave them 4 options, the others being the Archmage, the Priestess, and the Crusader – each of which would have given the game a very different tone. (The Crusader-focused game would have felt very Black Company, for example), and initial 4 PCs were

- Alire, a wood elf bard who would eventually multi-class to sorcerer and take every choice that gave him more background points and more spells. His OUT is that he is part of the 'living wards' that the Elf Queen uses to imprison the eldest Green dragon, a canonical part of the Dragon Empire lore. The PC is an interesting case because when the player found out about the arenas in Axis, the imperial capital he was all in on Alire having been a gladiator. We used some of his extra skill points for that, and I wrote up his weapons using Roman terminology and the player was just tickled. He's the only PC I've ever seen with a trident-and-net fighting style.
- Sir Kai III, house of Windsor, a human paladin with the OUT of his mind is 'a folded map' that needs tea to open. The player is, no shock, an enormous anglophile obsessed with geography and vexillology. One of his backgrounds is that he was part of the Imperial Reserve, the elite force sent by the emperor to shore up defenses where needed. As my *Dragon Empire* is Brust's Drageria in politics, Windsors are part of the House of the Dog, and Sir Kai's shield is emblazoned with a corgi.
- Sol, a dark elf druid, primarily a shape-shifter with a displacer beast animal companion, who's OUT is that she is an adopted daughter of the Diabolist's (an Icon in the setting, but not our campaign big bad). Her displacer beast doesn't like her much either. Sis Kai had been sent to eliminate her but took her parole instead, explaining how both of them are in this group together. Sol's player wants to be so dark and edgy and... 13. I want to say, "Oh Sweetie," give her a hug and let her know she'll be OK. Two years later she really is less deliberately edgy.
- Nugera, a high elf wizard. The player really wanted to play a 5E Artificer, so I re-chromed the Wizard to fit that concept and explained how ritual magic worked if she wanted to do unique things. Her OUT is that after she lost an arm escaping the Orc Lord's work camps, she made a new one of bronze & glass and she her familiar is a clockwork budgie. The player came all summer, but after-school activities got in the way, and she dropped out. Strangely, part of the new school year kids included a boy wanting to play a high elf Artificer. To ease the campaign log Nugera just alchemically changed genders.

In our second session a friend of Alire's showed up and made a Wood Elf ranger. He never came up with a name and only showed up for 2-3 sessions. I had to learn to not take that "OK I'm trying this and it's not for me" as a personal failing. Strangely, when we got to the start of the second summer Alire asked to swap out characters for a bit and started playing a wood elf ranger – I got the sense that he had tried one in *5E*, didn't like it, and wanted to see how it played in *13th Age* – so again for simplicity in the log I just made them the same person (the original never had an OUT, but in the retrofit he's on year 99 of a century long exile from the Elf Court).

In our 4th-5th sessions we added three more players who would join the campaigns' cores.

- Onyx, the centaur fighter/wizard, whose player had a crystal-clear idea of what they wanted walking in, and so I let them have it. I had to quickly make up a racial power for centaurs (a burst of extra move once a fight, and logical bonuses to lift/move); well worth it for the player's engagement. Onyx is the only centaur to serve in the Imperial Bodyguard, and his magic focuses on abjuration and divination while his combat is fast, strong, and well armored. No, *13th Age* doesn't have a divination spells; we just use his background 'trained in the Archmage's academy' to gather information via crystals & cartomancy.
- Numina, a high elf cleric. Onyx's player's sister, who came with no idea at all. Decided to be an elf in a support role; everything else came out over time. Like our nameless ranger, the player looked so put on the spot when asked that I didn't want to push it; we decided elves don't take their final names until later in life. It took months of referring to her as Numina in my notes (shorter 'than the Elf with No Name') before I mentioned that and her eyes lit up. Since *13th Age* lacks a set pantheon, I decided that re picks of strength, healing, and trickery meant she worshipped Prometheus. She shows up every week. Her OUT is still undefined, but she is a former soldier in the Crown Hospitallers. I'm curious if she continues since her sibling graduated, but she is friends with Sol's player in the same grade.
- Xela a human sorcerer/necromancer, who has the strange OUT that "his wand is actually a twig". The player has said "I don't want to deal with an OUT, so this is trivial and unimportant." Point taken. Xela is the only PC without a tie to the empire, having been 'rescued' from the service of a dragon when the group blew up his house killing it. He's a bandit, scoundrel, professional dungeon crawler, and is the proud father of an animated skeleton, Timothy. Xela was, for a long time, the party's best "thief" just on his backgrounds, a real *13th Age* strength to me.

Finally, we had two other players show up during that first bit both of whom were not really value adds to play. Remember what I said re the maturity gulf between 12 and 14? These kids were very, very 12. One was a half orc barbarian named Kalekis II, who never bothered to learn any of the rules, was perpetually confused about who they were, where they were, what they were doing and what the rules were but didn't actively damage the story. The other was a little chaos goblin, who took over Nugera (changing his name, after weeks of being nameless, to Realname McRealnameson, as a dig on Kai's player who, when the paladin was trying to infiltrate a noble fop's fencing society was caught out on a name said that he was Fakename McFakenameson, which was honestly a funny in-the-moment bit). This player only came to torment Kalekis' player – stealing his dice, messing up his actions, distracting him – and generally being a jerk until forcefully called on it. Since it was a library event and not my own I couldn't just kick him out

I really had no idea why these two kept showing up – what were they getting from this? The Kalekis's player kept asking what his assignments were, like this was a mandatory school thing. It was *baffling*.

Eventually I split the groups: Alire, Onyx, and Numina in one group; Kai, Sol, Xela, Kalekis, and Rlename in the other. This improved things considerably. The *13th Age* engine breaks down with 6+ PCs, which I had learned in the past. My original plan put Xela in group A but he asked to stay with Sol since he was friends with her from track. Fair enough, and he helped give group B focus. In retrospect, group B would have been unmanageable without him. Everyone kept showing up every week, and group A had all the adventures I had been hoping for when they picked the Emperor as a patron, and group B played through an updated 3E adventure I had used ages ago and all seemed to be having fun.

Group A had a mad necromancer distill the ghost of an NPC who Alire had pretended to apprentice too and was now irritating him in death into a bottle of spirits this paid off his debt to them for finding his lost animated skull that was working with a cult under a gladiatorial arena; group B discovered that owlbears, which were actually Pandarrots, which were actually evil Duolingo owls that destroyed Xela's first skeletal companion, Bob while travelling through a faerie wood to get to the Temple of Blood Everflowing. The usual nonsense.

Aside from Rlename & Kalekis it was immensely fun. It's the first time I've run a long game unable to curate the players: this was a library function, so while I could cap it would take a lot to be able to exclude. That taught a lot about patience and player management.

Comments

Attronarch: It's easy to forget how unforgiving OSR play can be, but they really did make some bad decisions here. (So far the kids in my *Knave* game have avoided a PC death but they came really close once with giant rats.) Is Brother Goose seeking atonement for some wrong and hence spell-less?

Mark A Wilson: Indeed all good problems! The prior campaign world sounds neat (shades of *The Magicians and Mrs. Quent*), and you're likely best for avoiding Vecna from what I've read. Very much agreed on *Baby Driver* and *Speed Racer*.

Patrick Riley: Oh Patrick, I'm five years late but you have my utmost sympathy over your step-daughter's death. I was going to comment on the legality of your termination, but you seem better situated now so I shan't bother. RAE the *City of 1000 Names* adventure.

Myles Corcoran: Myles, I'm so happy to see you here and hopefully we can both keep the muse running. I have always loved your write ups; the dry humor of "the syrup-coated hazelnuts were hardly a consideration" was beautiful, as was Ratty Nightingale.

PUM: Gumshoe has been interesting for my group as well. During pre-vaccine Covid I ran a *Mutant City Blues* game for several of my players on Roll 20 that moved to in person after vaccination, and I had to introduce the game in stages (letting them have flat bonuses on their general abilities rather than pools until we moved to full pools). *SotS* is easier with *Night Chalice* in that they allow a lot of swapping investigative abilities for general ability bonuses and I let the players decide refreshes happen between games – with the caveat that taking a refresh means a month has passed in game – so players have more pool options. The stress of “do we press on with our ever dwindling pools or do we let the opposition have time to advance their plans (and we develop new problems trying to keep the guild running)” is oddly reminiscent of the OSR dungeon crawl style.

Gabriel Roark: In later issues I'll be discussing my B/X homebrew that I used for a friend group (as opposed to kid group) and want to go back to that had me musing a lot on the D&D XP table hows & whys. Needless to say, this was all fascinating for me.

Michael Cule: I hadn't realized how much I missed seeing PPOAE (now PPOEA?). Also, morbid as it is it's good that you're keeping your will up to date. One of my group passed in 2021 at age 51 and the question of what to do with his massive gaming (and other book) library was a real issue for his sister.

Mark Nemeth: RAE Write ups. I love folding boats! One of the randomly created spell titles in my knave game – rolled by a player who said she wanted to play a healer when *Knave* doesn't really have rules for that but ended up with the background of Physician because the dice gods were listening – is *The Magnificent Healing Carriage*, and she has a collapsable origami ambulance. Like you, I am glad you suffered a campaign loss there – they are important for D&D to feel like, well, D&D.

Brian Misiaszek: it would be impossible to believe that Lauren has graduated from university, save for the fact that my daughter is approaching her sophomore year. How has time done this?! RE Cuba Cthulhu: Clearly the core of your Cuba plot is that the Monsignor 'died' in 1942 while holding his office till his death in 1940! Dun Dun Duuuuuuuun! Also a fascinating retrospective on pulp fascist takeovers of the US.

Reviews to Fill Space:

I recently finished Molly Tanzer's *The Diabolist's Library* series and quite enjoyed them; lots of ideas for multi-generation gaming, maybe in a contemporary *Ars Magica* style. Her *Rumbullion* novella is also quite fun in an epistolary roshomon mystery way.

I am about to start *Folded Sky*, the 3rd in Elizabeth Bear's *White Space* series and wanted to recommend the first two: *Ancestral Night* and *Machine*. These are well done SF where the 2nd is strongly influenced by James White's *Hospital Station* series. The core premise is “what if in the future humanity could access our neural software so that we can make ourselves not-assholes.” The villains are people who say “but am I really human if I, personally, don't have the opportunity to be an asshole to people?” (Caveat, I went to school with Ms. Bear – I have a call out in one of her series as the protagonist was based on her PC in my *Amber* campaign – so take that as you will.)

In the ultra-small-press range the theater director at the town High School where I volunteer to help with set build gave me her father's self-published book on her grandfather's military unit's actions in WWII Europe. Joseph Milatano's *The Sons of Bitche* details the 100th infantry's formation (out of members of the USO and soldiers who were being sent to college to learn post-war reconstruction skills when the army decided the needed more infantry than either of those) heading across France to retake the forts of the now German-controlled Maginot Line. Milatano is a former news reporter and once you get past the duplicative aspects of the intro to first chapter is remarkably engaging. If I ever do run a Godlike game (WWII Supers) it will be using this.

Goodnight Captain Fasaad, wherever you are.

Gaming Biography

Upon reading George's zine last issue, I was mildly embarrassed to realize that in my reintroduction in QPLG #1, I failed to talk about my gaming journey as several of you also did.

I have a distinct memory of being in 6th grade¹ (circa 1980) when a classmate showed me (his older brother's) AD&D Monster Manual. Eventually, we started playing during lunch and class breaks (the teacher let us do this inside the classroom) using what can only be described as "we don't know what we are doing" rules. This eventually evolved into semi-regular playing with the same guy as DM outside of school. We also dabbled in Star Frontiers.

Fast forward through junior high where I was introduced to Champions² (2nd edition) and high school where the main AD&D group switched to Rolemaster. My best friend and I also tried to play Traveller, Toon, and Boot Hill (he was big into westerns), but with just the two of us, it fell flat. Of that original group of kids, I'd guess that I'm the only one who is still playing RPGs.

Going back to grade school for a moment, before we got into D&D, we would do a lot of play acting and make believe. For example, we'd use drawing paper to create starship consoles on our desks, arrange them into a bridge configuration³, and act out an improvised scenario about encountering hostile aliens. This formidable experience is the core of my roleplaying style.

For me, the roleplaying is the game. The tactical and mechanical elements are fun, but I'm here for the makebelieve. Theatre and drama never attracted me and I'm too shy and introverted⁴ for LARPs.

¹ It could have been in 5th because I had the same classroom and same teacher for both grades.

² I learned how to use an RPN calculator making Champions characters.

³ Our teacher was very liberal and let us arrange our desks however we wanted so long as we weren't facing backwards.

⁴ Yes, these are two different things.

I went to the other end of the state for college and joined a new cadre of friends. This included at least 3 AD&D campaigns, including the transition to 2nd edition. Also played Call of Cthulhu, Cyberpunk, and Marvel Super Heroes. It was also during this time that I started running games of my own (with embarrassing bad results initially), attending game conventions (DunDraCon being the main one), and joined Alarums & Excursions.⁵

One time when I came home during a break, I joined a campaign session and played the PC of someone who couldn't make it. Afterwards, the GM commented how I played the character better than the original player and was the only one who actually roleplayed.

Decades years later and I haven't stopped.

How much for a finger?

My home-town group played Battletech and picked up the original Mechwarrior RPG. This was their first experience with point-based character building and when they realized you could get additional character points for missing an eye or an arm, they started negotiating how many points they could get if they removed a hand or even individual fingers. I still wasn't the most sophisticated gamer, but even I could see the madness unfolding.

They put all their points into getting bigger mechs (and presumably piloting skills), whereas I like small mechs⁶ and put more emphasis on personal skills and rank. This, naturally, made me the commander of our little squad. I then spent the entire game session chasing down these chaos-monkeys as they did everything they could to break regulation, go AWOL, and stir up trouble. I think I even got reprimanded for their insubordination.

This experience has left an indelible distaste for games driven by PC mischief and for being the official leader of a party (especially in a (para)military organization).

⁵ Thankfully, I joined when stencils were no longer the norm, else I would not have started contributing.

⁶ My preferences are 80% vibes. I like Locusts, Marauders, and non-humanoid mechs.

The Adventurers Guild

The Adventurers Guild is the name of my current D&D 5e (2024) campaign as well as the in-game institution and metagame construct. The guild brokers quests for adventurers and operates guildhalls that provide them a place to socialize with fellow adventurers.

The guild ranks members as Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, and Diamond. These map onto character levels 1–4, 5–8, 6–12, 13–16, and 17–20, respectively. The guild posts quests by rank and the guildmasters approve adventure parties for quests. In-game, the guildmasters try to match the perceived difficulty of the quest to the capabilities of the party. Out-of-game, I am letting the players pick what their next adventure will be. I also include quests they aren't quite ready for yet. I also include quests I think the players won't want or ones I really don't want to run so as to add flavor to the world. After a couple of sessions, I create a new list, removing some they haven't picked under the pretext that some other adventuring group undertook them.

It is possible, though I have not done it yet, for two or more quests to actually be the same adventure under the hood except with different motivations. For example, "Investigate and remove the threat of bandits along the road south of town" and "Deliver a letter to the next town to the south" could result in very similar encounters with the same opponents.

Quests may reference places or people that don't yet exist on the map. As the PCs undertake quests, I expand the world around Islingford-upon-Orlin to match the PC's travels.

The players pick the next quest either at the end of a session or in between sessions which gives me time to create the adventure. I then try to tailor the adventure to their current level and who will be showing up the next session. I can also incorporate side quests or subplots tied to specific PC backgrounds and interests.

Each session is scheduled for five hours: noon to five o'clock, but actual game time is 3 or 4 hours. One of the stated goals of this gaming group is to socialize in person (and not on screens) and so I am more tolerant of out-of-character and tangential banter as I might have been a decade ago. I mentioned last issue that my convention games have been running long. This is in part because I have months to prepare. With only a week or two to prepare the adventures in this campaign, they are much more lean and thus shorter.

The Player Characters

As of this writing, they are all level 4.

Millie Weaver: Human Wizards (Abjurer)

Millie was a maid. She worked for a wizard and taught herself magic because using Prestidigitation worked better than elbow grease. Whether the wizard knew Millie was doing this is unknown. He could have been giving subtle nudges (such as by never mentioning or objecting to her learnings) or completely oblivious. After he died, the wizard's daughter, Isadora, made it impossible for her to stay. Her subplot heats up below.

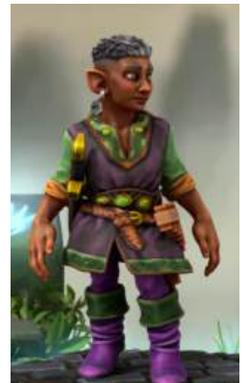
Anan Miadove: Copper Dragonborn Fighter (Battle Master)

Before joining the guild, Anan has been a failed alchemist apprentice, a failed boat builder, and (presumably failed) city guard. He's stubborn and doesn't admit to his own failings and mistakes; we'll see if he ever grows out of that.

Anan's player is a bit of a rules monkey so is informally in charge of guiding the players rules-wise so that I don't have to.

Iggy Smalls: Rock Gnome Bard (College of Glamour)

Iggy was in a depressive funk due to unrequited and tragically lost love when Anan dragged them to the Adventurers Guild to join up with him. The circumstances around Iggy's love's death (or maybe just disappearance) and the travelling stranger with a mysterious, magical musical instrument at the center is a subplot I'll have to develop and explore eventually.



Iggy's player is the most "rules challenged" of the group and took a while to consistently use abilities like bardic inspiration. On the other hand, they are the most eager to contribute to worldbuilding, such as detailing several taverns in the city where Iggy has performed, and even wrote a poem/song about an NPC.

Entan: Human Druid (Circle of the Land)

Entan comes from a family of druids who shunned civilization and who groomed him to be a healer. Having been told never to go to the city, he naturally became curious and when overheard tales of adventure by a

visiting dwarf, he left his sheltered life behind and headed to the city.

Entan really does not like using healing spells and avoids it whenever he can. Everyone knows the score and it's a running joke with the group (PCs and players alike). He doesn't have any drive except "adventure," and his player is a bit passive until/unless I actively engage them.

Chayote Cucurbits: Rock Gnome Cleric of Hathor (Life Domain)

The group met Chayote in Orlan where they were investigating what turned out to be "The Cult of the Reptile God" (AD&D adventure N1). She is elderly but spry. She traveled widely in her youth and when she returned home, it didn't stick. Chayote is also in search of her niece, Pumpkin, who also left their home in search of adventure.



Iggy and Chayote's players created images using [Heroforge](#) but did not actually purchase figures.

Griffon Hunt with Lord Stansbury

Escort a noble on a hunt to Mt. Falwin: 20-100 gp per member.

Overview

Lord Roderick Stansbury has two children: Tiffany and Roland. Though the Stansbury family has wealth and influence in Islingford-upon-Orlin, he is keenly aware that noble birth and titles often do not garner the same respect that great deeds and adventures do. He encouraged his children to join the Adventurers Guild and "bring glory to the family name." Tiffany took this advice to heart and joined the Adventurers Guild. She uses her exploits as a tool of one upmanship she can lord over her aristocratic peers.

Roland, however, is less interested. His interests lie more in finance and would rather manage the family's interests than go adventuring. He struck a deal that he

would humor his father and go on one noteworthy adventure in exchange for more tutelage and responsibility in the family investments. Roland is a handsome young human, aged 16, with blonde hair and blue eyes (like his older sister). His clothes and gear are of fine quality.

Stansbury is one of the older families of Islington-upon-Orlin and their original wealth accumulated through land leasing. Now the family wealth is grown through investments and lending. Lady Gwendel Stansbury rarely comes to the city and instead manages the estate on the outskirts of the city.

Lord Stansbury asked Tiffany what kind of adventure would be appropriate for her brother. She had heard rumors of a griffon in the area of Mount Falwin and suggested a hunt, escorted of course. What she did not know was that the creature misidentified as a griffon is actually a chimera. Had she known, she would have gone after it herself along with The Crimson Crows.⁷

Meeting Lord Stansbury

The PCs are instructed to meet Lord Stansbury in the Stansbury city home.

The three-story house sits in the dense city center. You are welcomed by a tall, thin goliath with reddish skin. He leads you past the entry parlor and office and brings you to the second-floor living room. The decor displays wealth in the craftsmanship and materials, but is not ostentatious. "*Lord Stansbury will be with you shortly,*" the attendant says in a gravelly voice just above a whisper. He then walks over to tall floor-to ceiling shutters and opens them up half-way to reveal a small balcony overlooking the small garden in the back of the house. It also lets in fresh air and indirect light to make the room more comfortable. "*Please wait here and make yourselves comfortable,*" he says before leaving the room and shutting the door behind him.

The room has a couple of sofas and a few well-cushioned chairs surrounding a low, oval table in the middle of the room. The walls are decorated with paintings of either landscapes inspired by the surrounding countryside and wilderness or portraits of the Stansbury house from generations past.

⁷ Her adventuring party. The Crimson Crows, are "professional rivals" of the PCs' party whose members mirror the PCs. For example, their fighter is a black dragonborn and their bard is an orc who juggles. Tiffany (a noble sorcerer) is Millie's mirror.

Pause to ask if the players want to do anything while they wait.

Eventually the door opens and in walks Lord Stansbury, a middle-aged human with blonde hair and mustache and blue eyes. His clothes are finely tailored in shades of forest green and brown. Behind him follows a young man with similar hair and eyes, unmistakable as the Lord's son. Third in tow is the attendant pushing a small cart upon which sits two porcelain pitchers and several crystal glasses.

Lord Stansbury addresses you with a wide smile, *"Welcome adventurers to my home. Thank you for heeding my call. I am Lord Roderick Stansbury and this is my son, Roland."* He punctuates the last statement by placing a firm hand on the teenager's shoulder. *"We have both tea and ale. Please introduce yourselves and Ferrand will serve you."*

Pause for introductions.

Once you have been served, Ferrand gives a nod to Lord Stansbury and exits the room, but leaves the cart and its contents behind. Before he can shut the door, a figure appears at the door. She is wearing a silk dress with gold embroidery. You immediately recognize Tiffany from the Adventurers Guild and you also clearly see the family resemblance. She says, *"Excuse me, but I wish to borrow Miss Millie while you explain the nature of the quest."*

This was me setting up Millie's side plot. Her player indicated that while the player was willing, the PC was not. Millie would try to avoid her side plot. That basically gave me the green light to drag her into it.

Once Millie left the room, Lord Roderick Stansbury continued.

"I have great respect for what you adventurers do and I would ask that you share an adventure with my son. I have heard there is a griffon residing on Mount Felwin and I would like him to bring home a trophy." Roland himself makes no reaction to this pronouncement.

The PCs can ask questions. Roland is just a standard Noble, as described in the rules. That puts him at around level 2 and proficient in rapier. This was also convenient because the party had acquired a magical rapier that no one could use, except the fighter, but he's a polearm specialist. In the setting, magic items cannot

be simply bought and sold, but they can be traded and bartered for. This gave the PCs someone who might be interested in the rapier and would have the means and connections to possibly trade it for something the PCs wanted. Unfortunately, the player of the PC with the rapier was not in this session.

Meanwhile...

Mistress Tiffany Stansbury

Tiffany pulls Millie into the kitchen. She looks you up and down briefly and smirks before leaning back on the counter. *"I heard about your promotion into the guild. Congratulations,"* she says with an honestly respectful nod. *"You can think of what I am about to tell you as a gift from one guild member to another. A certain person of considerable influence in arcane circles has been cursing your name around certain halls of influence. Wait, that is not entirely true. Fact is, I am fairly certain that she knows not your name, but her description of 'that brown-haired wastel who seduced and betrayed my father,' I am certain refers to you. I do not know what you did or what she thinks you did—nor do I care, though I am curious. Whatever the reason, Miss Voss is on a rampage. She has ordered agents of the Arcane Estate to, quote, 'Bring in that thieving whore for interrogation.' Being out of town for a while and her lack of a useful physical description—or your name—has kept you safe, but she will eventually find you if you linger in Islingford. Perhaps it is good that you will be escorting my baby brother on this quest."*

The stolen item is a magical candle that cannot be lit (rolled up from the Trinkets table during character creation). When Millie found it mixed in with the ordinary candles (probably put there by mistake by another maid), she took it and practically forgot about it. Isadora does not even know what the candle does, but someone from the Arcane Estate asked her about it and that put her on Millie's trail.

More backstory: When Isadora found Millie reading one of her father's spellbooks in the library, "Rather than recognizing Millie's earnest dedication, Isadora publicly humiliated her, declaring, 'A maid pretending to be a wizard is like a dog trying to read.' She then burned the book in the estate's hearth, dismissing Millie's learning as a waste and insulting her deeply." Millie left the household and soon thereafter joined the guild. Isadora inherited her father's "ceremonial title of Protector of the Arcane Estates" (but is such a social and political animal that she has given the title more weight).

Setting Off

As the PCs get ready to set off with Roland...

Roland has his own adventuring gear and well adorned riding horse. Lord Stansbury will see the party off and give the party one last comment outside of earshot of Roland: *"I am entrusting my heir's safety in your capable hands, but I also want Roland to experience what it is to be on an adventure and to come back with a noteworthy tale. Perhaps a side trek through the dreadwoods would be exciting. You will be paid even if you do not track down the griffon, but if you do, allow Roland to have the kill shot."*

One of the challenges of the adventure is to keep Roland alive given that he is completely underpowered to take on a chimera. Giving him the killing blow would count as a "bonus achievement."



Tech note: I use [Worldographer](#) for the overland hex map, [Fantasy Calendar](#) for the calendar, and Google Drive for everything else (including this zine).

The party set off on the auspicious day of Kotturday the 1st of Ascending Summer. Mount Falwin is just over a day's travel from the city with the dreadwood being an easy passthrough point. Inside the dreadwoods, they helped Roland hunt and bag a stag whose antlers would be a fine trophy should the griffon hunt come up empty.

The Lair of the Griffon Chimera

Hunting a creature that flies comes with certain difficulties (and several Wisdom (Survival) rolls). They came across the carcass of a bear that had been killed and mostly consumed by some more fearsome predator, so they knew they were on the right track.

They spotted a winged beast flying high near the mountain and eventually spotted a rocky outcropping of what might be a cave on the mountainside. It was too steep for their mounts, so they proceeded on foot up the difficult incline. As they reached the base of the outcropping, the chimera stepped out of the cave, looked down upon the ascending party and breathed fire on them.

Roland fell to the ground instantly and they had to scramble to prevent him from rolling down the mountainside. As they tried to make it to the cave, the chimera took flight and attacked their flank. [To my great frustration, the breath weapon failed to recharge for the remainder of the encounter.]

What followed was a fierce battle with the chimera giving as good as it got. Chayote had revived Roland who then took a position near the rocks and contributed his crossbow to the battle. Eventually, the chimera had had enough and began to fly away.

Roland shot his crossbow and hit it squarely, but failed to deliver the requisite damage. Millie finished it off with a ranged spell attack.

I rolled Roland's to hit and damage rolls in the open rather than behind my screen as I usually do. I give myself the option to fudge dice rolls (see the next adventure for an example), but when it comes to these types of situations—especially when seeing the dice rolls adds excitement for the players—I like to do it in the open. They knew what he needed to hit and I told them how many hp the chimera had left. As they cheered on the NPC and watched the dice fall, the damage roll fell short by 1 hp. Though disappointing, I feel that fudging that last hp wouldn't have felt as dramatic, to the players or to me.

They removed the chimera's dragon head as a trophy well suited for mounting on a noble's wall and had a pleasant journey back home.

Bodyguard for Lady Fionna

Provide bodyguard services for Lady Fionna: 50 gp per member per day for 1 week.

Due to odd scheduling, I only had one week to prepare for this quest following the hunt. This was also the same week that I started my new job, so my brain was a bit frazzled and not running on full power when Saturday arrived. I did not have the brain power to pre-write all the descriptions and dialog or to fill a particular plot hole in the adventure. I was also missing an additional player than I had thought (totally my fault), so I only had 3 of 5 instead of 4 of 5 PCs, which threw off my plans a bit.

I had planned on a scene in which the PCs were escorting Lady Fionna back to her home when they were accosted by mercenaries who shouted, "There she is!" and "Get her!" Of course, they were actually after Millie, rather than Lady Fionna, so that would have been a fun couple rounds of misdirection. However, when the time came to do this, I just did not have the energy and I let the moment pass. Anyway, back to the adventure...

The setup was thus. Lady Fionna recently returned from afar to her family estate following the death of her husband. Shortly after, the estate was burgled with some fine silver and gold items stolen from the dining room. The next night, the two servants and cook were murdered with Lady Fionna discovering their bodies when she came downstairs in the morning. Fearing for her safety, she went to the Adventurers Guild to hire some bodyguards. Such was explained to the PCs when they met with her after accepting the quest from the guild (though I forgot to mention the first bit about her husband, but that was immaterial).

On the way to the estate, they asked the usual questions about enemies, other burglaries, etc. and got no sufficient answers. Millie's player speculated it was a haunted house which they would soon discover was correct. Under the estate house, accessed through a secret door in the pantry, is the family crypt. The burglar discovered this secret door and expecting to find greater treasures beyond, ventured down into the crypt. While attempting to loot the crypt, one of Lady Fionna's ancestors' spirits was disturbed and woke as a vengeful wraith, killing the burglar whose body remained in the crypt as the secret door shut on its own, sealing it inside and out of sight.

Having now been woken, the wraith was set on protecting their progeny. In other words, Lady Fionna was never in danger, but anyone else in the house was. Thus, the live-in staff was doomed.

After doing a search of the house, the PCs set up watches as Lady Fionna went to bed. They soon encountered the specters of the staff as they floated up the main staircase. When Chayote turned a couple, they fled back to the crypt, passing through the floors. "Why did they come up the stairs?" Millie asked. "Habit," I replied.

The PCs now knew there was someplace below the house, triggering a search that led to the discovery of the secret door. After making their way down, they found the body of the burglar and the wraith.

Not long ago in Alarums & Excursions, there was a discussion about the level-drain ability of some undead in AD&D. I love that level-drain puts fear into the hearts of players, but I hate removing hard-earned levels from PCs. In D&D5e, undead like wraiths and spectres (anyone killed by a wraith becomes a spectre) have a life drain ability that seems to achieve the former while avoiding the latter. The touch of one of these undead not only reduces hit points, but it reduces maximum hit points by the same amount. Effectively, this means that the wounds are incurable (at least during the fight). Furthermore, when their max hp reaches zero, it is instant death for the victim.

The fight in the crypt was brutal. The PCs were overmatched. The only reason Chayote did not die was because of temporary hit points granted by Iggy and me fudging a bit.

I couldn't find the rules on how temporary hp interact with the life drain ability. Suppose a PC has 20 max hp, 20 current hp, and 5 temporary hp. If a hit would normally do 12 damage, for example, it would first be taken up by the temp hp and then applied to the actual hp. In this case, the PC would still have 20 max hp, but their current hp would be reduced by 7 to 13 and their temp hp would be gone.

Life drain says, "If the target is a creature, its Hit Point maximum decreases by an amount equal to the damage taken." If life drain does 12 damage to someone with 5 temp hp, does it reduce the max hp by 7 or by 12? If it reduces it by 12, then the max hp would be reduced to 8, forcing the actual hp down to 8, as if the temp hp had been completely ignored. While my

new job-addled brain struggled with this question, it also gave me cover while I was dealing with the fact that I had actually rolled enough damage (thanks to rolling a natural 20 to hit) to kill Chayote outright regardless of how we handled the temp hp.

In the end, we decided that it was only fair to allow the temp hp to absorb some of the damage and to reduce the actual hp and max hp by whatever was left over. I then declared the damage suffered and Chayote was down to 2 hp (and max hp).

Some of you OSR fans might cringe at me fudging the dice this way and I can understand why. For me, having Chayote die did not seem like the fun thing to do. It was more fun to scare the bejesus out of the players and force the PCs to run away. In fact, the race out of the crypt and out of the house while keeping Chayote away from the undead who were only mildly encumbered by stairs and walls was quite a tension-filled end of the scene.

I had already determined that the house was the extent of the spirits' domain so once they left the building, they were safe, but they didn't know that until they had escaped. The PCs and Lady Fionna retreated to the detached carriage house and spent the night.

A "long rest" in D&D5e restores all lost hp and returns maximum hit points back to normal. I still don't know how I feel about this rule. I understand why it's there, but having such a quick reset from such a harrowing encounter seems a bit too "cinematic."

The group decided to return to town and find Lady Fionna somewhere to stay outside the house. They knew she was safe from the spirits outside the house, but did not know she was safe from them regardless. They also vowed to return to the house once Anan would be available to help dispatch the threat. The session ended there to be taken up a month later.

The Plot Hole

Why didn't the servants and/or Lady Fionna search the crypt after the burglary? Wouldn't the servants have noticed the secret door even if they didn't know about it beforehand? Why did Lady Fionna deny knowledge of any basement when asked by the PCs? Fact is, I just wanted the PCs to discover the crypt on their own without being told about it.

There may be other holes. This is the one I fretted about.

Take Two

Following a month-long break, it took awhile for the players to "get settled" and into game mode and maintaining focus was a challenge throughout the session. This helped contribute to some tactical errors later on.

The PCs met Anan at the guildhouse, explained the situation, and the four of them went back to the haunted house. With 4 PCs and their battlemaster, I knew the encounter would not be as harrowing (though Anan did nearly insta-die from a critical), but I did not "up the stakes" by adding more spectres or wraiths from what the PCs encountered initially. Chayote was able to turn a couple of the specters and this bought time to focus on the wraith. Once it was down to the two turned specters, they did a good job corralling them into position, but then miscommunication led to different PCs attacking different spectres, resulting in a 4-on-2 fight rather than two 4-on-1 fights.

On the final blow of the encounter, Anan killed the final specter but also used weapon mastery to push it back 15 feet. This caused it to fly into and through the wall of the crypt. Unsure if it was truly defeated, I let the paranoia linger and the PCs cautiously left the house. Their plan was to stay a couple extra nights in the house just to make sure. For some reason, Anan and Iggy stayed behind outside the house while Chayote and Millie returned to town to update Lady Fionna.

This was the opportunity I had waited for. A couple of toughs and their boss confronted the two women as they made their way back on horseback to the house. Earlier in the day, before meeting Anan, Millie had caught sight of someone who was watching her but ran off when she tried to confront him.

Drained of most of her spells was a very inconvenient time for Millie to be ambushed. They tried to escape through the city alleyways, but Millie's poor riding skills made it difficult and the mercenaries were able to block her path. After a few volleys of heavy crossbows and ranged cantrips, the cleric and wizard decided to turn tail. This time, they took a very circuitous route back to the estate with no further trouble.

After spending the night in carriagehouse (again), they ventured back into the crypt, verified no spectre had returned, undisturbed the wraith's sarcophagus, said a prayer to play it safe, and concluded their quest.

Elemental Trouble

The party had three days until the new quests were posted, so they had time to do whatever they wanted. Millie wanted to purchase candles⁸ that matched the one she had taken and that Isadora was after. I then pulled out the marketplace battlemat I had drawn earlier, as if I knew they'd end up there eventually.

Upon leaving the candleshop, they saw a horse-drawn cart barreling down the center of the road and out of control. A group of impish mephits were harassing the horses. The group leaped into action and bit onto the distraction hard.

After a round of meeting the cart and fighting the mephits, Millie was beset by an invisible stalker. Despite her best efforts to escape and Chayote doing what she could to heal her, Anan and Iggy were too preoccupied by the mephits to assist. When Millie was rendered unconscious and hoisted into the air, Iggy cast *Dissonant Whispers*⁹ which caused the air elemental to flee away from the party and take Millie with it, giving it a head start in a chase they had no hope of winning.

The encounter was overpowered for the PCs' level, but there were opportunities for them to survive and retreat. Unfortunately, poor tactical choices and a few unfortunate rolls (and forgetting that Heroic Inspiration was available) lead to the cliffhanger ending.

Comments on E&A Issue #1

Michael Cule

CUNNING PLANS AND OVER-REACHING AMBITIONS sounds like a perfect title for talking about your current games. And you aren't alone. :)

Mark Nemeth

Taking a Loss echoes something one of my players mentioned recently. She thought the bodyguard plot (which she had speculated was a haunted house) and the "we nearly lost a PC" encounter with the wraith had the right level of investigation and danger.

⁸ These were "bougie" candles so they cost 10x.

⁹ Iggy should not have been able to cast this against an invisible target (a fact that was causing Millie problems), but Iggy's player is terrible at reading the technical details of spell descriptions and I'm terrible at fact-checking them.

It is easy to be a "Killer GM" of 1st-level characters who could be taken down with a single good weapon damage roll. At 2nd-level, one-shotting a PC becomes far less likely, but you still have to watch the numbers.

Anthropomorphic animal people are one thing (RYCT Lee), but centaur¹⁰ anatomy is just weird: 2 spines, 2 ribcages, 2 sets of shoulders, 6 limbs,

RYCT Timothy, I cannot distinguish between "steel" and "still" when my wife says them with her (very faded) Louisville Kentucky accent. I refer to my Californian accent as, "As heard on tv" as it's probably as close to "received pronunciation" as we get in the States. I recognize that I could be completely full of shit about this.

I use that same method as you for critical hit damage for the exact same reasons, RYCT Gabriel.

RYCT Spike, I hate the term "fiat currency" because all currency—even gold bars—only has the value people agree it has. "Intrinsic value" is a lie. What you don't want is to have your money be useful for other things besides being a token value, such as turning copper coins into copper wires. The only difference between monetary systems is how scarcity is achieved and counterfeiting is prevented whether mining out of the ground, printing by the government, processing algorithms, etc.

Re *American Notes for General Circulation*, I highly doubt that anyone who holds "some of the more absurd ideas of American exceptionalism" would be dissuaded by anything or anyone nor would they ever read this book.

Patrick Zoch

I liked the NPC personality tables. I even learned a new vocabulary word (not saying which one). I note that some Openness traits, like Patient and Listener, are not negative and others, like Show-off and Bossy, are not positive, despite their location on the table.

For unusual convention pairings (re cts to Spike), I think you could take any fannish con (anime, furry, gaming...) and pair it with any business or industry convention. 20+ years ago, I was at a cable television trade show that included cable channels as well as technical and industrial companies. My company was selling a handheld cable signal testing device across the aisle from an adult entertainment booth.

¹⁰ Or more generically, "taurs" if you want to have non-equine options.

BUGBEARS & BALLYHOO #41

July 17, 2025, for Ever & Anon #2

Gabriel Roark

Rancho Cordova, CA

gabrielroark@gmail.com

Summer has been good to us so far. My mom's been home for a couple months now & my dad is enjoying retirement. He alternates between working in the yards & caring for mom. She is getting her fiery personality back & joins us at the kitchen table for family gatherings in her wheelchair now. Mom has a lot of physical therapy in front of her still, but she recently had her first prosthetics appointment & came away from it greatly encouraged.

Celeste & I went ice skating together for the first time in adulthood this month. It was a lot of fun & quite tiring. We are looking to make it a regular thing.

The two gaming groups in which I participate are alive & well. On alternating weeks, Trevor runs our 5e campaign using *Keys from the Golden Vault*, which is a collection of heist-type adventures. Our PCs have all reached level 6. The other alternating weeks sees Trevor & a different group of players tearing apart the Temple of Elemental Evil (AD&D 1e). By nextish, the PCs should have squared off against four earth elementals. I expect it to be a brutal tango.

IN THIS ISSUE

- Comments on E&A #1
- Ignorable Theme: Do you stat and equip your intelligent and powerful villains who are going to defeat the inferior "heroes"? Why or why not? Does doing or not doing this influence how you run the session/campaign?
- Nextish

COMMENTS ON E&A #1

Egoscan Index:

- Cover
- Overlord's Annals 4(5)
- Twisting the Rope #1
- Dreadsword 1
- De Ludis Elficis Fictis
- The Phoenix Nest
- Engines & Emulators #1
- The Seedling #48
- The Dragon's Beard #86

Cover (Idle Doodler)

"Homage" is a fitting & amusing nod to Jack Harness's cover for A&E #1. Well done. It looks terrific with the Ever & Anon logo, too.

Overlord's Annals 4(5) (Attronarch)

Oof, that was a rough few sessions for your players! At least Rashomon didn't

have to hear the citizens of Hara mock him for long. Enjoyable read.

Twisting the Rope #1 (Corcoran)

It's great to see you back in an APA, Myles. I also took a break from contributing to A&E (during the USAan pandemic lockdowns) for reasons like yours. I am a little bit awed by our fellow zine-writers' ability to write lengthy, clever, & penetrating contributions month after month. Lately, I am trying not to psych myself out about contributing so that I can enjoy the camaraderie & incrementally improve my own zines.

Your Mausritter map is appealing. The hex grid base map is one I've not previously seen: some of the hexes are flush with one another (probably all hexes in every other column), whereas others have a gap between them. Are the hexes all the same size? Where did you find this hex paper?

Dreadsword 1 (Hyde)

This is fun! Another AD&D campaign. Maybe I will have to bring my group's Temple of Elemental Evil play reports to E&A. Let's compare notes.

You wrote that you run AD&D "pretty much in the way...recommended to be run in the rule books," except for the following subsystems: weapons versus armor table, monks, & psionics. I use weapons v. armor & monks but have yet to run psionics. Why don't you use the weapon v. armor tables? I find that the to-hit adjustments make weapon selection more meaningful in the context of battle with humans, demi-humans, & humanoids. I don't agree with some of Gygax's modelling of weapon efficacy, though, and find David Hargrave's modifiers in *The Arduin Grimoire* to be superior to AD&D's.

I like your practice of cleaving to the implied setting of AD&D, as described beginning with your third paragraph on page 1. I might have suggested to my players that they read the *Players Handbook* with implied setting in mind as a foil against the inevitable creep of later-edition rules & perspectives.

Loved, "...the party slung a sleep spell, sending them to the lands of nod."

On page 8, you indicated that you use the grappling & pummeling rules. Same. We still find them a little clunky. Maybe I need a cheat-sheet.

Our gaming group has two very good mappers. Indeed, it is an interesting player skill.

Cool zine, Mitch. I'm looking forward to future issues.

De Ludis Elficis Fictis (Pum)

Terrific name for the continued/new zine. Sounds like you had a great trip in Japan. Thanks for sharing.

The Phoenix Nest (Cule)

You contributed to *Trollcrusher*?! Next thing we know, you'll tell us that you game with Hartley Patters...(thumbs over to page 3) what?! Please pardon the ravings of an old-school gamezine fanboy (Patterson edited *News from Bree*). Prayers & a forest of touched wood for the man—I hope he's kicked Covid by now.

Good job remembering the importance of character sheets for learning & playing the game. Rookie me, leaving it off my list.

Engines & Emulators #1 (Row)

Regarding Karma Lapel publications: it took me till Engines & Emulators to get the joke: caramel apple!

Are you a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, that you had heard about George Phillip's *A Gentle Stroll* before E&A? I had not heard of the N3F APA till George was mentioned AGS in the E&A Google Group.

Regarding your temporary move to Wisconsin: no wonder you told me not to mail the A&E back issues from John Redden back to you! Let me know whether I should ship them to your Wisconsin address or (gasp) Portugal when you get there. I could also send them right on to the zine library (if you so direct), but then you wouldn't get to read them!

Waldenbooks was formative to my awareness of the RPG hobby, too. In the Sacramento area, we had them in every shopping mall. In addition to various D&D products & *Dragon*, the Rancho Waldenbooks carried Iron Crown Enterprises' *Middle Earth Role Playing & Fantasy Wargaming*. What an embarrassment of riches!

The Seedling #48 (Nemeth)

Relatable thoughts in your introductory/natter paragraphs. I am not yet retired but did get to play in the 5e game last week during the daytime (we played about 2:00–8:00 p.m.). It was pleasant not going past nightfall for a change.

Regarding your thoughts on "Killer DM," it sounds like the lethality did not swing too far in either direction. Maybe the 5e Challenge Rating conceit is to you what the high e-string is to Robert Smith (of the Cure) on guitar. To Smith's ear, the concert pitch high e sounds off, so he detunes it one semitone & gets satisfactory results. To the extent that you use the challenge rating, maybe you need to "detune" it to be a bit harder than CR

2, say, but not tuned all the way to CR 3. How does one do that? I'm not sure. Maybe I will have developed some insight into this ineffable quality of refereeing nextish. The E&A Brain Trust is liable to deliver, anyway.

The idea of a non-static group of PCs (with each player running more than one PC) is tantalizing. Playing the different personalities in an invested manner that also respects the bounds of player/character knowledge, however, sounds daunting for player & referee alike. It could, for instance, get difficult for players to remember which of their PCs remember what. Play reports could help with retention & appropriate separation of spheres.

RYCTM on critical hits: my table might adopt your method. Sounds fun!

Thanks for caring about the court situation. We will be back in mid-August. As much as we want things to proceed, we are enjoying the break as best we can.

RYCT Michael Cule about obeying God out of respect for His expertise more than His power, well put.

The Dragon's Beard #86 (Zoch)

Zoch's Big 5 Traits for NPCs looks most gameable.

THE FINE PEOPLE OF E&A GENERALLY

This first issue brought me a lot of joy. Thanks for brightening the corners.

IGTHEME: DO YOU STAT AND EQUIP YOUR INTELLIGENT AND POWERFUL VILLAINS WHO ARE GOING TO DEFEAT THE INFERIOR "HEROES"? WHY OR WHY NOT? DOES DOING OR NOT DOING THIS INFLUENCE HOW YOU RUN THE SESSION/CAMPAIGN?

I do stat & equip my intelligent & powerful villains, irrespective of

whether I expect them to prevail over the PCs. My friends & I tend to play RPGs with a fair bit of crunch: The Arduin Grimoire, AD&D, and Palladium games. I don't think it influences how I run the session or campaign, but then the survival rate of my villains of late is perilously low!

ROSTER OF A&E ISSUES

Heath shared a blasted good idea about compiling our A&E PDFs for future reference. Everything that I've seen Lee write about distribution of A&E right through the Lastish has me questioning whether we are within our rights to compile the PDFs somewhere. Consider in A&E #593, "A Few ~~Words~~ Paragraphs from the Editor":

"Purchasers *who vow not to send electronic copies to anyone else* may opt to receive A&E as a set of emailed files, mostly Word97, or as all-PDF all Times New Roman files" (emphasis added). What do the rest of you lot think? We could always ask Lee.

In any case, compiling a list of who has which PDFs of A&E is uncontroversial, as it does not involve the exchange of products. It is certainly fair game to get in contact with legal owners of copies & ask research questions. To this end, here is a start on a list of available PDFs as well as current gaps in coverage:

- #1-31—Heath Row
- #32-35—Gabriel Roark
- **#36—Missing**
- #37-38—Gabriel Roark
- **#39—Missing**
- #40-76—Gabriel Roark
- **#77—Missing**
- #78—Gabriel Roark
- **#79—Missing**
- #80-85—Gabriel Roark
- **#86-96—Missing**

- #97—Gabriel Roark
- **#98-121—Missing**
- #122—Gabriel Roark
- **#123-124—Missing**
- #125—Gabriel Roark
- **#126-147—Missing**
- #148—Gabriel Roark
- **#149-203—Missing**
- #204—Gabriel Roark
- **#205-293—Missing**
- #294—Gabriel Roark
- **#295-298—Missing**
- #299-304—Gabriel Roark
- **#305—Missing**
- #306-308—Gabriel Roark
- **#309-398—Missing**
- #399-593—Heath Row

I'm sure many of us have PDFs & maybe print copies of #399-593. Feel free to add to the list in your zines, or maybe we can post it in a central place.

NEXTISH

- Comments on E&A #2
- IgTheme essay



Twisting the Rope #2

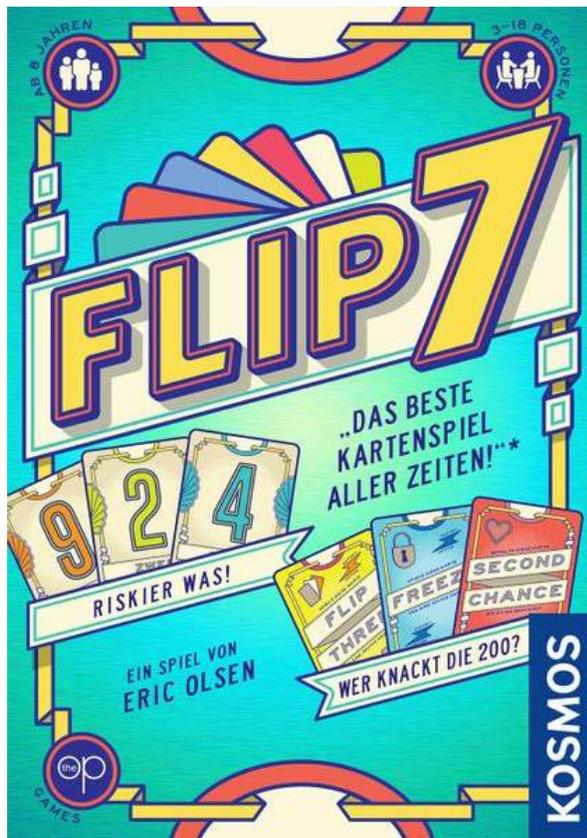
Standing on the Beach

Apologies for the A4 formatted PDF in the first issue. I was certain I changed the page setup in Google Docs, but obviously not.

This month in Cork has been one of extremes. The sun has been out and we had glorious weather for a few weeks much to the delight of ice cream vendors. It was too good to last however, and we're back in the more typical, reassuringly dull, wet Irish summer weather. The cats are very annoyed with us that we've let it get to this. They were enjoying the sunshine and spending the day out in the garden.

Mutterings

Since 2019 I've been involved with a staff boardgaming club in the university where I work. The group is good, filled with interesting people who love to play games. My involvement has rekindled my enthusiasm for boardgames and I've somewhat predictably ended up adding to my own collection. One such recent addition is *Flip 7* by Eric Olsen.



Flip 7 is a press-your-luck card game with an unusual pyramid deck consisting of 1 zero card, 1 'one' card, 2 'twos', 3 'threes' and so on up to 12 'twelve' card, along with a small number of special cards without numerical values but interesting effects in play. The oddly balanced deck means there are many more high-valued cards than low ones, which has an interesting impact on the core mechanic of avoiding making a pair.

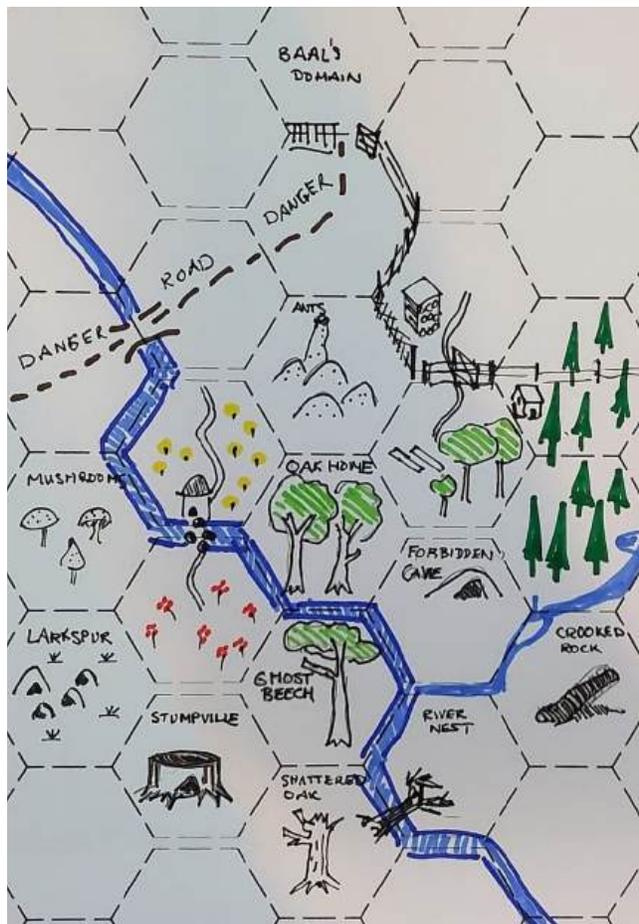
The play is simple. Flip a card to add to your face-up collection of cards or stick where you are, much like Blackjack. If you flip a number card that matches one of your already face-up cards you're out and score zero for that round. If you choose instead to stick, you score the sum of your earlier face-up cards. Play passes to the left and the next player makes the same flip or stick choice, and so on, until everyone has stuck, or gone bust. Play continues with further rounds until someone breaks 200 points and at that point the highest score wins.

The special cards add spice, like a Second Chance card to avoid going bust one time, or the Flip Three card, which you can play on anyone, including yourself, and force them to flip three cards in turn, which might bust a player, but also might add three cards' value to their hand if they're lucky.

Flip 7 is a light-weight game with a high degree of luck but on those terms a greatly enjoyable game that gets a whole table excited by the flip of a card. In a recent Friday lunchtime game, one player comfortably reached 215 points and decided to stick only for another player to push his luck and flipped cards to a total of 216 without going bust. Every card had all the players at the edge of their seats.

A Mausritter Campaign

I have been running *Mausritter* (<https://mausritter.com>) for my gaming group. A 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 the map¹.



The characters and their players are:

Sky, a sparrow-rider with an aerial mount, Miss Clutterbuck, played by Sam Mullaney.

Can-can, an ex-dancer and tin miner, played by Marie Lane.

Gwedolene, an ale-brewer, sometimes accompanied by Vicent, a drunken porter-mouse, played by Kate Sheehy.

Odette Snow, a foreign mouse and dam builder, played by Alex Ferguson.

Ambrose, a scrawny wireworker, singed with electrical burns, played by Peter MacHale.

Suddenly, Sky shouted an urgent warning as the hawk dived towards the platform out of the sun.

The mice scattered and dove back into the protection of Shattered Oak. A hasty whispered discussion followed as the raptor circled overhead. All the while, Baron Oswald and his rat soldiers lined up outside to prepare for a frontal assault.

Quickly, CanCan and Odette, well practiced shovellers, went to fill in the access tunnel they had previously used to gain entrance to

the Oak. Captain Holly and her remaining guardsmouse went to check the main door was secure. Sky and Ambrose remained at the top of the tree, near the entrance. Sky dragged up one of the fallen rat invaders, Ambrose then worked his electrical magic, stringing wires over the rat-corpse² before the two mice heaved the body out of the hole to the observation post. This lure served its purpose. After two lazy circles, Gelrad the hawk descended like an arrow to land on the rat, pleased with his prize after missing the mice only minutes before. He was not pleased to find that Ambrose had wired the rat to his battery and the hawk received an

¹ The first mission is taken mostly from an adventure published by Xeno and Kraft here: <https://xenokraft.itch.io/shattered-oak>.

² "Have you turned the rat off and on again?" Sky asked.

unwelcome shock and was knocked off the oak-top. Sky and Ambrose watched relieved, as the hawk flew away, a few feathers short, squawking imprecations at rats and mice alike.

Below, the other mice prepared for a rat attack. Gwen dipped some acorns in the syrup and stacked them near the kitchen window, hoping to use them to lure a greedy rat into the line of fire. At least one rat had eyes bigger than its hit points and went down.

As the hawk retreated, Baron Oswald was furious. He clambered up on top of the wagon under the kitchen window to deliver a rousing speech to inspire his rat soldiers.

Unfortunately his oratory was no match for gravity, as Sky, Gwen and Holly heaved against the boulder on top of the entrance roof and shoved the bloody great rock loose to roll forward over the roof and onto the declaiming rat lord.

Seeing their commander so summarily dealt with, the remaining rats routed and scattered to the four winds. Huzzah!

In the aftermath, Sky flew on Mrs. Clutterbuck to Larkspur to deliver the news of Shattered Oak and Captain Holly's request for reinforcements. The other mice repaired the damage to the oak as best they could, and gingerly reset the boulder trap³ on the kitchen roof with ropes and pulleys. The following morning Sky and Mrs. Clutterbuck returned and the group set off with a wagon-load of syrup, some hawk feathers, and the profound thanks of Captain Holly.

As the beetle pulled the wagon along, the group were in high spirits, pleased with the way their first mission had gone. They were pulled out of their celebrations by the sounds of a fight down by the river. Sky shot ahead on Mrs. Clutterbuck as the other halted the wagon and made it safe. Gwen held back to guard the syrup-laden wagon as the others spread out to approach.

Down the riverbank they found a frog-knight in battle with a group of mouse bandits and a trained lizard. The poor frog was outnumbered but put up a strong defense. He was surrounded, however, and things looked grim. This would not stand with our mouse heroes.

Ambrose and CanCan ran up, shouting and waving their weapons, as Odette slipped under the weeds of the riverbank and approached from downstream. Sky, overhead, neatly clipped one of the assailants with a slingstone and he retreated clutching his head.

Ambrose exchanged blows with one of the bandits, his needle-rapier against the barbed fishhook the bandit held. Both put up a good defense but with his attention on Ambrose, the opponent did not see Odette in the weeds as she threw a knife that sunk into his shoulder like the bite of a cat.

CanCan lashed about with her own fishhook and drove her opponent and the lizard back into the water away from the beleaguered frog-knight. The knight, emboldened by the arrival of his rescuers, pushed forward and delivered a ringing blow to the lizard's snout.

That was enough. The bandits fled and the lizard dived under the river's surface and swam away. CanCan and Ambrose helped the frog up the bank and back to the wagon.

Philbert the frog-knight introduced himself and thanked his rescuers as Gwen served him a mug of restorative beer from her personal supply. Given room to talk, Philbert revealed that he was indeed a man in a frog's body, but cursed by a witch.

CanCan nipped in and kissed the frog. "Maybe he's a prince!" she muttered as nothing happened beyond a really impressive blush from the frog. "I'm not that kind of frog!"

³ With a thoroughly cleaned boulder. There was some discussion if it was worth getting an entirely new boulder but boulder supplies are short around the oak.

Comments on E&A 001

General: Apologies for lack of comment on the many continued exchanges from previous issues of *A&E*. I am starting from scratch here, it seems.

I notice that in some session write-ups, people include the names of the players to go with the PC names and in others, it's just the PC name. Is there a rhyme or reason to picking one or the other?

George Phillies: Re starting board wargames with Avalon Hill's *Tactics II*: Hats off to your long wargaming career. Your description of the early days with the 1974 edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* sounds like many of the original players' tales; you immediately dug into fixing flaws and niggles you had with the rules. There was something about the original, like for example *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, that propelled people into great periods of creativity.

Attronarch: How long are your sessions of *Conquering the Barbarian Altanis* campaign? You describe sessions up to #78 and the PCs appear to be between level 2 and 3 with the Level 5 cleric as an outlier. Is Brent Goose the only survivor of earlier groups and thus the only one with an unbroken XP record? Nearly 80 sessions to get to level 3 would feel slow to me.

Mark A. Wilson: I hope you meet Hemingway one day. Best of luck with the new house and the move.

Patrick Riley: I'm sorry to hear about your layoff. Another example of nonsensical corporate behaviour. Someone somewhere pointed at a reduced headcount, got their bonus, and the actual staff doing the work doubtless flailed around in your absence.

The other Microsoft/LinkedIn corporate bullshit run-around is more corporate nonsense where support is led by algorithm rather than a person. A plague on all such.

I liked the Rich Burlew inspired paper minis.

Mitch Hyde: Your hex map of your setting takes me back. I drew many similar maps on hex paper 40 years ago, though then I didn't have the option of digitizing it and overlaying text. I wonder where all our old maps go?

Pum: *SETI: Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence* looks beautiful and the theme greatly appeals to me. The 40-160 minute play time listed at boardgamegeek does make me wary. In your experience how long have the games lasted?

Re learning new rules: In my group I have the feeling that my desire to play new things is humoured by the players, who in the main would rather not have to learn new rules, or complicated rules, or new & complicated rules at all, thank you. Given that I have also lost my interest in complex or fiddly rules that might have appealed to me as a teenager, I have to pick and choose new games with teachability and ease of use in play as a major factor in my decision making. Even games I know like the back of my hand like Chaosium's *Basic Roleplaying* I would be slow to propose now, as having too many skills and too many moving parts.

Gabriel Roark: Your table of XP and levels for the various PCs, along with my comment to Attronarch above about 'slow' sessions per level reminds me how much I hated counting and calculating XPs in my D&D games back in the day. Kudos to those DMs who can manage it, but I'd much rather go with milestones or gut feeling for granting a level-up, if I'm playing a game that uses levels (such as *Mausritter* coincidentally).

Michael Cule: As we age the blessings of a good bed grow ever more necessary. The past is another country and the beds are like boards there.

RYCT Timothy Collinson about *Traveller's Hivers*: That was one of the many things I enjoyed about the *Alien Module 7: Hivers* book. The Hiver felt properly alien compared to the Vargr or Aslan, with some of the implications of their evolutionary history well thought out and applied to their modern, star-faring, descendants.

Heath Row: The list of game stores available to you reminds me of my youth when I would cast a jealous eye over the shops listed in *White Dwarf*, tantalisingly close to, but so far from Dublin.

What prompts you to emigrate to Portugal?

I have a sort of bubbling-up interest in sole roleplaying but not much experience thereof. Do you find you gravitate more towards the procedural dungeon crawl games or the journal writing games, or something else entirely?

Mark Nemeth: Re having a retrograde taste in games: What does it matter? If we're enjoying the games I couldn't care less about the pedigree. For what it's worth though, I count 4 D&D game write-ups in the last issue so you're not alone in enjoying the old staples.

Patrick Zoch: I enjoyed "Zoch's Big 5 Traits for NPCs". I love random tables for NPCs' personalities and reactions. Even though as science something like Myers-Briggs is complete tosh, the shorthand characterization is useful in a gaming situation. The Big 5 model is likely more representative of human psychology, but as shown in your tables needs to drill down into sub-traits to be useful.

Brian Misiaszek: Ah, Doctor Menace! We meet again!

Thanks for your *A&E* reminiscences over the original 237 issues of *Age of Menace*. I too found *A&E* a valuable gaming life-line during periods of drought in my role-playing.

You've really been bitten by the "Cuba in the '30s" bug, eh? It does provide a fascinating array of potential NPCs as your research shows. Are there many published *Call of Cthulhu* (or adjacent) scenarios set in Cuba?

Congratulations to Lauren on her degree and convocation (or conferral as we call 'em on this side of the pond), and to you on 15 years of dedicated service as a Head of Service for Geriatrics at HHSC. Your photos show how pleased Lauren and you were, and deservedly so.

Re Fighting fascism in the pulps: I wonder if modern-day circumstances are feeding a new growth in anti-fascist fiction. I certainly hope so.

Jim Vassilakos & Timothy Collinson: I checked the link to the back numbers of the Plankwell Campaign and found a pdf just shy of 300 pages. Damn, you're dedicated. Even in my *A&E* heyday of long-running campaign write-ups I doubt I got even into triple figured pages.

All contents licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International



Myles Corcoran

20 Brookfield Park, Cork T12 K7V7

Ireland

myles.corcoran@gmail.com

<https://mastodon.ie/@deetwelve>

OVERLORD'S ANNALS

ATTRONARCH, THE EXALTED OVERLORD OF UNCONTESTED VASTLANDS

VOLUME 4 · ISSUE 6 · AUGUST 2025

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 present three session reports from the *Conquering the Barbarian Altanis* Dungeons & Dragons campaign.

Adventurers head into unknown whilst holding hands.

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, 2025. *Control panel* and *Nonogram* illustrations by Attronarch. *Lizard* illustration by Anthony. *Rats* and *Turning* illustrations by kickmaniac. Typeset in L^AT_EX with Charter, a print-friendly typeface.

CONQUERING THE BARBARIAN ALTANIS: SESSION 79

Adventurers

Derennan, dwarf level 3. A dwarf hailing from Western Wastes.

Nolmbork, dwarf level 2. Portly, bald, red bearded, with an epic nose. On a mission to have a drink in every settlement in Wilderlands.

Orist, elf level 1. A dangerous looking elf.

Llyfed, elf level 3. Thin and balding elf whom also happens to be Rashomon's friend.

Hagar the Hewer, dwarf level 1. Imagine Conan as dwarf.

Tarkus the Promising, cleric level 2. Follower of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

Beorg the Gravedigger, fighter level 1. Inspired to adventure after burying several adventurers.

Oberon, fighter level 3. A tall, supple hunter adorned with bones and horns of his prey.

Hedwig Hogwarts, elf level 2. An always alert owl masquerading as an elf.

Gloomfrost 17th–20th

With just a few days left before end of the year, adventurers decided to recuperate, plan, and make contacts with influential people in Hara.

There was great commotion in the streets—hawkers and emissaries of the Invincible Overlord himself were aggressively recruiting anyone whom can hold a sword or spear.

“Liberate Zothay!”

“Save Dearthwood!”

“Travel the Wilderlands!”

“Invincible Overlord wants YOU!”

They'd yell again and again and again. Every lowly commoner was offered a gold piece sign-up bonus, while experienced adventurers were offered up to a hundred gold pieces.

Local jeweller finally finished the gold necklace Derennan had commissioned. It was fine but nowhere near as fine as the jeweller said it would be.

Either way, the party had another commission for him—a crown fit for a dim witted giant.

Derennan's plan of approaching the Imrael merchant family—oldest and most affluent in Hara—finally worked.

He was joined by Nolmbork, Llyfed, Tarkus, and Oberon.

Everybody tidied up, and strode up to Imrael's mansion overlooking the river.

Upon presenting their gift—a gold necklace with large amethyst—and request to Kennunn the Quiet, they were granted audience with Amulias Imrael himself.

The meeting was cordial, with the party offering their services. Amulias was professional and distant, for reasons Derennan discovered later.

Cadmias the Wise, vizier of the Imrael family, was advocating against getting involved with the adventurers, for he had seen firsthand how incompetent they are.

“One of them wilfully took a blade named Doomed! And now he is dead!”

Llyfed rebuked him.

Upon sharing they've been clearing up an old dungeon where a drug called Red Dragon was produced, Amulias said that Myrna Blaxter, the woman who sent them there, is a bit crazy.

She's been talking about this for years, but no one ever found anything. He was surprised to learn there were beastmen there, though.

The party also learned that Invincible Overlord was not recruiting just commoners and freelancers. All affluent families must send their first-born as well.

In addition, the rumour has it that Haermond II, Hara's castellan and general of forces, will take the offer as well.

If that is true, then one could reasonably expect a power vacuum that might lead to internal strife and unrest. Queen Earani Cor is primarily backed by Haermond II and Imrael family.

Upon leaving the mansion, Melell Imrael confided in Derennan that his father is distraught because his only living son—himself—is being sent to the City State of the Invincible Overlord.

“Please forgive my father. He is a good man, and would stand to benefit from your services.

His bad mood is due to me leaving soon. Damell, my younger brother, died very young. Tibon, my older brother, went missing several years ago.

He is only worried that I too will perish.”

“Tell me more about your missing brother. Maybe we could help.”

Derennan prodded.

“Truth to be told, I don't know that much.

All I know is that he was supposed to be married to the daughter of another wealthy merchant.

He went to their estate and never returned.

My father sent several messengers, but none ever returned.

Kennunn is the only one who came back alive and whatever he told my father was sufficient for him to stop looking.”

“Do you know where did your brother go missing? Maybe we could look into it?”

Melell promised that he'd investigate and let him know before he leaves Hara.

Party then spent two days tracking and snooping on the scribe's son whom had demonstrated the symptoms of Red Dragon abuse—fiery belching. Besides being a loser and alcoholic who hung out with other do-no-gooders, the boy seemed innocent.

Having run of patience, the party abducted the boy from his drinking place—an abandoned warehouse at the docks—and took him to their townhouse for gentle interrogation.

What they learned next shocked them.

Derennan let out a nervous laugh.

“Amazing.”

Boy has been belching like this ever since he was a little kid. He doesn't know why.

And the best part?

Myrna is his mother.

Adventurers discussed what the meaning of all of this could be.

Is Myrna dealing Red Dragon herself? Is she just delusional? Was she taking drug whilst pregnant and now went mad with grief?

Is the boy a polymorphed Red Dragon that is pulling their leg? Could the game be rigged so?

Many, many ideas were discussed.

Ultimately, a decision has been made to return to the Den to get out Brent Goose. But for that they had to wait for the crown to be finished first.

Hence they paid the jeweller for the rush order. The artisan promised them to be done by the end of Thawmist—the first month of the year.

Melell paid them a visit on the last day of the year.

“My father said that Kennunn will share all the details of Tibon's last known whereabouts if you prove yourself.

We have reliable information about Klekless Racoba's hiding place. If you bring his head you will demonstrate your capabilities.

Be warned though for he is not alone. Apparently he has a small, but loyal, force. Godspeed!”

And so did end the year of 4433.

Year's End

Everyone in Hara celebrated for five days straight, cleansing the last year whilst welcoming the next year.

It is a well known fact that your annual fortunes are determined by this ritual. Everyone in Wilderlands recognises the cosmic importance of these five days.

Thawmist 3rd, Earthday

“Right there, that ruined stone tower.”

Whilst waiting for the crown to be finished, the party of Derennan, Nolmbork, Llyfed, Tarkus, and Oberon decided to return to the dungeon underneath the ruined tower south-west from Hara.

The same one where they had found silver balls that made them rich.

In an hour and a half of delving they managed to trigger a dart trap that hit two of them, flee from a large snake, ignore secret doors, and find a corridor that reeks of death.

In the latter one they found a portion of the wall that had nine circles in a circle. One of them turned out to be a button which opens a passage nearby. It led into a thirty by thirty feet completely empty chamber with low ceiling.

After checking for traps the party crossed the room to the east, where another doors were. They opened into another similarly sized chamber.

But this one was not barren.

A two foot tall pillar of hexagonal cross-section was in the middle of the room.

On top of it was a round depression, matching the size of silver spheres they had found elsewhere in this dungeon.

In the south-east corner of the room was an elevated platform made from unknown material.

Weird symbols were carved along the edges.

What will the party do next?

CONQUERING THE BARBARIAN ALTANIS: SESSION 80

Adventurers

Derennan, dwarf level 3. A dwarf hailing from Western Wastes.

Llyfed, elf level 3. Thin and balding elf whom also happens to be Rashomon's friend.

Tarkus the Promising, cleric level 2. Follower of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

Oberon, fighter level 3. A tall, supple hunter adorned with bones and horns of his prey.

Nolmbork, dwarf level 2. Portly, bald, red bearded, with an epic nose. On a mission to have a drink in every settlement in Wilderlands.

Thawmist 3rd, Earthday

"Let's inspect that pillar more closely..."

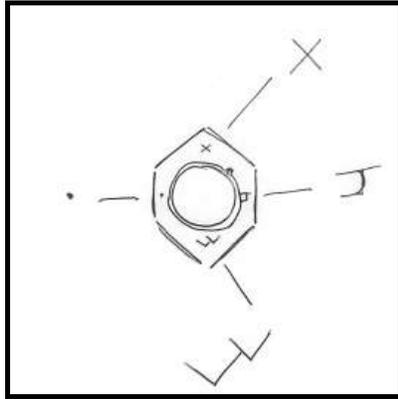
The party was in a most curious room. It was thirty by thirty feet, with low ceiling.

A raised platform with unfamiliar symbols dominated half of the room. A two feet tall pillar was in the center of the chamber.

Upon the closer look the party could see it had a circular depression that would fit a spherical object.

Around the hole was a ring with an arrow-like pointer pointing towards north-east.

Four symbols were etched on each cardinal direction:



"Let's return here later and bring the silver orb with us."

Indeed, the party abandoned these two secret chambers and backtracked.

This time they took the right door in the large chamber with pillars.

This led them to another doors that were difficult to open.

After the dwarves failed to force them open, Oberon the Ranger came forth and burst through the doors straight into the jaws of a giant lizard.

Nolmbork stunned himself in excitement, Derennan impaled the lizard, Llyfed cut off a chunk, and Oberon finished it off.

An alcove in the southeast corner had several incomplete skeletons, gnawed bones, and three sacks of coins totalling three hundred gold and three hundred silver pieces.

Following a brief discussion, adventurers decided to head out, find a safe spot to hide their treasure, rest for the night, and return next morning.

And so it was!

Llyfed found a toppled tree and buried the sacks into the roots.

Thawmist 4th, Fireday

Party returned into the dungeon beneath the ruined tower. They went back into the corridor where stench of death was strong.

"Careful..."

Adventurers huddled in tight formation and bravely proceeded forth, into darkness, into stench. A little over a hundred feet later they found two T-shaped junctions.

The first led into another dark corridor. On the entrance to it was a familiar primitive banner with hyena-like head on it. The banner was all tattered and torn.

The second T-shaped junction was flanked with two tall plaques.

Llyfed the Linguist gingerly approached them.

There were over twenty lines of text, all different from each other. Those in Common, and Elvish said:

"Suicide Corridor"

Derennan and Nolmbork could read the same in Dwarvish and Gnomish.

Smell of death was the most intense down that corridor.

The Company of Wise Adventurers decided not to explore this corridor.

They decided to continue down the long, dark corridor instead.

Another hundred feet later, they reached a turn and doors completely different from all they've encountered in this dungeon so far.

To call them doors would be perhaps and overstatement. This was more of a framed stone slab without anything resembling a handle or keyhole.

Dwarves stepped in to investigate. Lo and behold, on the each side of the doors was a single depression four inches wide, eight inches tall, and two inches deep.

Derennan and Nolmbork nodded to each other and pressed a hand into the depression—simultaneously.

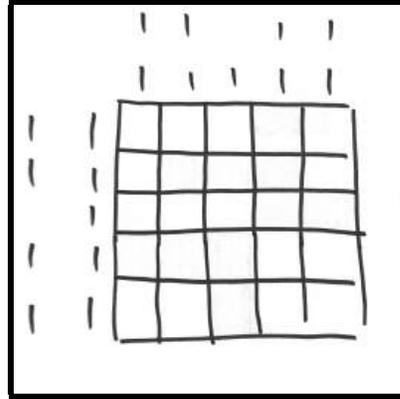
It worked!

The doors slid ajar, revealing another curious chamber.

A chest on top of stone plinth rested in the middle of the room. Another slab like doors were in northwest corner, and lowered portcullis blocked the exit in northeast corner.

Closer inspection of the chest revealed that it was in fact made of stone, not wood! The thing seemed either fused or chiseled straight out of the pillar.

On the front of it was a large, keyholeless, padlock. A grid and vertical lines next to it were etched onto the padlock:



“I’m stupefied.”

“Is this a riddle? A trap?”

“...”

“I know what this is.” Derennan announced.

“Nolmbork, poke the middle field with your spear.”

One dwarf obliged the other.

A cross hatch appeared on the middle field.

“Aha! Now touch the field on the first row and first column.”

Another cross-hatch pattern appeared.

“Now second row, second column...”

And Derennan continued giving orders, forming an X shaped pattern on the grind.

Once completed, the padlock popped open, revealing a chest filled to the brim with silver pieces and three exquisite necklaces.

“Are these magical?”

Tarkus the Experimenter tried on all three. Despite being covered in bling, he did not discover any additional powers.

“I think we should get out and back to Hara!”

“Yes!”

Encumbered by all the treasure, the party took twice as long to return to their current base of operations.



Thawmist 12th, Waterday

As promised, the adventurers had returned to the dungeon.

Freshly recruited porter, Deidamamina, was carrying a bowling-ball sized silver orb.

Recent hiring spree by the Invincible Overlord has driven the wages of hired help into the stratosphere.

Worse than that, Hara's general of forces has also been recruited, as well as two thirds of the fighting-fit population.

"Hara is understaffed. Forces of Chaos are mounting. Gnoll warbands, Altanian barbarians, internal strife. Ahyf will be sacked any day now. We should consider leaving Hara." Derennan theorised.

"Should we move further north?" Oberon pondered.

"Nope, running is too easy." Llyfed muttered.

"I think we should stick it out for a while but having an exit plan can't hurt." Derennan concluded this train of rational thought.

The party returned to the secret chamber with low ceiling and hexagonal pillar.

They placed the orb inside the depression.

It fit like a glove.

Nothing happened.

"Try turning the ring."

That worked.

They set the arrow pointing towards the X.

It lit up with dim light.

And so did all Xs on the rim of the platform.

One of them threw a portion of rations on the platform.

It disappeared.

"This is a teleporter."

"Should we tie a rope around one of us and test it out?"

"What if it is a one way teleporter?"

"True."

"All or nothing friends."

Adventurers stepped next to the platform, forming a line.

Then they stepped on the platform, holding each other's hands.

And then they vanished.



Screams and shouts reverberated off the stone tomb walls as five adventurers fought for their lives.

An endless mass of giant rats was all over them.

They crawled; they gnawed; they sought orifices; they brought disease.

They bit and they scratched and they squirmed and they hissed and they squeaked.

The adventurers swung and stomped; cut and crushed; heaved and hulked.

There was nowhere to move.

There was nothing to do.

Nothing but to fight for their lives.



Adventurers stood victorious, sixty-four dead giant rats beneath their feet. None of them went unscathed.

Solid walls surrounded them. No doors, no embellishments that would indicate secret doors.

With all the time in the world, the party closely inspected all the walls.

Their tomb was L-shaped, with twenty feet extending to the left and right from the central ten-foot square.

Ceiling was twenty feet high, slightly arched and embellished.

Each "square" had an extruded X pattern, with a different scene in each quadrant.

Derennan closely studied them.

After some time he found that one pattern is repeated in all Xs, albeit in different place.

"It might be leading us towards something?"

Indeed, following the repeating scene led them to a wall portion that sounded hollow, compared to others.

Hours of inspection revealed no secret mechanisms.

"Anyone has a pickaxe? No? How about iron spikes and something blunt?"

With all the time in the world, the party took to breaking down the wall.

Nolmbork and Llyfed worked on it for eight hours straight.

Derennan worked for the next eight hours.

Tarkus and Oberon took the next shift.

Rations and light sources were rapidly depleted.

"From now on, only humans work in light."

Nolmbork and Llyfed did another eight-hour shift.

Derennan followed.



Tarkus and Oberon did their best.

Cleric got progressively worse.

At the end of this shift he went down with fever and tremors.

Nolmbork and Llyfed worked their third shift.

With ill equipment the best they could hope for was making a tight crawlspace.

Derennan achieved a major breakthrough, opening a hole into another dark chamber.

“Look!”

The cruelty of their desperate situation became apparent in few moments.

The chamber they’ve broken into was thirty by thirty feet, with same barren walls as the tomb they’ve just broken out.

No doors, nothing.

The ceiling was adorned with same X divisions, with the scene of dancing dead making a circular pattern round the chamber.

“Let’s dance!”

And indeed, four desperate adventurers covered in sweat, gore, and festering wounds, danced their hearts out in a dark chamber deep, deep underground.

Tarkus sat in the corner, saving his strength for walking.

Nothing happened.

Adventurers’ disappointment was palpable.

“Let’s search all the doors...”

It’s been several days since they teleported into the tomb.

Their rations were almost gone, and light sources were very few.

“The wall here is hollow!”

Pushing it revealed a secret corridor.

It led into a small chamber with stone desk on which an assortment of silver figurines of various animals and denizens of Wilderlands laid.

Child-like giggles could be heard coming from around the corner.

“This is not creepy at all...”

Without much other options, the party formed a tight formation and stepped out the secret passageway and into the chamber whence the sound cometh from.

As soon as they entered the voices stopped and three figurines that were floating mid-air dropped to the ground.

“Hello good ghosts,” Derennan spoke in Dwarvish “we are just seeking a way out and mean you no harm. Can you tell us the way out?”

“Oh, we gave up on finding the way out long time ago.” a child-like voice replied in Dwarvish.

“Would you like to play with us?” it asked.

CONQUERING THE BARBARIAN ALTANIS: SESSION 81

Adventurers

Derennan, *dwarf level 3*. A dwarf hailing from Western Wastes.

Llyfed, *elf level 3*. Thin and balding elf whom also happens to be Rashomon's friend.

Tarkus the Promising, *cleric level 2*. Follower of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

Oberon, *fighter level 3*. A tall, supple hunter adorned with bones and horns of his prey.

Nolmbork, *dwarf level 2*. Portly, bald, red bearded, with an epic nose. On a mission to have a drink in every settlement in Wilderlands.

Thawmist 16th, Airday

"Would you like to play with us?" a dwarven child-like voice asked Derennan.

"Yes, yes of course." he answered.

The party of five has spent days carving their way out of a stone tomb they've willingly teleported in. Tarkus was coming down with fever, so Oberon stayed in the background to help him move about.

Now it was on Llyfed, Nolmbork, and Derennan to lead them out to safety.

But first, playing with ghosts of long dead children.

Derennan took a dwarf and a dragon toy, sat in the center of the room, and played out few scenarios. Audible gasps and cheers could be heard from the child.

Nolmbork and Llyfed used the opportunity to scan the square room. They found closed stone doors to the north and west.

"Woow, how long beard you have!" two more child-like voices, this time in Common, approached Nolmbork "Can we play with it?"

And so Nolmbork got many little braids on his beard.

Through mix of play and tender questioning, Derennan found out very little from the dead children except they were brought here long time ago and that they came from "deep deep" down below. Oh, and that horrible scream could be heard from north doors.

"We are looking for a way out. Would you like to come with us?" Derennan asked.

"Yes! Yes! But we must take our toys with us!"

And so Oberon carried a sack of silver toys in one hand, and stumbling Tarkus in the other.

Forcing west doors revealed another square chamber. Floor was lined with near-invisible grooves. They were few millimetres wide and criss-crossed the full width of their vision. The chamber smelt of burnt oil.

Llyfed stepped in first, followed by Nolmbork. Nothing happened. Torch was passed to the elf, revealing an archway to the north.

Llyfed stepped north, followed by Nolmbork. The whole chamber was sprayed with oil from above, setting them both on fire. Derennan's quick reaction saved Nolmbork from certain death. Llyfed endured, but was badly, badly burnt.

The party quickly moved on, hoping that the trap hadn't had the time to reset. They were right.

Long corridor led them into a massive square chamber. They bolted to the doors as soon as they could see them.

This led them to a junction. Moving straight ahead down the winding corridor led them to doors opening into a circular chamber.

The chamber was well lit with six torches in sconces alongside west side. Stone doors were flanked with two banners sporting yellowish hyena-like head. Portcullis blocked exit to southeast.

"Come, look at this. . ."

Thick blueish mist rolled behind the portcullis. Shooting a lit arrow into it resulted with a gone arrow.

"Erm, kids, would you mind to take a look into the mist and let us know what is inside?"

Dwarven voice went first. It was gone for solid ten minutes. Then it suddenly erupted "This is so much fun! Wooooo!" other two voices joined it, and soon all three could be heard coming from within the mist. They were having the time of their unlife.

"What if they are playing with skeletons or something? That wouldn't be fun for us."

"I think they are just finding the mist fun."

"Let's go. . ."

The demihuman trio lifted the portcullis in unison, and the party moved forward. Portcullis slammed shut behind them. They huddled, as not to lose touch with any of them.

Mist had sweet cinnamony smell. It was so thick one couldn't see their own hand right in front of the eyes. Llyfed took the lead, keeping his hand on the wall.

Eventually they found the way out.

“Kids, are you coming?”

“Noooo! Can we stay here?”

“Ahm, sure?”

“Yay! Just our toys!”

Party pressed on, entering a sizeable circular chamber. This one was not lit at all. Sconces were empty. Five skeletons dressed in rotted garments and decayed armour were clustered along the east wall. Although their weapons rusted long time ago, the great number of silver coins in their sacks and backpacks was still intact.

An audible grunt followed by metal hitting the stone floor came from south.

Adventurers jumped to the sides, bracing themselves for whatever it is that was making noise. More grunts could be heard, and then south portcullis lifted as well.

Two bulky, ten feet tall beastmen came in. Each carried a large club, as well as a coin sack with a symbol of yellowish hyena-head. The bigger of the two looked at this funny assortment of characters, laughed, and then demanded to know who they are. His request came out in broken Gnoll.

“We are mercenaries looking for a way out.”

“You? Mercenaries? Hahahah!” the beastmen laughed. “You are trespassing.” the laughter stopped. “Six hundred gold coins or your life!”

“Oh, we have prepared all this coin just for you!” Derennan pointed to assortment of sacks next to the skeletons. Then the demihuman trio quickly ran to bring them all to the feet of the two ogres.

“And all the coin you are carrying!”

“We gave you everything we have!”

“Elf, if I shake your dwarf friend and a single coin falls out of his pockets then I’ll turn you into a steak tartare!”

“Look, all my pockets are empty!” Derennan demonstrated.

Satisfied with the tribute, the monsters left, heading into the chamber with mist.

“Hey, can you tell us what way is out?!” Llyfed yelled after them.

“Sure, just follow us!” the smaller of the two replied.

The party decided not to follow them, but instead headed south through double set of portcullises.

Working their way through another square chamber, and two sets of doors, led them into a pentagonal chamber. The floor was caked with splatters of dried blood. All walls were lined with a clearly visible groove running the whole circumference of the chamber.

Stone slab “doors” were to the west and an archway to the south. There was a narrow blood-less path going through the middle of the chamber.

“Let’s go, one by one.”

The party crossed the chamber without triggering whatever was the source of all the bloodshed. Now they found themselves in a hexagonal chamber dominated by a large, dark pit in the center of it.

There were four exits from this chamber: the north archway they came through, the west portcullis, the east doors, and south doors.

Adventurers choose west. This led them to a T-shaped junction splitting west and east. The former terminated with an iron gate preventing further advance. The latter led them down a winding corridor which turned out to be trapped. Derennan and Llyfed were hit with a hail of darts.

Enduring this trap too, the party pressed on until they ran into another stone slab “doors” without any handle or obvious opening mechanism. The followed the corridor opposite of it.

“Huh. . .”

At the end of the sixty feet corridor they found a wide stone tablet with four square protrusions on it. Each square had a different set of symbols on it. From left to right square:

△ ▽ △

○ ▽ △

○ ▽ ○

□ ○ ○

Going back to the doors revealed a set of three symbols above it:

△ ▽ △

Nolmbork went back to the tablet and pressed the square with matching symbols.

The stone slab slid open!

“You stay back, I’ll check it first.” Derennan moved in.

It was a rectangular chamber some thirty by fifty feet. It was as plain as all they been through so far—with one small distinction. There was a writing desk with a matching chair in northwest corner.

SLAM!

The stone slab fell down, cutting him off from the rest of the party. Quick scan of the room revealed two skeletons wrapped in the rotted bedroll in the southeast corner, and stone doors to the north.

Party outside ran to the stone table, only to find a completely different assortment of symbols:

□ ▽ △
 □ ○ ○
 △ ▽ △
 □ ▽ △

“Check above the doors!”

Indeed, a different set of symbols were now above the stone slab:

□ ○ ○

Hitting the matching square opened the doors. Rest of the party ran into the chamber to join up with Derennan.

Searching the skeletons produced a locked spellbook and a ream of parchments.

SLAM!

Stone slab fell behind the party.

“Can you read the parchments?”

“Yes, they are in elven.”

The writings could be best described as diary entries which get increasingly desperate. They mention “ghastly undead crawling from the pit” preventing the author from leaving the chamber.

There also mentions of “effective, pressure activated trap” in front of the doors preventing the monsters from getting in.

“We have to get out. Let’s move.”

With Llyfed and Nolmbork badly wounded, Derennan took the lead. He opened the doors and then jumped as far as he could. No trap was activated. Then he strolled into the hexagonal chamber and was promptly surprised by two ghastly undead.

They dropped him in a single round. Rest of the party focused their missile attack on one of the undead, killing it in the process. The other fled through east doors.

“Quick, let’s get Tarkus over the trap! He needs help!”

“Check on Derennan! Quick!”

Indeed, the dwarf was not dead but merely paralysed.

Llyfed and Nolmbork picked up stiff Derennan while Oberon helped Tarkus move quickly.

“Where to?!”

“North or east?!”

“Let a die decide!”

“East!”

...

The party burst into a dank corridor filled with ghastly undead.

Wounded and heavily encumbered they barely made it through the doors before undead horde caught up. Llyfed stepped in to protect his allies. Nolmbork was caught by one and nearly killed in the process. It was solely his dwarven constitution that kept him alive.

“Let me go. . .”

Tarkus gripped his improvised holy symbol and called on the God of Red Wisdom.

Bright crimson light flashed the chamber, forcing the undead to flee in terror.



Tarkus collapsed to his knees, completely expired.

Derennan still laid stiff.

Nolmbork was half-dead.

Only Llyfed and Oberon stood tall.

How the hell will they get out of here?

IN NEXT ISSUE

Three different expeditions.

Back to Brazilian Gamebooks – part VIII¹: *Ecos da fantasia* (2024)
by Pedro Panhoca da Silva <ppanhoca@yahoo.com.br> and Maira Zucolotto
<maira_zuc@hotmail.com>

The greatest Brazilian gamebook writer, Athos Beuren, has decided to innovate once again when it comes to gamebooks. The author invited nine other writers (professional and amateur) to each send him a solo adventure. As a result, Beuren published *Ecos da fantasia* (“Echoes of Fantasy”, 2024), the first collection of Brazilian solo adventures.

This compilation of solo adventures was conceived by Beuren before the pandemic, in mid-2019. The author, inspired by the pioneering *Fighting Fantasy* series of gamebooks, decided to do something similar to what Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson did when *Fighting Fantasy* formed a new reading culture among the RPG audience of the time. The creators of the series simply couldn’t publish any more due to the overwhelming demand from reader-players for more and more gamebooks, so they hired new authors to meet this immense demand. Thus, in *Ecos da fantasia*, Beuren opened up space for new writers to publicise their interactive texts.

It’s safe to say that *Ecos da fantasia* was a successful publication. The book was crowdfunded and raised R\$11,285, which was 112% of the expected amount, with 115 backers. Beuren worked hard to apply the same rules system (based on four attributes: Skill, Confidence, Life and Talents) to all the texts, so that the combats and tests would follow the pattern he has used in his more recent gamebooks. The challenge feature (the famous “achievements”) is also part of the solo adventures, which are divided into:

- Xadrez com a morte no lado escuro da lua (Athos Beuren): this adventure takes place in 2184 on the dark side of the moon, where the hero must inspect Moonhide and extract Lumenite-7, a raw material capable of exploding the asteroid that will end life on Earth;
- O zigurate da chama viva (Newton Nitro): in this adventure, the heroine is a guardian of the Namoré tribe. Six namoré children have been kidnapped by the rival tribe, the mayteka, and her mission is to rescue them;
- The Night of the Pumpkin (Matteo Garcia Baum): in this adventure, the hero is a 10-year-old boy, accompanied by his friend. One Halloween night, the two come across a strange house that seems to attract them. When they enter to ask for candies, they are dragged inside by twisted branches, and the mission is to escape the haunted house alive;
- The Golden Tower (Edilaine Vieira Lopes): in this adventure, the hero is an important warrior who is sheltering from a storm in Tetsuo village. He receives a scroll from a stranger who tells him that it is impossible for the rice plantations to thrive. The hero soon realises that it may be a curse, and that the answer may lie in the golden tower;
- The Call of the Well (Eduardo Beuren): the adventure is set in 1941, in the middle of the World War. The hero is an Axis soldier who receives a bombing alert where he is, and seeks shelter. After two hours of bombardment, he hears nazi voices nearby, and when he chooses between fighting or fleeing, he realises that his enemies are also cultists;
- Willow splinter and wasp sting (Vitor Coeho): in this adventure the hero is a green cricket called Istmes who receives a mission from Adyna, a drain fly: recovering two magical weapons that are lost in Terath’s lair;
- The Crown of Shadows (André Wagner da Silva): in this adventure, the hero is an adventurer who gets an old crown from a merchant. After studying the item at home, he falls asleep. When he wakes up, the crown is stuck on his head and won’t come off. A

¹ The numbering of this series, which began with the now defunct *Alarums & Excursion*, has been retained here.

spirit reveals to him the curse of the item and tells him that it can only be broken in the Midnight Tower, where the hero must fulfil his duty,,

- *Alpisto Lero and the settling of scores* (Caroline Paseto Sulzbacher): this adventure is set in Caixinhas do Sul, where the hero is hired by Mr. Lero, a farmer cockatiel, who reveals to him that his rival, Esgarvão, has been sabotaging his farm in order to acquire his land by illicit means. His mission is to win (or stop) this bird war;
- *The Mystery of the Rechute Mansion* (Pedro Panhoca da Silva): in this adventure, the hero wakes up with no memory in the town of Mandali and is drawn, without any explanation, to a mansion. The aim is to find answers to his current condition, which must be inside this mansion;
- *The powerless wizard* (Jefferson Schaefer): in this adventure, the hero is a young apprentice who is not yet ready to deal with high magic, but his stubbornness makes him leave the tower of his master, Alaistar, and follow a strange noise coming from the forest.

As we might expect, most of the solo adventures in *Ecossistema da fantasia* belong to the fantasy genre, with the exception of “*Xadrez com a morte no lado escuro da lua*”, which is science fiction from start to finish. However, among the others the fantasy varies greatly, which enriches the collection: “*A torre dourada*” suggests an adventure in feudal Japan, “*O chamado do poço*” mixes fantasy and cosmic horror, “*O mistério da mansão Rechute*” contains elements of investigation/suspense/mystery.

What is most original, apart from the diversity of themes, are some new characters: in “*O zigurate da chama viva*” the protagonist is a jaguar-woman, in “*A noite da abóbora*” the protagonist is an innocent child, in “*Lasca de salgueiro e ferrão de vespa*” the protagonist is a cricket who will face other insects in the adventure and in “*Alpisto Lero e o acerto de contas*” the protagonist is a little bird who will interact with other birds.

Another very important feature of these solo adventures is comparing the authors’ storylines and writing styles: “*Xadrez com a morte no lado escuro da lua*” has a writing style full of metaphors, almost poetic prose, especially in the introduction (after all, Beuren has been a professional writer for years), “*O chamado do poço*” shows beautiful research into World War II, the elements of “*Lasca de salgueiro e ferrão de vespa*” are very faithful to what happens in the fauna and flora, “*Alpisto Lero e o acerto de contas*” brings a very humorous adventure full of good puns, as well as bringing to the public a little of the culture of Rio Grande do Sul.

Finally, the plurality of the authors themselves deserves to be emphasised. Newton Nitro is a well-known personality involved in RPGs, Matteo Garcia Baum is only ten years old and already writes very well, Pedro Panhoca built his entire academic career thanks to gamebooks (and has now been able to publish a solo adventure) and Jefferson Schaefer, despite being Brazilian, published his text in English.

With this strategy, Beuren has managed to please a lot of people: he has published new authors, he has published himself, and he has offered the public fast-consuming interactive texts that can act as a portal for gamebooks, RPGs and other hybrid products..

COMMENTS #593 (Alarums & Excursions)

LISA PADOL: Yes, I think the term “tycoon” is the most overused, right?

BRIAN CHRISTOPHER MISIASZEK: There are a (few) RPGs set in the Amazon, but none specifically in the capital of the state of Amazonas, Manaus. But it’s a great idea 😊 By coincidence, I travelled there in July 2025.

HEATH ROW: Thanks for the suggested links!

GABRIEL ROARK: Yes! In *Lone Wolf* it was possible to use the character sheet from one gamebook to another. The Narnia ones I haven't played yet and they're not translated into Portuguese 😊
SPIKE J JONES & JIM ECKMAN: Yes!

COMMENTS #1

HEATH ROW: Yes, *O porão* is very reminiscent of Wolfenstein! The Portuguese Carnation Revolution would make a great gamebook too 😊

∩ Rhodomontadulous Promenadz #2

George Phillies
phillies@4liberty.net
48 Hancock Hill Drive
Worcester MA 01609

I did ask myself which role-playing games I have played. Dungeons and Dragons, the original version. Castles and Crusades, a play-by-email game that I games-mastered. Empire of the Petal Throne, once. My combat spells are destructive. The Zelazny Princes of Amber game, once, revealing that if you joined an Amber campaign the second time the players met your character was useless. An extended Champions III campaign with an uncooperative DM who kept trying to kill my characters or interpret the rules to make their powers less useful. After one run, in which Moonshadow survived an attack by a robot monster, one of the other players noted that I had the only character in the campaign who could have survived the battle DM: Armor piercing autofire autocannon. Me: Hardened force field. DM: What? Let me see your character sheet. He had forgotten that I had Hardened Defenses. Empires in Arms is a 7-player board wargames on the Napoleonic Wars, but we did tend to play the roles of the rulers and their foreign secretaries.

I have twice been asked to GM a campaign based on my novels. The Eclipse tetralogy is about five 11-13-year-old superheroes. Comet flew across the universe, twice. In the same day. Eclipse notes in diary: Over the past year, got kicked out of my house. Solved the Lesser Maze, taking the Namestone as a prize. The League of Nations decreed that I am a war criminal, with a price on my head. I guess a hundred tons of gold is a lot. They are busy arguing about how to execute me, the Inco-Aztec Empire being the most creative. Started a world war. Flew to the core of the Sun. Visited a parallel Earth. Between that Earth and this one, stopped four alien invasions, incidentally blowing up two mountain ranges. Killed the Three Invincible Star Demons, incidentally dying in the process. The walk back was not fun. Did time travel to save the world. Had three Divine Beings on my widow's walk sharing coffee and cookies with me. The request was: I want to be in the same world, but don't have to meet your characters.

The second request was for a visit to the world of Practical Exercise, my first Adara novel. Adara Triskittenion goes to magical school, but this is not Harry Potter: Dorrance Academy most closely resembles a modern research university like MIT. In between a war, an assassination attempt, a kidnapping, and the like, Adara solves a major scientific problem that has baffled the locals for tens of thousands of years.

Then there was a request for Telzey Amberdon fan fiction. If I did write it, no one would ever see it.

A start to a D&D Campaign, continuing an article from the last issue:

∩ Short D&D Discussion

So we imagine a party forming in a local meeting hall, some food and beverages being sold. The people need reasons for traveling. For the sake of argument, they fourth-or-so born children of upper gentry/lower nobility, so staying on the family estate will by-and-by leave them with little more than a peasant's cottage, but leaving now doubles their wealth. They have as is expected prepared themselves for some sort of future. Only two of them have significant innate merit, e.g., wisdom. We will reach their characteristics in a bit.

Herman Engolph, Esq. is a Gentleman of Independent Means (local character class). His objective is to raise money to buy land, as Gentlemen gain from money, not from experience points.

Brother Gowophilus is a human cleric of Gow All-Fleeing, He who hides in his Invincible Fortress Beyond the Skies. He worries that he is becoming a heretic, because he is doing something that requires courage, while his faith's chief virtue is cowardice "A hero dies once; a coward can die many times".

Sister Jennifer is an elven cleric of the Corn Snake Goddess. There was a scandal for which she was falsely blamed, so she is leaving town. Quickly.

Vincent Goodheart is a budding human stone mage, a field of study rarely practiced locally. He annoyed his family by not taking orders in the clergy. He is looking for instruction elsewhere.

Emmanuel Lorne was an advancing human mage, until he proved that in a university defense that his preceptor's pet proposed spells were physically impossible. He is now moving elsewhere.

Brian Northwindson is from a human family of men-at-arms whose generations each retired to the farm while they were young enough to be in one piece.

Sandra ... skip her surname, which goes on forever ... had early talent at magic, but preferred to develop her martial skills. She has the curly golden hair, bright blue eyes, and small rounded ears that speak of elven ancestry; the troll part of the family tree only becomes apparent in combat.

I did roll for them. The dice were apparently affected by a Blandness spell

Name	Str	Int	Wis	Con	Dex	Char	\$x2
HE-GIM	12	12	11	12	11	8	22
Gow-CI	12	7	13	13	8	9	18
Jenn-CI	9	10	13	12	11	8	26
Vince-M	10	10	12	14	10	14	26
Lorne-M	13 9	16 18	9	9	6	12	18
Brian - F	12	8	10	11	11	11	24
Sandra-F	15 17	13 9	9	8	10	11	26

Two of the players have used the redistribution rules as interpreted where I was, in-period, to improve their characters.

The five characters who can cast spells have chosen them. More or less all characters can use level zero housekeeping spells that ignite kindling for fires, clean clothing, and the like. The mages are also aware of non-combat spells that maintain a modern-for-them society. Fro example, Growth of Plants, cast on a large acreage of wheat fields, greatly increasing the harvest some months later.

Comments on the Previous Issue

Note that there was a lot of issue, which is good, except that I tend to run out of steam in a bit after

writing comments.

Overlord's Annals: What do you mean, the *monsters* have napalm? Only heroes get napalm, err, oil bombs. That was truly clever. One of the more amusing things I recall having seen in a role-playing game, truthfully.

Bumbling Through Dungeons: Best of luck with your move. I am beyond the stage where I would consider moving again. Your list of campaigns was interesting. "railroady"...a fine word for the negative feature. You have time for much more playing than I do. The last serious campaign I played in was a Champions III campaign. Fortunately one player owned a laptop – those were less common then – to track turn sequence and points on character design. I have since run a PBM campaign, but I run world exploration games, not combat games.

Quasipseudoludognostication#1 A truly fine title. I am also a physicist, but I have been doing research for closing on 60 years. To put in a plug for one of my other clubs, if you are interested in playing board wargames, and looking for opponents for play via electronic communications such as Vassal, please note AHIKS.com.

"There is not an idea that cannot be expressed in 200 words." Tell us about stacks and sheafs! (The math ones, not the farming ones.) Better yet, don't try.

Sympathies on vacation. "I managed the core product line, the operating system it ran on, the standalone management system used by all the products, and I recently took over the decryption solution when the last product manager was let go back in October. There are whole sections of the architecture and technology that only I understand." This combination does not sound optimal for shareholders or owners.

Ah, rules changes. "I have these new rules..." No. "But they're OFFICIAL rules" No. "You have to use them." I am a former Army Sergeant (yes, actually, well, SP/5, a rank that no longer exists.) Do I need to demonstrate my vocabulary, or will 'No' suffice? Also, as GM, I control the divine beings, and if you are obnoxious in game your player will meet the angry magician player character I met in California (yes, really) last seen passing the 100,000th level. He quit using TK to pull dungeons out of the ground and put them back upside down, after dropping them from a considerable height in the top first orientation.. He advanced to the important spells 'create universe' and 'loot universe'. "These new rules are trash. Forget it." Welcome to the game.

Fine event writeup.

Twisting the Rope: Myles, welcome back. If you do hex and counter games, please put your club in touch with my games club, AHIKS.com. We also do games via Vassal or Zun Tzu, these being turn based not live games. Perhaps the true original D&D would be more interesting to your players. Mausritter? Grin.

Dreadsword: Nice illos. Very interesting detail on running games in the computer era. Fine writeup of campaign events.

De Ludis Elfis Fictis: Interesting game description of SETI. New rules can be challenging to treat.

Bugbears & Ballyhoo: A fine description of how you got into rolegaming. How to approach new rules,

especially new combat rules, was a fine suggestion. Debrief ...Very important! The statistical examination of time to level up was of particular interest.

The Phoenix Nest: Interesting background description. Sympathies on traveling accommodations. I support wills. My SF books are going to NESFA. My board wargames and board wargaming magazines are going to the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester. A long list of new games. Good exploitation of the IgTheme.

Engines and Emulators: Your moves are heroic. The list of Games Stores is impressive and important. Downcrawl and Brambletrek certainly sound different. Thank you.

The Seedling: Campaign events. Nice images. When I first participated in rolegaming APAs, color illos unless hand colored were out of the question. These are a positive change. Thank you for the book reviews.

The Dragon's Beard: Your personal history was worthwhile. 'Player looking for game' was a useful resource. The Big 5 traits of NPCs was a sensible addition to character creation.

Age of Menace: The good-bye to A&E was very well done. Pulp heroes present all sorts of options for games in the pre-WW2 period. You found some real characters to liven up the Great Cthulhu or whatever visiting Cuba. I have read a few issues of Operator #5. The villains are villainous, and not stupid. The heroes are ingenious, and have a plan B ready if plan A fails. The lead hero has a romantic interest who is not without her own resources, though she occasionally faces unique perils. Being fired out of a 36" or so gun, until she is rescued, comes to mind. The parade of Fascist coups competes with the Asian invasion of the United States as a scenario.

Traveler Play-by-Mail: Plankwell was a truly strange run in many ways. I was never quite sure what the lead character was actually doing, or why, but that seemed appropriate to the scenario. And after your comment we reach the end.

Setting the Tone

A gamesmaster setting the tone for a new campaign may well want to populate enough background that he can respond to unexpected player decisions. The tone also populates the sort of challenges that the players may encounter. Oft-times, the challenge is kept a secret from the players, something for them to find as the campaign advances.

So here we have a bit of background, more of the opening to my unfinished novel whose working title is *Small Giant Class Liberation Army*. After all, many rolegaming societies are positively medieval, in many of the less fortunate senses of that word.

This is a writeup, a lead-in to what is actually happening. Comrade Captain Chang by local standards are not particularly good or evil. Her people are isekai presenting an out-of-context problem for the locals. However, the hypothetical player characters are the locals who get to deal with a series of problems they do not particularly understand. We continue the writeup.

&&&&

Chang reached the survivors of her formation. Corporal Wu had taken charge. Near the waterfall, under

a rocky overhang, a cooking fire was being prepared. Despite their exhaustion, her men had broken down their weapons and were carefully cleaning them. She counted noses. "Wu," she said, "I do not see Peng or Gong."

"Comrade Captain, I sent both of them a distance downstream to give warning if anyone approaches. The stairs lead to a trail that parallels the stream. Was this an error?"

"Absolutely not! That brush looks impenetrable, except where you sent them. Outposts are the right thing to do." She looked around. It appeared that every man and woman had lent Comrade Zhou their blanket. She listened carefully. His breath sounded less ragged. Tseng pointed at his patient, smiled and nodded.

"Wu," she said, "It is possible that something will happen to Liu and I, and you will be in command." Wu began to look alarmed. "I hope this is not the case. But you should remember that Liu, Wang, and Ching are still up there. Ching is inside the cave. Three miles south of here there is a cavalry column. They appear to be Japanese, but strangely dressed. We are here to organize the people. We do not want to attract the attention of the Japanese."

"Yes, Comrade Captain!" Wu nodded grimly.

Chang turned to the rest of her men. "People," she said, "that cave was deeper than it seemed. We have come out far away from where we went in, much farther than it appeared. Still, we are in China, so we still face the Japanese Imperialists and the reactionary Chiang Kai-shek clique. From up there," she pointed at the rise. "we see several peasant villages, a wide river, and perhaps a column of Japanese cavalry. I've also seen an airplane, so a sky watch is needed. Finish cleaning your weapons first."

A crackling sound behind her was the cook fire being lit. The wood was very dry. It burned hot with next to no smoke. Tseng began stirring the cook kettle. It would still be an hour before they could eat. Weapons cleaned, men began to lean back on their packs and fall asleep.

"Comrade Captain?" Wu whispered.

"Yes?" Chang made herself smile. For all that Wu was entirely competent, she was also more than a bit timid.

"I have been watching the shadows." Wu pointed at the stream bank. "When we got here, they reached half way between those two big stones. Now they are getting longer. It is morning. How can the sun be setting?"

Chang was puzzled. "Some trick of the light. Put a small stone to mark exactly where the shadow of that jagged rock falls. Wait. In a while it will be clear. We are approaching noon, so shadows are of course shortening."

"Yes, Comrade Captain!" Wu scurried off to carry out her orders.

&&&&

By dinner time, it was obvious that the shadows were indeed lengthening. Indeed, soon the sun would be below the horizon. Chang was baffled. Where had the hours and miles gone? They were someplace far away from the cave's entrance, and somehow had managed to lose six or eight hours of time. Her men were not complaining. The Japanese pursuers were gone. The weather was considerably warmer than it had been. Most important, except for the few unlucky souls on watch, they had a perfectly legitimate excuse for more hours of solid sleep. They even had hot rice in their bellies. What could be better?

As twilight approached, Sergeant Liu brought his detachment down from the hilltop. "It is approaching being too dark to see anything," he said. "Except the tower off to the north. It appears to glow. It must

have electrical lighting. But if we cannot see, we are better off if not detached from the rest of your men. That Japanese cavalry unit stopped and made camp. They seem to be fond of lanterns. They occasionally set off fireworks.”

“Tomorrow morning we will take our next steps,” Chang announced. “We have broken contact with the Japanese. Now we can return to our mission. We will send a patrol, two people in each direction, toward each of those villages, and pile rocks to block the cave exit.”

Sergeant Liu nodded. “Captain? We have been running for most of a week. The peasants at the last village had been abused by the Japanese, and were willing to give us dried rice, especially after Comrade Tseng aided them, but we really need a day to recover.”

“Wisely said,” Chang agreed. “The patrols we send tomorrow should watch the villages from a distance, but not let the villagers know we are here, not until we understand whether they are friends or are puppets of the Japanese or the Nationalists.”

The next morning dawned with a haze over the sun. Grey clouds did not look filled with rain, but the day would still be cool. Chang wished she had had more time asleep. Twice during the night, she had been awakened by the night watch. Peculiar lights were seen in the sky. Even through the large binoculars, the lights appeared to be distorted rectangles, sweeping across the sky without making a sound. Morning calisthenics did little to relieve her grogginess.

Sergeant Liu identified a half-dozen men and women to scout out the three villages. They headed down the one trail, Comrade Zhong properly at point. There was no guarantee, Chang thought, that the trail led to the villages, but it had to go someplace. The brush off the trail was so thick that there seemed to be no danger that the six could get lost or fail to find their way back. Comrade Zhou breathed more comfortably, but his pulse continued to weaken. Chang sent Apothecary Tseng and a small escort out to find useful healing herbs. If they came across a boar or sheep, they were authorized to kill it, but only with one shot. Sergeant Liu was then ordered to make a count. How many guns, and how much ammunition, did her detachment now have? How much food?

From the top of the hill, Chang could easily see the Japanese encampment through the large binoculars. The Japanese commander was obviously quite slack. The sun was well above the horizon, but his men were still lollygagging in camp. If that was his custom, a dawn attack sounded promising, but the Japanese force was simply too large for such an attack to succeed. Besides, she told herself, her mission was to organize the workers and peasants of a district, not to fritter away her men and women in attacks that would at best kill a few Japanese soldiers. The embarrassing difficulty was that she had no idea where she was, other than ‘someplace in China’.

Now Comrade Ching was at her shoulder. “Yes?” she said. “You are guarding the passage, aren’t you?”

“Comrade Captain, the passage is gone,” Ching answered. “The window frame lies broken on the ground. There is now solid rock. I cannot see where there is a seam.”

“Let us go and see this,” Chang said. They walked a short distance into the cave. The cave seemed to come to an end. Chang scraped her combat knife along the rock. Indeed, there appeared to be no seam at all. How was this possible? she wondered. The frame lay on the floor of the cave. The peculiar glass had vanished. “Very well. You have a length of rope. See if you can drag this frame out of the cave. It’s metal. We may find a use for it.” Ching saluted.

Captain Chang headed back down the hill. Her men and women would soon be finishing their breakfast. This area appeared suitable as a remote base camp, precisely as described by Chairman Mao, though they would need to obscure or move away from the trail. However, they could not count on the weather remaining fair, so they needed to build some shelter before then. She would send Liu and Wu

off in opposite directions, staying close to the cliff edge, looking for more waterfalls and for places suitable for building shelters.

The Seedling

#49 Basalt serpents and portraits of beetles

On the Way Home, Finally

The Dullstrand Campaign | Sessions 53–54

Setting: Greyhawk—City of Dullstrand & surrounding environs

GM: James Schnedar

Game System: D&D 5E

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Species & Class</i>
Keolaren	Mark Nemeth	human druid
Gardai	Joe Ring	dwarf ranger
"Deuce" Durzub Mulakh	Mike Schnedar	orc barbarian
"Bova" Korst Bovasht	Polo Schnedar	lizardfolk monk

Prominent NPCs

Dudvin Hopnik	Keolaren's henchman, a human knight
Karvala	On-and-off party associate, an elven rogue
Gared the Red	Elven captain of a ship



Inside the abandoned temple. (Illustration created with Reve)

Recap

Having just slain two hydras, we entered an abandoned temple of the snakefolk. An inscription at the entrance read “By coil, from death to life.” The first chamber contained elaborate murals, along with a central table on which were arrayed twelve stone tiles bearing different symbols. Soon after entering, we were attacked by various emanations of psychic force, reminiscent of our worst nightmares.

Session 53 [as reported by Dudvin Hopnik]

The battle with the living nightmares continued. One of them struck Gardai, sending him into an enchanted slumber from which we were unable to wake him, even after the encounter. [Joe wasn't available for this session.] We concentrated our attacks on the remaining creature—or manifestation, or whatever sort of being it was—and eventually dispatched it. Looking more carefully at the stone tiles and recalling the inscription near the entrance to the temple, we decided to try to fit tiles bearing a skull (perhaps representing “death”) and an egg (perhaps representing “life”) into the receptacles at the south side of the chamber, in addition to the snake tile (perhaps representing “coil”) that we had already placed. I placed the tiles while others remained on watch. When the last tile was placed, a the door into the chamber (which had slammed shut after our entry) opened, as did another door to the west.

We heard a sound in the western corridor, and saw another of the living nightmares approaching. This one proved easy to slay, however, and we proceeded onward. At the end of the corridor lay

a large chamber, bare except for an altar in the center, surrounded by what appeared to be a pool of blood. There was a small rivulet of water flowing into the pool from the north, but the water somehow vanished before contacting the pool of blood, causing neither ripple nor dilution. Upon the altar was a large, transparent brain. Bova approached the altar and tossed a coin at the brain. At this disturbance, the brain suddenly gained solidity, and the bloody pool coalesced into multiple tentacles which moved to attack us.

I hacked at the tentacle nearest me, and two strokes from my axe proved sufficient to disperse it. Another nearby tentacle struck me but inflicted little damage. When anyone moved to attack the brain, it would teleport elsewhere within the room immediately afterward. At one point, it sent a strong electrical shock that inflicted grievous damage to Deuce. It also summoned a huge, bloody ooze from the pool. I struck the ooze repeatedly, then moved out of its immediate reach. Every time I hit it, some of its component blood splashed onto me, scalding my flesh with some caustic property. Eventually the brain ceased teleporting, and Karvala was able to strike a final blow, dissipating it. At the brain's destruction, the ooze collapsed into a lifeless pool of blood. All was suddenly quiet.

We noted that, as soon as the brain had vanished, the rivulet began to enter the pool and dilute the blood, albeit very slowly, as it was but a trickle. Examination of the altar showed that it had a stone lid, like a sarcophagus. We decided to have a rest before opening it, as Deuce had been sorely injured. I drew the final watch of the night. I was awakened a bit early by Deuce, who, having

taken third watch, was alarmed by movement of the door into the chamber, which had closed about a third of the way. We decided to place objects in the way to prevent it from closing, but the chamber contained no rubble, and none of our equipment was more suitable to the task than the blade of my greataxe. [Surprisingly, none of us had iron spikes in our inventory.] Nothing noteworthy occurred during my watch, and we awoke refreshed.

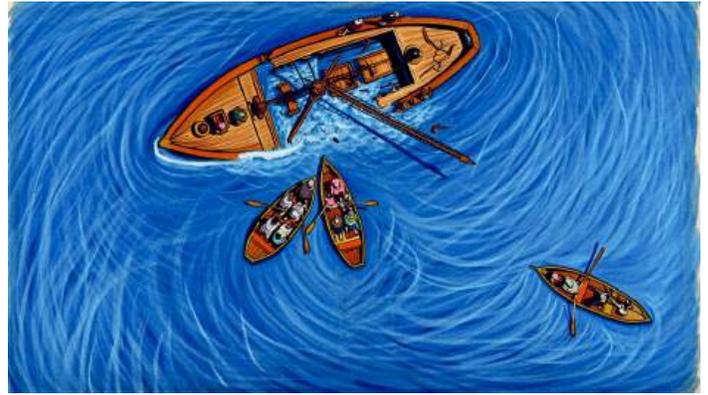
Returning to the pool, we found it somewhat diluted but still turbid. Probing revealed that it was about three feet deep, with an apparently uniform stone bottom. Bova and I entered opposite sides of the pool and tried to lift the lid of the altar. We couldn't quite manage it and called Deuce to assist. With his additional strength, we raised the lid and found the interior lined with tattered velvet, containing nothing but six potion bottles, a like number of canisters of opaque liquid, and a scattering of gold coins. With nothing more to explore, we decided to take the loot and return to Krakroc (Bova's ancestral lizardfolk village) to await the arrival of the ship we had chartered, which was due in about a month.

Gardai awakened after we dragged him out of the temple, and the journey back to Krakroc proved uneventful. The unusual canisters turned out to be ink for application of magical tattoos that would grant various powerful benefits to their bearers. Once back in Krakroc, we set about practicing our skills [leveling up]. Deuce and Karvala studied magical manuals they had previously obtained. I inquired about purchasing a magical shortsword, finding to my delight that Shaytail, the local lizardman merchant, had a diverse inventory. [I got a 20 on a d20 roll for the quality of his inventory.] I selected a sword that would deal additional damage on a well-placed strike [a vicious shortsword], and Deuce and Bova were kind enough to grant me the difference between what I could afford and Shaytail's asking price. I also purchased some iron spikes and a longbow, having found to my repeated dissatisfaction that it was common for our adversaries to be beyond reach of my thrown handaxes.

Session 54 [as reported by Dudvin Hopnik]

Our division of the loot resulted in my acquisition of two of the magical tattoo canisters: one granting poison resistance and another allowing me to make melee attacks from up to fifteen feet away. I applied the tattoos to portions of my anatomy that would be rarely observed, whereas the others displayed theirs more prominently. In the item distribution, Gardai gained possession of the powerful magical lantern we had obtained from the caverns [session 51]. He decided to attune to it, and Bova did the same with the Conch of the Deep [sessions 30-32], despite my misgivings.

We had about a month until the scheduled arrival of our chartered ship. Several unusual events happened during this time. Deuce, strolling through town, overheard what sounded at first like a rousing rendition of his namesake song, "Drop It Like a Deuce," [session 28] emanating from a nearby tavern. Upon entering, however, Deuce found that it was instead a parody song, "Flop It Like a Deuce," which incurred his anger. The traveling troubadour, clearly intimidated, apologized and bought Deuce a drink. Another day, Bova passed some lizardfolk children playing at a reenactment of his duel with Motgar and Eluv [session 36] and emphasizing his brutal slaying of the two. With conflicted emotions, he passed onward. My own experience with the locals was more acrimonious. A lone lizardwoman accosted and spat at me, cursing me for associating with the group that had murdered her husband. I tried to be polite and assure her of our imminent departure, but her anger would not be ameliorated. I later found that she was the widow of Jaoti [session 38]. During the month before our departure, Gardai has been growing progressively more irritable, culminating with him nearly attacking a lizardman in a tavern for an imagined slight. We restrained him and calmed him down. Upon further



Abandoning a sinking ship. (Illustration created with Reve)

reflection, he concluded that the Soul Gem in his cutlass [sessions 38-39] was exerting a compulsion on him to kill, as it had not been fed a new soul in several weeks.

Gared the Red arrived on schedule, and we embarked on his ship, the *Drake Crippler*. Gared remarked that piracy had recently increased, so he had employed several mercenaries. About halfway to Dullstrand, there was a sudden exodus of rats from the hold, alarming everyone. Descending to the hold, we found a large leak on the port side of the hull. Someone was shouting for help, and the ship's cook was seeking his dog, which had been lost in the water. Gardai and I went to help the person in distress, who had been pinned by a fallen bulkhead. We freed him and headed up to the deck. Bova found the dog and carried it out.

Up on deck, there was chaos. Gared had already left on one of the two lifeboats with a handful of his crew, leaving only one more boat that could not possibly accommodate the remainder of the crew, the mercenaries, and our party. The sailors and mercenaries had managed to capsize the other boat and looked ready to come to blows. We calmed them down and recovered the boat. I expanded my folding boat and found that we could accommodate everyone between the two boats, albeit with overcrowding. Gared's boat was already out of sight. We decided to head toward the coast south of Dullstrand, where the keep that Bova seeks to claim lies—and my master Keolaren is imprisoned. It was about a two-day voyage away. Early on the second day, we saw two bodies of sailors jettisoned from the other boat, which then immediately changed course. We let them go.

The tight conditions on the boat were unpleasant and distressing [giving me a level of exhaustion]. We were all pleased when we sighted the coast and disembarked, though we found ourselves about a ways south of our intended destination. There was a village nearby, which welcomed us. That night, an oppressive fog rolled in, disrupting our repose [another level of exhaustion]. The villagers



Undead spirits overrun the village. (Illustration created with Reve)

remarked that the fog had been a recent menace, emanating from the keep northward along the coast, and that it had never before been so bad. The morning sun did nothing to disperse the foul fog, and walking around the town, we heard a scream. A pack of ghostly undead had seized a villager. We moved to attack, but the undead killed her first, and she rose as a specter to oppose us. The combat was not so difficult as I had feared, and I made good use of both my new shortsword and magical tattoo.

After the fight, we concluded that we'd likely have no relief from the fog until we had liberated the keep, so we decided to set off for it immediately, despite our exhaustion.

Observations & Commentary

My observation and commentary on these sessions appears below.

GM Style

Now that I'm participating in three different campaigns, I've become more attentive to stylistic differences among the GMs. During the encounter with the brain and blood ooze in session 53, it occurred to me that this encounter seemed characteristic of James's style, whereas neither Polo nor I would likely have conceived of it. It's interesting to see how tone and style can differ, even though we're all playing the same rule system, with mostly the

same participants, with the similar ideas about how the game ought to be played.

For my own game, I have a upcoming scenario planned that may further emphasize this distinction. I'm a little apprehensive about how it may be perceived by the players, as it's heavier in tone than how we've usually been playing, but I hope they enjoy it.

Cooperators or Adversaries?

One unusual thing about RPGs is that, while the players are not generally competing with either one another or the GM, the whole concept of the games involves the GM creating adversity for the player characters. I've been thinking a lot lately about the extent to which it's appropriate for players to try to mitigate the adversity the GM dishes out. Obviously, the characters are usually supposed to overcome this adversity, but should the players try to battle through it as the GM may have imagined? Or should they try to shortcut it with their own stratagems? I've made no secret that I tend toward the latter approach as a player. I'm not sure, for example, whether James had recalled that I had a folding boat available to rescue everyone. Games, by their very nature, involve exploitation of weaknesses. My sense is that there's a set of rules that players will—and should—do their best to succeed within. I figure that my character would absolutely be doing his best to defeat his adversaries and escape from danger.

A Mysterious Painting & Familiar Caves

The Eastlands Campaign | Session 2

Setting: Eastlands

GM: Mark Nemeth

Game System: D&D 5E

<i>Player</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Class</i>
Cory Thomas	Hambone	barbarian
	Rowan	ranger
Dave Schnedar	Bear	barbarian
	Eve Aurelius	cleric
	Seneca Arkana	wizard
James Schnedar	Destrian Marvane	wizard
	Karn Thorn	warlock
	Kel Rask	rogue
Joe Ring	Bristol	fighter
	Dakota Shelvin	rogue
	Shadden Tuck	cleric
Polo Schnedar	Gruber Hawkstorm	sorcerer
	Mooria Zurka	ranger
	Wrag Drukstol	rogue

Recap

The party has returned from a second raid on a nearby orc lair. On their most recent foray, they encountered a group of orcs much too large to openly assault.

Session 2

After some downtime in Norvald for training, the party—Mooria, Bristol, Karn, Shadden, Grubor, and Destrian—planned to return to the cliffside cave where they had previously penetrated into the orc lair. In the interim, however, one afternoon while Shadden, Karn, and Grubor are drinking in the Constellation, the village steward, Haroot, approached Shadden and requested a word. Shadden told him to speak freely, and Haroot asked Shadden if he had noticed

anything out of the ordinary while sitting for his portrait to be painted by a local artist, Roglith. Shadden had no memory of sitting for a portrait or even of ever speaking to Roglith, though he vaguely knew who he was. Grubor and Karn chided Shadden for apparently having been so drunk as to forget, but the solemn demeanor of Haroot put a stop to their ribbing.



The mysterious portrait of Shadden. (Illustration created with ReVe)

Haroot briefly explained that Roglith had been found dead in his house, likely murdered. A recently finished portrait of Shadden, in Haroot's style and bearing his signature, was present in his studio. Haroot requested that Shadden accompany him to Roglith's house, and Shadden and his friends immediately agreed. Roglith's house was about three miles west of Norvald, in a woody, secluded area. Upon entering the dwelling, it was immediately obvious that the place had been ransacked. Proceeding to the studio, they saw Roglith's body, recently dead with his throat cut. On a nearby easel, there was an expertly rendered portrait of Shadden. Shadden again denied ever sitting for a portrait or even holding a conversation with Roglith.

Karn, leaning against the wall, suddenly spoke, stating that he had once been to Roglith's house before, about two years ago, while in the employ of Imadria Silvertongue, a merchant known for dealing in luxury goods. Imadria had purchased paintings from Roglith while also selling one to him, but Karn, having been hired solely as a guard, hadn't been privy to the details of the negotiations, nor had he seen any of the paintings involved in the transaction. Haroot found this interesting, but no one could see any way in which it was immediately actionable. Shadden asked to have the painting of himself, but Haroot declined, stating that it was needed as evidence and that he would impound it in his office until the investigation was concluded, at which time Shadden could probably have it, provided that Roglith's heir didn't want it. The group headed back to Norvald, somewhat perplexed.

A couple of days later, on a cold, wet spring day, the party headed southeast to the cliffside cave entrance. This time they decided to start by entering a cave about 30 feet up the cliff that they had previously noticed but never explored. Karn cast a spell on himself that enhanced his jumping ability, and he leapt up to the cave mouth, then lowered a rope for others. As they were climbing up, he crept further into the cave. Inside was a giant owl, sitting on its nest and staring at him. As others reached the cave, the owl grew increasingly agitated, then flew out of the cave, attempting to claw anyone in its way; the party let it go, unmolested. The cave proved to be a dead end, but in the debris surrounding the nest, they found a ring [later determined to be a ring of swimming].



The giant owl in its nest. (Illustration created with Reve)

The expeditioners climbed down and reentered the cave mouth they had previously explored. Eventually they turned to a previously unexplored cavern to the east, finding a single orc there, apparently trying to hide, though there was nothing to hide behind. They attempted to subdue it, but it proved combative to the last, and eventually they killed it. [In this setting, orcs and similar humanoid monsters do not converse, cooperate, or negotiate with humans.] The cave was a dead end, so they turned around and entered previously unexplored caverns to the west.

At length, they came to an apparent dead-end cavern that contained a quiescent pool of water and an ancient stone crypt. Karn and Bristol slid the lid off the crypt. It contained some sort of undead warrior, which leapt into combat, swinging a greatsword and attempting to bite. Its first attack sent Moorria to unconsciousness, but she was soon revived by Shadden's healing magic. Bristol and Karn couldn't seem to land a blow, but the magic of Grubor and Destrian proved effective. After a difficult fight, the undead being collapsed into a pile of dust, leaving only its greatsword, the pristine condition of which marked it as an weapon of magical enhancement.

The party's first thought after healing up was to see if the pool connected to a further underground cave—and it did, as there was a clear underwater passage to a cavern beyond. After a winding passage, they emerged into a larger cavern, where they were immediately attacked by two ghouls, which arose from lidless crypts in the center of the cave. The ghouls were dispatched without undue difficulty, and the party was pleased to discover that the crypts contained various treasures, including a jade statue of an owl, an enchanted longsword, a wand, and a pile of gold coins.

The next cavern contained two more crypts, empty this time. After that, they came to a four-way cave junction and proceeded northward. They soon entered a cave that intersected with chamber of worked stone, as if the construction of the latter chamber had unexpectedly encountered a cave. There was a door at the far end. The party decided to take a different path, wanting to fully explore the caverns before interacting with the orc lair, which they supposed to be beyond the door.

Retracing their steps and taking a long, winding westward passage, they came at last to a wooden barricade, beyond which they heard rough shouts and the apparent sound of a small combat. Moorria found a loose knothole in the wood and peered through it. Beyond lay a large chamber of worked stone. Two goblins sparred, watched by a few others, along with some mangy but vicious-looking dogs. There was also a single orc, bound hand and foot. Finding the barricade loose, the party attempted to push it over. They did so, finding that it was a weapon rack, and the crash of weapons on the stone floor instantly alerted the goblins. Both groups ran to engage in combat. The goblins took the worst of the initial onslaught. The orc eventually freed itself but proved as disposed to fight the party as the goblins. After a couple of goblins fell, the others decided to flee, but the party was able to pursue and kill them. Moorria took a short look down an exit corridor, but, as ill luck would have it, a door along the corridor opened. A goblin head emerged, looked alarmed to see her, then went back inside and closed the door, presumably alerting its compatriots to the intruders. Their resources depleted, the party beat a hasty retreat, spent the night at a nearby farmhouse where they had cultivated an



The goblins and the orc. (Illustration created with Reve)

acquaintanceship, and then returned to Norvald to heal up, evaluate their acquisitions, and divvy up the spoils.

During the following days, Shadden was approached by Norvald's head chaplain, Ivora, who assigned him to escort a midwife to attend the birth of a pregnant woman in exile; this is a service that the church provides when it can. The pregnant woman, Dozira was exiled about two years ago for repeatedly selling illegal poisons. She was exiled in the company of a man named Bloonar, whose own crime was armed robberies of outlying farmsteads. Shadden accepted the assignment, which required him to leave in about 15 days.

Daggerheart Revisited

Another Review of Nearly the Same Thing

Here we are again. After my negative review of beta rules for *Daggerheart* in *A&E* #583, I didn't think I'd be coming back to it. Yet fate decreed otherwise. A member of my regular gaming group had signed up to playtest some other forthcoming game; we scheduled the session, but the publisher never sent him the rules. So we decided to try *Daggerheart* instead.

We played through a simple scenario involving a goblin ambush, entry to the goblins' lair through a spider-infested cave, and a climactic fight with the goblin bigwigs and an ogre. The party consisted of a dwarven ranger, an orc druid, and my character, a ribbet (anthropomorphic frog) wizard. So, how was it actually playing the finished game instead of just reading a pre-production draft of the rules? Better. Not great, but definitely better.

Let's begin with the superficial stuff. The text is quite readable, in a decent typeface on nearly white paper. There's no faux-grimoire treatment. I can pronounce a general thumbs up on the graphic design. The artwork is okay. It has less glowing magic than *D&D 5E*, though still more than I'd prefer. It definitely looks like something made in the 2020s, so we'll see how well that ages. I'm not sure whether it'll become beloved nostalgia or cringe-inducing zeitgeist. Time will tell, but not for a while. The credits list over 50 artists, but everything is rendered in similar, though highly competent, style. (Unrelated aside: Am I the only one who liked when you could identify individual artists' styles and the illustrations in a rulebook wouldn't all be indistinguishable in style?) Anyway, the book's visual presentation pretty good.

Next let's move to character creation. You begin by choosing a class, which consists of choosing from a list of generally familiar archetypes. One of my main complaints about the draft rules was that the writing was terrible, so I'm pleased to report that it's improved. The class descriptions no longer sound utterly unappealing, for one thing, and it's pretty clear how they differ from one another. As in the draft rules, the production version contains 18 different ancestries (species) to choose from. Some of them are quite unorthodox, including anthropomorphized frogs, fungi, apes, and turtles. I originally thought—and still think—that this is too many; it's hard to conceive of any environment in which they might plausibly all exist. My GM apparently had similar perception, since he remarked that, were we playing an actual campaign, rather than a one-shot session, he'd probably place restrictions on which ancestries were available. Anyway, for this session, I was a frog guy, which turned out to have negligible affect on gameplay (so indeed, why do we need so many choices?). One part of character creation that I didn't like was an interactive portion in which each player asks pregenerated questions about the other

Observations & Commentary

My observation and commentary on these sessions appears below.

Exposition

In writing session reports for my Eastlands game, I've noticed that I feel the need to include a lot more exposition than I do for James's Dullstrand game. I'm not sure if this is simply because, as the GM, I know more about what's going on, or whether I've created scenarios that require more exposition. If it's the latter, I'm not sure whether this is good. It could be attributable to having integration into the setting, or it could simply be that I'm overcomplicating everything. Opinions are welcome.

players' characters. Our group held these answers to be binding, so if, for example, somebody answered a questions about our respective characters' mutual interests in a way that I found aesthetically unappealing (such as saying we both liked cockfighting or macrame), I'd just be stuck with it. A closer reading of the rules makes it clear that, as a player, you can reject anything you don't like, but I can imagine this being uncomfortable too, since some of the things I've felt lasting shame about are incidents in which I rejected an idea somebody else thought was cool. Our group got through this section in good faith, without anybody getting stuck with anything too annoying. I'll note that none of the other players seemed to dislike this aspect of the game.

Daggerheart's primary resolution mechanic consists of players rolling 2d12 against either a static target number or, in a situation of opposed roles, the GM's 1d20 representing the adversary. The d12s need to be distinct from each other; one is the *hope* die, and the other is the *fear* die. If the hope die is higher than the fear die, the character receives one point of hope, which is a resource that can power various abilities. Conversely, if the fear die is higher, the GM receives a fear point, which powers abilities of your adversaries. It's possible to succeed on a roll with fear or fail with hope, by the way. I thought the combat and magic systems worked pretty well, and they seemed to have a lot of thought behind them.

I cannot say the same for the initiative system, which everyone in my group disliked, to various degrees. The system is deliberately designed to be freeform. According to the rules, "combat has no initiative order, no rounds, and no distinct number of actions you can take while in the spotlight. Instead, fights play out narratively from moment to moment, just like noncombat scenes." To my group, this declaration seemed a bit overstated. In practice—at least in my group—there was a little bit more structure. As an example, let's say it's the PCs' "turn" to act. One PC, chosen by consensus, takes an action. If that action succeeds *with hope*, then another PC can act, and so on. Once a PC either succeeds *with fear* or fails, then one adversary of the GM's choice takes an action. The GM can then either spend a *fear* point to have another adversary (or even the same one), take another action, or the GM can pass the action back to the players.

I've mentioned a few times in *A&E* that my usual playgroup is scrupulous about fairness, so we mostly just rotated through our actions in a regular order. But imagine playing this game with someone who's more inappropriately forceful. One of the worst aspects of almost all multiplayer games is that it isn't your turn enough, but that's bearable when you know there's an equitable system regulating whose turn it is. Imagine having to negotiate this



Giant spiders generate a lot of fear in *Daggerheart*. (Illustration created with Reve)

every time, especially if multiple players can make plausible claims about how it would most benefit the group for them to get a turn. This sort of polite negotiation is what people have to do at work, and *work* is the proper term for it. *Of course* everyone would always prefer that it be his or her turn, rather than someone else's. Part of the appeal of playing a game or sport is that you're freed from the veneer of enforced politeness that permeates ordinary interactions (especially at work); the game rules provide a regulating framework, within which you're free to ruthlessly oppose your adversaries.

In *Daggerheart*, this regulating framework is ineffective by design. Even in my group, where we rotated through actions in regular order, it was difficult to keep track of whose turn it was, since the game has no mechanism to do it for you. Furthermore, there are other problems with the system, even in the absence of spotlight-hogging disputes. Every time I either failed a roll or succeeded with fear, I felt bad, since that meant a delay in the other characters getting to act. I had a sense that I was letting the group down. Another player mentioned that he felt the same. The GM was frustrated with it, too, since some of the adversaries were much more powerful than others, and he felt like he continually had to choose between wasting an action on the weaker ones or having the most powerful ones exclusively act, which wouldn't have made narrative sense. There was one point at which it clearly would have been best, from the monsters' perspective, to have the big ogre make about eight attacks in a row. This would have obviously been contrary to the spirit of the game, but perfectly within the rules,

Comments

On *EGA* #1

George Phillies

I enjoyed and envied your tales of the early days of gaming. Was it clear at the time that you were living in a formative golden age? Or are such things only apparent in retrospect?

Mark A. Wilson

I share your not-very-favorable opinion of *Wicked*.

Regarding your potential next campaigns as GM, how about combining them into one: Island-based city states compete with another through urban espionage, naval combat, and exploitation of a nearby forested but less civilized continent?

which leads me to conclude that the rules ought to be adjusted to match the intended gameplay.

Daggerheart's shortcomings in the particular respect are surprising, since the designers have a very clear sense of how they want you to play the game, and the rules continually tell you about it. On the first page of text, you're informed that "A tabletop roleplaying game, or TTRPG, is an interactive storytelling experience where players take on the roles of characters within a shared world and collaborate to tell a story about those characters." I've written before that I think the story is a byproduct of playing the game; the goal should be to have an enjoyable game session, rather than to create the most appealing narrative when viewed after the fact. In contrast to my views, *Daggerheart* advises players, "Don't be afraid to leap in headfirst and think like a storyteller, asking what the hero of a novel or a TV show would do here?" Yeah, no thanks. Part of the reason I like RPGs is that they allow players to experience a narrative without any—or at least with fewer—of the contrivances that permeate most other forms of narrative fiction. If my character does something dumb, it's because I really couldn't think of a better option, not because a bad decision was necessary to facilitate a particular storyline. Similarly, if I do something smart, it shouldn't be thwarted by desire for narrative tension.

In a way, RPGs can combine the best elements of narrative fiction and sports. This way of looking at it hadn't occurred to me before writing this review, but I think it makes sense. The inherently fictional nature of RPG gameplay allows exploration of virtually any setting, theme and tone. And the unscripted nature of gameplay allows players to try their best to achieve their goals, sometimes succeeding easily, sometimes failing miserably, and sometimes in tense uncertainty—as is true of competitive athletes. One of the inherent, unavoidable weaknesses of fictional books and movies is that they are, by nature, contrived. Sports, on the other hand, have organic, authentic outcomes, though sometimes at the expense of compelling narrative. There's no perfect fusion of the two, but RPGs may be as close as we can get.

Enough digression, back to *Daggerheart*. Am I going to play it again? Maybe. My group talked about having a limited-duration *Daggerheart* campaign, so perhaps that will come to fruition. I really did like the combat and magic systems. On the other hand, I don't know how anyone thought the initiative system was a good idea—players want to think about what to do, not about whose turn it ought to be. There's a decent game at the core of the rules system; I wish they hadn't contaminated it with an atrocious initiative system and buried it under a mound of the designers' silly opinions.

Patrick Riley

I'm sorry about your layoff, but I'm glad you already have another job. The whole situation sounds infuriating and stressful.

I liked your Tiamat rendition.

Certainly, being motivated by wealth in real life is boring. In fiction (and RPGs), I'd say that no character's motivation is interesting, ever. Literary motivations tend to be stock: wealth, love, lust, revenge, justice, survival, respect, knowledge, power, excitement, fame, fear, curiosity, etc. None of these is inherently interesting; the character's motivation is just there to add plausibility to the narrative. What's interesting is what actually

happens in the story, regardless of characters' motivations. Anything works, as long as it seems plausible. In an RPG, I think all that's necessary is for the players to buy into one or more motivations, regardless of what they are. I like to use wealth in RPGs because it's easy and everybody understands it, but the others can work, as well.

Although all of your listed options about the nature of a god are possible in theory, people don't give credence to most of them (except maybe a god that set the universe in motion and has little further interaction with it). If one assumes that there's a god that can create anything and deliberately misleads people, all information from that god becomes essentially worthless. I guess that could happen, but it's not actionable. This is kind of like positing that we're all in a simulation that doesn't resemble the true reality. It's not disprovable, but the possibility doesn't lead to any conclusions that can be a basis for decision-making.

I concur with your comments to Heath Row. As you suggest, players shouldn't have complete freedom to alter the tone of the campaign without regard for established convention and existing group preference. It's a hard problem, since the GM generally wants to the players to take an active interest in the setting, but they can also corrupt it by introducing elements at variance with established concepts. This is why the improve-esque "yes, and" advice makes me uneasy. I don't have a great solution.

Myles Corcoran

I remember you from the old days. Welcome back!

Mitch Hyde

Thanks for the explanation of how you run your games. It was interesting. I like your illustrations too.

How many sessions did your game writeup encompass?

Gabriel Roark

Hey, your group is gaining levels! The XP tally is appreciated, as always. I like the nonuniform advancement rates among *AD&D* classes; it introduces some heterogeneity without letting things get too off track, since the players' XP tends to increase faster than linearly as the campaign progresses.

Michael Cule

I like your new title and logo.

I know your usage of *boojum* is correct, but the word immediately makes me think of those weird plants in Baja California that look like a cross between an ocotillo and a saguaro. It's amusing to imagine two of them fighting each other.

To answer your questions related to my recent retirement, I'm 53 and in reasonably good health (as far as I know). I don't plan to seek further employment. Despite the disorder of the process, I'm pleased with the opportunity to retire early. But it would have been even better if it hadn't been so stressful. In my agency, at least, I

don't think they cut enough people to make terrible disasters inevitable. Rather, they cut enough people to put everyone in a position to have few aspirations beyond preventing disasters.

Heath Row

It looks like you've got lots of game stores in Madison.

It's cool you have pinball at work. I admire your restraint. In graduate school, I spent far too much time (and money) on the pinball machines in the student union building, when I should have been working on my dissertation. I suspect that, if you keep playing, you'll suddenly realize that you've gotten pretty good.

Patrick Zoch

Your Big 5 tables seem quite useful. Thanks for including them!

Thank you for your appreciative comments about Dullstrand. I don't coordinate with other players or get corrections from James, though I do send him the session reports after I finish them. There are a few things I know I've gotten wrong, and perhaps more that I'm not aware of.

Thanks also for your comments about my retirement. I'm sorry that your agency has had the experiences you describe. I feel bad for the people you mention who didn't get any retirement party. I'm not generally one for ceremony, but I do think it matters in this case. It meant a lot to me that my employees arranged a lunch for me, even though the prevailing atmosphere in the agency made it less celebratory than would have been preferable.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

Congratulations on the happy events in your personal natter.

I enjoyed reading about the Cuban historical figures. Same for the pulp stuff.

Jim Vassilakos

I'm glad to hear about your friend's positive experience with early retirement. And thank you, thank you, for getting *E&A* going!

What would a writers' circle consist of?

Timothy Collinson

Congratulations on your wife's upcoming retirement, and I hope the remaining years until yours pass as pleasantly as possible. One interesting thing about retirement is that it hasn't been quite as different as I'd imagined. It's great to have all the work-related annoyances vanish. But I'm still the same guy, with the same temperament, and the same interests. Perhaps this seems quite obvious, but I think I might have been imagining it as completely transformative, even for things that have nothing to do with work. Rather, it's as if every day is Saturday, which is indeed quite desirable.

I concur with your most recent comments in the ongoing Job discussion.

Book Reviews

Ring Shout

by P. Djèlí Clark, 2020, 5/10

The concept of this is obviously awesome: young black women hunting demonically transformed Ku Klux Klan members in the 1920s. The characters are cool, and Clark knows his history. He also writes with more style than most contemporary authors in this genre. For some reason, however, I never felt motivated to read it and didn't enjoy it all that much. So why not?

Although Clark is clearly capable of good description of setting, he doesn't do it a lot, so, between a few intriguing flashes of 1920s Georgia, it feels like a lot of the action occurs on a blank stage. Also, to my taste, there wasn't enough rationale for what was going on. If Clark wants something in the story, he just puts it in, sometimes literally having things appear out of thin air.

I don't begrudge anyone else's enjoyment of this; the concept is so cool that it can cover for a lot of faults, and Clark's historical

expertise adds depth. For me, though, the whole thing never quite came together.

Tarnsman of Gor

by John Norman, 1966, 6/10

As an adolescent, I remember seeing the Gor novels arrayed in my local bookstore. I was put off by something—perhaps the covers—but I figured I might read them someday. That day turned out to be 40 years later. By this point, having long heard of the negative reputation of the series, I was prepared to be scandalized. It wasn't all that bad—at least the first one wasn't—but neither was it all that appealing.

The writing itself is actually pretty good. While the style isn't transcendent, Norman's prose is serviceable and above average. The narrative itself is pretty stock for the genre (which is fine), punctuated by several quite remarkable coincidences (which are progressively harder to swallow). As for the much-discussed sexual slavery elements, they're certainly present, though not the primary focus of this volume. I'm not sure whether that holds true in later volumes; I rather suspect not. If you're on the prowl for something salacious, this will disappoint. If you're looking for something with moral rectitude, this will also disappoint. I wouldn't be averse to reading further books in the series, but it's more likely that I won't.

Ripeness

by Sarah Moss, 2025, 6/10

This book has two narratives, both featuring the same protagonist, in alternating chapters. One is in her youth in 1960s Italy, told in the first person, and the other is in contemporary Ireland, in the third person. In both narratives, the writing is in a stream of consciousness style with no quotation marks. That's not typically my favorite style, but Moss's execution of it is pretty good, so it's not anywhere near as obnoxious as is often the case. I do think, however, that it might have been more interesting to have the 1960s sections written in a style that was more of a contrast to the contemporary part. Since one narrative is in first person and the other's in third, it's easy to tell them apart, but more of a stylistic break might have been interesting.

I'm not the target audience for this book, which prominently features ballet, yoga, and childbirth. The contemporary version of the protagonist perceives herself to have found, in the author's phrase, a "late-life discovery of what she perhaps wanted all along," which consists of a non-acrimonious divorce, a small and tidy house, a few friends, a likable local guy for old-age booty calls, and plenty of time to read and go on walks. I think it's the kind of life that might sound good, at least superficially, to many people who are the target audience for the book. As I read, it occurred to me that the older version of the protagonist has recently become a bit of a cliché: a mature, educated woman, liberal in an orthodox way, now free of traditional family obligations, quietly discovering herself. I got a sense that this is how the author probably views the core group of her readers, either in their present or future.

The writing itself is good, and I was happily reading this for a while before it eventually occurred to me that I didn't have much interest in either narrative, both of which feature the protagonist as an observer of someone else's key moments, rather than the primary participant in her own. I'm not typically one to demand a lot of action, but this book had remarkably little tension; everything played out about as the characters—and the reader—would expect.

On reflection, here's the most interesting aspect of the book: I'm not sure whether Moss intends to commend or condemn the contemporary version of the protagonist. If it's a commendation, it's a rather dull and predictable point to make. If it's a

condemnation, it's so subtle that I'm too dumb to fully pick up on it; there's a reasonably clear indication of what the character has given up to get what she thinks she wants, but there's not much focus on whether or not that was a good decision. Maybe that's intended to be left for the reader to decide, but the question itself is so gently posed that I'm not even sure it was intended to be raised by the author.

Second Place

by Rachel Cusk, 2021, 8/10

This is one of the best depictions I've read of simmering conflict that never boils over, of how people can dislike one another but still tolerate each others' presence and even obtain insights from one another. It's about other stuff too: the nature of art, femininity, aging, familial relationships, and insecurity. It's conceptually dense. I think I might have prepared a different narrative tone; it's written as the narrator's informal account to an acquaintance, and I sometimes longed for it to be a self-conscious work of literature. But it's entirely possible that Cusk knows exactly what she's doing and has better sensibilities than I do, since this short novel clearly is carefully constructed and purposefully structured.

House Made of Dawn

by N. Scott Momaday, 1968, 5/10

I was impressed by Momaday's poetic language and sense of atmosphere. Some sections of this are wonderful, especially near the beginning. The structure, however, is a mess. I wish he had written a book with the same setting and a completely different narrative. Furthermore, the message struck me as overly reductive, and this may be the book that has saddled Native American literature with ubiquitous motif of the difficulty of being stuck between two cultures. It's a plausible idea, sure, but since the publication of this book, it's been accepted as fact without much analysis or questioning, which may not have been for the best.

Time Out of Mind

by Rachel Field, 1935, 8/10

Why hasn't anyone heard of this book? It was the first-ever winner of the National Book Award for fiction, and it's by a writer who was popular in her time. The quality of execution is very high. So why isn't it more popular now? The answer, I think, is that it's pretty old-fashioned, even for 1935. It's set in the late 1800s, and the style is more reminiscent of that era. To 1930s modernists accustomed to Ernest Hemingway and Nathanael West, it must have seemed woefully behind the times.

That's a shame, because *Time Out of Mind* is quite good and is worthy of a larger audience. While the plot, consisting of a coming-of-age love triangle, treads familiar ground, it's plausible and is presented with care, realism, and subtlety. The characters are interesting and believable, and they change over time in ways that make sense in the context of their circumstances and are also consistent with core personal characteristics. Rachel Field's writing is well polished, presenting events vividly, and using foreshadowing in a way that holds tension, rather than detracting from it. If you think you might like this, you probably would. For my part, I'll be seeking more books by this author.

Colomba

by Prosper Mérimée, 1840, 7/10

This ought to be better known than it is. It's a fun-loving book about revenge, 1840s style, well written, with an interesting setting (in Corsica), a fast pace, and memorable characters.

Is not every dream, even the most confused, a peculiar vision, though we do not call it sent from Heaven, yet makes an important rent in the mysterious curtain, which, with a thousand folds, hides our inward natures from our view?

—Novalis

Attacks of Opportunity

Issue One, Dylan Capel

Introductions

I'm a gamer who is based in East London and who got their start in the Eighties with the Fighting Fantasy gamebooks. I've gone through phases of being a massive *White Wolf* fan, then *Apocalypse World*, then indie Storygames like *Archipelgo* (which remain my favourites to be honest) and since then the *New School Revival*.

I contributed twice to A&E under different names and titles. I returned to reading during the COVID lockdowns where I had more time to read, initially I wanted just to lurk but Lee Gold persuaded me of the economics of contributing something so I created *The Silent Temple* as something that was a bit experimental but was lightweight to create. It has been fun but I think with the end of A&E it is also time to retire that zine and start something else.

For the moment I'm probably going to keep some of the structure from the old zine while figuring out what I want to try and do next.

Watching

The second season of *Andor* was excellent and while it maybe wasn't as perfect as the first, constrained by the need to connect to the existing *Rogue One* film for example it was still far better television than anything else I've been watching. It felt as if it touched on really important ideas about grief, survival and loss but never quite had enough time to explore them or the characters properly relying on a few cliches to get everything in and in some kind of resolution.

I want to try and avoid spoilers but I found myself surprisingly moved when the last episode started with Andor dreaming of the sister he was searching for in the first episode. One of the themes I felt of the second season was the way that insurgency and war interrupt lives, the conventions of storytelling are equally disrupted, neither comedy nor tragedy just brutally cut short. That is often our real life experience of death and it felt powerful.

There was also quite an interesting insight about people's identities. If an infiltrator dies in the course of their mission do their family think of them as

someone loyal to the regime? The nature of spies is one of deceit and the truth is rarely revealed.

Reading

The Kickstarter edition of online wargaming magazine *Collected* 28 has come out and it is one of the most beautiful books I've ever seen. The layout, photography and artwork is all top tier. The magazine is dedicated to alternative takes on *Games Workshop's* models and quirkier lines like *Necromunda* and *Gorka Morka*. It's quite a chunky collection with pieces on artist Ian Miller and *Mordheim*. Definitely worth picking up if you see it.

Playing

I've been making some use of spark or random tables in my one-off event games to try and make characters unique but very quickly. The *Ravenloft* book has a list of strange items that are perfect for gothic horror games.

I've also come across a table of random magical lanterns, ones that have a minor but useful magical effect in addition to being a source of light. This seemed both kind of fun for a player but also an opportunity to do some implied creation and backstory as to why and how such a lantern might exist.

Initially I thought that maybe each player should have a lantern like this but I thought that it might get too wacky if everyone has one and maybe each character should have a unique piece of generic dungeoneering equipment but each should be a different type. For example maybe one has a rope that can untie itself on command while another has a tapping tentacle to replace the 10ft pole.

I've been playing a mix of on and offline games and it is interesting how different systems align to different forms of play. Using simple spreadsheet character and faction keepers makes it a lot easier to play games with lots of secondary stats or equipment specific rules. *Belonging Outside Belonging* probably works better when the tokens and factions are on a shared canvas as it is easy to see the state of play at a glance.

Games that use shared pools of dice or where the players need to swap things between one another seem much more complicated compared to the real world. The game *Fallen* uses a physical dice to represent each attribute and you can either use the face number repeatedly or roll and discard the die to get a better outcome. It seems surprisingly hard to intuitively represent this online.

The PHOENIX NEST



MORE EVIDENCE OF MY GENIUS

There's a bit of setting I've used in several campaigns at least once each for my two groups. This is a pantheon of six gods. And I promise you (though I could not prove it) that I came up with it before Lois McMaster Bujold came up with her notably similar Five Gods and made a lot more money from the idea than I will ever see.

I was thinking one day about the Triple Goddess idea: Mother, Maiden and Crone. I couldn't tell you if I knew about this idea before Neil Gaiman used it in SANDMAN: I think so but my conviction that I looked at his use of them with the Three Witches from a DC comic I had followed in the sixties and seventies and thought 'Gosh, that's clever!' may be a phantom memory inserted to justify my high opinion of myself. ¹

¹ SANDMAN was started in 1989 and WYRD SISTERS 1988. I can't now sort out which I read first.

² THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF E&A: There's a horde of female scholars at the gates wanting your guts for garters. ME: Tell them they can have them when I'm

**A zine for EVER & ANON 2 by
Michael Cule**

**Of 3 Barratt Place, Easton Street,
High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 1XS.**

UK. Copyright 2025 © Michael Cule

E-mail: Michael.Cule@gmail.com

Phone 01494 535878

Mobile 07816101942

**Hear me & Roger BW pontificate on
RPGs and other world shaking topics:**

<http://tekeli.li/podcast/>

Read my Blog why don't you?:

<https://room3b.blog/>

I was thinking about this as I said and I thought to myself, thought I: "This feminist triple theophany is all very well but what about men?"²

We have three divine aspects of the female: The mature, fertile Mother, the carer and the teacher. The Maiden, on the cusp of entering into the world, free of anyone's hold and a object for adoration. And the Crone, past the years of childbearing, the midwife and the undertaker, the keeper of secrets and the knower of truths.

What would the corresponding male aspects of the divine be? The Father is the counterpart of the Mother. Mature, as loving as her but sterner, the provider, the judge and the ruler. Then there is the Son, who is the male in the flush of his youth. He is setting out to achieve things, to see and shape the world. He is the soldier, the hunter, the explorer of new lands.

finished with them; TPPoE&A: Are you going to be doing this reminiscing on yer past triumphs every issue? ME: As long as the material holds up.

TPPoE&A: The conceit of the man!

And then what? If there is the Crone, who is Woman after her years of loving and mothering or (in Granny Weatherwax's case after a lifetime of avoiding those two pastimes) what is the male equivalent?

Uncle.

I put Uncle into my pantheon not only because I myself am an Uncle and have avoided fathering (though not entirely avoided loving) but because he is a genuine cultural/evolutionary phenomenon. No really: philosophers and scientists have said so. Uncle is the Useful Exception to the rules of biological evolution. He exists as a reservoir of familial affection as a relief valve for some of the pressures on parents. His neeves³ can turn to him for council and can occasionally expect presents.

He handles the odd problems that deities with more rigid portfolios ignore and has all sorts of people under his protection.

In my games he wears a bandana and looks a bit like Doc Cross, just because.

I will say that I took some of his characteristics (he looks after celibates and homosexuals equally) from Bujold's Bastard but isn't a divine/human/demonic mixture like the Bastard but a purely divine personification of a human type.

He was last seen as the patron of the universe spanning troubleshooters of the City of A Thousand Gates, Aegis, the city of refuge beyond the settled worlds. He may turn up again: I like him that much and the fact that Uncle's People as a title reminds me of Napoleon Solo and Ilya Kuryakin doesn't hurt either.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

...has been Hot.

Probably where you are too but let me make it clear that we British persons have evolved from the protoplasmic slime to suit a cooler climate and that multiple heat waves (involving having to smear our mostly pale and sun-fearing hides with sunscreen and investing in air conditioners) are not something we are used to. You Americans cunningly build your houses out of wood for the most part and though vulnerable to earthquakes and tornadoes they must be wonderfully cool in the summers unlike our brick-built homes which are intended to keep the heat in during our long, wet and cold winters.

I even asked Ant (one of the players in the On-Line TRAVELLER 2300 game) how things were in Aberdeen, whose coastal cooling properties had been filling my fantasies for weeks. But he said the difference in temperature was only a couple of degrees so I chucked that ambition away as well.

I did go up a little way north to Manchester for Stabcon and I was rewarded on the weekend of my visit with the downpouring of actual Mancunian rain on my head. It was most welcome and home-sickness inducing.

I also realised that I had attracted over the years a group of regular players who actually turn up and want to see what I had ready for them as a one-off convention game. This time, after wrestling for a week with a scenario set at an alternate Democratic Party nominating convention in 1936 in which FDR was facing a non-assassinated Huey Long in a deadlocked political struggle I finally went with one of the few scenarios written by S John Ross for URESIA, a tale of swamps and spiders called SPIDER MEAT. Fun was had but I do wish having finally figured out that they were at least

³ A neat term for nieces and nephews considered as a class, which I took from Graydon Saunders Commonweal books.

partly coming to see me that I had done some actual creation. Oh, well I booked for next time so I can try to do a Christmas special.

I got to play the board game SETI with Pum and discovered again that I should not drink at Stabcon and I should be more careful to keep my tea consumption high: I fell asleep several times while he was explaining the game to me. (It was rather good: much better as a simulation of a long term scientific project than TERRAFORMING MARS.)

CUNNING PLANS AND OVER-REACHING AMBITIONS

My GURPS BANESTORM game remains in abeyance while Hartley recovers from his Covid bout. We check in with him once a week and I go back to doing nothing much on Monday evenings, a development much to be deplored.

My Wednesday night RQ: GLORANTHA game has started and had a Session Zero and three actual weeks of role-playing. I bought (on Pum's recommendation) a recording device and intended to use the recordings to create actual narratives... But the damn recordings didn't work so I'll give you a brief summary without the pithy dialogue that I know you enjoy so much.

Starring Alan as ESHAN, a Seven Mothers worshipping Nobleman with a lot of social skills. Tasked by their CO with keeping this lot from embarrassing themselves, the Legion and the Empire.

Graham as VOSTOR a worshipper of the Lunar war god Yanafal Tarnils with a dark secret.⁴

Drak as JARATHIR another YT initiate with a Big Sword.

⁴ He has a Chaos feature: he regenerates injuries. Graham chose this and the other players know: but their characters don't.

⁵ The Plain People of E&A: Who is female. ME: Yes, yes. TPPoE&A: Which you keep forgetting... ME: Yes,

Martin as SANDENE⁵, a scout/sniper because some people have to be different. But still worships YT. But not as different as...

Pum as KEANUS another heavy infantryman who worships Humakt just to prove the tolerance of the Red Goddess.

The player characters are from Lunar Tarsh, the border kingdom closest to the Kingdom of Sartar where the great battle between the Lunar Empire and the Storm worshipping barbarians is being fought. And yes, in a reversal of the usual campaign frame of Gloranthan games, they are loyal subjects of the Civilised Imperial Power of the Lunar Empire. (Also, chaos-tolerating and chaos-employing which their enemies think makes them Evil.) The five of them have all been awarded a High Military Honour and sent on a jolly up to the capital to have it presented to them on the anniversary of the Emperor's Succession, a big military parade and celebration.

They will be missing out on the honour of joining their Legion (the Second Furthest Foot) in guarding the sacred ceremonies to dedicate the new Temple Of The Reaching Moon in Dragon Pass but in compensation they do get a holiday in the Capital and to be presented to the Emperor. Such Honour!

(Those of you who know your Gloranthan history will recognise what is coming up. So do my players but they let the doom laden foreshadowing do its work without excess commentary.)

They were given a send off by the Legion Commander who put the noble officer among them in charge and asked him as a special favour to deliver the ashes of Tribune Quintas Aggarius to his father Senator Falerius Aggarius along with a letter from the CO. "He died bravely. Let's leave it at that."

I know TPPoE&A: Martin's drawn boobs on the character standee and you still... ME: Gah!
TOOoE&A: And she never sleeps because of a gift from her God. You forgot about that too.

I laid before the players five envelopes which had printed on the outside five tempting extra bonus things to enhance their character. There was a faithful personal valet, the slave Vishi who was a pygmy. There was a boost to a character's Reputation. A chance to increase one stat by one point. An extra roll on the Family Heirlooms Table. Stuff like that.

I warned them though: inside each envelope except one was a further complication for the characters' life.

They all went for an envelope: two of the resulting complications bear mentioning.

The person who chose the slave valet (Graham, naturally) got a gambling problem and a small job from the loan sharks of the local Furthest Mob.

"You're going to Glamour, right? Well, we have a little job. Nothing complicated. Just deliver a message."

"Your first night the boat will be stopping at Barnborn. Go to the Tomb of Alakoring Dragonbreaker while wearing this hat," he hands you a ridiculous hat with a green feather in it "and wait for a someone to come to you and say "That's a bold cap for this town" and you reply "My Uncle Harsta gave it me." He will then give you further instruction and a package to be delivered in the capital. Do as he tells you and you will be given a package at the other end. Bring it back and you're all clear. All clear? Lovely."

And the bonus to Reputation (which Alan's noble went for) came through a family connection to Fazzur Wideread, former commander of Lunar forces in the south, currently a retired officer kept busy by tending his garden and writing his memoirs. He just asked that he pass on a sealed message to "Aronius, son of Belial, at the Imperial Receipts Office."

At Barnborn, the first night of their journey (by grain barge⁶, down the Oslira river paid for by the Legion) the wheels started coming off my carefully laid plans when it proved that Graham had left the piece of paper with his contact mission at home and the middleman who turned up and gave him a package to deliver, another feather to replace the one in his hat (I sort of imagined it as an Alpine hat with a feather in it) and a new contact phrase and a place in Glamour (a bar) to await contact was a little sarcastic about the chances of this job going well.

His manservant proved to be omniscient, sarcastic and nosy. He also got upset when Vostor 'humorously' mentioned his non-existent High Llama riding skills. Which he had never had the chance to pick up having been enslaved at the Battle of Moonbroth at the age of ten.

At Mirin's Cross they were overawed by the magnificence of the architecture and insulted by the condescension of the locals, especially the upper-class ones. "What sort of uniform is that? Oh *really?* How *fascinating!* Is that slave a dwarf? How unique! Is he for sale?"

When they got to Alkoth they were struck by the cyclopean magnificence of the emerald high walls of the city, erected by the Solar war god Shargash, the burner and destroyer. The captain of the barge did his best to dissuade them from entering the city saying it was a terrible place but that went out of the window when Vishi the slave went walkabout and disappeared through one of the gates. Following him they found that:

To get in they had to have the ritual of a symbolic 'execution' by having their heads 'chopped off' with a reed axe. Having done this they were allowed to enter the city which they were told was an outer suburb of the underworld. There was a scent of burning and a taste of ash in the air. Great stacks of shrouded bodies were present in neatly laid out storage

⁶ They were not important enough to get transport by Moon Boat.

lots, awaiting burning and sending down to hell in Sacred Time. The ghosts of the departed meanwhile were wandering about the city doing a little tourism before their due date.

They found Vishi kneeling before a large drum, with a large beater beside it. He had been drawn there by a voice in his head and the sound of drum beats.

He felt he was being called to beat the drum but was resisting. Jarathir too fell into the trance but both of them managed to resist and step outside the bounds of the city and return to the boat.

And when they tried to leave their boat was surrounded by suddenly shot up weeds and reeds and a member of the lowly peasant population (who would have been one of the targets of the city folks genocidal rage if the drum had been beaten) turned up and told them 'the Hag', his tribe's patron river goddess, wanted their help. This involved the destruction of a chaos creature, a walktaups. They chose not to specify what reward they wanted but the goddess promised them any help she could give while they were on the great river.

At Raibanth they were insulted (again!) by an even more supercilious officer who tried to con them into buying 'more suitable' uniforms for meeting the Emperor from his cousin.

Leaving the river at Raibanth they walked for a day going north to the capital with the great mass of the Crater (where the Goddess had taken up the Earth to become her celestial body) rising ahead of them and the glowing red orb of the Moon becoming ever more directly above.

They stopped at the Gods Wall, one of the oldest sacred monuments in the world, dating from before the death and resurrection of the Sun God Yelm. It depicts one hundred gods standing before his throne and honouring him.

Jarathir was particularly struck by the appearance of one of the divine portraits, Rashorana, the Tortured Woman, depicted bound and hanging upside down.

(Drak wanted his character to pursue Illumination, a concept far too complex to summarise here, and I gave him a 1% starting score in it because the idea pleased me and he had done some basic research to come to the Wall and find her.)

At the gate of the Capital, they showed their identification and travel passes to the guards and got directions to the Office of Detached Service in the Forum. They bought maps off a street vendor (they could have got them free from the Bureau of Tourism and Information but they could not have found the BoT&I without the maps) and at the Office a very fed up lady Bureaucrat gave them official accommodation chits for a week but told them the city was full of people, even the barracks were full of border legions from the east who were here to march past the Emperor. "Come back in five days and I'll be able to tell you more."

The Bureau of Tourism and Information had no better ideas about where they were to sleep that night but Eshan remembered he had a cousin in the city who managed to put them up by the illegal expedient of letting them camp on his roof.

And during the night they saw a strange looking figure all glowing with red lunar magic and wearing a costume that resembled a bat leap from the roof of a nearby building landing on some unfortunate person in the street.

"Ah, yes," the cousin said, "that's The Bat Man. Very mysterious. People say he drags away evil doers to feed the Crimson Bat. People say."

The next day, the chat around the breakfast table included the fact that the person the Bat Man had taken the night before was "Aronius, son of Belial, of the Imperial Receipts Office." Which caused their officer to roll his eyes.

After some business in the city, (whose nature I forget) they then set out to the noble estates out of town to deliver the first of their messages to a noble Senator. It was early evening by the time they found the place and managed to get to speak to the Senator and hand him the container

of ashes and the letter from their Commander.

The Senator was deeply moved by the moment and wiping his eyes asked them to follow him out into his gardens. In the midst of the surrounding vineyard, stood a garden studded with funerary monuments and statues. He called over a gardener who produced some tools and a small sapling in a pot. The Senator with his own hands dug a small hole, poured the ashes into it and then planted the sapling there. He murmured some prayers and as the soldiers stood there with heads bowed a rather lovely young woman in upper class robes came up with a trollkin in tow.

“Father? What’s so urgent? And why aren’t you getting ready for the ceremony?”

She was introduced as the Senator’s daughter, Faleria Aggaria, and the trollkin (who unusually was not wearing a slave collar) was known as Ureus The Valued.

Momentarily non-plussed by the fact that her brother’s ashes had now been reunited with the grove of their ancestors, Faleria nonetheless insisted that her father needed to get changed and prepare to attend ‘the ceremony’.

As he allowed himself to be led off to wash and change the Senator looked down at the trollkin and asked if there was not a vacancy at ‘the property’. Having that confirmed, he told the party that knowing the city was chock full of military visitors on the occasion of the great celebration of the anniversary of the current Mask of the Emperor passing the Ten Tests he would rent a room in one of his properties to them and directed the trollkin to take their housing chit and arrange for them to be given supplies from the Food Dole. Which they accepted with gratitude and a certain amount of confusion about all these sophisticated urban terms.

The trollkin harumphed and said “Yes, My Lord.”

⁷ An elderly woman in the robes of an Acolyte of Great Sister, the incarnate goddess who

They headed into the city (I think in a couple of carriages) and eventually arrived at their destination, an *insula* or block of flats at the corner of Victory and Plenty (those being roads in the Forum District). According to the Senator, conversing with Eshan on the way, the land had been in his family’s hands since before the Goddess ripped up the lands to the North into the Heavens to form the Red Moon, an event which transformed his family from mildly prosperous landowners to one of the first Senatorial families.

The tenants and the Janitrix⁷ waited outside in their festival best. They greeted the Senator with band music and a cheer. There was then a formal religious ceremony inside the *insula* in which the Senator climbed up the stairs to each level, stopping to offer a sacrifice of incense and flame at the mural of Great Sister, greeting each person by name and eventually coming up to the roof where he sacrificed to the spirit of the block (its *wyter*) bound into the huge water tank up there. The spirit accepted the worship and sprayed the whole building with two great wings of water. Everyone got soaked and also felt spiritually cleaned and strengthened. A party started.

And a short while later, the party found itself in possession of the keys for Room 2 on the fourth floor, a two-bedroom space, sparsely furnished with some bunk beds. The trollkin rent collector took their Army rent chit and told them how they should collect their portion of the building’s food Dole and told them if they weren’t staying long to let him know.

And since Vostor had recognised the bar on the corner of the block as the place he was supposed to wait for contact, he put on his hat with the special feather and went down there. The others followed and got to watch when this fellow came up to their comrade, gave the contact phrase, relieved him of the feather and the package and told him he could keep the hat.

They were far too polite to comment on any of that.

counterbalances the Emperor She is almost perfectly rotund and smiles beneficently on everyone

And so ended their first full day in Glamour. The second was much more interesting.

NEXT: Still no recording but epic and historical events.

IGGY'S THEME: UNDER THE HOOD OF THE BIG BAD

I don't detail any bad, big or otherwise, until they are needed. Not until the last minute, when I've got to the climax and the players have laid their plans. By that stage I know the characters' capabilities (or at least I should) and I know what they will handle easily and what will give them trouble.

I didn't stat out the Demon Emperor of Megalos (in either of the two campaigns that allowed the PCs to off him) until I knew where the fight was going to take place and roughly in what circumstances. I made versions of him with my maximum skill at GURPS character generation each time and then ran with it. I think that the second time was better detailed and more exciting for the players but that may be my conceit.

I certainly didn't stat out Dracula in THE DRACULA DOSSIER until the investigation had climbed to near the top of the conspiracy pyramid. I knew from the first that he would be the Master Vampire of the Linea Dracula, based on the outline in the core book of NIGHT'S BLACK AGENTS but a lot of the mythology of the various types of vampires in my version of the setting had been developed in play, part of it due to PC actions.

I have sometimes had medium and even big Bads unexpectedly defeated and even destroyed by clever and lucky PC actions. I have sometimes been caught short with an insufficiently prepared monster. But my general advice is don't commit yourself to one version of the climax too soon.

Be as detailed as you like and as your game system permits.

COMMENTARIAT

Upon the First Issue of The New Order: Which is to say E&A 1

You know, it's going to take a while before not writing Lee's name as the first entry to feel normal.

GEORGE PHILLIES: *"Prepackaged world environments for less imaginative gamemasters were in the future,"* I say, steady on! As someone who has always enjoyed taking someone else's world and making it my own I feel cut to the quick! // *"The economic rationale for dungeons was not always clear,"* Oh, you said a mouthful. So were the social, theological and cosmic rationales. It would be a while before people stopped and wondered where these gold-filled holes in the ground were springing from. And when they asked that question, they got into some weird answers. Professor Barker's answer for Tekumel was part theological, part cultural and all magnificently ornate. ("We rebuild our cities on a regular cosmic schedule and when we do, previous layers of the cities get buried under more and more rubble. The shrines and temples down there still have to be maintained, for the honour of the gods. Of course we do. We are not barbarians!") Nowadays, cosmic infections from other realities are popular to explain the peculiar holes in the ground that no sensible person would ever start let alone finish.

PATRICK RILEY: I'm not at all sure I would dare ask my players to describe my games. They might go all British and murmur something about things being fine, don't you know. Or worse they might honestly tell me! // Congratulations on the new job. May you prosper there. RYCT Me: Yes, I know of the Ninth Amendment: I also know that some members of the Supreme Court think it should never have been written. It's not in fact the vaguest part of the US Constitution. The Tenth is worse and the Constitutional Convention provisions are quite useless. RYCT Lisa: The rules should either be loose enough or easily

expandable enough to handle anything a character in that world could actually do. RYCT Jim Vassilakos: I wonder how sociological theory would describe fandom. Doubtless there are reams of PhD theses on the topic. // I'm also not sure 'culture' is a universal thing among all possible language and tool using species. // Re your SAVAGE WORLDS game: I know why my City of Aegis has 1000 gates (actually 1024 which is to say k).⁸ Why is your City so profligate with Names.

MYLES COCORAN: Welcome (back)!

PUM: Welcome to the Pretentious Latin Titles Club. I've just resigned so *you* can be President and Lord High Everything Else. // We should do a proper feature on Martin's Magnificent Mensa.⁹ In the meantime here's a picture of his most recent bit of enthusiastic dungeon crafting: Standees/name plates for the player characters with space for useful details and the character's dominant Runes:



B. HEATH ROW: RYCT JOSHUA: I have run a GURPS game set in 50s Britain: a bit of an everything-and-the-kitchen-sink setting with Aliens (including cute ones that looked like cute rodents), Illuminati (including Winston Churchill), psionics (including half the players) and flying saucers. The fate of the world depending on what the British Government did is a trope of British TV SF of the period and I played it up shamelessly. A bit like Fringe but

⁸ Hmm perhaps another instance of my Genius. Maybe next time.

fewer conspiracies. I must get back to that milieu sometimes. (Perhaps for the STABCON group. Hmmm.) //There's a reason GURPS gets recommended, you know... RYCT Me: I can't now recall the title of the Mack Reynolds story but it was one of his near future pieces in which The Government was forcibly moving everyone onto credit cards and looking to outlaw cash. The new universal card was touted as the Most Secure Thing Ever with security features including bio-metrics and fingerprint identification. The central character is allowed to test those security features and enjoys himself.

MARK NEMETH: RYCT Me: My feelings about whether God should be obeyed are based on doubts about his motivations not his power whether in strength or knowledge. More importantly, I object because surrendering your own judgement to anyone else, even an infinite being, is just wrong. There are people who want to 'lay their burden (of moral responsibility) on the Lord' but this cannot be done. We have the knowledge of Good and Evil and continue to pay the price our first ancestors paid for it. It would be wrong to say "I am just going to let this person over here make up my mind for me." And foolish to try. // As for Jonah, I have always thought he reflected on the likelihood of getting lynched by the people of Nineveh. If the idea is that he hates them I would say the author failed to communicate the backstory.

PATRICK ZOCH: The NPC personality tables are very interesting (I probably would bristle at the psychological models you say went into them) and useful for designing pre-planned characters. I think that random tables reflecting fewer characteristics would be better for spur-of-the-moment characters. When the player asks if there is anyone in the street who saw someone jump down from a second floor window a moment ago and run away there are several things you will want to ascertain. Is there anyone? Did they see anything? Do they want to talk to the PC? Are their wits still at least partly functional. You would not believe the kvetching I got from my players when the first person he

⁹ Latin for 'table'. But you knew that.

approached didn't want to talk to him and the second did not appear alarmed by the enquiry, said yes, she saw the figure. She could provide a brief description but was really busy right now tending her florist's shop. So unless he wanted to make a purchase she was just going back to watering. I got complaints about this...

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: RYCT Me: One of the things (one of the *other* things) that bothers me with regard to God and alleged messages from God is that I no means of being sure if I've been contacted by a) a genuine omnipotent being b) a being that's more powerful than me but not omnipotent or c) someone with a few tricks and a confident manner. People seem happier to accept that something unusual is coming from The Big Guy than is strictly logically necessary.

Burning Bush! Good enough for me!

Flying winged humanoids? Classic that is!

Dude walking on water? Is there something I can do for you, Boss?

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES, MY FRIENDS AND DON'T BUY ANY SECOND HAND MIRACLES

De Ludis Elficis Fictis

by Pum (AKA Paul Holman), Harrow, ENGLAND.

Email: Pum@Pum.org

July 2025

Web: <http://www.pum.org>

Recently I have mostly been ...

... playing Mr Cule's new Runequest 7E campaign, set in the Lunar Empire. The player characters are all soldiers from the Furthest 2nd Foot unit of the Lunar army. We are travelling to see the Red Emperor to receive commendations for our recent heroics, and are encountering mystery and adventure along the way. So far, among other things, we have side tracked to save a village from a Walktopus, and are currently in the Lunar city of Outer Glamour, investigating a vigilante that rumour says is a man who looks like a bat, or something of that sort, that we have dubbed "The Manbat!" It may be the undead that we briefly detected before it fled, in another apartment of the building we are staying in.

Stabcon was the usual fun of 50 odd hours (minus sleep, etc) of playing board games. I mostly played SETI, as it was highly available, and at the moment I like it a lot, but I now need to at least get reasonably competent with it to continue liking it.

Other than that, I've been mostly sweltering in the uncommonly hot weather we have been having lately, lying around muttering "it's too hot to do anything!"

Comments

E&A#1 Patrick Riley: I love your new title for your zine.

I very much agree with your comments about the advantage of an APA/zine platform encouraging long-form essays and discussions, compared to online forums and the like.

Sorry to hear about your Involuntary Unscheduled Vacation, and I'm glad to read that you have found suitable new employment, and with a small pay rise!

RYCTM re gravity batteries etc, and I recently read about a thermal sand battery in Finland, which uses surplus electricity from renewables to charge it by heating it up¹

E&A#1 Myles Cororan: it is very good to see you back contributing – I do hope you continue. It was nice to see you at Worldcon in Glasgow, and I do hope you stay in touch one way or another.

Thanx for writing up your *Mausritter* game – I do enjoy a good write up, and what a cute game system

(I also like looking through interesting rules systems, simple or complex.)

E&A#1 Mitch Hyde: Re allowing players to map themselves, and correct anything that is too egregious, this is what I like to do, as GM and player. I recently played a couple of sessions in a dungeon with rooms connected by teleportals, and really enjoyed (trying to) map it.

re not able to map whilst using infra-vision, as ink does not produce heat: is that official rules for D&D? I always assumed infravision was an extended range of vision rather than an alternate mode.

E&A#1 Michael Cule: re Roger's idea to start a campaign by dropping pre-gen PCs into trouble, killing them, and then create new PCs that are the follow up team that investigate the mystery sounds rather good – I must try to remember that to use sometime.

Ah Trollcrusher, the first fanzine I read – fond memories. Do you have any early issues that I might peruse please? I have issues 4, 6 - 9, 11, 12, 19 - 29.

E&A#1 Heath Row: your work's D&D pinball machine is indeed very cool. Many years ago I was rather envious of a friend who bought his own pinball machine.

E&A#1 Mark Nemeth: RYCT Gabriel Roark re elaborate currency: in my homebrew campaign, I use the old English system of Pounds, Shillings and Pennies for the purposes of flavour. I am just about old enough to remember "old money", but not old enough to remember farthings and groats.

RYCT Gabriel Roark re natural 20 damage, I recall using double damage in the 1980s, with also a rule that a natural 20 would hit and do normal damage if it would not normally hit according to THAC0. Now I think I prefer something like max damage + normal damage, but, as you imply, I think, this is largely a matter of taste.

E&A#1 Patrick Zoch: excellent NPC persona tables. I have long thought of doing something like that as a web page or app, kind of like *dmheroes.com* I would add an optional table for what the NPC is currently doing or preoccupied with.

E&A#1 Jim Vassilakos: RYCTM re the purple fungus mystery, sadly, Mr Cule was not happy with that campaign, and abandoned it; a shame for me as I was rather enjoying it.

====### Everyone else, RAEBNC ###=====

¹
<https://www.ess-news.com/2025/06/11/finnish-100-mwh-sand-battery-is-operational/>



THE DRAGON'S BEARD

AUGUST 2025

© PATRICK ZOCH



DRAWING LIKE DYSON

I've drawn maps for dungeons most my life. Early on, they were sprawling labyrinthian hallways and chambers neatly drawn with a No 2 on blue lined quad paper. Fancier maps warranted black ink on green engineer paper. I imagined they were maps of Gygax praise and TSR publishing. Many maps never saw use, drawn for some forgotten dungeon in some unrealized campaign lost while waiting to gather a party to explore them.

Later my maps were simplified to mere pencil sketches for utility purpose while running a game. Some maps managed to make it to graph paper. Many did not. None had legends. I knew the dungeonscape well and I did not need graph lines to indicate dimensions.

Eventually, my maps became more abstract, providing conceptual ideas of the dungeons, caverns, and environs. As I translated them to the tabletop with terrain or markers on the battle mat, the realized space more or less conformed to the ideas on the map but adjusted to the limitations of the terrain pieces or the needs of the situation. It has been my way for the past twenty or so years.

The digital age and virtual table top environments unleashed innumerable full color maps for immediate importation to VTT systems. They were beautifully illustrated and conveyed more than dimensions and features; they conveyed mood, tone, and ambiance. These new maps were works of art, but I feel they should be appreciated as art by artists not cartography by cartographers.

I love the elegance of a well-drawn intricate map. I love the clean black lines, clear map symbols, and precision of information. I admire the maps by DysonLogos, simple and elegant, and showing how black and white cartography can be an art form or its own.

I wanted to try my hand at drawing good maps again, maybe not as good as [DysonLogos](#), but capturing the same spirit of elegant cartography. I opted to start with using an historical reference in Orford Castle. Cowle Keep is a one page dungeon map provided in this zine. While I am generally pleased with the results, I need to improve on the technique in the future. I am not sure the trademark hash pattern used by Dyson is effective in the walls — it looks too cluttered. I will improve on it in the future. I hope you enjoy Cowle Keep.



VILLAINS: I GOT TREASURE AND I'M NOT AFRAID TO USE IT

Most role-playing games have a plentiful gallery of rogues and monsters to throw at the player characters without any adjustment to their abilities, stats, or equipment. They are ready to use. One bandit or guard is pretty much like any other bandit or guard. There is rarely any need to change a stat, ability or equipment. Most won't even have a name beyond Bandit #1 or Guard #2. And even then, their names are determined by the roll on a random table, if only to prevent a world populated by too many Bob's. On the table, minis in different poses and different colored clothe help create the illusion of difference in their sameness. They are the background cast and nameless characters without a speaking part in the game other than generic phrases.

Villains stand out first by having unique dialogue with the PCs. They have names and are prone to proudly introduce themselves so the whole world knows who they are, especially the PCs who are about to die. I may start with a base template for their stats and abilities, but I will update and upgrade them to be an distinctive and appropriate threat to the PCs. Spells are carefully selected for the scenario instead of a random selection. Villains are smart like that. They are equipped according to their success and threat. Their weapons and armor are not only of the highest quality; they are unique, often ornate, and occasionally magical.

Villains are tough to defeat, not only because of their vicious nature and dedication to purpose, but because they are more capable and resourceful than the average fodder the PCs face. Villains have loot, not just coins and jewels, but expensive equipment. That expensive equipment is not just for show, kept in mint condition just for the PCs for when they kill the villain. No, that equipment is for the villain to use against the PCs. (which, incidentally, is part of how the equipment is identified without magic). That +1 plate armor and cloak of invisibility: the villain will use it. That +3 magic blade or rod of disruption: the villain will use it. That ring of regeneration and amulet of health: the villain will use it. And that potion of fire breath or scroll of animate dead: the villain will use it. If the PCs do not act fast, they may find that some treasure is consumed or charges spent during the fight against them, denying them the use of the treasure afterwards.

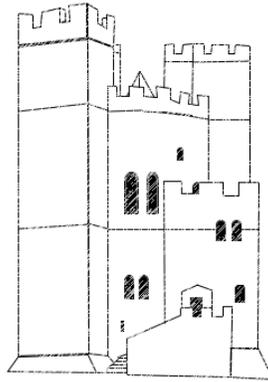
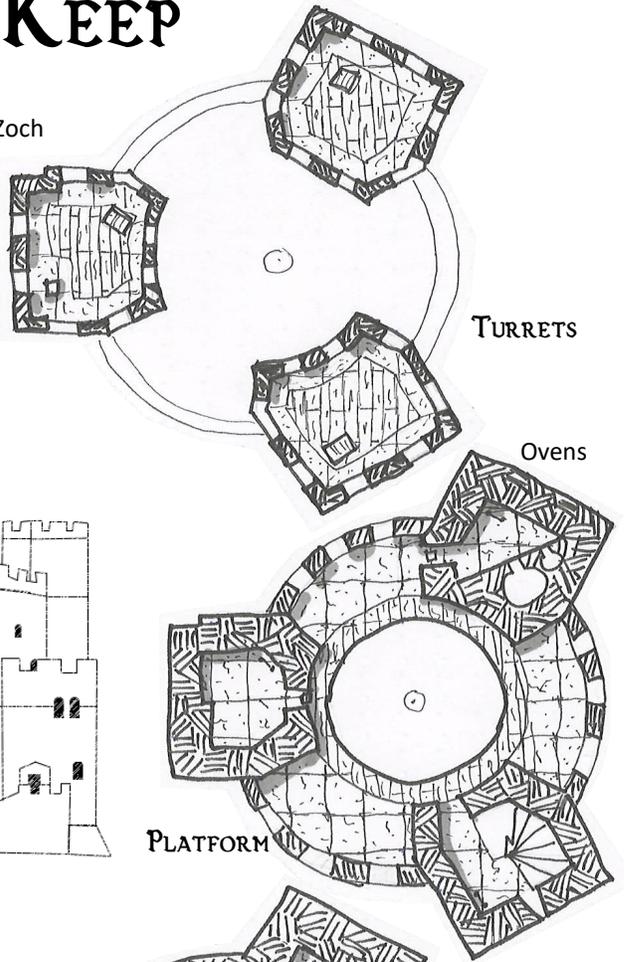
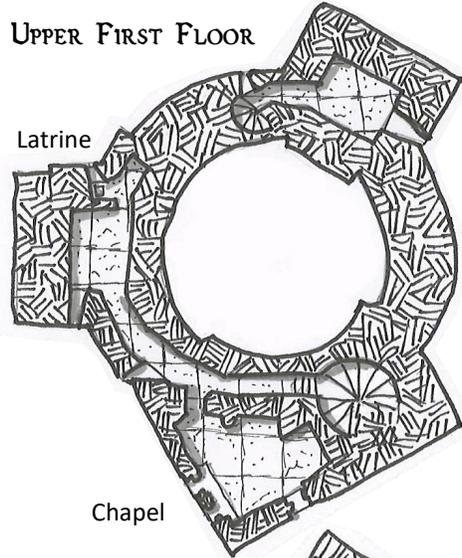
Each of my villains are unique, with their own name, motivations, stats, abilities, equipment, and treasure. All to better defeat the player characters. And to make the victory and recovered treasure all the more rewarding.



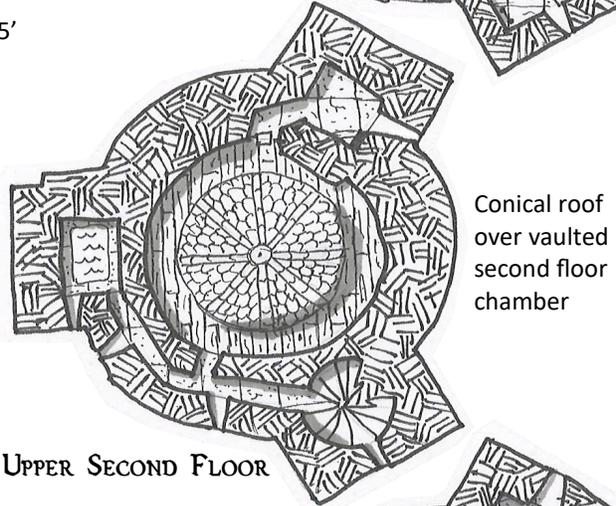
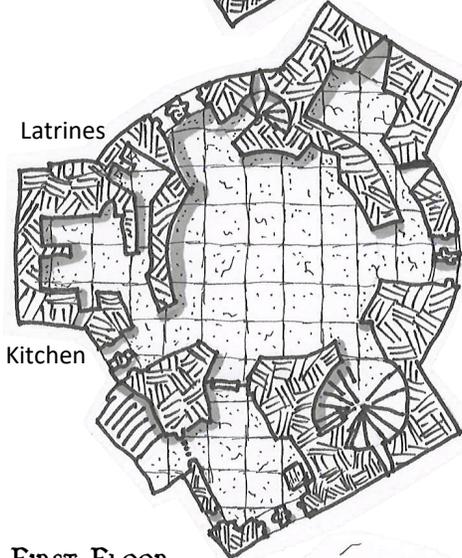
COWLE KEEP

Based on Orford Castle
Hand drawn by Patrick Zoch

UPPER FIRST FLOOR



□ = 5'

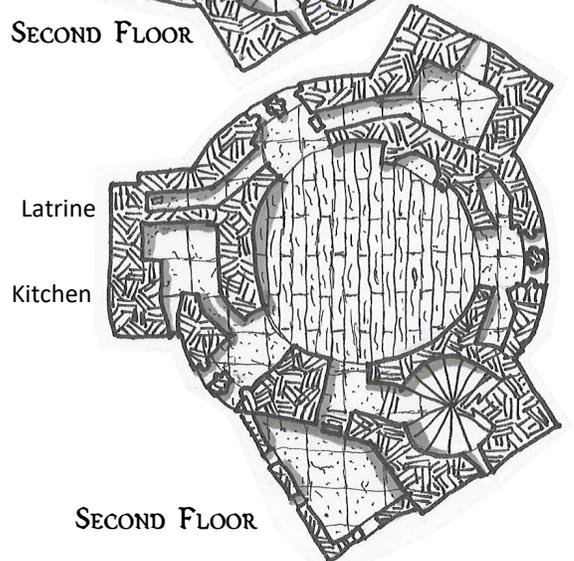


FIRST FLOOR



Well in center

2



1 COMMENTS

Jim Vassilakos — A great first issue! I look forward to reading every one. E&A looks to be a worthy successor to A&E.

George Phillis — Welcome to E&A! Re: Starting D&D at first level: It never occurred to me that a 1st level character would have a platoon of followers or could be a noble's son with a retinue setting off on adventure. I totally missed that opportunity. We always seemed to play a motely lot of opportunists thrown together for misadventure and misfortune as often as fortune and glory.

Attronarch — Glad to see the continued session reports from the Conquering the Barbarian Altanis campaign. Session 78 was brutal: something unusual is holding that odd mixture of monsters to work together. They are lucky that five survived.

Mark A. Wilson — Best of luck on the move, and the board game design. I had to put mine on the back burner for a while (and it may find it's way off the stove completely). I look forward to hearing more about your campaigns — looks like you have plenty RPGing going on!

Patrick Riley — Love the new title. Re: Getting the Thing. I like the all-goblin party and plotline. Looks like a great game to play. Thanks for sharing the scenario. I really liked the Order of the Stick inspired art. Those kobolds were awesome, and I, too, liked that your art reflected the characters, including Sessa's missing arm.

Myles Corcoran — Welcome back! Love the session report on the Mausritter campaign. It looks like a great campaign and I really like the starting setting map — it has that cozy countryside feel to it. I haven't played Mausritter yet. I've played Mouse Guard and Chi, which both have mice as primary characters. Unfortunately, both groups fell apart before we resolved our first adventures. Your Mausritter game already looks more coherent than the two games I played.

Mitch Hyde — Welcome to E&A. I look forward to hearing more about your AD&D campaign. Awesome session report, and I really dig your artwork for the game. Given that you are not really set in Greyhawk, how do your players reconcile the world setting difference on ADDKON server with a SNAILFLAIL protocol? I notice the server is German? I'm glad you included a map for your campaign (I was wracking my mind trying to square your campaign setting with the Greyhawk Sword Coast environment. Frankly, Never_plays_elves has the coolest handle.

Paul Holman — Welcome to E&A. Funny you mention playing so much [SETI: Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence](#) board game. It has been a hot game since last year, but I seemed to have missed it. Instead, I was focused on Tomáš Holek's other game, [Galileo Galilei](#). I discovered it last year at the Dice

Tower Retreat and fell in love with it. We pre-ordered a copy and waited six-months for it to arrive. It just made it to the US this year, and it appears to be gaining a fan base. Meanwhile, I need to go back and try *SETI*. I hate to miss out on a good game.

Heath Row — I always struggled with the concept of a solo-rpg, so I appreciate your session reports on two solo-playable rpgs: [Downcrawl](#) and [Brambletrek](#). The closest I've come to a solo rpg was the [Quest Calendar: Leaf Riders of Wrenwood](#), an rpg played in calendar form each day. I did not manage it more than a couple of months before I lost interest.

Mark Nemeth — RE: Dullstrand. I'm not surprised by the creative use of the folding boat. It has been one of the most versatile magic items I've seen. In one game we are playing, we have used it as a bridge, a ladder, a bar for a door, and a boat. Re: Eastlands. I was surprised to see so many characters rolled up at first. It looked more like a DCC campaign. But I like the setup for the campaign and I think the construct and purpose for the multiple characters looks interesting. It also looks complex. I agree with your reservations about how it will work out in the end. I look forward to the forthcoming session reports to see how this plays out.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek — Fascinating summary of pulp heroes fighting fascism. It makes sense that the pulp writing of the 30's and 40's would reflect the rising danger of fascist movements, especially given their emergence in the 20's in nations in opposition to the U.S. I am not as familiar with the pulp genre as I would like to be, but I am curious if such a writing style existed in the Soviet Union during the same period and if they wrote about heroes combating fascism also or if this was a uniquely American phenomenon in defense of democracy. Did the British pulp industry produce heroes who combated fascism in the same way as the American industry? Censorship certainly dominated publication content in Germany, Italy, and Japan, and I assume any pulp material promoted propaganda material, but I wonder if their heroes fought against democracy movements in the same way our fought against fascism or if the antagonists were more nation or ideal centric, and not governance centric. I wonder about the Chinese pulp heroes of this era and how they may have evolved from the beginning of WW2 to the end of it with the rise of Communism.

Everyone Else — Glad to see so many returning contributors, whether under new zines or old. Glad to see new contributors; I can't wait to read all the new material. I am seeing more color seep into the zine, and the new format is probably ripe for more visually striking zine design.

I can be found as pdzoch at [boardgamegeek.com](#), [rpggeek.com](#), [enworld.org](#), [fantasygrounds.com](#), [discord.com](#), and [boardgamearena.com](#).

Ronin Engineer for Ever and Anon #2
by Jim Eckman,
Mountain View, CA
alarum@roninengineer.com

Ignorable Theme

I don't normally call my NPCs villains, but I do try to create them ahead of time with appropriate details so I'm not scrambling to generate them during play. This also helps locate (in)famous persons that the players may wish to visit.

In my Bushido games, many famous martial art schools and teachers were generated ahead of time as well as their locations.

A Fistful Of SF Game Systems

Science fiction is my favorite genre and prior to Traveller's release I ran a very small campaign based loosely on some of Andre Norton's novels. I used Star Guard for physical encounters and my sole player and I winged it on investigation and research results. The main character was a Zacathan archaeologist chasing down clues about a recently uncovered Forerunner race. They had to submit reports, publish papers to get money and equipment to continue.

Call of Cthulhu - (Cthulhu Icarus?) could be used as a ruleset, adding some SF weapons, tools, etc. Missing the academic subgame among other issues.

Traveller – Ugh! There is hack for improving and learning new skills but it's very crude.

Space Opera – Sort of in print, byzantine rules set, furry friendly (humans are the cockroaches of space) and has a large amount published material. FGU has a website and there is new supplements in the works.

I ran a couple of campaigns using this, but the amount of house rules required inspired a friend to write their own SFRPG.

Wanderer! - (Rough draft completed, author passed away.) Basic mechanics based

DareDevil/Bushido game mechanics. An insanely huge goodies list and a decent random worlds generator.

Stars Without Number – An OSR space game with character classes? I'm still reading the rules.

??? – Any recommendations? I've been out of circulation for 25 years.

Starting a Campaign:

Why is/are the character(s) adventuring?

- They are desperate, typical Andre Norton.
- Boredom or why not, Traveller or RAH.
- Circumstances, ship's crew or lifeboat.

Party size:

- 1 – Solo play, journaling.
- 2+ - a game!

For SFRP I think the maximum players I've ever had was seven, averaging three to five and sometimes I had one. My typical Bushido games were 15+ topping out at 25 or so.

My SF campaigns were more exploration and social interactions, combat was rare because it was dangerous even for the PCs. There was one ship, so party unity was easy to maintain.

Thoughts on Space Travel

I guess there is the 'no travel' option for those who love zombies and dystopias and 'slow travel' for those who love the idea of generation ships. *The Stars Are Legion* by Kameron Hurley, has some new ideas on this hoary trope.

For those of us who like bopping around the universe you can have small ships like the Locator 9-Bs from Vance's *Star Princes* series that anyone can use and are inexpensive or at the other extreme starships are complicated and so expensive. Only large governments have them. I fall somewhere in the middle. My campaigns usually featured a recovered small freighter that the players fix up or something of the like. They tended to have higher tech parts that made them

superior to other ships in exchange for always having to search for spares.

Next is what are all these ships doing? Is trade practical? Is it all small volume, valuable items or are there bulk freighters carrying grains to feed 'City' worlds ala Asimov's *Foundation* series. I prefer few and small.

What about space combat? I hate it, one bad roll can trash an entire party, the only exception would be single occupant fighters. That lets the idiots die gloriously and the wiser live to fight another day. Shades of *Battlestar Galactica!*

Fueling and servicing the beasties, depending on costs, can be easy, or a financial or logistical nightmare. As I don't use much money in my campaigns, I tend to make spares hard to locate and repair depots small and specialized while fuel is close to free. This makes for an occasional fix the ship adventure.

How do you fly? Are you a Newtonian craft, like Traveller, that you apply thrust vectors to or do you 'drive' through space, just pointing the ship in the direction you want to go? Other fun variants, solar sails, shot from a catapult, etc.

How do you handle FTL travel? Keep on trucking like *Star Trek* or jump points, or jump paths? Or galactic trains and other oddities? Limiting the number of destinations can make the GM's job a bit easier.

How have you handled this?

Reactions to Issue #1

Several have asked why no EPT?

#1 It's the game that never quite made it. There have been a few hard cores that have run campaigns but mostly its one shots.

#2 The Tekumel Foundation's policy towards non-profit fan work changes on a regular basis and I don't want to work on something that I can't publish.

#3 Barker's legacy.

Michael Cule

I stole the idea from RAH Starman Jones sans slide rules and tables. I've read some of Melissa Scott's Silence Leigh series but these came later.

Everyone else

What a great first issue!



Figure 1: *Strange Harbor* by Jim Eckman

Engines & Emulators #2

July 21, 2025

Engines & Emulators is an apazine published by Blasted Heath Row, P.O. Box 259240, Madison, WI 53725; kalel@well.com; 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to Ever & Anon and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers Association (fwa). This is a Karma Lapel publication.

Event Report: Free RPG Day

The deadline for last month's mailing was also Free RPG Day! (<https://freerpgday.com>) So I ventured out to Gamer's Library (<https://www.facebook.com/GamersLibraryMadison>) on State Street to check out the shop—and see whether they were participating in the recognition of the day.

Gamer's Library is a relatively decent-sized shop, split down the middle to offer a spacious retail area, as well as tables for game play. Concentrating primarily on board games and collectible card games, they're also an independent Warhammer retailer and dedicate several shelves to roleplaying games.

Even though most of their roleplaying game stock focuses on *Dungeons & Dragons*, other games are also on hand, and they offer a few intriguing independent games. I was drawn to *Goblin Quest* (see below) and the Powered by the Apocalypse game *Rhapsody of Blood*, both of which I thought would be fun solo.

Around the corner from the register, the store offered Free RPG Day materials along the display cases on the table side of the store. I didn't see that immediately upon entering. I picked up an issue of *White Dwarf* (see below) and two other items, so I was able to select two Free RPG Day options.

Having checked out what participating publishers were offering online before leaving the Infernal Wilson, our furnished apartment, I picked up the *Wires in the Woods* Solo Quickstart and *Level 1: The Free RPG Day Indie RPG Anthology* Vol. 6. None of the games in that volume are designed for solo play, but any game can be played solo, and I was inspired by its wide range of content.

The staff was friendly and helpful, and one shared a story about how, as a preteen or teenager, he broke the glass of another store's display case while rolling a particularly large, heavy die. A cautionary tale, to be sure.

Given the availability of tables, the store also hosts an active schedule of public play, including *D&D* Adventurers League, *Pokemon*, *Magic: The Gathering*, and *Warhammer 40,000*. Even though

we're only staying at the Infernal Wilson for another month or so, if I tire of solo play, I know where to go: my closest local game store, Gamer's Library—on Sunday morning.

Store Report: I'm Board! Games & Family Fun

After a screening of *Them!* in conjunction with a book release event in late June, I stopped by the Sun Prairie location of I'm Board! Games & Family Fun. (<https://imboardgames.com>) I'd been to their campus location on Monroe Street in Madison previously but hadn't checked out any of their other locations yet.

The Sun Prairie store offered more roleplaying game stock than Gamer's Library, above. Organized into sections labeled Classic Systems, Fifth Edition Supplements and Compatible Settings, Independent Publishers, Licensed Properties, Pathfinder/Starfinder, Starter Sets, and other categories, I'm Board! offers a little bit of almost everything for practically everyone.



I was especially attracted to the *Pathfinder* Pocket Edition volumes published by Paizo Inc., but I don't really need any more *Pathfinder* materials. (I should use what I already have, once it's not all packed up any more.) Regardless, the Pocket Editions are absolutely adorable and very handy, reminding me of the fourth edition *Dungeons & Dragons* Essentials volumes and *Mutants & Masterminds: Pocket Player's Guide*. Faunch!

The store also stocks *Call of Cthulhu*, *Dragonbane*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *Star Wars* Roleplaying, *Blades in the Dark*, *Kids on Bikes*, and *Numenera*—even the *Pendragon* Starter Set. The stock on the shelves indicates that there are plenty of options beyond *D&D*.

In addition to another recent issue of *White Dwarf* (see below), I picked up two of Scott Almes's *Simply*

In any event, it's always fun to return to *White Dwarf*, even if you don't play *Warhammer* or *Warhammer 40,000*. After reading *Dice Men: The Origin Story of Games Workshop* by Ian Livingstone with Steve Jackson (*Emulators & Engines* #21), I'm glad I did.

Solo Game Report: *Goblin Quest*

While at Gamer's Library (see above), I was drawn to Grant Howitt's *Goblin Quest* (<https://gshowitt.itch.io/goblin-quest>) largely because of its appealing book packaging and colorfully playful artwork by Jon Morris. After reading a couple of issues of *White Dwarf*, it was the perfect roleplaying game to explore in a solo session. Reminiscent of the *Pathfinder* module *We Be Goblins!* and games such as *Monsters! Monsters!* in which players roleplay the creatures that inhabit fantasy roleplaying game settings, *Goblin Quest* is a very fun—and funny—game. It would be much more fun playing with a group of other people, even without a gamesmaster (what Howitt calls the game master), but even solo, it resulted in some delightfully simple silliness.

Instead of creating characters, players create clutches of goblins, each representing five distinct goblins. Death comes quickly in *Goblin Quest*. You select an expertise, a quirk, and an ancestral heirloom, as well as a good luck charm that's utilized to reroll unfavorable outcomes. The character sheet features all five goblins, which you name, and Howitt encourages you to draw the members of your clutch. So I did:



When playing with a group, each player identifies the quest its goblin wants to embark upon. Those quests are then combined into one big, confusing quest. Playing solo, I selected a quest for each member of the clutch before combining them. A couple of my options were deprioritized in order to make the resulting quest work better as a unified, though messy, singular goal.

Bingo Red Eye had found a dilapidated boat in the Great Battle Camp's Junk Pile. He wants to sail across Slime Lake to see what's on the other side even though he can walk there. (You can actually see across Slime Lake.)

Kutt of the Mudborn Avengers—which might be a better clutch name than *Destined for Greatness*, which I chose hastily, misspelling it in Goblinese—has been reading a ratty paperback of Rainer Maria Rilke and wants some answers: Who made All This? Why? He'd like to find them and rub their face in it.

And Finger the Keg Killer is really hungry for a chicken dinner. The goblin-beautiful Hatey Bloodpaw has agreed to cook one for him, as long as he provides the chicken and lets her eat half—the bottom half. If they sail far enough in Bingo Red Eye's ramshackle dinghy, maybe they'll reach Cowsmash the Butcher. He usually has chickens.

Combining those quests, I ended up with the following quest: Sail to find the Chicken Who Made All This. Players brainstorm what equipment and materials you might need to accomplish the quest. My list included items such as the boat, a map of Slime Lake and navigation tools, chicken bait (seed or worms), a chicken trap (a basket or sack, perhaps), a chicken dictionary to enable and foster communication, Kutt's dog-eared and well-worn paperback book, and a not-too-dirty washcloth.

You then break the quest into three more manageable tasks, each of which has three stages. You identify whether a misfortune befalls you at any step along the way, and you assign a difficulty rating to each stage based on the number of players and the existence of a misfortune. For solo play, I used the number of goblins rather than the number of players. All of my misfortunes, randomly selected, occurred during Stage 3 of each task.

Task #1: Prepare to Hunt Chickens

Stage 1: Enter Cowsmash the Butcher's (4)

Stage 2: Procure chicken-related tools and materials (4)

Stage 3: Learn as much as we can from the chickens to prepare for the Chicken Who Made All This (Misfortune: Orcs and bugbears—Some bugbears decide to play goblin football)—5

Task #2: Float the Boat

Stage 1: Enter the Junk Pile without being seen (5)

Stage 2: Find the boat again (5)

Stage 3: Take the boat to Slime Lake (Misfortune: Orcs and bugbears—A bugbear makes you a deal that you foolishly accept)—6

Task #3: Chicken Catch-a-Story

Stage 1: Find the Chicken Who Made All This (6)

Stage 2: Establish without a doubt that we have the Right Chicken (6)

Stage 3: Capture the Chicken (Misfortune: Goblins and hobgoblins—A hobgoblin cart full of paperwork and supplies smashes into the goblins)—7

I had to look up the game online to learn how difficulty ratings work—thankfully, there was a discussion on Reddit. Difficulty ratings are not target numbers or modifiers for use when undertaking actions or while engaged in combat. They're countdown dice, and each successful action lowers the rating by one. At 0, you've successfully accomplished the stage in question.

When goblins undertake tasks, players make a modified d6 roll against a simple oracle-like table that determines the degree of success or failure. The actions you undertake at each stage—and whether your goblins succeed or fail—offer additional opportunities for silly storytelling and subsequent hilarity. For solo play, I might lower the base difficulty rating from 5 to 3 to decrease the number of actions needed. Regardless, even though I haven't yet undertaken the quest—I've only created it—*Goblin Quest* is great fun.

Not a bad way to spend a Sunday afternoon. The misfortune for Stage 3 of Task #1 reminded me of Games Workshop's game *Blood Bowl*, which introduced another interesting option for game play. That stage itself could be played through as a simplified, modified solo game of *Blood Bowl*.



Chicago Tribune, Feb. 25, 1955

Game Report: *Unsurmountable*

Scott Almes's Simply Solo games (<https://buttonshygames.com/collections/simply-solo-games>) published by Button Shy are extremely compact, portable card games packaged in their own pocket-sized carrying case. *Unsurmountable* is designed for one player of at least 8 years old and can be played in about 15 minutes.

The game's small deck includes 17 Mountain cards and one Rescue Helicopter card, all featuring artwork by Christy Johnson. Your goal as the player—or mountain climber—is to arrange the Mountain cards from your Base Camp (effectively your hand) so there's a continuous route up the mountain, each level getting progressively smaller from a base of four cards to the one-card peak. You can only play cards in a specific location of your base camp, but you can discard other cards to activate their abilities. As your base camp empties, you adjust and refill its cards.

If you're able to build a complete mountain with a continuous path from bottom to top, your mountain climber succeeds. If you run out of cards before you finish building the mountain, however, you lose. The rules offer additional levels of difficulty to keep the game fresh and new over time.

I've only played *Unsurmountable* once since buying it at I'm Board! (see above), but it was fun—and I'm likely to play it again. Given the game's small size and portability, it's a great game to carry with you. The only thing you really need to find in order to play wherever you are is a flat surface large enough for your mountain. At the Infernal Wilson, I found that a folding television tray table offers adequate room.

Comments on Ever & Anon #1

In *A Rhodomontadulous Promenade* #1, **George Phillies** shared information about his background playing wargames, computer games, and roleplaying games. I was unaware that you'd gone to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or that you'd founded the MIT Strategic Games Society (<https://www.mit.edu/~sgs>), which continues to this day. Kudos! When I lived and worked in the Boston area, I participated in activities organized by the MIT Electronic Research Society and attended MIT Anime Club screenings—but didn't get involved in the Strategic Games Society or Science Fiction Society.

Thank you for sharing the opening to the unfinished novel *Small Giant Class Liberation Army* and the reprint of the opening to *No Tears for a Princess*. I think that it's only fitting that the closure of Alarums & Excursions resulted in the creation of two roleplaying game-related apae. Alarums & Excursions peacefully co-existed with The Wild Hunt,

Interregnum, The Lords of Chaos, and even APA-DUD/Pandemonium over the years. Given how active A&E was at the end, there's likely enough energy and interest for at least two roleplaying game apae even today. I wish you the best of luck with A Gentle Stroll.

Attronarch's *Overlord's Annals* Vol. 4 #5 continued publishing session reports from the Conquering the Barbarian Altanis *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign. I especially enjoyed kickmaniac's illustrations.

In *Bumbling Through Dungeons* #1, **Mark A. Wilson** informed fellow apans about his preparation for the Origins Game Fair. (<https://www.originsgamefair.com>) I've never been to Gen Con (*Emulators & Engines* #24) or Origins. I hope that your time with playtesters and other designers was fun and fruitful, even if you weren't able to schedule any pitch sessions with publishers. That you'll have seven games ready for pitch sessions next year is impressive and inspiring!

Your remarks about not contributing to Lisa Padol's one-shot tribute to Lee Gold resonated with me. In writing my contribution, *Emulators & Engines* #24, continuing my numbering from A&E, I realized that what I was writing was an appreciation of roleplaying games and A&E—as well as of our former OE. Gold looms large in my understanding of roleplaying games.

I was intrigued by your statement that “D&D's odd half-edition is seemingly not selling too well...” I haven't seen any reporting on its sales, but having recently been tempted by the *Pathfinder* Pocket Editions (see above), I'm curious whether a \$50 splatbook or ongoing online subscription is an appropriate entry point for new or casual players these days. A more affordable combined handbook for game masters and an even more affordable, concise player's guide might prove more appealing, especially during a global economic downturn, even if we're not yet in a recession.

Your future hex crawl adventure and nautical campaign inspired by *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* sound promising. I look forward to your report from Origins!

Patrick Riley's *Quasipseudoludognostication* #1 offered a reintroduction of sorts, which was helpful even for me. I am sorry to hear about your layoff earlier this year. I'm not sure you're indulging your ego; it sounds like your layoff was a mistake made by your former employer. They lost a strong talent. The fact that you found a new job at higher pay so quickly is a testament to your expertise and skills. Hopefully, your new boss is less of an <expletive deleted>. Your

experience with LinkedIn perplexed me.

Thank you for your conrep on Kublacon. I especially enjoyed your writeup of the *Kids on Bikes* session. I recently encountered a novel titled *Meddling Kids* by Edgar Cantero that seems to be a sendup of *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* by way of H.P. Lovecraft or Stephen King—kind of a gently parodic version of *It*. Your comments about published scenarios for *Trail of Cthulhu* and *Shadowdark* intrigued me. Do you generally dislike published scenarios, or just at cons?

That you published your final comments for A&E in E&A was wonderfully appropriate. I appreciate the sense of continuity and consistency this new apa offers, even though it's already its own distinct entity.



Chicago Tribune, April 29, 1955

In *Twisting the Rope* #1, **Myles Corcoran** described a common experience among apans. “I found myself falling behind with the reading and finding each deadline more anxiety-inducing than a spur to my imagination,” he wrote. I've felt that multiple times over my time participating in apae. In the late 2000s, it led to burnout and a period of gafiation. Now I try to find a Middle Way that enables me to satisfy minac requirements, if any, while still focusing on finding the fun—that spur to the imagination. If fanac becomes a hassle, we're doing it wrong.

I appreciated your description of moving from complicated rules systems to rules-light games over the last 25 years. That might be a common trajectory for long-time players and game masters. I was amused by the mention of a risk-averse player who makes

characters who avoid combat. Sometimes, we make characters who aren't like us at all—and do things we might not. Sometimes, we recreate ourselves.

It's awesome that you and your co-workers organized a boardgaming club. Where I work, there are occasionally roleplaying game groups and sessions—I ran *Pathfinder* for a short time. There's also a fantasy book discussion group. While I applaud and encourage such activities, as I get older and further along in my career, I find myself wanting to spend less time at work rather than more, even if pursuing activities I otherwise enjoy outside the workplace. The details about your *Mausritter* game reminded me of my solo play of *Brambletrek*. (*Engines & Emulators* #1) I should return to that! Hopefully, E&A will spur your imagination. I enjoyed your fanzine and look forward to more.



Chicago Tribune, June 3, 1955

Mitch Hyde's *Dreadsword* #1 was right up my alley. Thank you for focusing on *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, eschewing generative artificial intelligence, and bringing a bit of Old School Renaissance flair. Your illustrations are glorious. I got a kick out of you not using the psionics subsystem. When I started playing *AD&D*, there were way too many paladins and characters with psionics within my group of friends. “The wilds must be littered with

ruins of dead empires, and overflowing with lost treasures,” you wrote. I do believe I'd enjoy sitting at your table.

In *De Ludis Elficis Fictis* dated June 2025, **Paul Holman** expressed appreciation of Lee Gold and A&E. “Even when I did not contribute, I valued and enjoyed reading A&E,” he wrote. Hear! Hear! While I would have welcomed more in-depth reportage on your travels in Japan, I hope your travels and return home were safe and easy. Your discussion of introducing new rules made me think about the differences between the 2014 and 2024 fifth editions of *Dungeons & Dragons*. “With new or alternative versions of rules, we have hit the problem of people remembering the wrong version of the rules,” you wrote. Even during the Kerzmielzorg campaign before I left the Los Angeles area, we'd often catch ourselves disambiguating between the two; we'd intended to play the 2024 version but kept returning to the 2014 version.

Gabriel Roark's *Bugbears & Ballyhoo* #40 described the progression from A&E to E&A as though a character had experienced level loss or life drain. Well done, good sir. I am glad that your interest in *Arduin*, participation in an Internet forum dedicated to Original D&D, and correspondence with Lee Gold led to your presence here. I am glad that you continue to concentrate on “old-school RPGs,” and I look forward to future issues of *B&B*!

In the first issue of *The Phoenix Nest*, **Michael Cule** mentioned the British apa Trollcrusher, James Branch Cabell, and David Langford by the end of the first column—providing multiple areas of potential inquiry. Of Langford, I already know. I enjoyed reading about your experiences at Eastercon. How was Stabcon and Convulsion?

Mark Nemeth's *The Seedling* #48 discussed one of the benefits of retirement: playing more games! “If I could just get all my friends to retire too, we could play in the daytime,” he wrote. That's one of the reasons I'm looking forward to the end of my vocational labors. I've been slightly envious of a friend who retired a year or so ago—the DM of the Kerzmielzorg campaign in which I participated—who's able to run and play in online games during the day, albeit primarily with people in Europe.

I wish I'd remembered that you lived in Albuquerque! We spent a night there during our drive from California to Wisconsin (*Faculae & Filigree* #43), and I shared time and table with a friend made through science fiction fandom and fanzines at Los Cuates on Lomas Boulevard. Next time I visit your city, I'll reach out to you, as well. However, I'm not sure I agree with you that you have “somewhat

retrograde taste in roleplaying games.” Your taste in roleplaying games is just fine, and I’m glad you’re here.

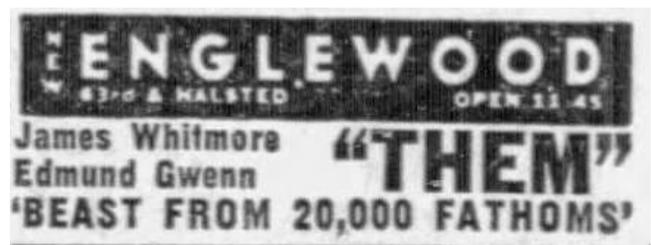
In your session reports, I enjoyed the illustrations created with Reve, as well as your observations and commentary. Thank you for the book reviews, even if you included them to “fill the remaining space.” I was most intrigued by Kim Stanley Robinson’s *2312* and Roger Zelazny’s *Jack of Shadows*, even though I really enjoyed your exploration of the critical response to Lauren Haddad’s *Fireweed*.

In **Patrick Zoch**’s *The Dragon’s Beard* #86, he offered an appreciation of Lee Gold. I agree with your description of her as “gracious, no-nonsense, and welcoming.” Your piece, “Zoch’s Big Traits for NPCs,” is a doozy of an article—and the kind of material I think was published more regularly in A&E during its earliest days. I shall have to set that aside to use for NPCs and PCs alike in my solo game sessions.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek’s *Age of Menace* #238 detailed his exposure to and esteem for A&E, as well as Lee Gold. I have enjoyed reading about how all of us first encountered the apa and its OE. Congratulations on your final days at Hamilton Health Sciences Centre and the graduation of your daughter. I enjoyed reading the biographical sketches you wrote for the Havana Horror game. Grounding roleplaying game scenarios in real-world history offers an excellent opportunity for research.

Your article “Fighting Fascism in the Hero Pulps” is an even better example of that, even if it’s not connected to a game currently underway. What an impressive piece of writing! The research must have been a lot of fun. I would welcome more writing—from any of us—along these lines.

And in *Traveller Play-By-Email*, **Jim Vassilakos** and **Timothy Collinson** offered the 46th chapter detailing their Plankwell Campaign. Thank you for undertaking E&A, Jim. Given how many former contributors to A&E are already here, I expect we’ll have much of the remainder of the group participating soon.



Chicago Tribune, June 10, 1955

BUMBLING Through DUNGEONS

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

ISSUE #2 (E&A #2 - Aug. '25)

I saw some others doing introductory-style writings at the start of their zines and - E&A being a new venture (albeit spinning off from another with many of the same contributors), I thought that sounded like a good idea. Here is my own preamble, one issue late:

Hello, I'm Mark. I stumbled onto my older brother's AD&D manuals in the late 80s, and he also handed me a copy of *Fellowship of the Ring* when I was in middle school, so really a lot of this is his fault.

I rediscovered TTRPGs in the 2010s and quickly came to adore them. I mostly play D&D with a long-running group (~8 years at this point), but have had one other short-lived (~2yr.) group and have at this point played 15-20 other systems in either one-shots or short arcs.

I am an avid board gamer as well and, at this point, game designer. The creative aspects of gaming call to me as much as playing. It's why I love GMing in RPGs, and creating maps, adventures, supplements, and more. In the past couple years, I've designed numerous board games, playtested them exhaustively via outlets both digital and in-person, have created pitch materials for some of them, and am just reaching the stage where I am pitching them to publishers. This is a time-consuming, money-consuming, energy-consuming process. It's fun, but believe me when I say it's a luxury hobby in which even most *published* designers are still losing money when accounting for time, travel, prototyping, software, etc. I suspect many reading this already know this fact, though, since there are plenty of RPG design credits rolling around in E&A's contributors.

I run a website - *Bumbling Through Dungeons* - where I write (formerly also made videos) about gaming topics. Articles release weekly, more-or-less.

I do digital marketing and SEO for a living, specializing in growing website traffic, and so my website does a reasonable amount of traffic despite being a side project.

I enjoy cycling, rock climbing, running, and in a former

life was a semi-professional musician (violin) though I haven't picked up my instrument with regularity for years. Before gaming took over a significant portion of my social life, I was also an avid swing dancer, and still greatly enjoy dancing (the loud music is more of a challenge these days, granted). I have just moved into a (rented) home with my longtime girlfriend and feel as though settling in is a new hobby as well, but hopefully not for much longer.

I enjoy running homebrew sandbox campaigns set in established, published worlds that I adapt to my needs. Some campaign reports can be found on my aforementioned website.

Media

Summer Wars was recommended to me by the algorithm as a result of my interest in Digimon. The director was also at the helm for some of the most lauded Digimon short films, and he borrowed many of the themes (digital manifestation of real-world emotional maturation) of Digimon and ported them in the more standalone *Summer Wars*. It's enjoyable, and surprisingly ahead of its time in a plot that centers around an AI, but also juxtaposing it wonderfully with a story of family and responsibility.

RPGs

In the final dungeon of our current campaign, with probably 1-2 sessions left. I'll likely do a bit of a campaign writeup at the end, since I think it was a moderately interesting premise that others might appreciate reading about.

My idea for my next character is a bit of a metagame conceit. She (in my mind the character is female) is a somewhat oblivious monk whose monastery kicked her out under the pretense of being their liaison to a newly appeared magical city (the inciting incident for the campaign). Knowing that she has anger issues, she's super into meditation and breathing, trying to use those things to quell her darker urges.

The idea would be to roleplay this in a bit of a real-world sense, focusing on some breathing and focus techniques during sessions to be more present in the sessions themselves and avoiding doodling, checking my phone, spacing out, etc. I don't think I'm bad with these things,

but I also think I - and the game - would benefit from an increased focus on that sort of active attention.

I haven't traditionally liked monks in 5e though, so I'm still sort of scratching around for a sub-class that sounds fun to play mechanically.

Origins Recap

Lots of playtesting of my game designs, some networking, and no pitching whatsoever. Which was a bit nerve-racking as I talked to designer friends with multiple meetings lined up, but I deliberately didn't set any up since I think I'm a year out from putting my best foot forward with them.

Murder Mystery RPG at Origins

I also played in a fascinating **Murder Mystery RPG One-Shot**. Sherlock Holmes themed, but mostly (according to the GM) to increase sign-ups with a known IP instead of generic murder mystery.

The fascinating part is that it wasn't a mystery to solve at all. We were given a character to "champion." Slightly different than roleplaying a character; we were to take an active role in their actions, but any player could dictate the location, words and actions of any character in the game...to a point. But I'll get there.

We created a bit of a backstory for our characters and set starting locations on a rough map of town. The murder victim and location were named. And then...we made up the rest. Indeed, there was no "right" answer. We could discover clues, create intrigue, implicate certain characters, and roleplay individual scenes. And so on.

But then if one player said something happened and another disagree, it went to a simple dice resolution system. And as soon as one of the championed characters was implicated by another player, the disagreement started, and the accused needed to either defend themselves, prove their innocence, or invent new details to point toward someone else. Drama ensued, but all within the Magic Circle.

Part of the challenge that was interesting to me is that we all could have decided that an NPC (there were a few of them, un-championed) committed the murder and crafted an airtight case against them. But where's the fun in that? It would merely be perfunctory.

And so it was an improvisational exercise, but also a social one as we all sort of upheld the implicit bargain that we were collaborating on a story together, and "gaming the

system" to trivialize the mystery would sap the fun of it...and ruin the challenge of crafting a compelling story.

In the end, it went to trial with an accused and two players acted as attorneys. We, the others, acted as jurors, and we could only base our ruling off of what was presented in court, not anything we knew from the previous phase.

The accused went free, and no conviction was ultimately made. The killer was still at large and we were unable to bring someone to justice. No one seemed to mind. It was a satisfying experience, a type I'd not truly seen before and which I greatly enjoyed. Such a different and interesting mode of interaction, even for roleplaying.

I played (or rather, championed) an aristocrat colloquially known as The Fool. I merely pranced about town trying to stir up drama so that I could look like the hero and improve my social standing. I didn't care a lick about the victim and indeed contributed nothing of value to the investigation. It was grand fun!

Responses to E&A #1

...will need to wait a month. I'm up against the deadline.

Conversations With Lucifer (#1)

Borrowed from a haphazard document I keep of unrelated thoughts, fragments of inspiration, and snippets of semi-artful construction.

—

I have wondered why Lucifer has left the throne of Hell, as he often has. And so I asked him once.

"Why abdicate?" I inquired. "Better to rule in hell than serve in heaven, is it not according to you?"

"Indeed it is," his response, "but that is not all. For, once ruling, one's rule becomes accepted. All is as it should be. But that which spurs true heretics to their kingdoms is the will to subvert, to deny, to alter. Once altered, what remains? And so I leave, for my kingdom is naught but the passionate denial of what I am - of what we all are - under Creation."

"So you no longer want your kingdom?"

"Until I no longer have it. Then it is once again profane and in want of my leadership."

I pondered this a while. "So you see," he finally broke in, "the contradiction of our existence."

B11½ - The Royal Harvest Festival Apophenia, Expurgated Version



Figure 1 - Sebastian Münster, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Muxed & Mixed & Muffed: AE7KL

The modules B11 – King’s Festival (TSR 9260) and B12 – Queen’s Harvest (TSR 9261), both authored by Karl Sargent, were published for Basic D&D, © TSR 1989. Ken Rolston reviewed them in *Dragon Magazine* (July 1991) and enthusiastically considered they “are absolutely the best introductory adventures in print for D&D-game-style fantasy role-playing games.” I don’t think Rolston’s absolute opinion was widely held. The B series of modules contains some gems, but these two aren’t among them. Functional, simple, and work-a-day in construction, the loosely coupled adventures were intended as introductory adventures suitable for brand new players. They were published and forgotten, and recorded memories of playing them tend to be lukewarm.

The back of module blurbs for them suggest (B11) Someone has ‘borrowed’ a cleric, and without him, the fabled King’s Festival cannot go on. Unfortunately, it looks like the bad guys have him, and the characters must rescue him.

And... (B12) The wizard Kavorquian is dead. But certain items were in the wizard’s keeping at the time of his demise. Now the characters must venture into dangerous vaults and recover the missing property.

Heavy on background story and narrative, the first module is hostage rescue, and the second module is item recovery - staples of D&D adventure. Both adventures place a heavy emphasis on setting up the action for the PCs, seeking buy-in from the players, and engaging the action within the narrative. Otherwise, they’re simple dungeon crawlers. The adventures start with guards, lead on to some tricks and traps, present some tougher guards and then named NPCs, and end with treasure and the objectives. This is laid out in a somewhat linear format so that the very structure of the dungeon more-or-less enforces the flow of the narrative. Typical design based on the premise that meaning emerges from organization.

Which has not been my experience in roleplaying. Instead, meaning emerges from play. I’m convinced that a series of random events or things in random order will provide meaning when played, because players –humans –so persistently seek pattern and meaning that when none is present it will be generated anyway. We’re hard-wired to make sense of things. And make sense of things we do –even when the sense isn’t really based on the thing.

Such is one of the basic foundations of “cut-up” – says Wikipedia: “The cut-up technique (or *découpé* in French) is an aleatory narrative technique in which a written text is cut up and rearranged to create a new text. The concept can be traced to the Dadaists of the 1920s, but it was developed and popularized in the 1950s and early 1960s, especially by writer William Burroughs.”

It’s time for the cut-up to bump into D&D. I want to see if a cut-up adventure can generate the same type of meaning and play as the structured adventure itself. My method was to take the maps and the keyed indices of B11 and B12 and do a cut-up, putting the same map rooms into random order and putting the same keyed entries into another random order. After doing that, I did a once-over to revise the content into 5th Edition – mostly by doing monster mapping. Then I glossed over a sort of merged introduction and prettied up the maps. I left out the narrative intro, because any experienced DM wouldn’t need it anyway. And I swapped out the politically incorrect orcs (which no longer exist in the game) for goblins.

The result is a single dungeon adventure, with most of the rooms, monsters, and NPCs contained in the original two adventures. I made sure to “xander” the maps (essentially creating multiple access points, diVerent access methods, and circularized maps) to avoid forced linear play – and this multiple-access facet of the dungeon is my favorite part of the result. The result is a usable Tier 1 adventure that, I am sure, would provide a play experience at least as good as the original adventures. And, I also am sure, one which would lend itself to a session report with good narrative meaning. Because, back to my premise, the meaning will emerge through play and is not derived from structure.

Now the why – why do this? The genesis of this misguided project comes from several discussions that I’ve read that focus on AI-generated content (and Wizards of the Coast says they’re “all in” with AI). The concern of Artificial Intelligence is that it takes/steals from human-generated content (Natural Intelligence?) and then just morphs it into something that it calls new. But really, it isn’t new. It’s relatively trivial to ask any AI bot to generate a D&D dungeon. And the bot will puke it up. And there you have your next game session. Well... if an AI bot can do that, then I sure as heck can do that too. And I decided to do it using a cut-up, which seems to be – at least conceptually – kinda close to what an AI does, if on a much smaller scale. And I’ve provided my source citations.

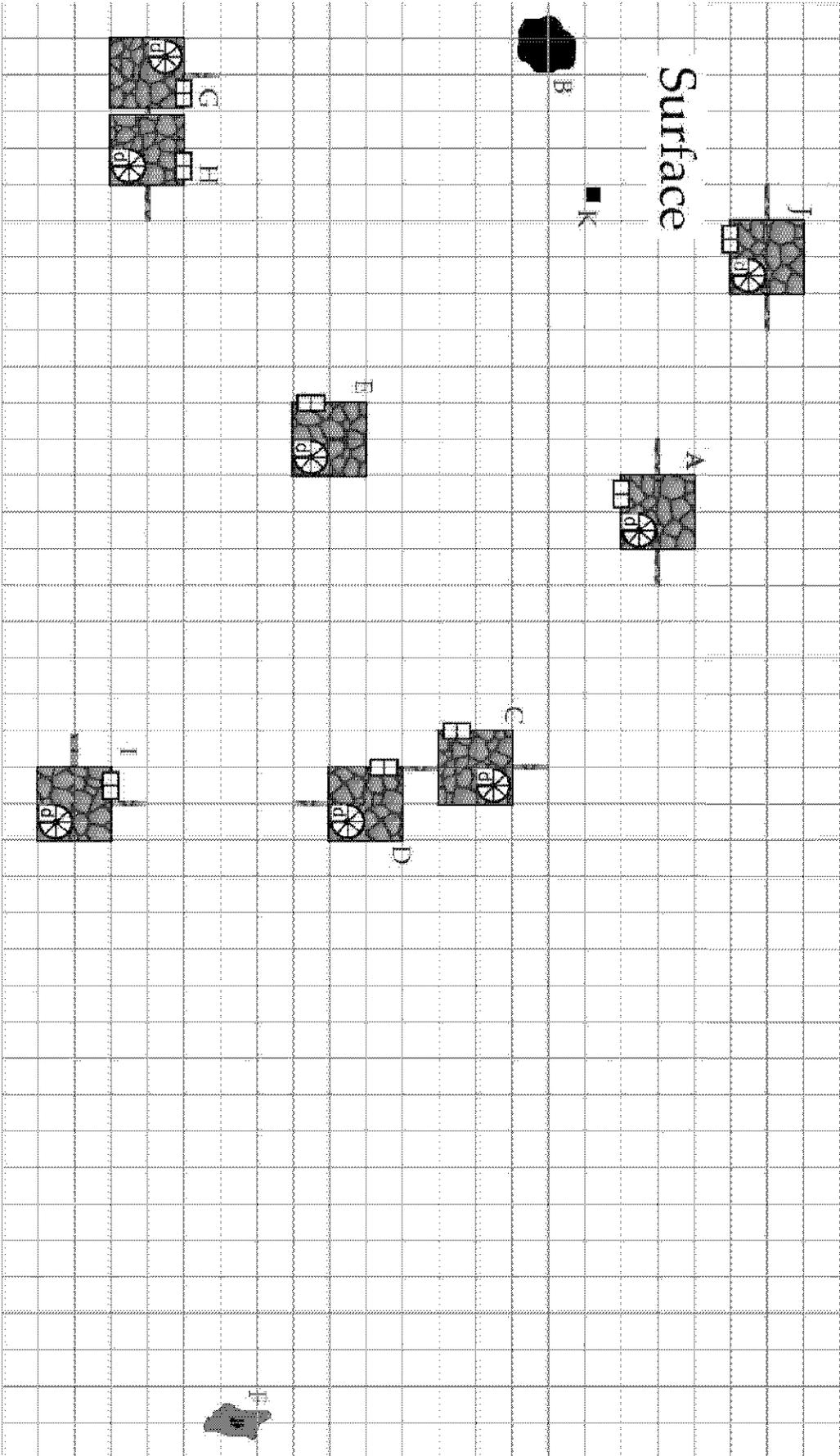
The result of the cut-up dungeon is remarkably AI-like in a couple respects – in particular, the “seems to make sense” surface followed by the “doesn’t really make sense” reality. My favorite parts are the obvious errors that my process produced, a few noted here:

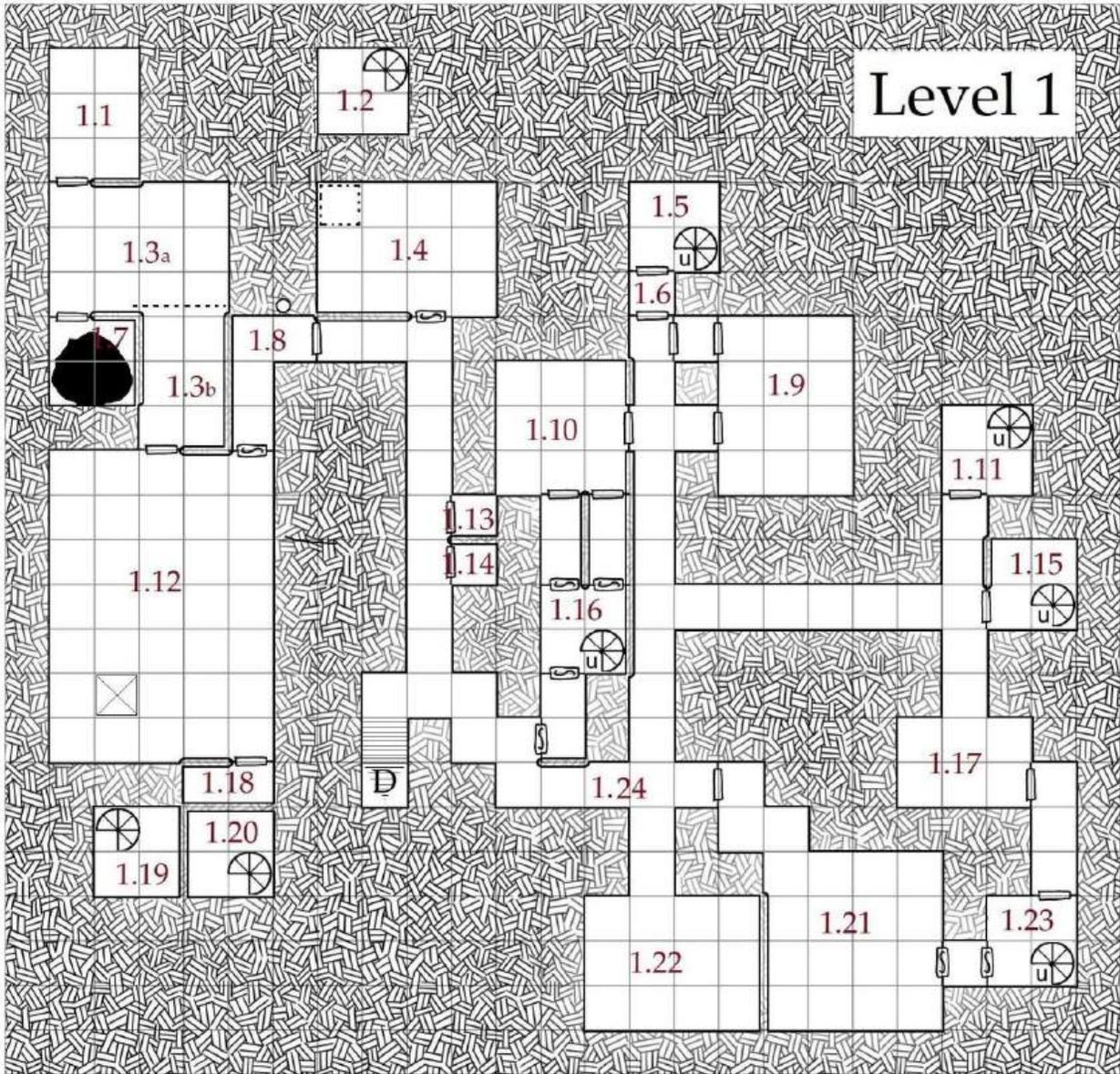
- ⦿ A duplicated room because of an error in a spreadsheet (2.10 & 3.10)
- ⦿ A kitchen being accessible only via a latrine (4.7 & 4.8)
- ⦿ Two named NPCs showing up twice (3.16 & 4.6)
- ⦿ The weird vertical layout with horizontal dispersion
 - I counted grid squares from the “two towers” (G & H)
- ⦿ A reference to an NPC that doesn’t occur in the narrative (4.2)

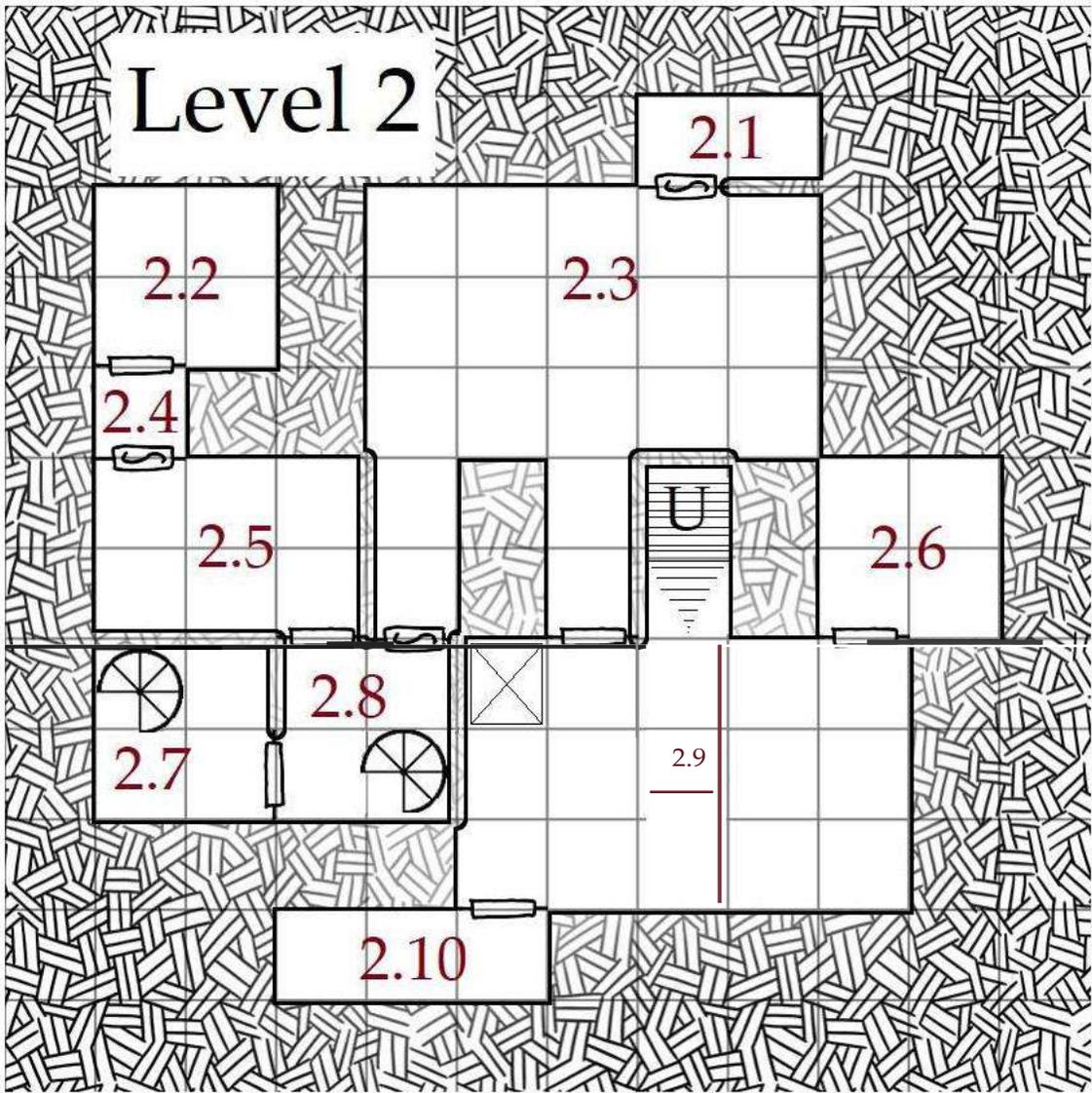
That’s all pretty AI typical, to me (lately, I’ve been reading a lot of student-submitted, AI generated papers). In any case, this thing contains zero AI generated content.

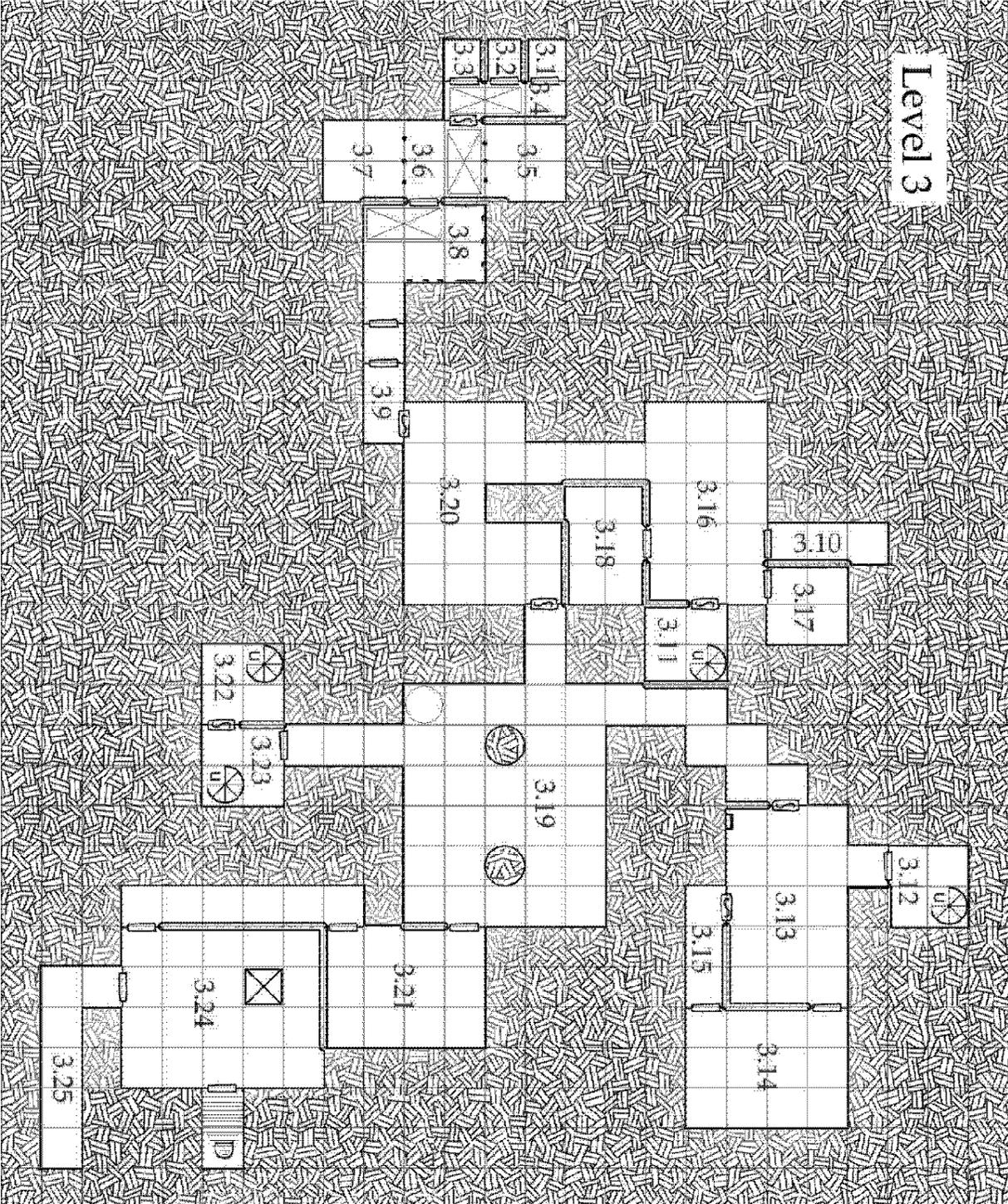
~~Without further ado, here’s B11½ - The Royal Harvest Festival.~~

Err... Without further ado, here *isn’t* B11½ - The Royal Harvest Festival. It was putatively too copyright infringing for the comfort of the APA. So, the actual module part has been cut. You’re missing out on the only good part of this ‘zine, alas. I’ll just dump in the maps, though, ‘cause I worked a long time on those and they are 100% my work.









Level 3

Level 4

U

4.4

4.1

4.9

4.5

4.10

4.2

4.11

4.12

4.6

4.7

4.13

4.8

4.3

4.14

4.15

Accidental Recall #1

For Ever & Anon #2
© 2025 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

I wrote an intro for A Gentle Pavane (or maybe walk? I'm not sure), so I'm just gonna steal it for this; apologies to those for whom this is a repeat:

I started playing roleplaying games in the mid 80s, having found about their existence in the earlier 80s at the age of 11, but not having any friends to play with, nor confidence to start running myself. In fact, I did so somewhat prior to my becoming a reader of the genre of SF and Fantasy, which I also did t 11...at least if one discounts Oz, Narnia (a favorite among my gifted class at 9; I read the first book slightly later), Doctor Doolittle, and the odd novel with an interesting description. Regardless, I became aware that SF&F was a genre with a name that I could look for if I wanted to find the kinds of books I liked to read somewhat late into my 11th year, and my introduction to the concept of D&D came somewhat earlier.

I have continued to be an avid player of RPGs from then to the present, and also occasionally penned hacks and supplements that were used by other people, or at least I am arrogant enough to hope so. Probably my largest impact on the hobby is as a playtester, however, as through Alarums & Excursions, and later through acquaintance, effort, and attendance at Metatopia, a playtesting convention in New Jersey (where I have the fortune not to live), I have playtested an unbecoming number of roleplaying games, and also a fair number of board and card games as well.

I also participated in Alarums and Excursions for a substantial period of time. In short, I appear to have typed something around three hundred and six zines for that publication (the number is somewhat vague to me, as at least one zine appeared not using my usual title and also I failed to increment my zine's issue number at least once so the number was reused, so it's probably closer to 308). That means that my words appeared in more than half of the APA's issues, for which I can't bring myself to apologize; that they appeared with fewer errors than I wrote, credit can be given to Lee Gold as editor, but I don't expect to see her like again.

In that time, I've played quite a lot of different games. When I first appeared in A&E, I was done with D&D; I wanted freedom in my roleplaying games, and games that involved opportunity to optimize and strategy, I thought, constrained that freedom, turning my thoughts to numbers and optimization.

My thoughts have evolved a number of times since.

So these days, I play the latest edition of Dungeons and Dragons (I also have some thoughts as to how those rules could be improved), occasional Good Society (a game originally written to do GM-less Austinean roleplaying), the odd Powered by The Apocalypse game or playtest, Gumshoe (a game structure focused on mystery solving, although it has been used for more than that, of course; the current campaign is a Trail of Cthulhu/

Fearful Symmetries game, focused on early 20th century supernatural societies and occasional horrors, run by my very capable wife), and a succession of parlor LARPS, a minority of which I co-write [as I'm active in the larping communities in the Northeastern US].

For my sins, I also filk, program, and play strategic board games.

Con Stuff: Our con activity has been *way* down since 2021 for the obvious reasons, so it was something of a trip (as it were) to do two cons in two weeks.

[Dexlite](#) was a dizzying array of games, separated by semi-scheduled bits of relaxation. Lisa and I volunteered to run our Good Society hack, Dangerous Refuge, twice—once on the official schedule and once for Sparks (the rebranded "games on demand" non-scheduled games system); Lisa ran one session and I ran the other. Interestingly, both of these sessions differed from our core concept and how our previous sessions have gone, in that the players constructed a world and session that was replete with external threats/problems and light on internal ones.

On the one hand, we could probably reduce this frequency by writing a deck of suggested Desires that pushed players towards internal tension. And should; not only can we not, in fact, use the base desires without either permission or referring to them by number (and I'd rather have the option to publish a complete game rather than a supplement, since I really like how playtests have gone), but obviously, dark fantasy school adventures do have notably different core motivations, typically, than regency romances.

On the other hand, it was really fun seeing how, despite the PC group being less strive-driven and more focused on external dangers and threats, whether they were from the Connections (who are, in fact, intended to do exactly that and the players were brilliant at bringing that) than our core setup, the games worked quite well—in Lisa's game, the players dreamed up a Problem where the previous graduating class had all failed to graduate, and in less than four hours, played themselves into a stunning conclusion where the PCs had to, despite difficulties, graduate One Year Early, freeing the school from Doom.

And in my run, the players doubled down on YA Dystopia, building a school that was a prison/indoctrination camp for teenage psychics the entire world was afraid of, whose greatest enemies were the faculty themselves and the school building itself, and whose allies were...well, the school building itself and one another—if they could be trusted. The game climaxed when the players decided that the Newcomer PC would allow his connection to DIE in a challenge set for both of them (while she saved him; the player playing the connection signed off on this,

of course), and that the faculty would decide, after the telekinetic PC intervened to save the matter-transmitting PC from a humiliating pop quiz, that she needed to die, resulting in a Danger phase full of menace and culminating in the students BREAKING OUT OF THE SCHOOL to be airlifted to a secret rebel base. I'd definitely read that first of a trilogy book!

I also played a small array of board games, other RPGs, and even a LARP of course, including getting to try a session of Daggerheart, but I think RPGs were thinner than they've been at previous Dexlites (not to mention Dexcons). In order to reverse this, we'd need more larps I like on the schedule—having some on Sparks is great, of course, but those serve as an outlet for players that don't have enough games to play—for the players to even be there there need to be games for them on the schedule.

The following weekend, I went to [Summer Larpin'](#), a rocking, larping convention, which I've been doing as an extra larping convention for...quite some time now. I was signed up for three games and played in four (Sunday is unscheduled for SL); S.U.F.I.E.T.R.A, a fighting game-themed game (this time using a Street Fighter playset complete with a martial arts tournament) with a solid plot core that got elaborated on a bit with workshops where I played The Monster (character names were workshopped here so my name was unique to this run and ended up inspiring an extra relationship, though I forgot to get resolution there but did use one of my flashbacks on that), Shadow Soiree, a dark fantasy secrets and powers and quests game with solid inspiration from the Witcher, among others, where I played the Flame Reader (character names actually were usually titles here, which honestly made them way easier to remember; the only "names" I remember were Prospero and Pandora, both of whom were exactly what it said on the tin), Arabian Days where I played Aladdin's Djinn (which means I'm not going to say what name was on my badge, as that was not public information at the start of the game, although that Aladdin was in the game was)—which was also a secrets and

And now for a very recent but brief writeup

We had a house guest on Thursday in time to spectate the latest of Dan's Neitherworld games. Sometimes this game is a bit of a snooze, as many D&D games can be. And sometimes, well.

Incidentally, houseguest had a few other adventures on the trip. She spent time hanging around the periphery of the Origami USA convention, sharing stuff with folders they'd never met (and a bit with us), did touristng...and on Sunday, I ended up accompanying her to the Unisphere; an entertaining side trip on our way to getting early dinner in Flushing Chinatown. I once ran across the Unisphere—a giant metal sphere first made for the 1964 world fair—by accident when walking from Willets Point to a friend's place where we were going to watch a Star Wars marathon (the first time I'd seen the trilogy), and it floored me.

But it wasn't *nearly* as large in my memories as it was in real life.

powers and quests game, and as my one "signed up at the con because the game had lost players game, also played in Jubilee, which was an interesting psychological game—you played both your own character, who had two "voices" governing your behavior and future, and also were one of the representatives for those voices for the other three players who had the same voice as you had. It was a fun experience!

I also showed up late to the Dance, but still got to dance for over an hour, which just goes to show how much my endurance has improved—I did take breaks, but mostly not because I was tired but because the pairs people had formed didn't include me—or just because my face was running with sweat and I wanted a chance to cool off a bit.

I've also gone back to playing Genshin after taking a few months off, but in a very controlled manner; I play through the latest storyline, then spend a week doing any new exploration that has popped up while my return bonus (less valuable than the rewards for playing every day, but lasts a week and you need to have taken a 14 day break that ended at least 45 days after the last time you got the reward) runs out. And I might play a bit longer if more fun events show up while I'm in the middle of this, but one I'm out of new content I go on break (even if it's too early to get the bonus) and come back when I want to—often when it's time to get the bonus again. It's a lot more healthy than playing every day, which is itself a lot more healthy than spending (unreasonable amounts of) money on the game.

That we've gotten to the point where you have to be careful of certain types of games because they can be actively harmful—well, on the one hand, that's novel, and on the other hand, that's only because gambling has become a heck of a lot less common; games that ruin your life have basically always been with us, but now they sometimes do so without offering you free money you never get (or the opportunity to take money away from other players while the game-provider tucks away a tidy side profit).



Anyway, back to the game. For starters, there are some past events that happened in previous sessions.

- The party got a contract to trade in a city in the Dark Empire, and took it, figuring that it would be interesting and at minimum they could avoid accusation of "helping the enemy" by carrying back intelligence instead.

- While there, the group came across a Dragonborn princess from a different country elsewhere in the Evil Empire ruled by Dragonborn, who had been kidnapped to force a marriage to the mayor of the city they were trading with.

- The group resolved to rescue her, mounting a daring rescue by leaving, using special means (see below) to arrive an impossibly short time later, hiding their identities (they were, after all, in the town only as a trading ship) and sneaking through a complicated series of checkpoints...to find that by the time they attempted to finish the escape, the soldiers from the Dragonborn kingdom were attacking in order to reclaim their princess—including the soldiers of the prince she had a marriage arranged with...who would expect to complete the marriage as soon as the rescue ended.

- Questioning the princess, the group determined that she was painfully naive but not really all that interested in her fiancée. However, she was also very sheltered and duty-bound to finish her engagement, while also hopeful that the group would prevent it from happening (not that she would -ask-).

- So, since my job is absolutely to make things more interesting and *also* the GM had allowed my character to her her hands on a sentient Time Travel Engine, she proposed a cunning plan: We would abscond with the princess to the north and freedom. The princess would then have time—hopefully a year, to learn about the world and get a better sense of how to assert her place in it (and of what she actually wanted to do). Then, we'd use the time travel engine to return her to very close in time and space to where we left, resulting in a somewhat older and more mature princess better able to deal with the politics of her native land and make her own choices.

So, last session, the Time Travel Engine (called "Chrys" by Irabella, my artificer, since it's looks like a crystal) alerted Irabella that we had reached a point where we were in danger of the forces of the Dragonborn Kingdom catching up to us, since in *this* branch, their princess had been gone for a bit over two months. Since we were wrapping up the previous adventure (the focus story for another PC, which also had some lovely shenanigans), we elected to sail in a Shipsinging Ship (a feature of Dan's Neitherworld—the world is incredibly large; the universe has a single flat planet with as much habitable surface area as is speculated to exist in the entire universe, extending out in all directions; a shipsinger with an appropriately equipped ship can make this vast terrain tractable, since all Shipsinging journeys take 2 weeks no matter how long or short the distance is...well, unless you mess with one with, say, a time travel engine, which was how the group was able to make an impossible round trip quite a few sessions ago) using Chrys to cause our journey to end a few hours after we left the last time we were in the region.

It worked brilliantly, with our ship passing within sight of...our ship, 6 months earlier. Of course, *we* didn't remember passing our own ship going the other way, but Chrys has already told us that he chooses to make the party immune to the effects of changes in the timestream, which can be inconvenient, but since our adventures occasionally involve changing time, also avoids a lot of unnecessary pain and complication (and the players having to adjust their own memories of what happened in previous session). We had two weeks to talk on the way back, with the most significant conversation being that the princess said that she had a solution to the problem of her upcoming unwanted marriage: She could become a warlock nun of the Dark Lord. The group was a bit nonplussed, but agreed that that plan would probably work if she couldn't come up with something better (and she could probably bargain for being a 5th level warlock, which might be weaker than the party's 7th level but is still pretty good).

Then, time seemed to stop for everyone except Irabella, and she had a brief, scary, and very confusing conversation with an old-appearing man, who questioned her about her motives, suggested that she shouldn't share details about this

conversation with people (in general, anyway), and gave her one really interesting piece of advice: that she should tell the [dragonborn] princess that when she was looking for something, she should search for it inside the fountain of...the city the group had rescued her from [which was *not* where we were going].

Then, it was a matter of arrival. It took a bit of work to not have a fight, but eventually, we were able to convince the Dragonborn king, his courtiers, and the Chronomancer wizard he'd contracted to find his daughter (which explains why this had suddenly become an urgent issue, not that I know what abilities a Chronomancer has except maybe by looking at the 3rd party material they were introduced in) that we had *not* kidnapped his daughter, who was Right Here, and everyone should be friends. Oh, and that maybe the king should not be in such a hurry to marry his daughter off to her fiancée since she had just been through an Awful Experience (she had not. She had been through an awful experience 6 months ago, but they didn't need to know that, and anyway, it was true in a manner of speaking).

With info—including the party's somewhat edited account of their adventures in the region—exchanged, the king decided that there were, in fact, greater priorities than marrying his daughter off to a minor noble; he now had cause to conquer the city that had captured his daughter on pilgrimage, increasing the status of his kingdom immensely (yes, they were both part of the same empire, but it's an *evil* empire, so a certain amount of infighting was expected; nobody messed with the immortal dark lord because he was a power level to himself, but as long as you didn't commit lese majesty and paid your taxes there was a lot of freedom to mess with your neighbors).

The party was asked if they wanted to join in, and since they liked these people more than the ones in the city (and anyway, there was a prophesy that seemed to indicate that important events would be happening with the Dragon Princess that was a group...ally? Friend? Project? Client? Something like that...near a fountain in the City, so we were already involved. And the princess had vanished, with all signs (she was contacted via a communication device and claimed she was anywhere but, just cementing the impression) pointing to her having snuck into the city with advance troops. Eventually, the group split; Irabella and Magpie, the party thief (played by Susan) snuck into the city to help with any early attack methods and keep an eye out for the princess; the rest of the group went with the king and his (laughably small) army.

Irabella and Magpie found that their efforts were hardly needed—while the doors of the city would have been open on a market day in any case, someone had done an excellent job of sabotaging them so they couldn't be closed under any circumstances, and there were clear signs that the city had been heavily infiltrated by dragonborn advanced scouts. However, as they approached the city fountain, they saw the princess dueling (and losing) to three town guards—actual town guards, not her father's troops. They came to her aid, downing one of the attackers and attracting the attention of one of the others. The princess, meanwhile, was pushed into the fountain by another town guard...and emerged, holding...nothing in particular, which she dispatched the remaining town guard menacing her with remarkable efficiency. She had found the fabled (to everyone in this area, anyway; the party had never heard of it) Invisible Blade, which had, until it was lost, been the traditional sign of rulership of the city.

Meanwhile, the king and his tiny 25 person army had gone through the undefended town gates, and been met...well, partially by resistance, but also by acclimation as his advance scouts (far larger in number than his "army") joined up with his guards, presenting an appearance of inevitability. But eventually, there was the beginning of a melee in the city throne room...which was interrupted by the princess dispatching the

evil Mayor (who, if you remember the beginning of this story, had kidnapped her with intent to forcibly marry her quite recently...in his timeline, anyway; for her it had been a bit longer) and announcing her right to declare herself Queen of the city by right of the Invisible Blade!

The Dragonborn king—her father, was nonplussed by this turn of events—being out-manuevered by his own daughter—but

Comments on Ever & Anon #1

Cover (Idle Doodler): But do virgins really taste better than those who are not? If they do presumably the dragons would know.

George Phillis: Re price lists: Them being criticized, endlessly, has never stopped being part of the game (less so for other games less focused on the inventory list). The price rules in D&D5 was followed by a fan-made "sane magic items price list", which in turn seems to have never been updated for items added after 2014 and also was based around specific assumptions about what was important and powerful in the game that [surprise] don't apply to all games.

5e, meanwhile, avoided overt criticism of its price list by not having one. Instead it had a price range for specific rarities of items, which tended to result in permanent magic items being absurdly cheap compared to temporary ones (which were only half the price) and also didn't take into account places where some items were (as always happens) too powerful for their rarity.

And, of course, some people were/are of the opinion that rarity and price should be entirely divergent; that unlike the game design (where rarity was intended as a soft gate, with tier 1 parties getting mostly common and Uncommon items, tier 2 getting some Rare items, tier 3 getting Very Rare items, and tier 3 getting a reasonable amount of Legendary items; that is, it was more or less equivalent to price), that rarity should represent how *rare* an item was in the world, with price being based on utility, not rarity. And, well, this isn't what the designers intended at all, but for items where they were fine if there was only one or two of them around but not if people could fill bags of holding with them, there's a certain logic to this still.

Attronarch: I see the party has continued their unlucky journey to doom. Still, there wasn't a TPK this time, eh?

Mark A Wilson: I can't speak for Lisa, but I suspect just writing a farewell to A&E would be fine whether or not you know Lee (who is, after all, still alive and needs no epitaph). You certainly spend enough time within its pages.

The idea that the D&D 2024 update didn't sell well seems to be something that a few people on D&DBeyond made up. Most people seem to have switched to the new edition, and a brief web search turns up the Polygon article that says that the 2024 PH sold more in a month than 2014's PH did in 2 years. The same D&DBeyond thread claiming that only 3000 physical copies had been sold also included testimonials that Wizards sold more than 3000 copies at Gencon alone in 2024, and that as of April that retailers were blowing through their stock and constantly having to reorder. Take with several grains of salt, and a note that as Wizards redid their distribution channels in 2024, that what claims to be an apples to apples comparison (of Bookscan numbers for Tasha's, the last 2014 general supplement or close to it, to Bookscan numbers for the 2024 PH, which seems to capture only a tiny fraction of sales) is anything but.

Patrick Riley: good to see you in these pages. Sympathies on the involuntary employment changes...and congratulations that you replaced the job so quickly with something you were suited to!

laughed and accepted it with good grace, accepting, too, the position of "honored guest" she bestowed on him. The city troops, too, lay down their arms and accepted their new ruler, and the party? Well, amidst a bit of celebratory looting (or at least preventing key members of the old guard from fleeing for their lives), and keeping an eye out for anyone attempting to continue the chain of regime change, they celebrated, their charge having clearly grown into her own power and authority.

I don't really like players creating their own shenanigans. IT works for me much better when players are expected to create *other* players difficulties; among other things if one player isn't up to this, the GM/Facilitator or another player can pick up the slack more easily.

Re Power Grid: Wait, there's a new version of the rules? I'm gonna have to look those up.

Myles Corcoran: Welcome back to the APA-hacking fold! Hope you stick around for a bit. I'm going to try to be lighter on comments if I can manage it, in the hope that this makes it harder to fall behind and easier to treat the APA as a pleasure, not a burden.

Re Mausritter: So it's basically an OSR-style game where the PCs are mice? Nice!

Mitch Hyde: I'm glad your zine has only human-created heresy.

Paul Holman/Pum: Re your host's fancy game table: Ooh, shiny! I've often gawked at fancy game tables at conventions, but given city living, have yet to play with someone who had one. Mind, with most of our games running online (if for no other reason than that a lot of players are remote) it wouldn't matter much if I did.

Re Japan trip: 7 weeks; that's fantastic!

Michael Cule: re me: Small nations can't afford scruples when bordered with larger nations: I could make several allusions to modern politics, but they'd probably contradict, and anyway let's not.

Re swordsmen and Sorcerers: It's been remarked multiple times that contrary to roleplaying games and more modern fantasy, sword and sorcery was replete with magic-less heroes who fought other adventurers and sorcerers alike, using cleverness, brawn, and skill at arms, but that magic-users as protagonists was comparatively rare in the subgenre. Similarly, early Pendragon only allowed for PC knights for a reason; magic users were plot devices, not heroes in the bulk of the Matter of Britain.

Re romance in games: Some of us enjoy it (or dislike romance but enjoy paying established romantic relationships; I like both but find the latter more novel), but we're a rare breed who have to find one another. Like gamers inclined to romance in other ways.

Heath Row: I'm still thinking of my zine title. All my zines (and my handle) are memory based, but the idea of at least a reversal of my zine letters has an appeal. Recall would seem to work well for the second word, but for the first...a visit to a thesaurus leads me to Arbitrary, Accidental, and Aimless (those were all suggestions from Gemini before I managed to find a M-W link but they showed up in the dictionary page as well, naturally). I enjoy the way Accidental has multiple layers of meaning, meaning both mistaken but also incidental, momentarily off-theme (well, key), and apparently vagrant (if you're a bird), so Accidental Recall it is.

Re Tyrant's Eye Pinball: No, I haven't seen it in the wild yet! But there's an excellent Pinball Bar near me, Solid State, so I'll have to visit it again and see if they've picked up a table for it.

Re the Cathy Gale Avengers: We were able to watch multiple seasons on Amazon Prime; we've been distracted but likely will continue with the Emma Peel (which are excellent but decidedly of a different flavor from the Gale ones) in time.

I think the only use we had for graph paper in D&D in the 80s was drawing maps as the DM described things. The fights were played out entirely in theater of the mind—sometimes to hilarious effect, as a DM ambiguity in description or player misunderstanding resulted in a character doing *Exactly* the wrong thing, whether it was my 1st level MU getting his arm bitten off by an alligator or another PC thinking an ant was a normal sized ant, not a giant ant bigger than his PC was, but it often worked well.

Re meeting people at conventions: Yes! It's rare (fortunate given how many people one meets at a typical convention), but we have picked up the occasional player through convention play and the players in question are universally excellent.

Re miniseries: A number of local GMs have done this in Double Exposure gaming cons (in Morristown) by running a "long con" event, where they run a series of linked games at the same convention, encouraging players to sign up for multiples and thus experience a longer story at the same convention.

I'll note that from my experience of playtesting Paragon Blade (the two player Gumshoe game, with one GM and one player), it tends much better to 90 minute sessions than longer; after an intense 90 minute experience you both likely need a break even if it's a half hour of something else before diving back in.

Not coincidentally, reports from Pelgrane (specifically, Robin's first and latest editorial letter, published at the end of June) indicate that Paragon Blade is nearing publication.

Mark Nemeth: re TPKs and their likelihood: having skimmed, I'm surprised you managed to not have a total party kill, rather than several near misses. Good on your players (and you) for maintaining that tension without crossing the line. Yet, anyway.

Re divination of the past: I mean, mysteries are a core element of gameplay—the past can answer a myriad of questions, from "what was this magic weapon used for before" to "what's the code word for this wand" to "ok, so why *does* the arch-lich want the Scroll of Doom?" To, for that matter, "What is responsible for the disappearance of Princess McGuffin and did she die or has she been spirited off somewhere?" Of course, it behooves the GM to not let the players skirt all gameplay mysteries with past-scrying magic, but magic can still be a nice shortcut to letting players find out stuff the GM intended them to learn but is having problems otherwise leaking, letting the players get to the important part of making bad decisions and fighting for their lives. After all, the ability to scry the past is exactly like the ability to scry the present (-1 second), plus the ability to see stuff that isn't true any more. It is -certainly deeply powerful and problematic, just much less so than the ability to scry the future, particularly in a game, since the nature of a game is that the future isn't determined yet. Scrying the future also requires that the GM establish important facts about how time (and time travel) work; is all of future time determined, so scrying the future means you've set the future you see in stone? Is it a series of possibilities and when you scry you actually make the future you see more likely? Is the future a cloud of possibility so what you see is almost useless as it is made *less* likely by your having seen it, but that vision may still grant more options? What about if multiple people are viewing the future? Do they block or interfere with one another?

Re my typeface changing for the last issue: Lee wasn't up to the process she's used for my zine in the past. Normally, I put up a zine in HTML; Lee imports that HTML into Word, does

various massage to make it look like my zine has looked in the past (Including setting typeface, reformatting into two columns, etc) and publishes it. In this case, though, she wasn't up for this process, so asked that I reformat it into two columns and set a font size myself, then admitted that she also wasn't up to doing an HTML->Word->PDF conversion herself at all, so instead Lisa (who has word) imported it into Word, made sure it looked ok, and sent the resulting Word file to Lee. Since we don't know exactly what Lee's font choices were, naturally it was a bit different.

Our D&D games are a bit weird about alignment as well. In Dan's game (Neitherworld), he plays with alignment in that he'll have "evil" NPCs explain how they have realized that acting in a "good" method makes them more likely to, well, win and be able to cooperate (we've had similar experiences in Stephen's prior campaigns); my PC in that campaign is officially unaligned, has some "evil" outlooks and thus sympathizes with the "evil" NPCs, and often does "good" actions since her outlook is basically "lawful merchant and also a genius" so she thinks the world works more conveniently for her when NPCs she thinks are interesting are trained to have freedom of choice, and that the world is better when things are peaceful enough that merchants can trade largely uninterrupted (Pirates, of course, are extra bad). In the Spelljammer game, the PCs are pretty heroic (I mean, their motivations range from not wanting to be a pawn in the games of wizards who want to become gods to wanting to solve the apparent death of a god and find their place in the universe, to wanting to forge a Great Weapon and prove her skill among the mage-smiths of the universe), but while beating up evil is often important to them, the focus is on the places and people they meet—and on not causing too much of a mess in galactic diplomacy (they're not sure they've succeeded in this one, but...they can try to fix it?). My PC in this game is technically Lawful Good, and displays it pretty spectacularly, but they also are tired of being a divine toy and thus have triple connections—to Laros the god of law, justice, and architecture, to Grumash the god of orcs, excellence, and conquest, and a warlock contract to the collective of the Great Weapons. And in Stephen's current game, the PCs are students so they bounce between wanting to pass their classes and wanting to stop the latest Threat to the School/Students they've discovered, with alignment barely involved; fortunately as one of the PCs is a chaotic shape-shifter focused on their latest conquest and not blowing up accidentally, and another is a necromancer who has a skeleton frog as a pet and wants to learn how to resurrect (or reanimate, she's not picky as long as he comes back largely whole) her now long dead father. Oh, and another PC is a serially reincarnating warlock of the mad tea party goddess, who would mostly like to survive to graduation this time.

Re entangled items: As for me, I don't like items that will try to possess my PC or change their religion, but I love items that have a personality and talk. Too many can make a PC a bit too much of a menagerie, though.

My elaborate audio system in general works well. But there are always exceptions: I ended up replacing my mic after it mysteriously stopped working in a game (it turned out that the issue was that ghost power had been toggled off but the new mic is very nice). And during the third Worldcon business Meeting, I had a period where I couldn't hear anything and *could* be heard (faintly) because I'd accidentally switched the output to my mixer (which doesn't go anywhere despite it being hooked up to monitors) while my input was still the system mic which is pretty quiet.

Re gumshoe drive: the player is the one who picks the hook, the GM can suggest that a plot element is a "hard driver" or "soft driver" for the drive picked, but the player can always choose to ignore that driver and lose Stability (The mental HP stat) instead of regaining some if they want. And in most games,

if a Drive isn't working well for a PC, the player just changes it, but of course the *point* of a drive is to make sure the PC has a reason to get involved in an adventure, so the GM and other players will understandably be annoyed if the player interprets their drive as not giving them any reason to play (whereas if one makes the odd choice to *not* make a bad decision your drive suggests and accepts the stability hit, so be it). So, for instance, my current Gumshoe character has Adventure as a drive, so the more dangerous/exciting something seems, the more likely she is to go for it; in another game Lisa ran, a PC had duty (another specific PC) so she would be easy to entice by making sure that other PC was going along on an adventure. In a very real way, your drive in your standard Gumshoe game is "what makes your character a PC who gets into adventures/trouble?" and your choice is going to be a very important flavor element.

Swords of the Serpentine is different; that game still has drives, but they don't work the same way at all; instead of acting as incentive engines, they are statements about your character's three best things in life. This serves two purposes: First, it does act like any other Drive even though it doesn't provide a mechanical benefit for doing so; by defining the three things your character most likes to do you give your character a reason to do stuff. But also, whenever you're rolling a die to do a thing that accords with one of your drives, you can check that drive off for the session to add an extra one to the die, letting you add to the dice both with the usual method (expending from a related skill poo) and also a much smaller motivational pool you can draw from.

Re prison rules: well, no, prison rules are often highly arbitrary. I can understand some of the history without agreeing with them in the least bit.

Re Good Society motivations: while there's a certain amount of plot-building (and often an open conversation towards the midpoint or end of a game about where things are going so people can get on the same page OOC), I don't think goal is a particularly important difference. As described, D&D games often start out picaresque (but may not; PCs often start out with some clear motive even if it's "become a famous adventure", "become rich and powerful", or "avenge my father", but that motive will often be blurred and change over the course of play, particularly as characters dramatically rise in power if they survive), but characters will often develop motivations as game develops; a villain or villain group will often focus the PCs on stopping them; a goal that isn't immediately achieved may result in the PCs shifting to a longer term plan to accomplish that goal, and a goal will often lead to secondary goals as a consequence. Similarly, a PC's Motivation in Good Society is by no means fixed; it will often change over the course of play, as events in play change a character's perception of events and what their prospects (and who their true friends) are, such that even if the player never formally changes the goal written on their character, in functional play it's unlikely they will be playing the character in a longer game with the same goal they started with. Of course, Good Society is played as a more pure story driven game, with player actions bouncing off one another to make a resulting story that one hopes is engaging, but since nobody controls the outcome of said story, it will often go through several twists and turns before an ending is reached, and if the group is so inclined, that ending might just be the stage for a followup story.

ryct Pum on the PCs wanting to report something that they can't do without incriminating themselves in something

else: I'm reminded of an event that Lisa published in A&E that occurred in Gaylord's Harlem Unbound Call of Cthulhu game. The PCs, all black in the 20s, had discovered that a priest (white) had kidnapped a pregnant woman (also white). Being black and in 1920s New York, they weren't comfortable either committing crimes to rescue the woman or for that matter reporting the matter to the police. So instead, they leaked the matter to a white suffragist, who reported it to the police and was able to (for the moment, anyway) resolve it, making themselves seem like ignorant and innocent black workers, rather than the investigators and (in this case) manipulators they actually were.

Patrick Zoch: Interesting tables; thanks for posting them! An interesting strategy to avoiding having all your NPCs act/read the same.

Re hoping to have someone to play with when Trickerion (the anniversary version) arrives: Me to, Patrick, me too. I've still yet to play Car Wars 6, and that's mostly on me; friends I've broached the topic with have been guardedly enthusiastic but I've yet to make a serious effort so schedule something.

Re being uncomfortable with romance specifically in a family game: Yeah, I see that, particularly if some of the PCs are minors. I often play romantic roles with Lisa, and by that I mean we'll play enemies or lovers or parent/child or more or less anything; I think I've never cheated on her in a game or vice versa, but that's only -yet-. But we're both adults and we've been doing this for a minute; romance with kids in the game is its own whole thing, much less with your *own* kids.

Re Good Society: If anything, a lot of my play of NPCs (connections) in good society is for them to directly combat PCs goals—when I'm playing a NPC I'm functionally being a GM (even as a player) while when I'm playing a PC (Main Character) I'm very much being a PC, where playing the character true to their personality is more important than how it pushes around the other characters. But the point may stand, since I suggest that the stance for NPCs is very different than that for PCs; it's the PCs story and the primary role of NPCs is to make the PCs lives more interesting. If I'm asked to play a connection a PC is trying to get help from, I'm unlikely to directly block this—but I'm very likely to take on an agenda with the role—anything from "how can I use this to put you at odds with another PC" (including/especially mine)" to "what can I charge for this favor that you want/need that will make your PCs life more interesting and/or complicated?" Well, and, of course, "what can I do with this to push the PC to get a positive/negative reputation tag" with a proviso that while that's often how I play, it's only rarely what I'm actually thinking at the time; I tend to put reputation entirely out of my mind during play (except during the reputation phase) and only later realize that I was interacting with it.

Brian Misiaszek: Good to see that you've made the jump! You may have "only" contributed your zine for 40% of A&E's run, but I warrant that's more than 90% of contributors did or more.

Jim Vassilakos: I didn't realize at first that it was a deliberate choice, but I appreciate that you've, like a lot of the "like A&E but in reverse" chosen to put your OE contribution at the END of the zine. It's actually a really interesting thematic choice and I look forwards to seeing how it affects the APA over the years, regardless of who is taking on the role (if you don't end up stuck with it forever, that is).

An Unlooked For Zine #1

Copyright Lisa Padol 2025

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

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

As many folks know, I'm gathering zines for a single one-shot electronic-only apa called Something Completely Different, as a thank you to Lee Gold, sort of a festschrift (which, if I remember correctly, is a collection of essays collected into a book in honor of a professor) and a celebration of the community she created.

Somehow, someone got the idea that the deadline for this was 21 July. This is not the case.

THE DEADLINE FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT IS **31 AUGUST 2025**.

If you haven't submitted something and want to, you do still have time. If you have questions about Something Completely Different, ping me and I'll see if I can answer them.

NATTER

I suspect I'm not going to have time to comment on the last A&E this time around. It's been busy. We've been to DexLite and run 2 sessions of our Penned to Good Society game, Dangerous Refuge, as well as played in a few other games, and the following week, we went to Summer Larpin', where we didn't run anything, but packed a lot of costumes for several larps. The week after that, we had a house guest in town for the Origami USA convention.

I have no idea what my zine will wind up looking like, as I have no idea what Lee did when she massaged it. I also have no idea whether I'll stick with the current title.

COMMENTS ON ISSUE #1

EVERYONE WHO GOT THE BALL ROLLING ON E&A: Thank you. I didn't have the energy for this.

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS: Not all d4s are caltrops. See <https://www.thediceshoponline.com/crystal-caste-pearl-white-d4-dice> for an example of a d4 that I've heard called a "rice stalk". (Granted, it's technically a d12 with 8 faces squished, but then, a d10 is technically a d20 with 10 faces squished.) There are some other variants as well. So, if one wants to avoid the caltrop problem, one has options.

WHAT IS THIS?: Lee Gold also wrote Land of the Rising Sun, Lands of Adventure, and GURPS Japan, as well as several novels and many filk songs, and she published Xenofilkia, an apa for filk songs from many filkers.

GEORGE PHILLIES: re "I was not generally believed": Nod. I remember Erick Wujcik telling me that when he first spoke about his ideas for what would become the Amber Diceless RPG, people stormed out of the room in fury at the idea of being separated from their precious dice. I believe it. Today, I can point to several rpgs that don't use dice.

re what adventures "absolutely" must have: Even today, I can give an outline of the typical one-shot convention adventure, to the degree there is such a thing. You start with a short fight scene to get folks accustomed to the system, maybe as part of an adventure that began before the actual session and is wrapping up now, and then there's a lull before the main plot, which will include at least one fight (a climactic one at the end). There's a fair amount of freedom even within this formula, of course, and it's a reasonable one to use for a convention one-shot, especially if you're expecting to have at least some players unfamiliar with whatever system you're using. This certainly worked for me when I played Fate and Victoriana at conventions.

re "A good campaign would present the players with a series of layers of mystery and challenge, with the players at first not necessarily knowing what the problem is, let alone what they are to do to solve it.": Indeed. Such campaigns exist, and I've run a couple of them. One does need to set expectations correctly, and it is interesting to look at how, for example, Masks of Nyarlathotep has been changed from edition to edition.

MARK WILSON: How was Origins and the move? re Speed Racer: Yes! It's delightful! We should see it again. re your gaming group: Let us know if you try Daggerheart. Having now played it, I think it might be similar and different enough for their taste and your own.

re next campaign re urban settings: I like those too. I am running an Urban Shadows game set in NYC and playtesting a Swords of the Serpentine game set in its fantasy city of Eversink. The Harlem Unbound game I played in was set mostly in 1920s' NYC, and Aviatrix's

Crown of Creation mostly in 1960s' Los Angeles and San Francisco. Masks of Nyarlathotep. and Eternal Lies are mostly set in cities, And I've worked on Call of Cthulhu scenario collections focusing on NYC and New Orleans. And I also like the cities of Al Amarja in Over the Edge. Thomas Manuel did an interesting essay on some urban rpg settings, including Blades in the Dark's Duskvol, which, he noted, is basically built for criminal heists.

PATRICK RILEY: re your GMing style: From what you have said in A&E, these descriptions sound accurate. re 200 words: I agree on both counts, I think. I have often been frustrated when reading online articles recommended as "deep" but which seem to me to be doing a brief, superficial skim of the surface.

Congratulations on the loss of the old job and congratulations on starting the new one.

re Kublacon re Kids on Bikes: I should read the stuff I have for the game and decide whether I need the hard copy. re BASH!: Players getting enthused by setting details that one or two other players don't have the background to spot is something I don't know how best to address, whether I am the one getting the details or the one missing them or the GM or author who needs to decide how much background to explain. This is also true. for historical settings; fr'ex, I know the GMs/writers of the larp Arabian Days pondered that very question and will be adding optional reading background sheets.

re Many Deaths of Edward Bigby and running published scenarios: I do not intend to try to convince you to like these, but I do disagree with that it is gauche to run them. Many gaming companies, including Pelgrane, are happy to have people willing to run their scenarios at conventions. I have done this for them with scenarios from Trail of Cthulhu, Swords of the Serpentine, and the Yellow King RPG. I have run a Clockwork: Dominion scenario that I fell in love with after playing, with the permission and blessing of Reliquary Games. I ran Delta Green's Observer Effect. Some of these scenarios were published, some were not, and some were unpublished at the time I ran them, but have since been published, I wrote none of them. I think I did at least a decent job of running them, and think the folks who played generally enjoyed themselves. And, while I have run some "officially", as in explicitly as a Pelgrane GM or a Reliquary Games GM, I have also run them at conventions where I wasn't part of the company's presence, as there was no such presence, and the company is happy to have this.

Also, many more people actively want to play these scenarios than their authors could run for. Home groups can't cover this. Some groups only play certain systems, regardless of a given individual's desires.

Some GMs don't run published scenarios, so someone who has heard of one they want to play may only be able to do so at a convention where it is being offered.

I don't think it's SOP to indicate whether one is running one's own scenario or someone else's. I think it would be good if it were, as that would draw people who want it and make it easier for those who don't to avoid it. Considering why this isn't done, some reasons include:

- * It's not required. There's generally no field for it if I submit an event for, say, a Double Exposure convention, so not only don't I think to, but the interface discourages me from doing so. Tabletop Events is being used in ways the creators hadn't anticipated, and that's a whole separate rant.

- * Most gamers don't expect this information. Get enough of them complaining about its lack, and odds are conventions will start to require it.

- * Unspoken and unwritten expectations. Sometimes, a GM decides to run a published scenario, and the folks who sign up recognize it. I know if someone is running Star Chamber for Delta Green that it's a published scenario. Ditto for The Haunting, aka the scenario that has traditionally been included in the core Call of Cthulhu rulebook. I deliberately signed up to play a published Night's Black Agents scenario because I wanted to get a feel for it before I ran it for my local group. I jumped at the chance to play the first scenario in the Fall of Delta Green campaign The Borellus Connection, which is actually a bad example because the GM was very good about making it clear that's what it was.

None of this, of course, addressed how well or badly any given GM runs someone else's scenario, as that's a different topic.

re World of Darkness game re hating PvP: I think if a scenario definitely has built-in PvP, that should be in the event description. If it has potential PvP, that's hazier, and probably something that needs to be discussed before play starts. When I ran a Swords of the Serpentine scenario, one player raised the question and the consensus was that the players would avoid outright PvP, but small acts of selfishness, like pocketing valuables left lying around and not telling people in character, were fine.

re For Family and Home: re "City law does differentiate ": I believe you meant "City law does not differentiate ". I love Neeru's description! I am so there for a kind, gentle, utterly ruthless destroyer of those who mess with their family. re Scene of the Crime: My first assumption had been that Rajesh was secretly working for the villains, and that the villains hadn't found what

they were looking for or otherwise had some reason for planting a spy. I gather that wasn't the case. It just struck me as suspicious that this was someone the PCs hadn't met, replacing someone they knew.

re the tavern: What is Milo, apart from a thrall? Like, I have no idea whether this is an animal, a gnoll, a kobold, or something else. re card game: The orcs don't want the PCs to play, but the dwarf does. If the PCs say they want to play, but aren't willing to physically fight for this, what happens? Do they have to make some kind of roll? Do the orcs and dwarf argue it out, and if so, who wins? I'm glad you got a good player for Sessa!

re Mark Nemeth: If I were to write an adventure to run at a convention, I'd probably try to make it modular so I could trim or expand as needed. If one can do that, I don't think it counts as overpreparing.

re Michael Cule re people taking "whichever approach gives them the most benefit and/or hurts or angers their opponents the most": Nod. This reminds me of the Tichborne case (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tichborne_case). Basically, someone claimed to be the lost Tichborne heir, and from what I could tell, this claim was highly dubious, and the courts found against him. The fascinating thing, however, is that the lower class people of the time seemed to simultaneously believe:

* He was **absolutely** the genuine heir and the court should give him his due

* AND he was **not** the heir, and good for him for sticking it to the aristocracy! He **deserved** to win his case.

re Mark Nemeth re being motivated by wealth only being as interesting as the reason why one is so motivated: For me, I think it depends on both the medium and the context.

* Fr'ex, in the anime Cowboy Bebop, it's more or less understood that the characters perpetually need money, so the hook is usually, though not always, "You're bounty hunters, and this is the bounty of the week."

Faye Valentine, the most obviously greedy of the crew, is also the one who has a particular reason for needing money. She's in debt, for complicated reasons that viewers eventually learn, and yes, that makes her more interesting than just "I want money!" For the others, it's vaguer.

Jet Black and Spike Spiegel are the original crew, and generally need money for food and fuel, and ship repairs. I don't know to what degree that's interesting

in itself, but we see Spike turning down money at least once, and these two characters have arcs that aren't really about the money. Ed doesn't seem to need money, while Ein is a dog.

* In the movie *The Killer*, the title character needs money to pay for an operation to give a singer he blinded her sight back. Everything flows from that.

* In games like *Cyberpunk*, *Swords of the Serpentine*, and the *Dying Earth* RPG, it's more or less assumed that a) PCs are motivated by money and b) they start every adventure broke, or at least having spent or lost any recent windfall. If I go in knowing this, I can lean into it, and just accept it as a genre trope.

But for at least two of these games, it's not always that basic. There's at least one *Cyberpunk* scenario where the PCs' motivation is to save their home; money is not a factor, I think. I've seen *Swords of the Serpentine* scenarios where it's about saving the city from a threat or about getting back a small personal item that means a great deal to the PCs.

And there are games with completely different motivations. There was a convention game where we were all playing incarnations of Moorcock's *Eternal Champion* -- all of whom were children, and the group was trying to find its way home.

re me: Yes. I agree that the key thing is that the system be able to handle whatever the players come up with for their PCs to do that it makes sense that the PCs could (or at least, might be able to) do. Both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Swords of the Serpentine* have a category of action called "Maneuver" that's a sort of catch-all for anything that doesn't fit neatly elsewhere. This is so much better that, fr'ex, 6th edition *Call of Cthulhu*, where I wrote down the grapple rules on an index card and, invariably, proceeded to misplace the index card whenever it was needed.

re Spike re *The Good Place*: Yes. I was thinking of that show and of the episode where this was discussed at some length. re me re the player who was exasperated with "how the faculty was endangering children": This is something to consider in a school game rpg (even if one then dismisses the concern and chalks things up to genre conventions), and it was always provided at least a bit of tension in the *Strange School* game. I don't know if having the players each create an NPC faculty member they were willing to play helped or hurt there.

re Patrick Zoch: I'm not sure we had an igtheme in A&E about handling NPCs who surrendered or were otherwise taken prisoner. I remember a Gen Con Online game of *Blackbirds* where the PCs, without consulting each other, came quickly to an agreement: NPCs running away were killed because they might be

going to raise the alarm. NPCs who threw down their arms and surrendered were bound, but not otherwise harmed -- by the PCs. The PCs had a mission and went off to do it, leaving the prisoners for their NPC employer. We didn't know if this NPC would kill or spare the prisoners, but we did know the NPC and their forces would arrive soon enough the prisoners wouldn't die before that. We didn't worry in or out of character, as the adventure didn't focus on this aspect.

MYLES CORCORAN: Hi! re igtheme: I'm glad I'm not the only one impatient with D&D. I can handle Stephen Tihor's Strixhaven game because he's a good GM, the campaign doesn't focus on combat per se, and D&D Beyond simplifies a lot for me. I also have a player who isn't interested in combat, and also not particularly interested in complex mechanics. RAE Mouseritter write up. How complex is the system?

MITCH HYDE: I think your idea to use a smaller scale is correct. You can always expand as needed.

PAUL HOLMAN: I hope the holiday was good. re igtheme: If one wants to play a particular adventure or campaign, but to use a different rule set, that is often possible. It does require at least one person in the group to be good at translating between the two systems with an eye towards what features one wants to retain. While I sometimes ponder whether I could just translate all horror scenarios into Cthulhu Dark, I'm not sure I really want to do that. I do wonder if I could translate Fall of Delta Green or Night's Black Agents into Fate or Over the Edge.

re implementing new rules in stages, there are some scenario collections that aim to allow that. I think both Delta Green and Call of Cthulhu have something in that line. Of course, that requires playing specific scenarios, sometimes with pre-generated characters, and that's not always to everyone's tastes.

re me: Sure thing! I'll pass your thanks along. I've also found the Benefits subsystem useful. I've not yet tried to run Trenchcoat, but would like to, perhaps with the Call of Cthulhu campaign Tatters of the King. I've run it twice, so I'm familiar with it, and it's oddly gentle in terms of giving the PCs very good odds of surviving to the very bitter end.

GABRIEL ROARK: Lee was, of course, correct about you fitting right in. re igtheme: These seem like good steps to follow. I've sometimes "taught" new systems (sort of -- it may be more like different flavors of Gumshoe) when playtesting a scenario or campaign. And I very much need to read such things carefully, not just for content that might need discussion, but also for "bumps" -- places where the author screwed up the plot or the rules or the clue trail.

Fr'ex, one scenario I've run a couple of times, a Cthulhu City scenario for Trail of Cthulhu, has one clue that should be found by whoever has a particular skill. Let's call it Skill X. Problem: None of the pre-gens has that skill.

Because I read the scenario and annotated a printout of it before running the game at an online convention, I could deal with this easily at runtime. If I'd hit this first while running it, I'd have been flummoxed.

A session zero may not be possible at a convention, and certainly, many gamers sign up to play things they've never played before. In this case, I recommend a combination of:

- * Practicing your spiel explaining the rules
- * Using cheat sheets, even if you need to create these
- * Deciding how much time out of the session you want for the pseudo-session zero step, particularly if you're also having a quick review of safety tools
- * Choose a scenario that can work with players who are willing, but ignorant of the particular rule set

MICHAEL CULE: I think that, as a term for female anatomy, "phoenix nest" is less rude than many. I'm more likely to think of it as the campaign mcguffin that you created. Sympathy on the beds in hotel and other facilities. Good luck with the current games, and best wishes to Hartley.

re igtheme: Hard agree on generating characters together. re running combat as part of this prep: In the probably unlikely event of your facilitating Good Society or Cthulhu Dark or something similarly vague when it comes to combat, would you still do that?

I agree re telling players if one is also new to the system. re the fake out with a TPK for horror: Tempting, but I think I'd want to let the players know I was doing this, rather than springing it on them.

re me re NDA: Thanks for the clarification. re snatching the document back: Good to know the PCs are on the ball. Fair point re "To be or not to be", but the other speech is still better.

HEATH ROW: Good luck with your move. re game stores: An impressive list. What is the Gamer's Library like? re Downcrawl: I'm intrigued by the game and wonder if it could be used for a setting like the anime Made in Abyss. But I am not sure it could get the right feel or consistent logic. re Brambletrek: This has a very different feel, in part because of the first person narration. Given the urgency of the quest, I wonder how much in world time is supposed to pass.

re Pinball Wizardry: I've not seen that one yet. re me: I'm glad you enjoyed the con report. re one-shots,

campaigns, and lengths in between: I have run "one-shots" for my home group that sometimes become two-shots. The Storybrewers Discord has people offering short campaigns of 4-9 sessions where a session is roughly 3 hours online with a break more or less in the middle. When I played a duet game with one of the folks on the server, we found that with two players, we were both always on, and kept our sessions shorter, about two hours.

There's an article about how to do 90 minute sessions: <https://aaronrpgs.tumblr.com/post/786737656203706368/the-tight-90> Memento Mori is intended to run about 5-7 sessions. I'm playtesting a 5 adventure campaign. Depending on how aggressively one moves the plot along, I could see this taking anywhere from 5 sessions to 15. And Fate of Cthulhu is 4 adventures.

MARK NEMETH: re airlines not providing vouchers for delays due to weather: Is this how it's always been, I wonder? I ask because, decades ago, my parents chose to drive us home from Florida rather than take a plane, because a hurricane was coming and they thought the flight might be canceled. My mother later said that if she'd realized that the airline would have had to recompense us for the flight -- I think she said they'd have to put us up in a hotel -- she'd have been tempted to risk it, but the bottom line was that she wanted to make sure my brother and I were home in time for the first day of school.

RAE the write up. You seem to be having a blast playing Keolaran's loyal retainer. re Taking a Loss: GMs often forget that things that seem obvious to them are not obvious to their players. Certainly, I've been guilty of forgetting it more than once.

It is also an issue when I'm trying to keep something secret because the players and PCs haven't yet learned it. I've learned that if someone's using a fake identity, I really need to make sure my notes only use that identity's name; otherwise, I'm likely to slip and use their actual identity.

The key thing for a group taking the loss is that it needs to be acceptable to everyone out of character, including the GM. This sounds obvious, but if, fr'ex, James not only expected the group to reject the Professor's offer, but built the entire adventure around the assumption that there was no way they'd ever accept such an offer, that could have been a problem. E.g., if the Professor had a campaign-ending victory because the PCs agreed, that would be a problem, at least presuming the group didn't want to end the game just yet.

re Long Combats: This is always a challenge, yes. It's why I became fond of systems like the original Over the Edge, Fate, and systems that outright discourage

combat, like Cthulhu Dark (if you fight a monster, you die, period, end of character) and the larp Time Travel Review Board (where the combat system is "Declare 'Combat!' NPC guards drag your character off and you switch to a new character, because this is a horde game where most people play multiple characters.").

re Unexpected Uses of a Floating Boat: This is a good example of a GM or author not realizing all the implications of something. When I ran Eternal Lies, a Trail of Cthulhu campaign, the PCs were trying to figure out how to get into a villain's mansion. I handed them a map of the place, as they were able to get access to the blueprints of the building. It didn't show any secrets -- but it did show a balcony that ran between a couple of rooms on the upper floor, and one of the players spotted this at once. As far as I can tell, that was something the authors wouldn't have intended to be there, as it's an obvious weak point in what's meant to be a very, very hard place to sneak into, as in the PCs aren't supposed to be able to do this. And there is absolutely no mention of this balcony in the text. I'm very curious about what happened with the map, and what the authors actually intended.

re Peril at Every Trail and Cavern: Matt Stevens's Heartland City game, many years ago, had us playing 2 PCs each. One group of PCs investigated pulp crime in Heartland City, while the others globetrotted, having pulp adventures in the Hollow Earth, outer space, and so on. Later, there was a brief experiment as we all created a third PC for more of a slice of life during the Depression, a family trying to run a restaurant or bar. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas stopped in at one point, prompting one of the PCs to accidentally-on-purpose drop her manuscript near them. They assumed it was an accident, or pretended to, and said, "Miss, you dropped your manuscript," causing her to pick it up and flee the room, which is all I remember about that part of the game.

After reading several issues describing your setting, I found it felt odd to have the first thing that happened once the game started be "Oh, Adventurers! We want to hire you for a dangerous task rather than risk doing it ourselves!" I think part of the oddness is that one of the people Gemma is hiring to take the risks she doesn't want to take is her own younger brother.

It's also odd to see the picture of Lady Wylinga, not because she doesn't look as old as one might think, but because she seems to be dressed to go out on an adventure when she's actually patrolling her own property. And it's odd that the magistrate from Stolt wants to hire people from a different place to find the man who was unjustly exiled. After reading about how you were trying to make a world that felt lived in, with communities that, while not utopian, made sense and were generally functional, it seems odd that no one in

Stolt wanted to help find their outcast member, even for money.

I suppose this just illustrates how odd the tropes folks take for granted in "typical" rpgs are. I remember an Everway game long ago where a couple of PCs informed the rest that some logical course of action was Right Out because of a prophecy or the custom of their village (which is where the adventure was set) or both, and the rest of us looked at their players like they'd grown another head. And it occurred to me that if it had been NPCs telling us this, we wouldn't have questioned it. The odd restriction would simply have been a parameter of the quest. But because this came from the PCs / players, even though this was almost certainly based on information the GM had handed them on paper at the start of the game, we reacted differently, and probably more realistically, to the extent realism is a factor.

re Multiple Personalities: The key is to keep the groups as separate as you can. When the groups must mingle, try to make sure that one player's PCs aren't talking to each other.

re Joshua Kronengold re divination about the past: Oh, that is an ability I love to have as a PC, just as I love to have empathy. From me, it's an invitation to the GM not just to infodump, but to mess with my PC's head, getting them lost in the past, in someone else's memories, or in someone else's feelings.

re the change in typeface for Josh's last zine: Lee usually does the work of massaging his zines, but for the zine, she requested Josh do most of that. He can probably go into more detail about precisely what we did; I helped out, but don't really remember much besides asking, "Is this what you want? How about this?"

re Gumshoe Drives: If you're creating your own character, you pick the Drive. If you're playing a convention one-shot and there are pre-generated PCs, these will usually have Drives already, just as they have all the other bits already.

If you're playing in one of my games and it's not a convention one-shot or a playtest, even if you've created your character's Drive, I'm usually open to you changing it to one you think works better for you. The main thing is that you need to engage with the scenario. If you do that, I don't really care what your Drive is, although you may find it easier to explain why your character runs towards the danger if you have a Drive that fits. If you don't engage with the scenario, well, yes, I can penalize you by docking you Stability points, but chances are that something is wrong that has nothing to do with the Drive mechanics. Either that or perhaps the in-game situation has put your

character in something of a no-win situation, and that's not necessarily bad; it depends on whether you are enjoying how the game world is breaking your character.

Eternal Lies has a situation where characters with certain Drives are in serious danger of losing much, if not all, of their Stability. I don't know how the authors run this, but I know that both I and Aviatrix take pains to signal what's going on so that the player can decide how badly they want their PC to fare.

In my case, I did it with the way I said, "But you're SURE you're ALMOST THERE! You just need to study this more..." The player caught on quite quickly and had their character pull back.

In Aviatrix's case, she had an NPC arrive, figuring that the NPC would pull the PC out of the situation. To her surprise, the player decided that they didn't want to do this. Instead, the PC pulled the poor NPC *into* the situation with them! Aviatrix accepted this and had both NPC and PC wake up the next morning, possibly in jail for creating a disturbance. It was an oddly hilarious scene.

re me re the hag and the genie: That makes sense, thanks. re D&D 3e: The group was large, but even when only a few players showed up so that it was the GM plus 4-6 players including me, combat still seemed to take forever.

re Good Society and D&D: LOL at the idea of any Good Society game or any Pended to Good Society game being tightly plotted. This is very rarely the case. Heck, the Strixhaven D&D game I'm in is far more tightly plotted because a) the GM is keeping an eye on what the players are trying to do and b) the Strixhaven book has a default campaign, although it's loose enough we don't usually feel constricted -- though Josh has Thoughts on that.

I do like to have characters who have personality and motivation. One of the folks in our local gaming circles noted that they want to feel that an adventure or campaign would have gone very differently with different players and PCs. Otherwise, why are they bothering to play?

Sometimes, I'm fine with an adventure where, regardless of who plays it, the beats are the same, and the ending boils down to success or failure, or even to degrees of success and failure. But it's true that if my character's motive and personality don't matter and don't have any effect on the game, I might as well not be there. Anyone could pick up my character and it would be the same.

And if there are only so many ways for external events to go, which is often the case in a one-shot, and sometimes in a campaign, particularly if one is using a commercially published campaign, then it becomes even more important that the internal life of the PCs matters -- desires, relationships, and so on. This is also very true of the kind of larp I usually play, where there's a starting situation, the characters are all pre-written, and sometimes, the larp is extremely structured. If my character's internal life as I portray it isn't relevant in any way, then it's not a larp. It's a play.

re psychology in media et cetera: I very much enjoy the movie *Rope*! I also enjoyed reading Robin Wood's book *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, which made watching a lot of Hitchcock's films much more fun and interesting. Note that I am an English Ph. D., which means I enjoy literary criticism, and the book is basically lit crit of Hitchcock's films. (I do think that lit crit should be comprehensible without requiring readers to have a degree, and I think Wood's book is.) I also enjoyed the movie *Rebecca*, though I've not yet read the book. I've not read or seen *The Return of the Soldier*.

re Brian Misiaszek: Should you wish to play *Call of Cthulhu*, and if you're willing to do so online, there's at least one online discord server that runs an online convention for this. re 2312: I found this okay while reading it, but not particularly memorable afterwards.

PATRICK ZOCH: Good luck with online gaming! Interesting trait generator. Thank you. re me re the clothing vendor: Yes, exactly. re the foxes: Yes. It's hard to predict when this sort of thing will happen. I created what I thought was an obnoxious unseele sidhe NPC in *Cthulhupunk Plus Twenty* a couple of decades ago, and this was one of the group's favorite NPCs. After, I ran a pbem set in the same world, and the PCs were students at a high school with magical portals between four different campuses on four different continents (the school was in Fukuoka, Vancouver, Tromso, and Nairobi). And I made an NPC that I thought of as a sort of secondary villain. It turns out I was wrong; he became a (mostly) beloved chaos vector. In retrospect, if an incoming player liked this NPC and another one, who was a different sort of zany, they'd probably enjoy the game, iirc. (Josh and Myles can tell me if I'm correct. I'm not entirely sure why these two characters worked as well as they did.)

re the Haunted card in *Phoenix Dawn Command*: Oh, my PC's daughter is very much a recurring NPC, regardless of whether or not her card comes up in spreads. The cards simply describe what happens in combat or in skill challenges. Outside of these, she's been seen by various NPCs, pranked one of the other PCs, expressed opinions, and given advice.

re NPCs in *Good Society*: Yes, social engagement is "core to the entire role play experience in the game". This doesn't necessarily mean that an NPC / Connection must "aid in another player's goal". Often, it means that the Connection should be an obstacle to that goal, making the Main Character's life Interesting. And once a player has described the Connection, they don't have any control of it. That's up to whoever plays the character.

Sure, the Connection's player can, and often should, ask the player who created it just what they want from the Connection. And Josh can go into detail on his philosophy of playing Connections. That said, I've seen Connections change quite a bit. I created one Connection that I described as using my Main Character to do social climbing. The person who played the Connection, however, had the Connection be deeply in love with my Main Character. This complicated my character's life in so many ways, including getting my character into a duel.

In one *Penned to Good Society* game, a player had so much fun playing the Connection I'd created to make my Main Character's life hellacious that, when they thought they should retire their Main Character and create another, I pointed out that the rules of the hack we were playing allowed them to promote their Connection to a Main Character. This delighted them.

re Spike Jones re unusual convention pairings: I gather that one science fiction convention shared function space with a mortuary convention. I was at one occult convention (the difference between occult and new age events being a decimal place) that shared space with a motorcycle convention. Both groups got along quite well. They liked that we admired their tattoos. We liked that they spent money in our dealers' room.

re Mark Nemeth: Oof. Sympathy on the interference with proper sendoffs for fellow workers. I gather it wasn't possible to do something informal, outside the workplace structure? Even if it was, of course, that's a lousy way to repay folks for years of good work.

BRIAN MISIASZEK: I'm glad you got a good party! What is next for you? Congratulations to Lauren! re creating a *Pulp Cthulhu* scenario set in Cuba: If you want to publish such a scenario, you have a couple of options. I think the demand exists. I know of one scenario set in Cuba, "Servant of God" in the collection *Tales of the Caribbean*.

JIM VASSILAKOS: Thanks for making sure this apa would happen.

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: re me: Indexers definitely need diligence. Also focus and patience.



Issue 239

brian.misiaszek@gmail.com

Age of Menace

Brian Christopher Misiaszek



5 Livingstone Drive,
Dundas, ON, L9H 7S3
CANADA
Tel 905-627-5496

Copyright Brian Misiaszek 2025

From Our Last Episode...

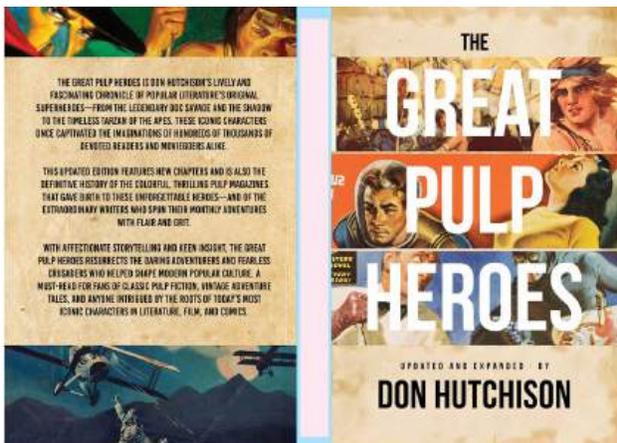
It's been very hot and very hazy in Hamilton Ontario with the smoke of far-off forest fires from Western Canada. I snapped this photo of a very strange crimson sunset caused by such particulates scattering away all the shorter light wavelengths leaving only the longer red ones to be seen.



I played hooky for a couple of hours from my two-day annual Geriatric Medicine scientific meeting to slip over to the **2025 Fantastic Pulp Show and Sale**, both, by happy coincidence, taking place on the same day, May 31st in the same city, Toronto.

I caught up with my dear friend Don Hutchison, now an energetic 95, and fellow pulp historian John Wooley, who came up from Oklahoma; I last saw John at PulpFest in Pittsburgh two years ago, along with a few other good friends, including pulp fan and fiction writer Peter McGarvy.

Don told me he has a new, expanded, and revised edition of his delightful non-fiction survey *The Great Pulp Heroes* coming out this August from Steeger Books in time for this year's *PulpFest* in Pittsburgh. See attached photo for a mock-up of the hard and paperback cover. I had a nice time catching up, making a few purchases at the show and accepting with delight an invite for a BBQ that same evening with Peter and others at his place in Toronto too



What else is new in role-gaming? I'm still Peter Hildreth's online *Savage Worlds* alternative Victorian era game with our last session yd on July 20th 2025; he promises an E&A submission after Gencon. And in London Ontario after a *Celebration of Life* for a late professor friend of my wife Caroline and I, we dropped into a gaming & comic store and found a bunch of vintage HARN and Shadow World modules from late 1989 for \$10 Canadian each.

Havana Horror:
Dramatis Personae
Gerardo Machado (1869 to 1939)
 President of Cuba **1925-1933**

I've been digging deeper into historical figures for a Pulp Cthulhu scenario set in 1930s Havana, Cuba. I ended up going down quite a rabbit hole, exploring vintage scanned newspapers & untranslated Cuban magazines like Bohemia and Carteles using Google Translate. Oddly enough, I also found a digitized collection of Machado's own post-exile papers, donated to the University of Florida, which proved fascinating and provided some of the images included here.



Machado on cover of Time Jan 1st 1931, & Nov 1933

Gerardo Machado was a Cuban general who became a widely popular president in 1925, and then ultimately dictator. An open admirer of Benito Mussolini, by 1930 Machado's mix of strongman tactics and state-backed thuggery for all opposed earned him the nickname "the Tropical Mussolini." President Machado ruled Cuba ruthlessly as a dictator from 1925 until August 12th 1933 when he was forced to flee the country. His time in office left deep scars on Havana's streets and in the Cuban nation's soul.

Background



A hero of Cuba's War of Independence (1895–1898), Machado rose to the presidency in 1925 with widespread popular support and grand promises of modernization with his campaign motto "Water, Roads, and Schools".

Buoyed by then current high sugar prices, his government's first term saw the construction of massive national projects like the *Carretera Central* (Central Highway) to connect Santiago de Cuba to Havana, and across the country paid for massive urban renewal projects such as constructing hospitals, paving roads, upgrading sewage systems, and building new aqueducts. In Havana itself *El Capitolio Nacional de Cuba* (Havana's Capitol Building) was built, along with the *Hotel Nacional de Cuba*, and expansions and upgrades to the University of Havana.



El Capitolio exterior completed after 3 years May 20th 1929



May 20th 1929 opening ceremony of El Capitolio

The first two years of his administration were arguably a high point in Cuban prosperity, and he was named "favorite son" of 25 municipalities, and fawning newspapers called him "El Supremo," and "El Titán." He sponsored a tariff reform bill in 1927 aimed to protect Cuban sugar and other manufacturing industries since world prices were falling due to overproduction, and there was internal concern that some 2/3 of all sugar production was owned by American or Spanish companies.

On a goodwill visit to the US in 1927 he even met with then US president Calvin Coolidge in the Cuban Embassy in Washington DC to try and get tariffs on

Cuban sugar reduced since the US purchased almost 56% of their exports. Later in 1928 Coolidge would later return the favour 1928 do a state visit to Cuba on the occasion of the Pan-Am conference, the first and last time a US president ever visited Cuba.



Presidents Coolidge & Machado at 2028 Pan Am conference

Though Machado had promised back in 1925 not to seek re-election, in 1927 the still-popular president announced his intention to run again. Under the electoral *Law of Emergency* a docile pro-Machado Cuban Congress first extended his term by two years, a blatant *prórroga de poderes* despite constitutional bans on re-election. He then convened a hand-picked constitutional convention for his political party, which rewrote the constitution to allow a six-year presidential term.

Public outrage, especially among students, sparked the creation in 1927 of the *Directorio Estudiantil Universitario* (DEU), or simply the *Directorio* as they were referred to by both the public and newspapers, to resist his power grab¹.



Re-election, Repression & Dictatorship

Before the November 1928 election, Machado used bribery and intimidation to somehow secure the nomination of every other Cuban major political party, not just his own Liberal party, effectively

¹ Later in 1933, DEU would become the only student body in world history to have ever held national political power in their country.

running unopposed. Not only does he win the election, but to the protests of many in April 1929 Congress approves the extension of term of office to a six-year term which would extend his rule on through to May 20th 1935.

Only a few brave Cuban senators spoke out about this undemocratic behaviour, to no effect. A very distasteful political cartoon about Machado soon after led to the owner of that newspaper being mysteriously murdered days later producing a chilling effect on other media owners.²

While conservative elites and big business aligned with American interests welcomed his strongman stability, Machado's blatant manipulation fueled fierce resistance from students, unions, and former political leaders. Already battered by now falling sugar prices, Cuba's economy plunged deeper into crisis after the October 29th 1929 global stock market crash, leaving hundreds of thousands unemployed and unhappy.

1930

Desperate to keep his popular public works projects afloat, including expansions meant to transform the notorious *Mazorra* Cuban insane asylum into a "model" institution, Machado's government sought shady loans of millions from at least two private U.S. banks. In January his regime also slashed salaries for all public government employees from 10-15% except the army and banned public demonstrations by any political party or group not officially registered.

As unrest spread, Machado's modernizing image dissolved into open repression: censorship tightened, political opponents were jailed or vanished, and dissenting newspapers were shut down. Critics now branded him "Nero," "Caligula," and a "Tropical Fascist."

Independent unions were outlawed; the José Martí Popular University and labor halls were closed; Spanish and European labor leaders who spoke up were expelled as "undesirable aliens." Cuban Supreme Court justices not deemed sympathetic to Machado's rule were replaced by others.



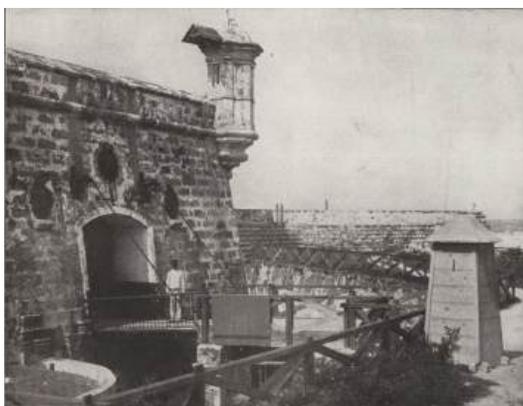
² A reminder that if you cannot make fun of a leader of a country you no longer live in a free country.

In September 1930, the *University of Havana* was shut down to silence the growing student and labour protest movement. Constitutional guarantees were suspended the following month and secretive military courts popped up. By the end of November, all schools in Cuba were closed, and *Diario de la Marina (Naval Journal)*, Cuba's oldest newspaper who had been harshly critical of Machado's strongman policies was forced to halt publication. The graffiti on the walls of buildings became for a time the only place of free speech.

1931

The following year was no better for Cuban democracy. On January 4th 1931 a wave of arrests targeted the recently revived *Directorio* membership and all members that could be located were jailed from Jan to March that year, and when released many spoke of torture & intimidation. Political beatings and later killings of dissenters became routine under Machado's regime, now being carried out through his secret plain-clothed paramilitary force known as *La Porra*, Spanish for "The Club" or "The Cudgel."

Originally formed by pro-Machado lawyer as the Cuban *Patriotic League*, the early name masked its true purpose: to crush any public demonstration against Machado with violence and intimidation. Its members, which included both ex-military, gangsters, and businessmen, joined for different reasons: some members sought favor from the dictator, some wanted access to firearms without a license, and others simply liked the idea of a "get out of jail for 15 Pesos" card if caught by the police breaking the law. Even the Havana Chief of Police was a member. The new name Porra was soon used, and their cheerleader-like public supporters were dubbed *Porristas*.



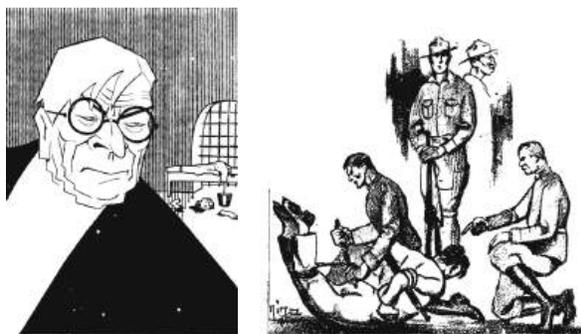
Atarés Fortress, HQ of La Porra & Palace Guard.

By February 1931, the *Porra Machadista* had made their headquarters in Havana's old Spanish-built *Atarés Fortress* a grim stronghold that also housed the Presidential Palace Guards under the command of the notorious *Captain Manuel Crespo Moreno*, himself a Porra leader. Senor Ramoncita Souto would serve as secretary for the Porra, and military veteran Colonel Antonio Jiménez as its Director. But

the person paying for everything and in charge of this corrupt Secret Police was Octavio Zubizarreta, Cuban Minister of the Interior in Machado's cabinet.

Members of *La Porra* were allowed entry anywhere with a card that identified them to the police, and were supposed to receive a monthly salary from Minister Zubizarreta and the Machado government; instead, this went directly into the pockets of Souto, Jimnez, and Crespo.

By mid-February, *La Porra* was operating openly, using brutal tactics to crush the swelling street protests and strikes spreading across the island. Inside the Atarés, the sadistic Captain Crespo ruled like inquisitor: captured dissenters were tortured using methods worthy of the Spanish Inquisition. Survivors described the dying being dragged out and beaten to death with crowbars, sometimes by Crespo's own hand. Years later, the bones of some of the missing, at least 346 linked to the later **A.B.C.** secret society, were unearthed, buried in shallow pits under the stables within the old fortress walls.



Later in 1931, Machado even sanctioned a *porra femina*, a female legion of terror led by a woman named *Estela Moré* "...a striking mulatta of San Lázaro Street" infamous for trading hospital beds for votes and stripping women bare in public to break their will if they tried to oppose her. With nails hidden in their fists, Estela Moré's Amazonian enforcers clawed skin and shredded clothes, sowing dread among even the boldest of Havana women who dared rally for change.

Radicals opposed to Machado's official terror & tyranny escalated their own political violence in response. With the leaders of the *Directorio* in jail at the time, *Ala Izquierda Estudiantil (AIE)* or *Student Left Wing* emerged on January 3rd 1931 as the tiny if radical pro-communist (and really puppet of the new Cuban Communist Party) as a splinter group of the DEU, and immediately this initially very small secret organization began its revolutionary and anti-imperialist programs.

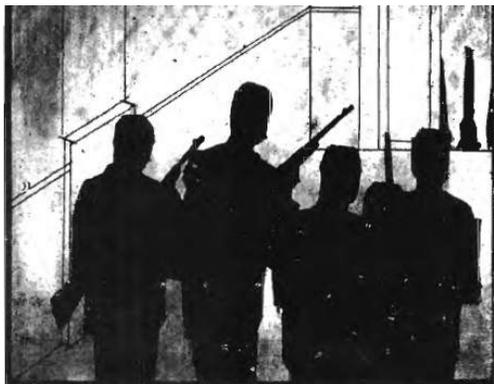
Firecrackers were set off in movie theatres to cause alarm, bombs sent by mail or thrown at police stations to cause terror, shook Havana's nights, as anti-Machado factions launched their own campaign of terror of their own against Machado's National Police and other perceived Machado allies.

Hundreds of bombs would be detonated over the next few years, not just sent in the mail, but car bombs and even ice-cream bombs



On February 23rd 1931, the same day that a bomb explodes in the Presidential Palace in a failed assassination attempt against of President Havana Machado the legally elected Mayor of Havana is replaced after order of Machado after criticizing the Machado government.

An attempted revolution which had started smouldering in early 1931 in Cuba's western province Pinar del Rio was suppressed and broken by August 1931 after Cuba's onetime *President Mario Garcia Menocal* with *Colonel Carlos Mendieta*³ using a private yacht filled with shipload of 26 other insurgents was hunted down and later captured to much national and international fanfare. Rather than being treated harshly, the "August Rebels" were given great courtesy, and were given amnesty and exiled to the US in January the following year.



More successful was the secret anti-Machado A.B.C. movement founded in November 1931 after the failed August Rebellion by a young Cuban lawyer named *Joaquín Martínez Sáenz*. Revolutionary and conspiratorial, the A.B.C. advocated wealth redistribution and were composed of the intellectual and academic elite in Havana society, professionals, along with university students mostly in law and medicine until the university was closed.

The A.B.C. name itself had no meaning itself, and reflected their strict cell-based structure, where the top 7 governing members were known were only known by their code name A-1, A-2, A-3, etc.; under each A-member were 10 'B' members, e.g. B-1, B-2,

B-3 etc.' and under each B-member were 10 'C' members etc.) designed to protect secrets even under torture by Machado's *Porra* enforcers. Members of A.B.C. only knew the individual who had recruited them, and Sr. Sáenz was A.B.C. member A-1. The symbol of the A.B.C. was inspired by the Star of David with their letters arranged into two overlapping triangles.



In addition to publishing their A.B.C. Manifesto which indicated they were neither communist nor fascist but elitists. They started their own terrorist bomb and arson campaign, which was effective enough that US newspapers and news magazines took notice. The A.B.C. also published "death lists" naming government targets and carried out several successful assassinations. On July 9, 1931, Captain Calvo, head of the Cuban National Police's forensic division, was gunned down by shooters in a passing car. September 27, 1932 the President of the Cuban National Congress and Machado confidant, *Clemente Vázquez Bello* (1887–1932), was killed when his Lincoln car was riddled with sawed off shotguns fired by a commando car of five death squad *Abecadarians*.



Bello's assassination was part of an even bolder and cunning plan: the A.B.C. plotted to kill Machado and other members of the dictator's cabinet during Vázquez's state funeral in Havana's Colón Cemetery, not to mention most of the foreign Diplomatic Corp who would also be in attendance.

Conspirators dug a tunnel from a sewer beneath the ornate marble Truffin family pantheon (*name from his wife's side of the family*) and packed it with 60 kg of dynamite & 134 cartridges of a high-powered quarrying explosive called "cheddite," enough to obliterate the marble cemetery monument and anyone nearby. Had it detonated, the blast would have killed anyone within 20–30 meters instantly,

³ Carlos Mendieta would briefly become Cuba's president himself in 1934.

with marble shards seriously injuring bystanders as far as 50–100 meters away.

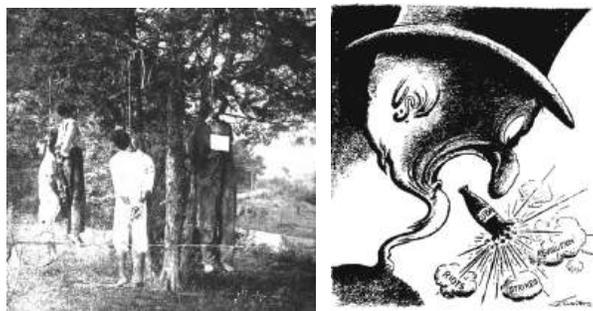


The plot failed only because Vázquez's widow, Regina Truffin, who had been living in the US at the time, suddenly changed her mind and chose to bury him instead in his hometown of Santa Clara. The hidden tunnel and explosives were discovered the next day only after a curious gardener in the cemetery found the 700 m long detonation wires connected to the high explosives.⁴

1933 & Machado's Slow Fall from Power

By **January 1st 1933** not just Havana but all of Cuba seethed with an confusing array of factions and secret groups involved in labour strikes, sabotage, political assassinations, murder, and increasingly open talk of revolution.

Alarmed by the chaos and fearing it would again have to enforce the Platt Amendment yet again, the United States, under the newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt, dispatched his friend Benjamin Sumner Welles as Special Envoy to mediate in April 1933.



May 8th 1933 Welles arrived and immediately turned a suite at the *Hotel Nacional* into his personal HQ since it was much closer than the then location of the US embassy. Days later at Machado's country estate Welles urged President Machado to call general elections for the fall of 1934 and he himself not run, else risk U.S. intervention during their first official meeting three days later. Stubbornly, Machado responded saying he would refuse to leave office before his term ended on May 20th, 1935.

July 1 1933 a meeting is mediated by Sumner Welles in American Embassy in Havana of with all political

factions both those in supporting and those opposed to Machado to try find a way to have a truce to stop the chaos and bloodshed that was apparent even in the US until a more durable solution could be found even if it mean to having new elections in 1934.



US Ambassador Sumner Welles & his HQ at the *Hotel Nacional*

Refusing to be part of this pro-US process not aligned to their left leaning interests were the *Directario*, the *AIE*, the *A.B.C. Radical* (a quasi-fascist splinter group who broke away from the main A.B.C. for being too cosy with the new US ambassador), Labour Unionists, the Cuban Communist Party, and other political factions.

July 23, 1933, Havana's bus drivers brought the capital to a halt with a strike that the National Police failed to crush, and this was the spark that would burn down Machado's regime. It began with the omnibus and streetcar drivers striking against the newly appointed Havana Mayor 'Pepita' Izquierdo's notorious bus racket, a corrupt daily toll that lined the mayor's pockets. Rail workers quickly joined in, striking not just against Izquierdo, but against Machado himself.

By **August 4th** the shutdown had spread island wide. Stores were shuttered, newspapers silenced, mail undelivered, phones dead, the national telegraphs service had halted. Hotels, bakeries, factories, post offices, government buildings all empty. Restaurants were closed, no service was provided for in hotels, and most medical clinics closed.

Havana fell eerily quiet: no demonstrations, no shouting crowds, no protest signs, just the nation's capital on strike, refusing to move. When police smashed open shop doors to force business to resume, shop doors closed again as soon as they passed.

August 5th trying to provoke public protest Machado's *Porra* left their HQ inside *Atarés Fortress* and tore through the streets of Havana in cars, firing pistols into the air. The people stayed hidden, silent, and unresponsive. That same day an attempted *Porra* roundup of Opposition leaders also failed since all had wisely vanished underground.

⁴ This dramatic episode inspired the 1949 John Huston film *We Were Strangers* based on the Robert Sylvester novel 'Rough Cut'

On **August 7**, an underground *ABC Radical* radio station broadcast a fake news announcement that Machado had resigned and urged citizens to march on the Presidential Palace. Even after the official radio station denied it, jubilant crowds poured into the streets of *Old Havana*, desperate to see him gone.



The crowds were met with gunfire. When the smoke cleared, it was found that National Police bullets had killed twenty citizens in front of the El Capitolio, and 160 more were wounded. Martial Law was declared.

August 11th 1933 Sumner Welles, the U.S. Ambassador, having learned of both public sentiment after the massacre and alerted of a planned military coup, bluntly told Machado take a "leave of absence". President Machado was also encouraged to dissolve his cabinet except for *General Herrera*, the Minister of War, and have Herrera assume the presidency, and claim it was all Machado's own idea. If he refused, Welles warned, "drastic actions" would follow, a thinly veiled threat of direct American intervention.

Machado stalled, hoping to cling to power. But the final blow came from within his own military. Anti-Machado conspirators in the army had invited General Herrera to join their coup. Instead, the *Machadoista's* Minister of War tried to disarm them, sparking a mutiny.

Early am Saturday August 12th 1933 Machado personally visited the *Fort Columbia Military Barracks* just outside of Havana hoping to use his charisma and military history to suppress the mutiny. He found General Herrera was still struggling to contain the revolt, when he himself was confronted by a group of officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. They told him respectfully if bluntly: to save Cuba from U.S. intervention and occupation, Machado had to go. Realizing his power base was gone, Machado finally gave in and put Welles's plan in motion that same day, and wrote the following (translated) petition for a leave of absence as follows:

Honorable Congress:

For reasons which I need not explain at this moment, I had decided to present a resignation from my post. Owing to the requirements of the Constitution I now ask a simple leave of absence, but wish to state that my resignation is hereby to take effect in due course

In abandoning Executive power I wish to congratulate all the members of the legislative body, of all parties including the Oppositionists, for the cooperation extended and the patriotic labors accomplished during the past years, which will go down in history.

Geraldo Machado

Early Afternoon August 12th, while waiting at his country estate ~ 17 km south of Havana *La Nenita* outside *Santiago de las Vegas* for the formal announcement of his resignation, Machado learned that riots in Havana were spreading out of control, and neither the military nor the police were making any attempts to stop them.



Protestors were attacking the government buildings, as well as those businesses owned by Machado, such as the offices of his private newspaper, *Heraldo de Cuba*, and a huge mob wrecked the presses (see above). The Presidential Palace was ransacked, and after heavy furniture was thrown out the windows, looters took off with everything from Presidential cutlery to bedsheets. Also happily looted and then set on fire were the private homes of many in his Cabinet, with special attention paid to the hated Mayor of Havana Sr. José Izquierdo, & the loathed Minister of the Interior, Sr. Octavio Zubizarreta for home the *Porra* worked for.



Signs posts marking *General Machado Avenue* were torn down by hordes of young women. The new

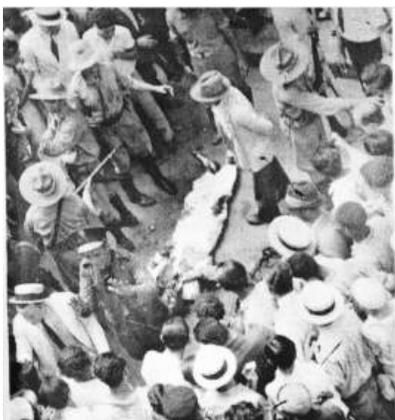
Machado *Monument* was destroyed by victorious patriots with crowbars defacing Machado's bronze visage, and his image on the bronze doors of the *National Capital* building was effaced similarly.



Green flags from the A.B.C. Movement were publicly displayed, and members of the group publicly travelled in marked vehicles which were cheered on by the hugely excited crowds of ordinary Cubans.



Grisly street vigilante justice was also meted out to any members of the *Porra* that could be found. Some were killed in the streets, gunned or hacked down with machetes, and then after slowly dying as the mob cheered, their corpses were mutilated. Others were offered a pistol loaded with one bullet to kill themselves more humanely before others took away that opportunity.



Reports that two US Destroyers were churning their way into Havana Harbour to protect US interests were correct but would not arrive until later.

2 pm Saturday August 12th The now ex-President Machado fled from his stately country plantation *La*

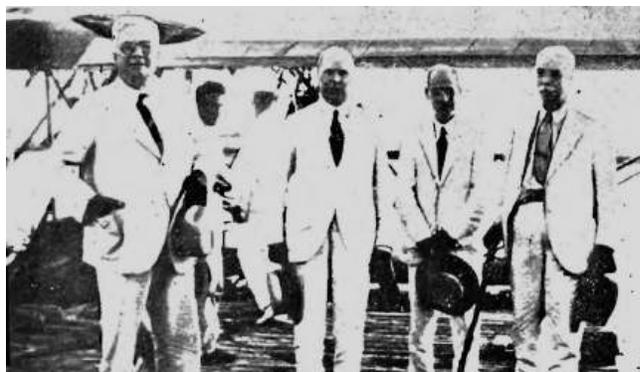
Nenita south of Havana in *Santiago de Vegas*, to the General Machado Airport (formerly *Rancho Boyeros Airport*) in his armoured 1933 Lincoln KA.

He chartered the only plane available: a Sikorsky S-38 amphibious craft owned by the *Compañía Nacional Cubana de Aviación*, a subsidiary of Pan American Airways. The plane was crewed by two Americans, and the airplane's presence was arranged by none other than US Ambassador Welles himself.



With the amphibious plane's pilot Al McCullough and his co-pilot Ramos, there was barely room in the six-seater for Machado and loyalists:

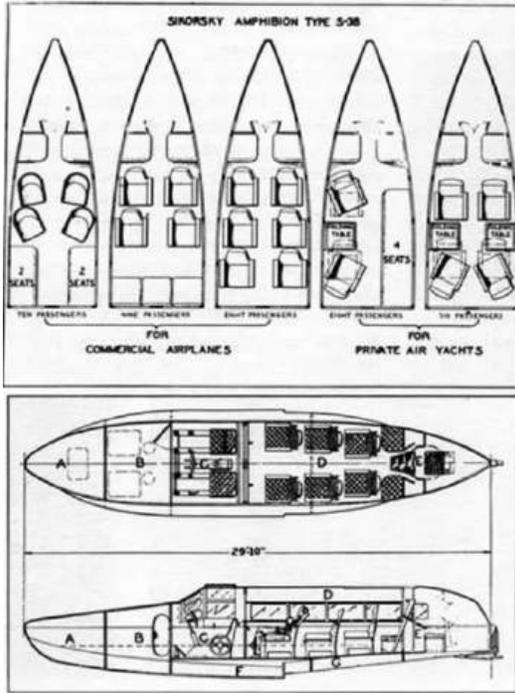
- José "Pepito" **Izquierdo** (*former Mayor of Havana*)
- Octavio **Averhoff**, former Cuban Secretary of Finance, nicknamed *the Rooster*.
- Captain Manuel **Crespo** y Moreno, former head of the Presidential Palace Guard & infamous *Porra* torturer.
- General Antonio **Ainciart**, ex Chief of the Cuban National Police.
- Captain Jorge **Vila**, president of *Compañía Nacional Cubana de Aviación*
- Dr. Eugenio **Molinet** y Amorós, former Cuban Minister of Agriculture
- Machado's trusted valet and bodyguard, **Molinar**, also squeezed aboard.



(L →R; Machado, Averhoff, Izquierdo, & Molinet at the airport)

There was barely room for a fraction of their very heavy baggage, not just suitcases, but crates crated paintings on that final flight.

However, both the control tower nor the aviation company refused to let the Machado's plane depart without express permission from the War Department and the *Cuban Aviation Corps*, which now controlled the island. For an hour and a half, Machado sat calm while his cronies grew increasingly nervous and agitated, pacing the runway as armed soldiers warily watched from a distance.



3 pm Saturday August 12th Finally, the official permit came through. But moments before departure as preparations for departure were being made, luggage being weighed and the plane balanced, the airport officials received a warning that an armed mob was racing toward the field, having learned of the *Tyrant's* planned escape. Flight preparations were rushed but finally at **3:32 p.m.**, the Sikorsky S-38 roared to life and lifted off the airstrip toward *Varadero Beach* on the north coast near Cardenas, Matanzas Province, where other members of Machado's family would be taken aboard, and then take off again heading east to the onto the Bahamas and exile.

And the hastily patched-together American backed provisional government that replaced him, backed by the A.B.C. and some of the more pro-American and pro-business opposition, proved fragile and short-lived. The true Cuban Revolution of 1933 was still to come.

Epilogue

Ex Cuban President's Geraldo Machoda's desperate flight to Nassau Bahamas would be a one-way escape. After travelling, first to Montreal Quebec Canada where he stayed at the Mont Royal Hotel, for

a time. Along with other birthday greetings the ex-President received (and kept and later donated to the University of Florida) somehow the A.B.C. found out where he was staying and sent him rather sinister birthday telegram (which I will translate);

HAVANA CUBA SEPT 25-757P

GERARDO MACHADO FORMER DICTATOR OF CUBA MONTREAL QUE.

MANY BOMBS ON YOUR DAY. SAY YOUR PRAYERS YOUR DEATH IS IMMEDIATE. HAPPINESS, CUBA.

ABC.

He would next travel by ocean liner to the Reich in Hamburg Germany. "The Donkey with Claws" would eventually settle in the United States where in Miami Beach.

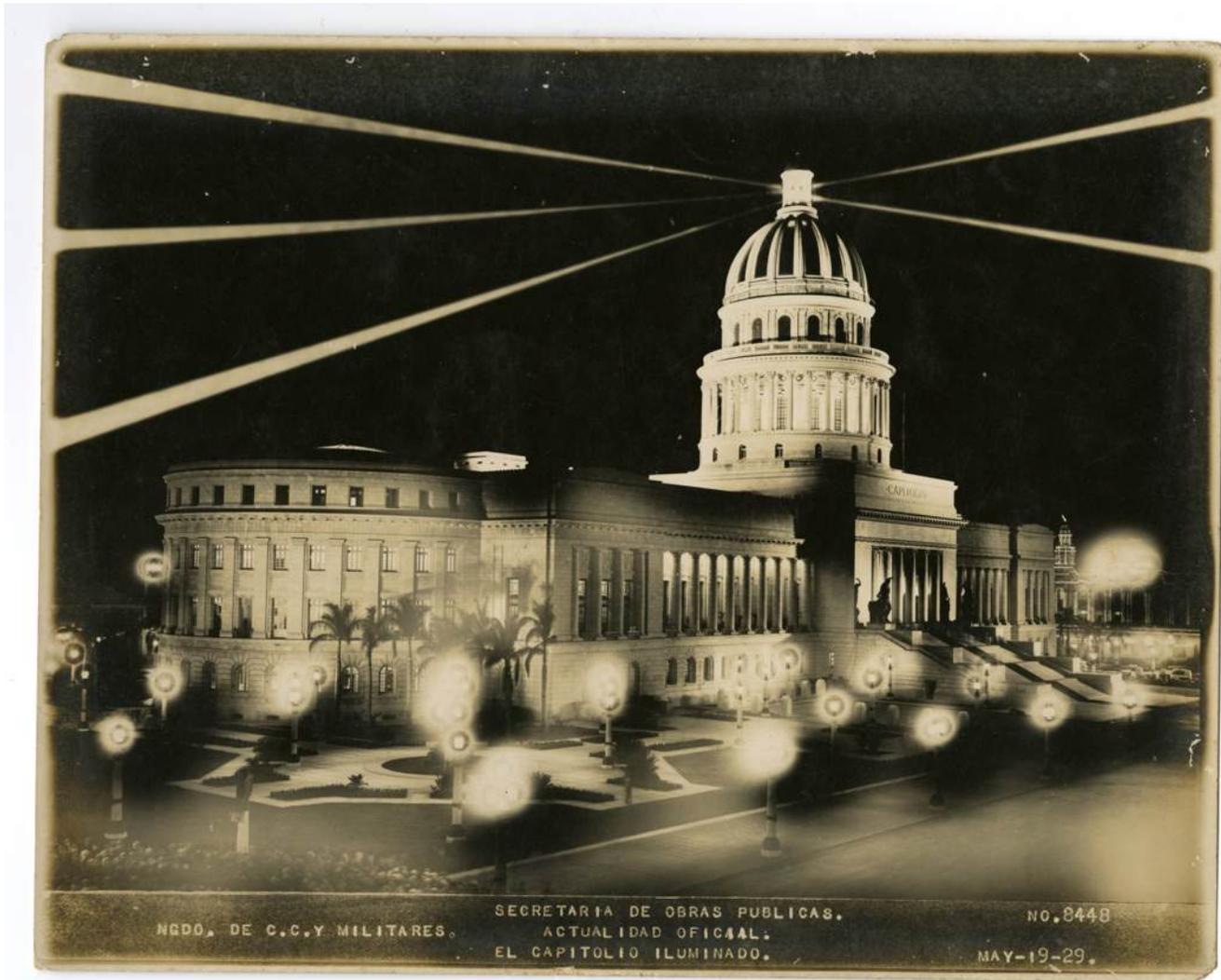
In a later newspaper interview, Machado refused to discuss his flight to exile, instead boasting that for years he was hailed as the Torch Man, the God Man — with streets, statues, and admirers across Cuba. He denied any blame for his downfall, accusing the US Ambassador and a fickle Cuban public of abandoning him for rabble rousers and self-serving opportunists.



Still scheming to head back with other exiled loyalists, Machado died of colon cancer in exile on March 29th 1939 a little over 5.5 years later at the age of 69. Many personal papers and photos from post-exile were donated to the University of Florida after his death.

Machado & Havana 193X RPG Adventure Hooks:

This background will hopefully help Keepers/GMs bring Havana and Cuba to life during Machado's rule. I wrote a few scenario ideas against different eras of this this backdrop ***El Fantasma of El Capitolio*** was inspired by the years when Cuba slipped from a bright prosperity under Machado's iron grip into growing dread. ***The Tomb Trap: The A.B.C's Stolen Funeral Bomb*** belongs to the period when his rule curdled into tyranny. Finally, ***Machado's Millions*** follows the events inspired by rumours of his flight to exile in the chaotic prelude to the true Revolution of 1933 still to come.



El Fantasma of El Capitolio

(Era: 1928–1931)

Background:

When Havana’s **Capitolio Nacional** opened with bombast in May 1929, its grand neoclassical dome and gleaming marble halls proclaimed Cuba’s supposed prosperity to the watching world. At a cost of 17 million pesos (over \$350 million USD today) taking an army of 5000 construction workers over three years to build, the project gutted the treasury but cemented Gerardo Machado’s image as Cuba’s “Modernizer President.”

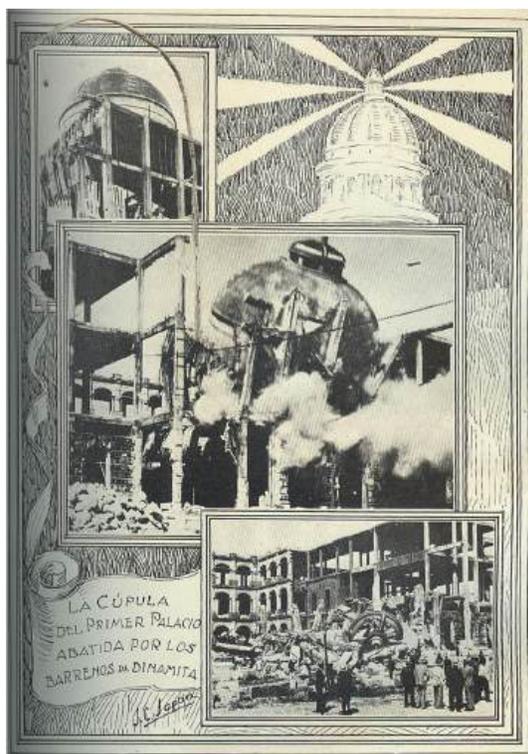
Inside the main entrance rotunda under the massive dome stands *La República*, a titanic bronze creole version of the goddess Athena giantess cast in Rome, then after transport to Havana in 14 massive crates was gilded in 22-carat gold. She towers 17.6-metre-tall, and after the statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial, it is the tallest indoor statue in the Americas.



And at her feet is the very heart of the Capitol, embedded in a bronze star on the floor of the marble rotunda, lies *El Brillante*, the massive diamond that marks Kilometer Zero of the new Central Highway.

The foundation of this new Capital of Cuba rose atop the old *Havana Park* — a shabby amusement ground where rollercoasters rattled through the skeletal ironwork of a failed Republican Palace construction attempt abandoned a decade earlier. Back then neon frogs hawked gin to American tourists beneath the rusting dome meant to symbolize a brighter republic.

Beneath it all lay the remnants of the Villanueva train station, itself built atop swampy landfill, the old garbage heap outside the colonial walls of Old Havana.



When Machado's American contractors, Purdy & Henderson dynamite-demolished the crumbling dome in 1926, the blast did more than clear the skyline for his grand vision. It cracked open forgotten layers below, which included Spanish catacombs, colonial crypts, refuse pits, and the restless bones of prisoners, slaves, and heretics. The American contractors, bound by orders to keep the schedule at all costs, poured concrete over what they found

Then the construction deaths began.

A collapsing wall. A drowning in quick-setting cement. A welder crushed by a fallen iron beam. Later their names would permanently chiseled into marble as a "fallen hero of progress."

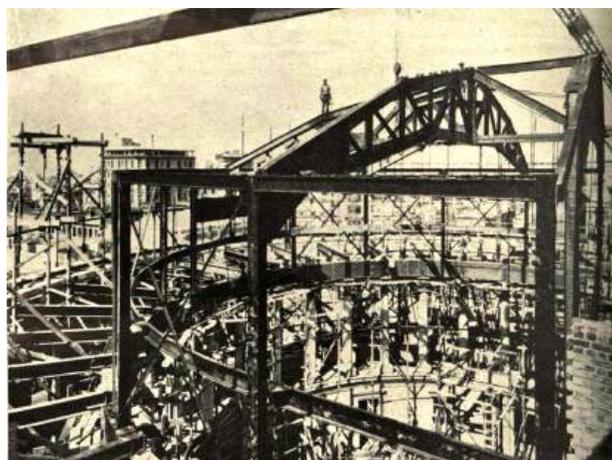
- **VICENTE MASSANET** - July 16, 1926
- **ÁNGEL CASTRO** - June 16, 1927
- **RAMÓN OLIVERA** - Aug. 25, 1927

By the end of 1927, beneath the imported marble floors, in the basements and darker sub-basements something old and malign seemed to stir. Workers whispered of icy drafts from nowhere, of tools corroding into rust overnight, of strange symbols scorched into basement walls overnight. Cleaners reported chanting under the floors. Some swore the Capitol's foundation stone wept blood when Havana's summer storms lashed the plaza. Sceptics called it swamp seepage the since the land had once been a Spanish garbage dump after all.

El Capitolio's construction schedule fell behind and Machado was angered when it became obvious the building would not be completed in time for the 1928 Pan-Am conference Havana was hosting. There were more delays that same year. The massive Dome shipped into the US needed reinforcing. Electrical equipment became erratic. Lightbulbs exploded and copper wires were stolen. There were more deaths too; a scaffold "accident." A corpse frozen in a locked storeroom, hastily ruled a refrigeration accident.

- **PEDRO HERNÁNDEZ** Nov. 22, 1928
- **BERESCFORD GRAGWELL** Jan. 7, 1929

By mid January 1929, maintenance crews refused to stay past dusk without armed guards. Even more orkers claimed they saw mysterious glowing lights flitting about the girders and cladding. Dubbed 'Fantasmas', 'Phantom' or 'Ghost Sightings' some workers even claimed strange glows had been seen even before the beginning of the new year. By February, after rumours of finding frost on the newly installed gold leaf covered statue of The Republic, many more simply stopped showing up to work.



The structure of the Dome's lantern had been left undefined by the engineers who drew up the project, which added further delay until just November. The final solution was finally adopted because of decisions taken on site to reinforce it against the prevailing winds, and to allow room for the electrical equipment needed for the lighting system and new **Scintillator** inside the lantern. The first in the world, this was an array of unique five massive arc-lamp projectors, rotating on dual axes, each throwing 60 million candlepower beams so bright there were claims made they would be able to be seen as far as the Florida's Keys on clear nights.

But the Scintillator apparatus which had worked perfectly when tested back in the US didn't work in Havana. Circuits shorted, arcs sputtered, and glass bulbs shattered. After missing their earlier bonus deadline, the desperate American contractors brought in **Edgar Talbot**, a jittery electrical

engineering genius from Philadelphia, to fix the system before the grand switch-on later that spring.

Then **Talbot** vanished 10 days after starting the job.

Starting Point for the adventure:

The PCs are hired (or stumble in) to investigate the *disappearance* of **Edgar Talbot**, the American electrical engineer. This can come through any one or more from the following:

- A desperate local manager for the construction firm Purdy & Henderson who fears the whole Scintillator project will fail and he'll take the blame.
- A quiet request from an American consular staffer about scandal if Talbot's body turns up dead in Havana.
- Talbot's bizarre postcard to his sister:



El Fantasma El Capitolio GM Secrets:

A Scientific Haunting by the X.Y.Z.

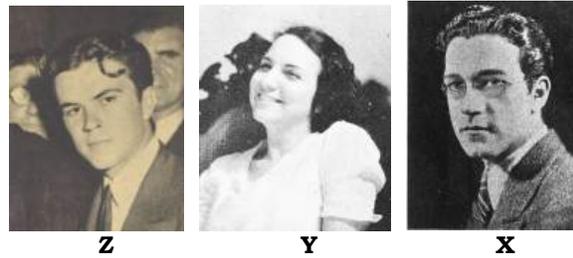
In late 1928 three young conspirators styling themselves the **Z.Y.X.** (two men and a woman, their alias taken from the initials of their given names), made their way through the sewers, and then through a buried, forgotten railway spur tunnel beneath Havana and under the new Capital building being constructed. With some difficulty, they made their way up into the sealed Spanish colonial catacombs, and upwards and into the unfinished sub-cellars and thoroughly explored the ever changing construction site.

Their aim after getting inside? Terrify the workforce, stall construction, and bring down Machado's "Temple to Caesarism."

The Z.Y.X.'s real names:

- **Z: Zenón Alvarez** disillusioned engineering student turned self-styled "rational revolutionary."
- **Y: Ynes Valdés**, a fiery young science teacher, expelled for radical pamphlets; She's the charismatic brain behind the hauntings.

- **X: Xavier Riera**, once a medical intern, obsessed with fringe biology and hypnotism — the cell's secret cynic and manipulator.



These three believed that mainstream *anti-machodists* lacked true elitism. Z.Y.X. want not democracy but rule by the scientifically gifted, a kind of utopian technocracy, inspired less by politics than by the wild promises of American *scientifiction* magazines smuggled in untranslated into Cuba.

In their naïve vision, modern science and ancient superstition would blend into a new arsenal of psychological warfare against those working on the new capital building. *Havana Park's* 1926 demolition had left odd scraps behind: funhouse mirrors, old neon tubing, a battered wire recorder, kaleidoscope light projectors. The Z.Y.X. salvaged it all, and added to it items pilfered from Havana University.

They wove "scientific hauntings" into a spectacle of fear:

- They drew bizarre glyphs in Vaseline, then hit them with UV spotlights controlled from their own switches secretly spliced into the real controls, then switch then off and clean off the previously glowing Vaseline
- They piped sounds of Gregorian chants, slowed down and distorted in pitch on the wire recorder, through the Capitol's overhead speaker grid,
- They sabotaged construction tools, some stolen outright, others soak with strong acid overnight and then rinsed and dried and returned looking bizarrely corroded and aged.
- Funhouse mirrors turned shadowy sub-cellars into ghostly labyrinths.
- Neon tubing and arc lights hidden deep in new AC vents, conjured up shifting shapes in mist and in the dark.

Throughout most of 1928 they thought they were clever. They thought the charade of a haunting would keep prying eyes away from secret meetings and smuggled hectograph printing presses to churn out pamphlets against the government. But as they prowled the sealed crypts beneath the old Villanueva rail station reading half-forgotten Spanish grimoires aloud in flickering candlelight and donning silk ceremonial robes found in damp chests more for laughs than anything else, they stumbled on something far older than any colonial burial ground.

Pandora's Lead Casket is Opened

Late in October 1928, in the deepest vaults, the three Z.Y.X. found in addition to old worm-eaten Spanish grimoires and mouldering robes and bones in the crypt a small and incredibly heavy casket about the size of a shoe box covered in crosses. They were excited, but disappointed that inside that instead of gold there was rather ugly and very heavy misshapen rock about the size of two clenched fists and not nearly as symmetrical. It was black and charred, covered with thumb-sized depressions.

When Xavier had opened the casket he had accidentally dropped it and the rock inside, breaking the casket and chipping the rock. The chip showed an interior shiny like black glass. The lumpy rock was incredibly hard, and left no streak when Ynes scratched it against a tile (and in fact cut and broke it), and it attracted the north end of the compass Zenon had brought along to help with their tunnel navigations underground.

Baffled why anyone would want a heavy rock, nor why it had been in a lead-lined casket they simply left it. But they underestimated what they had done.

The Thing Within

The rock was meteorite, but no ordinary meteorite. It is speckled internally by a matrix of hexagonal microdiamonds each no wider than a human hair but is >50% stronger than conventional terrestrial diamond. Centuries ago, it had plummeted glowing to earth and when found was seized by a desperate cannibal cult on the fetid swamp beyond Old Havana's walls. They fed it blood and fear in obscene rites, worshipping the thing it carried: a formless presence, neither living nor dead, a parasite of energy and consciousness born beyond the stars.

Horrified by the cult's cannibal feasts, the Spanish burned them out with fire and steel. But killing the worshippers was not enough. Knowing they could not destroy the entity, and not wanting to mess around with it any more the Spanish Jesuit priests sealed the meteorite in a lead-lined casket, burying it beneath the refuse heaps and swamps far outside Havana's city walls which had been completed in 1740. There it slept, blind and dreaming until the Z.Y.X., rummaging for secrets in the catacombs, cracked its tomb and woke the Thing Within once more.

This force-entity feeds not only on fear and pain but also on magnetic currents. The swirling streams of electricity that hum through the Capitol's Dome and its web of cables are ambrosia to it — fuel for its unnatural growth. Swirling slowly in this new surge of power as the beautiful but lifeless eyes of *La República* look on, the Entity which others will later dub *El Fantasma* has learned to bind the lightest of dust particles to itself, taking on a shifting, half-visible form: an animated aurora of eerie, spectral light that flickers and drifts with no fixed shape.



At first, it could only stir light dust, then rock powder powdered dry cement that, when charged, glow with a ghostly hue that terrified the night shift. Nervous workers started whispering of *El Fantasma* or 'The Phantom'.

Soon, the Thing's power grew. It could drag heavier scraps: wires, loose cables, even coils of iron. Hungry for every volt, it cracked bulbs and overloaded circuits, its sabotage causing the Scintillator's repeated failures.

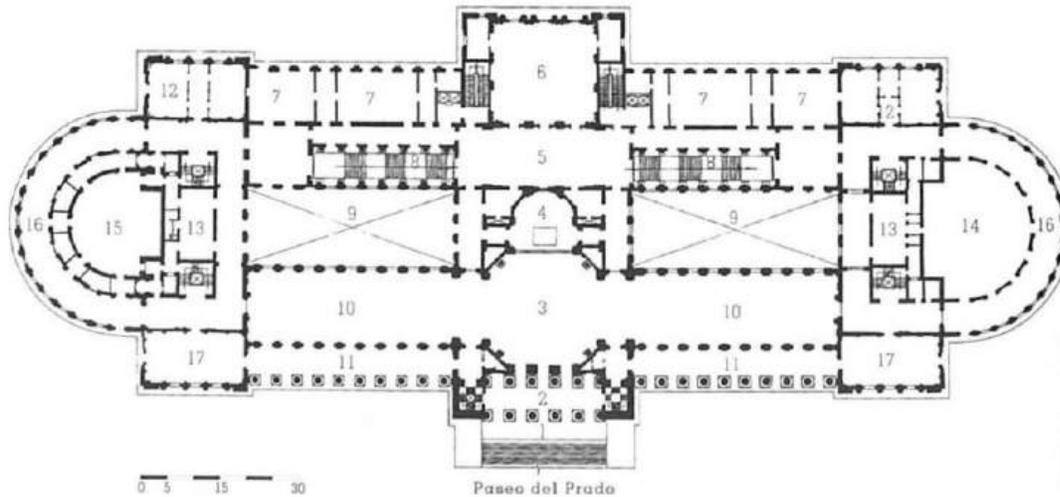
Yet the electric currents flowing through the Dome's metal bones alone can't sate it it craves the raw emotional charge that only living minds can supply. One of its first real victims was Berescford Gragwell, an electrician who caught the Thing's draining flow and tried to shut down the power feed. They found him frozen stiff on a balmy January day of 22 degrees Celsius — his thermal and psychic energy utterly leached away.

Since then, five more workers have vanished, with the Entity more careful to hide their remains. After feeding, the Thing shambled their cold, empty bodies down into the hidden catacombs, discarding them on the ground near the broken lead casket that once imprisoned its meteorite shell. Their absences were dismissed by foremen "superstitious deserters" too ashamed to claim unpaid back wages.

Bright light repels it. Daylight, floodlights, or the Scintillator's full blaze all disrupt its feeding. To the Thing, the dome's beacon is both a threat and a prize: the arc lamps' power draws it in, but the searing beam leaks energy it wants hoarded in delicious darkness. So it shatters bulbs, warps carbon rods, and tries to keep the Scintillator sputtering, broken enough to feed it, never whole enough to shine properly.

Talbot's final insight was this: if the Scintillator works at full force, its massive current could disrupt the Thing's resonance. Combined with *El Brillante* — the Kilometer Zero diamond's properly focused light

El Capitolio floor plan.



1: Steps, 2: Entrance Portico, 3: Rotunda, 4: Apse with statue *La Republica*, 5: Salon de Marti, 6: Library, 7: Committee room, 8: Stair of Honor, 9: Patio-garden, 10: Salon (*pasos perdidos*), 12: Secretary, 14: Senate, 15: Cámara, 16: Gallery.

might scatter the creature's binding energies and sever its internal cohesion and destroy it.

Talbot's final insight was this: if the Scintillator works at full force, its massive current could disrupt the Thing's resonance. Combined with *El Brillante* — the Kilometer Zero diamond's properly focused light might scatter the creature's binding energies and sever its internal cohesion and destroy it.

Z.Y.X. Is Fatally Divided

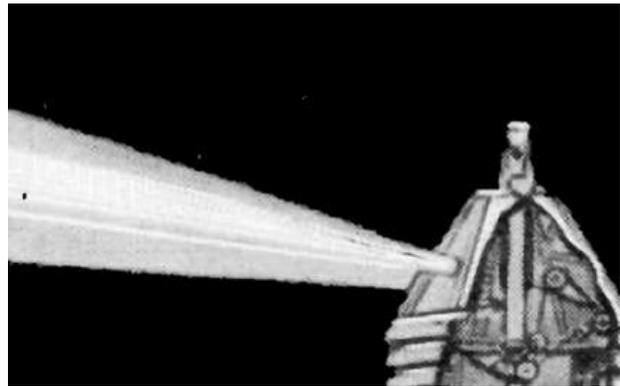
After witnessing the horrible the death of the electrical worker, all three members of X.Z.Y. realize their fake hauntings have somehow led to the emergence of a real *Fantasma*! They are divided on their next steps: one of their tiny coterie wants to fix their blunder but fear the wrath of the others. The other two want to *use* the entity.

- Zenón (Z) still believes they can control *El Fantasma*; that fear is power, and this terror is a tool. He dreams of directing it like a psychic weapon to destroy the Machado regime, then vanish it again. He thinks he's the mastermind but is out of his depth.
- Ynes (Y) is horrified. She was the moral heart of their tiny group. She is rationalist at first, but now convinced this thing must be destroyed at any cost. She's secretly looking for a way to sabotage Zenón's plan and might help the PCs if they can win her trust.
- Xavier (X) is the true viper in their coterie. He claims to back Zenón, but he's been secretly whispering to the entity in the vaults, trying to

merge with it, believing it can grant him unnatural power. He's unstable, cunning, and possibly already half-bound to the thing.

And into this mix comes the American engineer

The Case of the Failing Scintillator



The **Scintillator** is a massive, architectural-scale *searchlight array* of five enormous carbon arc lamps mounted on rotating, motorized bases inside the Capitol dome's lantern (the glassed cupola structure crowning the dome). Each of the 5 arc lamps is 26 inches in diameter (real spec!), uses carbon rods to create a searing arc of electric light, and can pivot horizontally and vertically, so beams sweep across the night sky. It was state of the art of late 1920s technology, and not surpassed until the beacon lights inside the dirigible mooring mast of the Empire State Building were built.

Talbot had been baffled from the moment he stepped off the *Munson liner* and set foot in Havana. The Scintillator itself should produce up to 60 million candlepower, visible for 100 miles, even to Key West. But each time when turned on the, mighty Scintillator sputtered, shorted out, or burned through carbon rods far too quickly.

Armed with crates of test instruments and replacement parts, Talbot spent long hours high in the Capitol's lantern dome, tracing circuits and measuring stray voltages.

At first the anomalies seemed like routine glitches and gremlins any engineer might shrug off:

- Voltage fluctuations in isolated cables.
- A faint magnetic hum that drained his batteries overnight.
- Tools misplaced, or worse, corroded to rust within hours.
- Replaced wires found twisted or half-fused days later, as if gnawed by something invisible.

But Talbot was methodical. He sketched the dome's iron skeleton, the spiderweb of cabling, even the old catacombs rumored to snake under the Capitol's foundations all in a desperate attempt to track where the current *bled away*.



What he found made no sense: the power seemed to vanish into the marble vaults and the thin air under the lantern's dome — impossible leaks that defied physics. When asked for answers by the construction firm, he stalled for time. He needed to *understand* before he could explain.

His confusion turned to dread when he noticed a rhythm in his readings: a pulse, like a heartbeat, echoing the strange parabola of the dome's iron shell. Alone at night in the echoing lantern, Talbot felt watched. He scratched wild notes by candlelight — and found strange glyphs in the margins that he didn't remember writing. They matched the luminous glyphs the English edition of one yellow

newspaper claimed to have been seen and sketched by workers who had quit on the spot.

When Talbot did sleep, it brought him no peace, only visions of swirling nebulae, glittering a rock that sparked living light, and a vast glowing hungry *thing* without shape or name pressing closer each night. He woke at his desk to find his blueprints covered in frantic sketches — cross-sections of the dome, the lantern's power grid, scribbled equations that made no sense even to him.

A week later, tracing a stubborn current drain in the sub-basement, Talbot crawled through a narrow crawlspace — and found the strange meteorite the Z.Y.X. had dropped and abandoned. Charred and cratered, heavy as lead yet glassy under his lamp, it hummed faintly when he touched it.

Pain shot through his skull. In that instant, whispers flooded his mind: *More flux. More fear.* He recoiled, dropped the thing, and fled upstairs, reeling with dread.

In fleeting moments of lucidity, he fought back — scrawling frantic notes, slipping a cryptic postcard to his sister in Erie, Pennsylvania. He tried to warn the American foremen the next morning, but it was Sunday. The offices were locked tight and there was no means to leave a message.

By then it was too late. Talbot realized the Dome's complex iron and steel skeleton and the Scintillator's pulsing currents weren't just *leaking* power, they were *feeding* something that could not be seen. A thing that fed on fear, pain, and electricity, like a parasite building itself a body out of raw psychic anguish.

In one last attempt to starve it, Talbot tried to reroute the circuits, and *El Fantasma* struck. Instead of killing him, it enveloped and walked him down like a clumsy meat puppet down into the Capitol's hidden vault, planning to eventually bind him as the living nucleus around which it could grow a true physical form.

Days later, Talbot's scattered papers in his room at the *Hotel Inghilterra* would reveal the truth to any who assembled them in the correct order and dared to read them:

Yet Talbot's last cryptic clues hints at hope: *El Brillante*, the flawless 24-carat diamond at Kilometer Zero, might disrupt the thing's resonance. The entity evolved to nuzzle among the hexagonal diamond lattice inside the meteorite, but the pure cubic crystal lattice of a terrestrial diamond could act like a poisoned blade. *If* someone can repair the *Scintillator* properly and align the diamond to act as a deadly filter for the brilliant rays of one of the power arc lights, the very current that feeds the phantom could scatter it like mist before a hurricane.

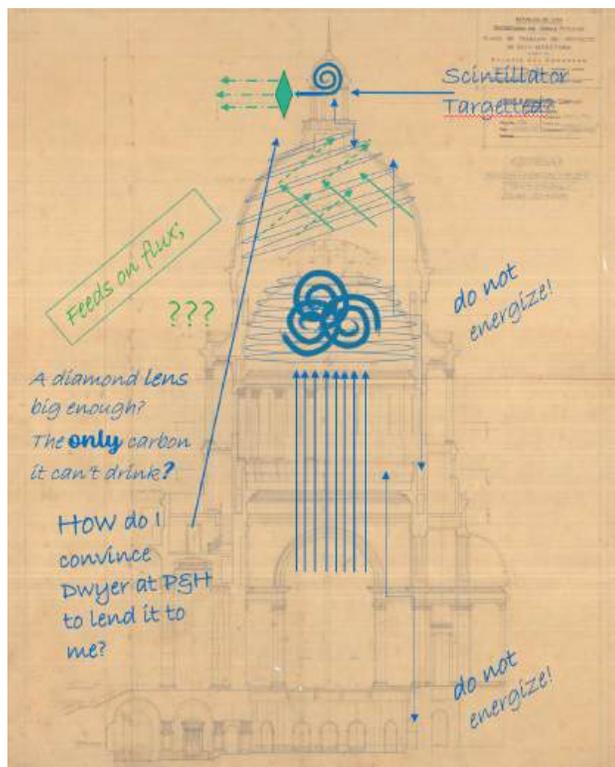
Tracing Talbot's last known movements:

Visit Talbot's room at the *Hotel Inglaterra*

The hotel is just blocks away from the Capitol construction site; the room was paid for by P&H but only until the end of the week. Talking to the maids and will reveal he had no visitors, didn't sleep over the last day he was seen; some thought he was talking loudly, even yelling in his sleep as if acting out a bad dream

The room is very clean, and inside there isn't very much

- Suitcase, extra clothing,
- some recent American magazines.
- a list of itemized expenses including "box of 10 flashlights with extra bulbs and dry batteries: \$12' from a local hardware store, and 'bribe to *Sargento Teófilo Muñiz* of the Nacional Police: \$10'
- Some extra electrical equipment, slide rule.
- Bizarre marginalia scribbled on blue prints of the Dome and lantern (see image below)



Visit the Havana office of Purdy & Henderson and speak to his liaison.

Talbot's main point of contact was *Mr. Charles E. Dwyer*; an ambitious young American civil engineer and junior project manager. Dwyer's a mid-level technical overseer, well-spoken, technically competent but easily rattled by strange delays. He thought Talbot was a bit unhinged but trusted his

technical genius to fix the *Scintillator* issues that had embarrassed his company with repeated failures.

Dwyer had signed off on Talbot's special orders for additional electrical parts and kept him housed at the *Hotel Inglaterra*. He also has a vague sense that Talbot became more agitated after poking around the old sub-cellars but Dwyer brushed it off as nerves. He noticed Talbot seemed strange, nervous, and jittery; refused to say what he thought was going wrong with the *Scintillator* other than some kind of unusual external grounding on the power cabling he was determined to uncover.

Visiting El Capitolio Construction Site

The construction site is frenetic with activity during the day, probably because workers are willing to be here after dark. Passes or someone designated to guide them inside are required if they were not hired through the Purdy & Henderson, especially now the immensely valuable gilded *Statue of the Republic* had just been installed in February.



In February-March 1929, *El Capitolio Nacional de Cuba* is still a massive, echoing shell of a building. It's clearly not yet furnished, with much work still occurring on the outside with the steps, gardens, statues still to be put outside, and *buzzing* with last-minute installations.



Through the now installed and impressive bronze doors the gleaming Statue of the Republic now stands, half-shrouded by scaffolding and ladders, while skilled workers looking like mustachioed Lilliputians wearing very clean coveralls touch up its delicate gold leaf. The *Kilometer Zero Diamond* has not yet been placed in its socket in centre of the floor the rotunda with the bronze star setting will be eventually be placed.

High overhead, scaffolding and catwalks crisscross beneath the vast Rotunda dome and extend into the echoing Halls of Lost Steps and the unfinished hemicycles that will soon house the *Senate* and *Cámara* chambers. There are plasters and painters calling out in Spanish and broken English to the foremen working for the American construction firm.

Crates stamped *Purdy & Henderson* lie stacked in corners, brimming with imported brass fixtures, mahogany panels, and sheets of European glass. In some back meeting rooms, marble tiles still wait on wooden pallets for careful placement by master craftsmen. Behind the statue approached by several corridors is the Grand Library's filled with empty soaring and polished mahogany wood shelves, waiting for the first legal and other books to grace them. The two open gardens can be seen with gardeners planting trees and flowers.

Toolboxes, soldering irons, buckets of acid wash for marble polishing, and other tradesmen's supplies are scattered through the corridors, left unattended after dark. Half of the new elevators are installed but many shafts remain yawning, barricaded pits. Cool drafts drift up through open ventilation grates now that the new air conditioning system hums fitfully, and copper pipes snake through the basement awaiting the final connections of the Capitol's massive central vacuum system.

All the while, dozens of temporary electric work lights dangle from rough hooks beside open junction boxes and tangled wires. Down in the basements, temporary generators thrum and shudder, keeping the half-finished grid alive while the Cuban Electric Company's connections are tested floor by floor.

Finally heading up to the Dome Lantern & *Scintillator*, access to the Lantern is made through internal staircases hidden inside the Dome. The Lantern itself sits on a 6.60 m diameter circular base and it is bordered by a bronze railing, with 10 Ionic columns and a gold-plated dome. Inside is the *Scintillator*, and the machinery to power the 5 rotating arc lamps includes giant induction motors and generators (DC output for the arc), rotating mountings, gearwork, and tracking arms.

Cables and conduits snake through the lantern's iron structure and care must be taken not to touch any of the live wires, nor brush too close to the gears if they try to operate such heavy machinery. Inside a central cabinet they can find extra carbon arcs, along with a notebook written in Talbot's handwriting. Inside are strange notes point to the catacombs under the sub-cellar where there was a 'rock that sparked', and a very bad smell.

If the Players Seek More Information?

For news they can try to seek out contacts with a local newspaper journalist working for *Diario de la Marina*, or monthly newsmagazines like *Bohemia* and *Cartale*.

One such a person is **César Varona y Gómez**, an up-and-coming free-lance reporter for *Diario de la Marina*, known for prior investigative pieces about graft in the prior regime, has been investigating stories of now 5 recent missing workers at *El Capitolio*; despite being told they had all fled the city, families of several of them have heard nothing. César himself is brash, charming, drinks too much, gambles a bit, but has informants among stevedores, taxi drivers, and bored secretaries at ministries.



If they ask quietly ask the right questions with the right people they can be connected with the local *Santería* religious community in Havana. **Reynerio Pérez Quezada**, an elegantly dressed black Cuban

man in his late 40s is a respected elder *Babalao* (high priest of Ifá), visiting friends in Havana's Cayo Hueso neighborhood. He has heard the rumors swirling that "Santería magic" is haunting *El Capitolio* but this well well-educated (he is also a bookseller) respected priest of the Orisha emphatically deny it and can explain that this *thing* is not of the Loa nor the Orisha it's an intruder, a "rogue" force the old ways don't fully contain. If convinced of the PCs good intentions they'll share charms, cleansing rites, or clues to old Spanish Church records about the Jesuits' last exorcism here.

Construction workers inside will not talk to *anyone*, but if spotted off-work outside having drinks at a bar or restaurant and given a 'Yanqi Dollar' (nb a day's wages would be \$2 USD) swear they will swear they saw him heading into a sealed sub-basement with a heavy case of equipment carried with a strap over his shoulder two days before he vanished.

There is no public library in Havana *per se* but there is a very extensive library at the University of Havana if the PCs develop a contact with a student or an academic working there

Other Possible Obstacles:

In 1929, the *Porra*, Machado's infamous secret police will not exist by that name until late 1930. But there are equivalents:

- Machado's regime relied heavily on his Presidential Palace Guards, the *Policia Nacional*, and *plainclothes political enforcers* unofficially known as "machadistas"; they may harass lone PCs, and accuse him or her of not having the right permits, and threaten him with "disorderly conduct" if they talk back. But really, all of them really just want a payoff of \$1 to \$5, depending on circumstances, a higher amount later during the day and night it is.
- **Sargento Teófilo Muñiz** of the *Policía Nacional*, who patrols the *El Capitolio* neighborhood by day, is a petty hustler who once shook down Talbot — who even listed the bribe on his expense sheet. Sloppily dressed with an unlit cigarette dangling from his lip, Muñiz will talk for \$5. He remembers the nervous *Yanqui* engineer fumbling maps, tools, and odd scribbles when stopped. Talbot dropped a battered metal engineer's pencil etched *E. TALBOT PHILADELPHIA* which Muñiz pocketed because good pencils are scarce. He also recalls rummaging through Talbot's bag and finding a folded blueprint marked: "DIAMOND AS FILTER? WHERE??"
- Security guards hired by Purdy & Henderson are now posted on the fenced off construction areas both day and night at the site will send away anyone without good reason to be on site; however a fast talking local reporter, or a pass supplied by Purdy & Henderson is shown, or a bribe (minimum 5 US or Cuban Pesos at night) they will not bother the Investigators

Exploring El Capitolio at Night

Real-World Dangers

- *Suspicious Night Watchmen*: Though Purdy & Henderson boast of tight security, they don't fully trust locals so they've hired jumpy private watchmen with dogs. Most can be bribed, but gunfire or loud noise will bring more guards running fast. There is one team of two that is slowly moving through the main level of the *El Capitolio* but they can be usually avoided.
- *Construction Hazards*: Open junction boxes, live wires, creaking scaffolds, and loose planks make every step risky. One slip could crash scaffolding to attract a guard, injure a PC, or kill power to an entire wing. The elevators are unreliable if called, a door may slide open onto a yawning black shaft; better take the stairs
- *Whose Afraid of the Dark?*: The basement and sub-basement levels are poorly lit; shattered bulbs and flickering circuits cast the shadows. The Entity's influence twists the electricians after its passage, and then there are the antics of Z.Y.X that are at work, and the PCs may hear weird, slowed-down moaning (Gregorian chants warped by hidden wire recordings playing back too slowly, or glimpse a glowing glyph that vanishes if touched, leaving behind only greasy Vaseline.

Tracking Clues

- While creeping through the half-finished marble halls, the PCs might notice faint trail along which they can find some of Talbot's abandoned electrical troubleshooting gear, another battered metal pencil etched "E. TALBOT - PHILADELPHIA," or a scrap of blueprint scribbled with "basement tunnel" and "catacomb steps" may lead them to the hidden crypt where the meteorite lays, along with There, half-buried among dusty stones, the missing construction workers lie stacked like cordwood: the Entity's hidden graveyard.
- A hidden hatch behind an unfinished elevator shaft could reveal footprints in marble dust leading to the old Villanueva rail tunnel; these scuffed footprints are from the Z.Y.X. conspirators slipping through hidden tunnels to enter and exit *El Capitolio* unseen. They may be able to back track these from wax drippings from candles they once used or other clues they could not entirely remove, that may lead to their hideout. Caution as parts of the route are boobytrapped. A stacked crate ready to topple marble blocks, tin cans strung to clatter an alarm, or a fake sealed door wired to a live current could all betray them.
- Inside the Z.Y.X. hideout, the PCs might find a hidden stash: a scrap of radical propaganda or Ynes Valdés's draft for "scientific hauntings,"

with an address scrawled on the back — a lead straight to their cell.

If the stumble into Z.Y.X.'s hidden haunt:

The splinter cell has claimed a hidden vault — a mix of crypt, storage, and staging ground under one of the sub-basements. Here the PCs discover a “scientific fake haunting” trove of equipment, a hectograph machine, paper, and about a dozen pamphlets promoting the aims of the ZYX and saying they are looking for new members.

On a d6 (roll every ½ hour while waiting there, they can find 1+2 =no one, 3+4 =Ynez, 5=Zenon and 6=Xavier. Keep on rolling every half hour after the first is found, and on 1-3/d6 another XYZ member joins them (GM's choice). Oddly enough the Entity doesn't intrude on Z.Y.X.'s space or on them for the time being as it considers Z.Y.X. as 'useful cattle/idiots' whose faked hauntings has raised the general level of unease and fear, which is all is the better for its more delightfully feeding.

If they find **Ynes** alone, she is rattled and second guessing what they have unleashed. From her they learn:

1. **The Z.Y.X. cell never wanted a real monster.** They were political elitists staging “ghosts” to spook the workers, not awaken cosmic parasites.
2. She comments that what she has seen in the horrible death of the electrical worker is somewhat resembles the threat in the 1927 HPL story “**The Color Out of Space**”. The have seen it several times flowing like a cloud of eerie light in the Dome above the rotunda, but have seen it flowing through into the space above it too.
3. **Edgar Talbot's disappearance spooked them too;** they tried to tail him, but now fear the all entity he disturbed will expose them *and* kill them next.
4. She knows about the location of the casket, the 'rock' and the crypts, but hasn't put 2 and 2 together, and hasn't been back since the creature has being using it as a crude waste disposal chamber
5. **She wants out** and sees the PCs as her chance to fix this. The other two are convinced *they* are manipulating the “haunting”, and don't fully grasp that the Thing is using *them*.
6. Ynes secretly passes the PCs crucial knowledge: where she thinks Talbot is held,
7. She warns them about *El Fantasma's* unnatural powers if they haven't encountered it ye personally, and said she overheard him muttering aloud that broken Scintillator *must not* be re-energized before the (diamond) filter is put in place.

If they find Zenón alone, he sees the PCs as a threat to his “Great Experiment” and will attack. If he finds them after they first find Ynez he will assume she has betrayed them all and attack Ynez, and then the PCs.

If they find Xavier alone, he wants power and won't help, but will play along until his companions arrive, and then try to convince them to help him feed the PCs to the Entity. Failing this, he will make his escape deep into the tunnels

The PCs may naturally decide if they want to 1) coerce the Z.Y.X., 2) split them, or 3) sabotage them, or 4) help them, all the while racing against *El Fantasma's* growing power.

Rescuing Talbot?:

Talbot still lives, but barely. He is sequestered inside in a hidden service chamber deep beneath the rotunda, one requested by Machado to be a historical vault but really to be another secret treasure hoard location of his own. Talbot is half-mad, half starved, and half-possessed. The Entity known as *El Fantasma* is reserving and attuning his mind to its powers to become its mortal *nucleus* to try to manifest more fully physically but Talbot's frail sanity stubbornly slows the process.

The ZYX members know where he can probably be located; Ynez would tell them if they meet her first, but will wait and see how they treat her companions.

- If freed too recklessly, *El Fantasmas* may erupt full force through Talbot, using him as a living Meat Puppet which cannot be harmed by mundane means, but can harm others while at the same time harming Talbot.
- If using distraction, by interfering with the building's electrical supply, or slowing with cold (say by shooting a pipe containing cold water) they may be able to save Talbot, who in turn can reveal the final wiring needed to *reverse* the Scintillator funneling the El Capitol's energy into a dispersal blast to shatter the thing's hold onto existence. But to do this, he needs the 24-carat diamond planned for installation in the floor of the rotunda. And he doesn't have it, though he knows where to find it, locked in the vault at P&H HQ.

THE MISSING DIAMOND AT KILOMETER ZERO



Plans are to set dead-center under the rotunda is *El Brillante* a perfect 24-carat diamond purchased to mark Kilometer Zero, the symbolic heart of Cuba's new Central Highway. It's a terrestrial diamond, meaning is made of crystalized cubic carbon, and this may be a possible solution to this problem. The ancient entity evolved to resonate within the hexagonal carbon structure of the matrix of hard *micro-diamonds* embedded in the meteorite.

- The cubic crystal of the terrestrial *El Brillante* diamond could act like a poisoned 'wood chipper', a cubic carbon lattice the entity cannot feed from, only shred and shatter against.
- Properly aligned, *El Brillante* can convert the *Scintillator's* full arc power from *feeding* the entity to *disrupting* its unnatural resonance, broadcasting out and diluting its malign psychic signature to oblivion.

However, plans to temporarily install *El Brillante* await the official opening (May 20th 1929), and the permanent installation after the true opening of Congress once all the interior fixtures are completed which is not set until February 1931. There is no diamond on the premises.

The massive 24-carat diamond, which is about the size of a small walnut, and would be worth millions of dollars today, is temporarily and quietly stored in the Havana offices of *Purdy & Henderson*. It's not yet mounted but sits locked inside a secure storeroom which is more like a bank-vault. It's displayed with great fanfare when foreign dignitaries or major backers visit to show the project's grandeur and how *Kilometer Zero* will unite the island's new Central Highway with the symbolic "heart" of the Republic.

Access is tightly controlled the diamond will be fitted into its bronze star mounting just days before the grand opening ceremony when the *Scintillator* is fully lit. Until then, it's guarded under lock and key, with a logbook for anyone who opens the secure storeroom.

Some effort by the PCs must be made to get the *El Brillante* to *El Capitolio*, either convincing the local construction manager Mr. Charles E. Dwyer. In desperation they could try to convince someone in Machado's cabinet to do so, but the latter would demand an armed guard, a full explanation, and talk so long that *El Fantasma* would likely complete its task.

***El Fantasma* (The Thing Within the Dome)**

(A "Color Out of Space"-inspired entity for *Call of Cthulhu 7E*)

STR: N/A (it has no conventional physical strength, but see POW)

CON: 120

SIZ: 50 (approx. when partially materialized)

DEX: 90

INT: 90

POW: 120

HP: 17 (SIZ + CON average / 10)

Move: 12 (or see "Flight")

Damage Bonus: —

Build: —

Armor: Immune to mundane weapons; some occult barriers or high-voltage bursts can inflict damage (see Special Abilities).

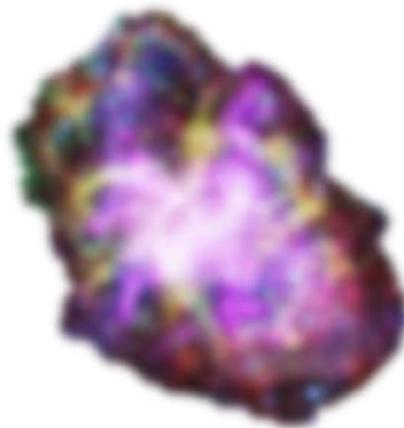
Combat

Attacks:

- **Psychic Drain (touch):** Drains 1D10 POW and 1D6 HP per round of contact. Victims frozen by the loss of thermal energy — treat as CON damage.
- **Auroral Touch (ranged):** 30% chance each round to arc a thin beam of scintillating energy up to 10 yards. On hit: 1D4 HP + 1D4 POW drain.
- **Possess Cadaver:** If it kills a human, it can puppet the corpse crudely for up to 2 hours before the body's tissue fails.
- **Possess the Insane:** If it temporarily drives a human Insane, it can puppet the living crudely for until it's Sanity is at least partially returned

Skills

Stealth 90, Listen 70, Spot Hidden 70, Psychic Communication 100 (acts like a subtle telepathy that can drive victims mad).



Powers & Traits

- **Formless:** Non-corporeal, passes through small cracks. Partial forms appear as mist, flickers of shifting aurora, or animate marble dust.
- **Fear Aura:** Any human seeing it must make a SAN roll (0/1D6). Direct psychic contact or "touch" attack: SAN 1D4/1D10.

- **Power Source:** Feeds on electricity. If starved of electrical flow or emotional fear, it weakens by 1 HP every 6 hours.
- **Light Vulnerability:** Bright continuous light weakens its cohesion: intense arc lamps, sunlight, or the *properly attuned Scintillator* cause 1D6 damage per round exposed.
- **Diamond Resonance:** If *El Brillante* is used as a filter or lens in the Scintillator, the Entity takes double damage from its beam.

Spells & Abilities

- Psychic Whispering: May implant disturbing dreams or compel vulnerable minds to sabotage equipment.
- Can “ride” electrical currents through cables.
- Cannot be fully destroyed by mundane means; only scattered/disrupted.

Sanity Loss

Witnessing its full manifestation: SAN 1D6/1D20
Being psychically contacted: SAN 1D4/1D10

Motivation

Feed, grow, disrupt light sources, keep the Dome’s power flowing, and eventually, extend its reach into the city through cables and terrified minds.

Weakness: If fully focused beams strike it while the 24-carat Kilometer Zero Diamond is properly mounted, it must make an opposed POW vs. Scintillator’s energy source. If it fails, it is violently dispersed back into inert crystal dust.

Notes for Keepers:

- Use the Entity like an animated environmental hazard as well as a monster.
- Its greatest weapon is fear, sabotage, and isolation.
- Defeating it requires clues, not bullets.

So...how do the PCs *fight back*?

A *purely mundane* fight will go badly — bullets, knives, clubs won’t kill an energy-resonant being. But pulp heroes *always* find a way. Possible tools:

Counter-Resonance:

- If the Scintillator can be *properly powered and aimed* — it can break the Thing’s resonance. The trick is getting enough juice flowing, aligning the reflectors, and using *El Brillante* as a filter or prism.
- PCs must *hold the Thing off* while someone repairs wiring or swaps arc carbons.
- Imagine a finale where the dome flickers with strobing beams, drawing the Thing into the beam-path before it’s blasted apart.

Professional/Improvised Banishing:

- Z.Y.X.’s Santería paraphernalia of salt lines, iron nails, sacred chants might help, and

Ynes may help PCs improvise a circle to contain the entity for precious minutes.

- A real Santería exorcism by a Brujah can force it back into dormancy *if* it’s weakened; the Babalao *REYNERIO PEREZ QUEZADA*, can be convinced to help if asked.

Bleed It Dry:

- The Thing feeds on *fear* and *electro-magnetic flux*. If the PCs cut power to the dome, it starves, but it will violently resist that.
- PCs might have to sabotage generators, dynamite cables, or force a blackout during the climax.

Attack the Meteorite:

- If the original meteorite fragment (the anchor) is found, it might be possible to encase it in lead again to sap its power
- *Caveat:* while blowing it up might disperse the Thing in all directions for short-term win, this can lead to long-term horror as it eventually reforms.

FACING OFF BEFORE THE FINAL HORROR

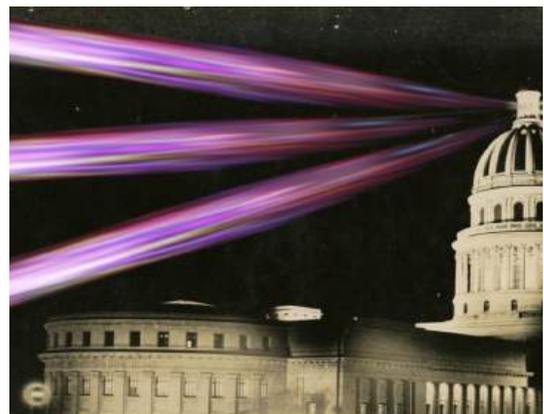
If the entity completes its “birth,” by outgrowing the Dome, which will occur within the next 7 days, it will become a terrible walking wearing Talbot’s body and trapped mind a *spectral tyrant* ready to slaughter its way through Havana’s streets.

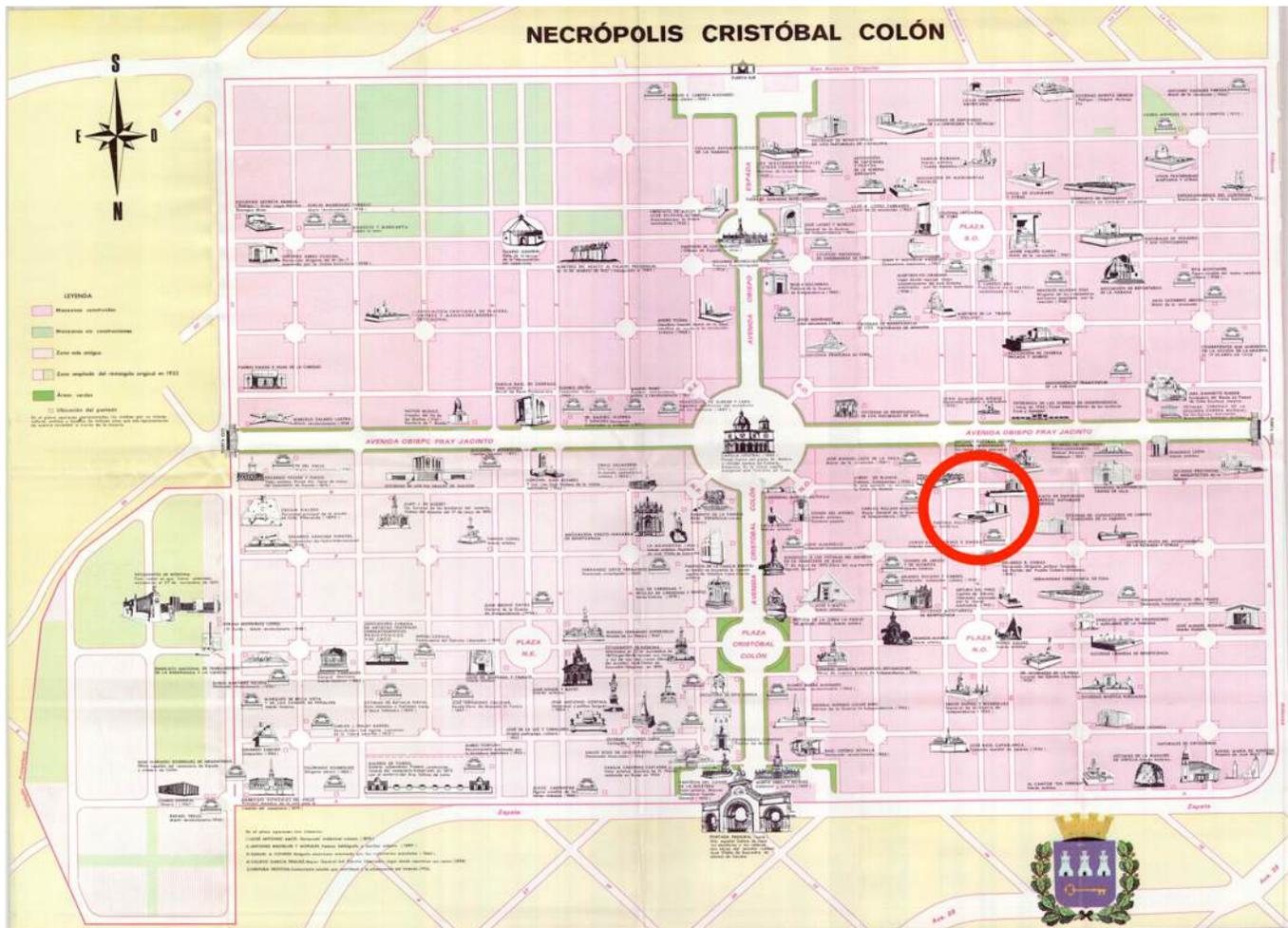
But if the *Scintillator* is repaired *properly*, with Talbot’s frantic scribbles as a guide. the entire Dome can act as a weapon: a giant ghost trap, where the Scintillator’s arc beam and the diamond precisely positioned in front of it, the entity will funneled then shredded.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

Success: The dome lantern blazes brighter than any lighthouse. El Fantasma’s psychic screams shakes all of Havana. The Capital is safe but who will ever believe what they saw?

Failure: *El Capitalio* births an unstoppable nightmare.





The Tomb Trap: The A.B.C's Stolen Funeral Bomb (Era 1933-1934)

The real reason Cuban Senator Clemente Vázquez Bello was gunned down in 1932 by A.B.C. members was that his death was part of an even vaster scheme to blow up his subsequent state funeral at Havana's Cristobel Colón Cemetery.

Sixty kilos of dynamite and 134 fuses of Cheddex high explosives had been secretly hidden beneath the family mausoleum. But the plan failed when at the last minute the burial moved outside of Havana. The bomb was discovered and seized by Machado's police agents. It completely disappeared, written off as lost in the chaos of the Porra striking back at known A.B.C. members.

But the funeral bomb *wasn't* lost. Machado's secret police, the *Porra*, had seized the stolen dynamite and repurposed it for revenge. The explosives were hidden under the *Mausoleo de Partido ABC* (A.B.C. Party Mausoleum) inside Colón Cemetery itself. This was part of a tit-for-tat plot of their own to wipe out the entire A.B.C. hierarchy at their next public gathering.

Machado's fall scattered the *Porra* as jubilant Habaneros took the streets in mixed riot an celebration. Homes and businesses owned by Machado's followers were attacked with fury. Files vanished. Green A.B.C. flags were flown openly and cars with ecstatic abecedarian's paraded in the streets. The bomb was forgotten, or so Havana believes.





But in 1934, rumors swirl that a coded map, drawn by a nervous *Porra* turncoat before his death, shows not only that the bomb was planted, but exactly where the fuse waits to be lit.

Now, rival factions, ex-Porristas (cheerleaders of the *Porra*), disgruntled and demoted army officers, foreign agents hunt the crypts for the map to the fuse of the well buried bomb. The total amount of explosives if detonated would mean not only would the immense ABC mausoleum would be utterly destroyed, but everyone within 20 meter radius would be killed (see red circle in map below). Even those outside this circle circle of death, but still within 75-100 meters would be at risk of serious from fragmented stone marble shrapnel unless under cover.

Some want to destroy it, others to extort the A.B.C. with it, or rewire it for their own plot. The Colon Necropolis will become a chessboard of assassins, tomb robbers, and idealists, all moving among crumbling vaults and decaying coffins.



Will the investigators find the trap first? Will the next anniversary memorial for the A.B.C. end with a violent blast that shakes Havana to its bones? Or will the vigilante tomb guardian of the Necropolis, El Ángel Oscuro (see Age of Menace 237), discover this diabolical plan, 1) relocate the bomb or 2) booby-trap the fuse, or 3) track down these profaners of the sacred dead (or 4) do all three)?

Machoda's Millions (1933-1939 era)

When Gerardo Machado's dictatorship crumbled in August 1933, he didn't flee empty-handed. By then, he and his cronies had looted an estimated \$7 million Cuban Pesos from Cuba's treasury when 1 Peso=1 USD. Accounting for inflation, that would be ~\$170-180 million USD today.

But such a value gross underestimate if you think of it as what that amount could *do* in a poor country like Cuba was just after the Great Depression (public works, bribes, buying power), it's arguably far more powerful by 20-40x. Such a horde of money could easily act **closer to \$500 million-\$1 billion USD** today in political leverage and 'black budget muscle' inside Cuba.

As mobs closed in on his country estate near Havana's airport, Machado's plan was simple: grab what they could carry, cash, bearer bonds, and jewelry stitched into diplomatic bags, and fly out under armed guard. His armored 1933 Lincoln KA limousine, its bulletproof windows and steel plating gleaming in the tropical sun, was stuffed with suitcases, lockboxes, and seven desperate loyalists. A second Lincoln KA1933 followed, loaded with three more men and more lock boxes filled with gold in bars and coin, three crated large paintings, and two other small crates.



Even combined, the two cars are carrying away a fraction of the total wealth Machado and his cronies had stolen from Cuba. Nearly 75% of the loot would be left behind in Machado's personal *Fort Knox Cubano* for later recovery.

But at the airport there is a problem. After passengers, carry-on baggage, and full fuel tanks for the Sikorsky S-38, there is only left 900 lbs of weight allowance, = ~33 standard gold bars (400 oz bars = 27 lbs each). Most of their treasure gold bars, priceless paintings, relics, blackmail dossiers were too massive to smuggle out on a single amphibious plane.



The ex-president turns white then red, Machado's cronies explode in anger, and the three Loyalist guards reach for their guns when the cold equations are told to them. As President Machado sputters out vile curses, the American Pan-Am pilot Al McCullough shrugs, and points over to the end of the airstrip and a far line of tall mahogany trees.



“You saw us weigh everything, including yourself and your passengers, *Señor Presidente*. You can add up as well as I can. I am telling you she won't clear the trees if we force this much gold into her belly. You will have to leave the rest of that luggage, those heavy boxes, crates, and those paintings.”

The pile he is pointing to contains lock boxes filled with a total of 78 gold bars that must be left behind, working out to ~\$643,000 USD in 1933. Total weight 2,106 lbs.

The three rectangular crates each contained a painting in heavy gilded frames, each weighing 50 lbs, 40lbs and 30lbs respectively in their wooden cases.

- **“The Weeping Saint”** attributed to Murillo, a large devotional piece 3x5 feet.
- **“Knight with a Green Cross”** circle of El Greco; 3x4 feet.
- **“Christ Bearing the Crown of Thorns”** attributed to Goya; 2x3 feet.

Total 1933 value of the art is ~\$120,000 USD (~\$2.5M USD today). Total weight 120 lbs.

Finally, the two remaining smaller crates contain:

1. **Crate 1: Religious & Art Relics** (30 lbs): A reliquary rumored to hold a finger bone of Christopher Columbus. The original gold altar service of Havana Cathedral. A black & white Capablanca 8x10 chess board complete with exquisitely carved pieces including, *Arch-Bishop & Chancellor*, a personal gift from the chess master; total weight 30 lbs
2. **Crate 2: Political Secrets:** A metal trunk doubling as a filing cabinet with eight years of blackmail on generals, foreign agents, and crooked business partners who had worked with the Machado regime. 50 lbs.

Machado snatches the pilot's clipboard, squints through his wire-rimmed spectacles, and scratches out the math himself: 2,406 pounds. Even if he abandoned every man aboard, the plane would still be too heavy to lift off safely. With a hissed curse and a final pungent epithet, he shoves the clipboard back into McCullough's chest and fixes his three loyalists with a dark scowl. His barked orders leave no room for questions; follow either *Plan A* or *Plan B*.

- **Plan A:** Drive the heavily laden armored 1933 Lincoln KA north, seventeen kilometers along poorly paved back roads to a private pier near the Havana Yacht Club. There, a waiting motor yacht *Enrique Villuendas* will slip them out under moonlight, past the coast guard, and onto Miami, gold, secrets, and stolen art safe in their hold.
- **Plan B:** If the roads look impassable, divert just two kilometers east to the Mazorra Asylum. There, under an abandoned ward behind the old laundry block, a one-way chute drops straight into a secure area. Dump the heavy lockboxes filled with bars of gold, each weighing 27 pounds, then carry the lightened load (just crates and rolled canvases, ~300 pounds) to the same secret rendezvous. Meet the yacht, vanish to Miami, and reunite with their waiting families.



As the engines of the Sikorsky S-38 cough and roar to life, the three loyalists catch the glint of headlights winding down the road toward the main terminal. Armed mobs, maybe, or revenge-hungry vigilantes. They decide fast: *Plan B* it is. They turn the Lincoln south, back past *La Nenita*, snaking through the cane roads toward Mazorra's rear gate.

[I will expand on this and the Mazorra itself in my next Age of Menace]

**More COMMENTS:
A&E Issue #593**



They are never heard from again.

IDEAS for the GM/Keeper:

1. Did something happen to the three loyalists in the Machado's armoured limousine *before* they could hide the hoard? In the frantic haste travelling on poor rural roads the very heavy car could have accidentally blown a tire and skidded off the dirt road into body of water and sank and drowned the three. The car is still waiting up to 1-2 years later, complete with the gold, the paintings, and the two small chest of art and political relics.
2. Or did the loyalists make their piggy bank delivery to the Mazorra and only on their way *heading back* towards Havana with their empty car were caught by a violent anti-Machado mob who recognized the car and killed the three. The armoured limousine could be found abandoned and empty other than a blood-stained interior by the new authorities. Empty that is, other than a funny looking black ivory chess piece on the floor of the car suggesting what had been carried
3. Or maybe, in the chaos as word of the capital's fall spread, the Mazorra descended into madness as *Machadoist* guards and orderlies fled into the night, while dozens of inmates broke their chains and brawled with the few doctors and other staff, and each other, who remained behind. In the shadows of the uproar, two of the loyalist conspirators tried to betray the third, to claim and keep Machado's treasure for themselves. But their intended victim was faster than they were, and their intended double-cross is undone in a hail of gunfire echoing through an abandoned asylum laundry hall outbuilding.

LEE GOLD: Thank you for taking the time, in your very last issue no less, to respond so thoughtfully to my outburst of frustration about the state of things. I appreciate the clarifying note about fentanyl traffic; it's heartening to see that others in your country realize that Canada's role is, in fact, minimal.

Your bit about the 51st state made me smile — not that I'm advocating for it, but your political math is impeccable as always. And yes, Trump's "official language" proclamation certainly did not win him any friends in Quebec.

Re my *El Cementerio de Cristóbal Colón* (mis)adventure: after I gave away my last funds to that driver, and after spending a few hours in the cemetery itself I trudged back on foot, parched under the merciless sun, until I found a lonely ATM on the other side of a barren and baked *Revolution Square*. Luckily my Canadian bank card allowed me to withdraw some Cuban pesos, then allow me to purchase some cold drinks, and so fortified walked another few hours until I got to my hotel across the street from *Parque Central*. While the distance as the crow flies was 5km, it was both hot and humid, my feet hurt, and there was a lot of to and fro-ing, since I could not use my phone's GPS while I was in Cuba but had to rely on my fragmentary Spanish and a cryptic tourist map.

Re your own early role-gaming: I always love reading about you and Barry in those early D&D days. There's something deeply reassuring in picturing both of you running games in side-by-side rooms — the hobby in its infancy, but already branching out in multiple directions at once. <> *Re Dementia:* I'm sorry to hear again about Barry's father; it's something I see too often in my day job, how the difference between Alzheimer's and vascular dementia can be so subtle but so important. Thank you for sharing that part of your story too.

Much love and respect, Lee, and again thank you for all these decades of care, curation, and community. I hope this is not the end of our conversations, but just a change of format.

PEDRO PANHOCA DA SILVA & MAIRA ZUCOLOTTI: Thank you both for writing about *O Porão*: I found your piece compelling and unsettling in equal measure. I appreciate the way you laid out not just the gamebook's historical context, but its present-day resonance too. I've been reading far too much lately about the evils perpetuated by far-right dictatorships myself though in my case it's mostly

been about early 1930s Cuba rather than South America and so *O Porão* strikes a raw nerve for me as well.

It's sobering to see how these dark chapters repeat themselves in different countries and decades, and I admire the courage the game authors had to turn such painful history into a gamebook that preserves memory and sparks discussion. Short as it is, 111 paragraphs seems to be enough to do what it sets out to do, remind, teach, and trouble the ambivalence of the reader to pick a side. I'm both interested and a little repelled, which, I suspect, means for the gamebook authors it's working as intended. Thank you for bringing it to my attention.

DYLAN CAPEL: Thanks for your sympathetic comments on the (euphemistic term) "The Situation". The current tariff against Canada as I write this (July 15th) is 35%, which will no doubt change again.

I don't mean to pick on the phrase itself, it is convenient shorthand for the complex world we now live in due to one person's regrettably chaotic actions, but use of such euphemisms risks smoothing over just how dire and deliberate so much of this mess has become.

I find it striking, and a bit disheartening, that so much of the real alarm and anger about this emerging new world order seems to come from outside the US, while many inside appear worn down to resignation. Maybe that's the exhaustion of living with it daily, but for the rest of us who are not Americans (nor would ever want to be), the fallout is very real.

It's infuriating to watch decades of careful trust and hard promises, like the *Budapest Memorandum*, which was about Ukraine giving up its nuclear sovereignty in exchange for peace, being torn up while people pretend it's just another faraway problem. Ukraine shouldn't be paying this price alone, and yet here we are. It's tragic that instead of stepping further from the brink, we're drifting back to a world where more nations feel they need their own doomsday insurance because old assurances and the flip-flopping of certain leaders *whose words means nothing* anymore.



Just last week I learned with much dismay that Stephen Colbert, the only talk show host who seems to 'get Canada' was essentially fired from his very popular television program for speaking up against the \$16 Million settlement CBS made against a certain political figure. This strongly reminded me of the playbook used by the popularly elected Cuban President Gerardo Machado who as in (extended) office from 1925 until 1933.

Re my *El Cementerio de Cristóbal Colón model building*; why thank you!

LISA PADOL: Thank you also for writing and for your thoughts both here and in your earlier emails this past spring. I really appreciated your candor about this *New Age of Menace* we seem to have stumbled into. It helps, oddly enough, to know I'm not the only one wrestling with how angry, helpless, and yet *compelled* to speak I feel some days.

Lauren says thank you too! The dance performances sadly aren't up online (the McMaster club tends to keep it local and ephemeral, which is a little frustrating for proud parents).

As for my *El Cementerio de Cristóbal Colón* misadventure, see what I wrote to Lee as well. And yes, that *Monteverde Angel* (or rather angels since there were identical copies of the original I spotted in Havana) is absolutely working its way into a scenario. I'm playing with the idea of it being not just a statue, but a signpost or a marker that someone to hide secrets in plain sight among the tombs. The whole cemetery has such a layered, half-forgotten atmosphere that perfect for conspiracies, old ghosts, and a bit of cosmic dread.

Thank you also for your note about "dying from Alzheimer's."

Hope you're well, that you will eventually get to read this reply (and start submitting to E&A yourself in turn, and that you're finding a bit of calm between the storms. I also just realized I have to write a submission for your own 'hail and farewell' publication to celebrate Lee Gold and nearly 50 years of A&E

MICHAEL CULE: Thank you for your kind words — and your sharp memory re *Trudeau*. You've absolutely nailed it: the timing and tone of that 51st state nonsense made it feel like an opportunistic jab, meant to belittle rather than bind. You're right too about the bully's playbook, FREX blaming Zelensky (or anyone who stands up rather than rolls over) is classic Trump, and so depressingly predictable. I hope enough people see through it for what it is.

Thankfully, up here, we're not exactly queuing up for honorary "full citizenship" for any other country other than our own under any terms. If anything, the talk has reminded a lot of folks why it's worth fighting to keep our Canadian mess our own, imperfectly but determinedly so.

I always appreciate your perspective from across the pond; it helps to feel a little less alone in all this. Hope things in your corner of the UK are as calm as they can be, given the world these days. And thanks again for taking the time to reach out and commiserate.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD: *Re Natter*; coincidentally my wife Caroline and I are halfway through watching first season of the Emma Peel/John Steed era of *The Avengers*.

MARK NEMETH: I did NOT enjoy your story of how your semi-retirement/retirement was accomplished. *Nil illigetimus carborumdum*.

JIM ECKMAN: RAE your accounting of being part of first wave of RPG fandom. *RYCTM*: I suspect even if he did, he would just come back as a lich.

COMMENTS: E&A #1

JIM VASSILAKOS: Kudos for last month's successful launch of E&A! And you are most welcome for all the encouragement to help with this prolonged process in getting things done upfront for the new APA whose name (or rather whose initials) is rather growing for me.

RYCTM on creativity: You know as well as I do how tricky it is to be and stay creative in Medicine without drifting outside the bounds of what our peers consider acceptable. I count myself lucky that in Geriatric Medicine the guidelines are less rigid than in other specialties, and there is equal amounts of Art and Science. Even so, I find like yourself that gaming and writing about gaming is a way to stay creative.

I find that aspects of role-playing and adjacent hobbies, such collecting and painting miniatures, building terrain, and now 3D printing (when I can find the time), gives me a chance to keep that creative muscle working, even when I'm not doing face-to-face gaming. That's one reason the old A&E was so important to me, and why losing that shared writing space was such a blow.

GEORGE PHILLIES: Your mention of early D&D (1974) and how freeing *RuneQuest* (1978) felt made me realize that when I started role-playing in 1980, there had only been about six years of RPG history behind me I had missed. This was at a time where there was NO internet to share ideas, just *Dragon* (1976) & *White Dwarf* (1977) magazines, and if you were lucky the RPG APAs *Alarums* & *Excursions* (1975) and the UKs *Trollcrusher* (1977).

Re Tactics: I was reminded when reading what you wrote about how a person kibitzing the other

(presumably) newbies in a role-game that this is exactly how computer RPGs (CRPGs) work with the player being the kitbitzer; even though your PC starts off at the equivalent of first level when you boot up the game, you the PLAYER don't forget what all you learned from playing PCs in other RPGs & CRPGs to be able to be more successful. And there's no GM to be irked.

Re your RPG story intro with the Chinese soldiers retreating into the impassible glowing cave and ending up in a fantasy realm when their exit is blocked by Japanese forces who are not interested in surrender, the far end opens through no agency of their own; while its perhaps unfair to mention this given you were writing a story intro, I was curious if that kind of setup might feel a bit like the railroading you dislike in CRPGs? (grin)

MARK A. WILSON: I followed the link in this included zine for the first time and I was astonished at the seriously impressive number of blog posts (300+), *YouTube* videos (80+), and more you have available online for the curious to discover. And we get to see your face and hear you speak too. I followed through and RAE your scathing review of the horrible *Top Ten Games You Can Play In Your Head By Yourself* (2019). Thanks for including your link to this role-gaming resource.

I hope all went well with your visit to *Origins*, and your recent move with your GF into new accommodations too.

PATRICK RILEY: RAE your role-gaming CV in your newly named sub-zine for E&A, but I was sorry to learn about your euphemistically phrased "involuntary unscheduled vacation". This was no vacation if you had to job-hunt, but I'm glad you landed on your feet and with an increase in your income too; I guess success is the best revenge. *Re RCTM on politics*: thank you!

MYLES CORCORAN: It was great to see you in print again lastish, almost as good as it was to see you in person back in February 2024! I really enjoyed your write-up about your recent *Mausritter* RPG campaign with your long-standing coterie of players. It sounds like a wonderfully quirky and rewarding game to run with mice and all.

I'm glad that board-gaming with other kindred spirits at University College Cork during COVID turned out to be not just a lifeline but also a way to broaden your gaming horizons. <> And thank you for the shout-out, it was much appreciated. I can only hope that others I wrote to can be enticed to return, if only for a little while. Looking forward to reading more from you soon here in E&A (but what the heck does the name for our zine mean?!)

MITCH HYDE: Hi there! I had a lot of fun skimming through *Dreadsword*. I loved the old-timey TSR fonts you used in parts of it. I also read with interest your online role-gaming saga catch-up and loved the

self-drawn cartoony images you included; these brought back echoed memories of other vintage games I have owned and played.

I also found it fascinating that your plans to play first edition games with all the other DMs who follow the (quirkily named) SNAILFLAIL protocol to allow for inter-campaign migration of PCs through all the DMs worlds. I even followed through to the link on your webpage, so kudos for your success with your competition success with your over-the-top, trap-laden killer-dungeon, *The Barbican of Blood*.

PUM: RAE your Japanese sojourn write-up and your description of the *SETI RPG* (which *Boardgamegeek.com* rates quite highly) when I looked it up curious about what this this orrrey at the heart of the game looks like).

Envious at your (*upcoming? finished?*) live gaming time at *Stabcon* this July too.

GABRIEL ROARK: I very much RAE the detailed path that got you into A&E with Lee Gold in the first place; thank you very much for sharing.

MICHAEL CULE: What, *another* zine title after ~40+ years? Are you daft? This forces me to think of a Clerihew of my own to mark the occasion:

Michael Cule,
old zine-making jewel,
a touch mad to shed *MUNDUS*
and to *Phoenix Nest* led us.

I hope that *StabCon* will be less mixed in your opinion than *Eastercon* was for you (and I mean in a positive way): *RYCTM on The New Age of Menace*: This is an interesting and quite plausible take. It's not just philosophical but pathological solipsism. And I would argue that Trump is a *Jabbercuck* to Putin's *Snark*.

HEATH ROW: I'm glad you landed here thanks to Jim's persistence. *Re your move to Madison Wisconsin*: I'm flabbergasted at all the sheer number of role-gaming stores in your driving proximity, including internationally renowned *Noble Knight Games*; there is probably more in your state than all of Canada now. *Re back-issues of A&E*; I regret not getting these earlier issues in pdf format. I'm tempted to pay for the obtain the 1st 30 issues from you and have you pass the funds along to Lee just as she was getting before.

MARK NEMETH: Good to see you and *The Seedling* again! *Re "The Tavern of Souls" game store* and that woman's disappointment that it was a game store; did you get the sense was she hoping it was a new Goth Bar or ? *RYCTM*: I'm pleased you enjoyed and commented so much on my overlong essay about the *El Cementerio de Cristóbal Colón* in Havana Cuba, my subsequent 3D printed funerary terrain, and even

my pulp hero/NPC write-up ideas using the *Pulp Cthulhu* rules.

Your mentioning my international political commentary wasn't excessive also reminded me that I haven't printed any terrain in a while (in fact I haven't used my printer at all since March) due to my increasing reluctance in support Jeff Bezos and Amazon by purchasing more ABS-like resin through them.

PATRICK ZOCH: Good to see you back writing too; I must say that was a very gracious 'thank you' you shared about Lee Gold and A&E.

Re your desire for a live synchronous role-game experience: I can sympathise entirely. While I am still a player in *Peter Hildreth's* online Zoom game, it's now been almost a year since a live face-to-face tabletop session. And if want a change of pace from online *Savage Worlds* I'll need to check out Discord.

Everyone else RAEBNC

Our daughter Lauren showing off her diploma



July 21st 2025. BCM

Traveller Play-By-Email

Plankwell Campaign, Ch 47: Redress of Collateral Damage

GMing: Jim Vassilakos & Timothy Collinson, Playing Capt. Plankwell: Conrad Rader
The character of Capt. Plankwell was conceived by Phil Pugliese

I had a theory about the vomit.

«No.» Josefeen shook her head. «*It had nothing to do with morality or your sense of honor.*» My thoughts and feelings had been intertwined with the Canon's, and, as far as Josefeen could tell, I simply preempted him due to my comparative lack of experience with vertigo and, more generally, intoxication.

«*You aren't as used to having your brain scrambled as he is.*»

I'd yanked out his memories, just pulled them out like weeds. Technically, they were still there, but I'd disconnected them, rendering them inaccessible. Hopefully they'd emerge only in fragments or in dreams. This was what Josefeen was taught at the psionic academy, and our minds were still linked, so for the moment, at least, it all made sense.

«*Partial mind-wipes are often accompanied with anxiety, paranoia, dizziness, and a general sense of unease.*»

Partial? Did that mean there was such a thing as a *non-partial* mind-wipe?

Josefeen's eyebrow arched ever so slightly. «*We call it brain-rape and skull-fucking for a reason.*»

"Is he going to be okay?" I asked, looking at the Canon, snoring softly in my gravbed.

«*I don't know,*» she silently replied.

"You don't know?"

«*We literally did psychic brain surgery, Gus, so, yeah, I don't know what he's going to be like when he wakes up.*»

Again, I felt sick to my stomach. I didn't want this. But I'd had no choice.

We couldn't let him go walking around with the knowledge that an Eye of God was in the Imperial Navy's possession. Fortunately, his desire to touch it as well as his trust in me led him to seek my favor — me of all people — but it was a risk I couldn't take. If what I'd done to his brain over the past few hours was so brutal as to change his entire personality, what might have happened if I'd allowed him to touch the psi orb?

«*It would have fried him, and he would have gone mad... even more mad than he already is, which, unfortunately, is saying something.*»

"I'll be fine," the Canon mumbled. "I'm fine." He reached up his hands and rubbed his eyes. "Where am I?" he asked, blinking, and then he stared at me. "Do I know you?"

"Yes." I tried to smile.

"Captain Plankwell is a difficult man to drink under the table, Your Grace," Josefeen said, "but we were delighted you tried."

"Oh." He frowned. "Son, unless you have a cast iron liver, I would strongly recommend you go find a medical clinic and get your blood filtered."

"Your Grace, can you walk?" Josefeen asked.

"Of course, I can walk."

He could, although not terribly well. I winced as he left my quarters, Josefeen promising to escort him to the nearest shuttle and arrange for his safe conduct back to Jewell. "And by the way, Captain," she said on the way out, "happy birthday."

I glanced at the clock. "03:25" glared back at me. Then I stripped — mostly, anyway — and practically fell into bed.

<Beep> <Beep> <Beep>

My eyes snapped open, and as I glanced at the clock — it was already zero-six-hundred — there was the briefest flash from a dream. "You're going to have to wait," someone was saying. Nizlich? But it was already gone, evaporating so fast I couldn't hold onto any other details. The bed's built-in alarm clock, meanwhile, was giving me a headache, or perhaps I'd already had one while I'd been sleeping. I stabbed at the cancel button with my finger but somehow missed it, not once but twice, and finally resorted to yelling — "Jacky! Cancel alarm!" — adding another layer of pain to my apparent hangover.

Blessed silence ensued, and as I lay there, I wondered why I'd stripped off only the bottom half of my uniform. I picked at the little holes where the stunner's barbs had hit me. Next time I'd spring for the mendware option. It could self-repair little things like this. Bullet holes too, although I supposed if I was perforated with bullets, the long-term condition of my uniform would be the least of my worries.

As I forced myself to get up, impressions of the previous evening invaded my consciousness. What Josefeen had called the *ways of the succubus* basically amounted to taking advantage of an unconscious victim. Watching her take control of the situation and seeing how little his mind meant to her, I realized the rumors I'd heard about NavInt were based more on truth than fiction. Crossing them would no doubt be, at best, career suicide. I'd apparently been given some latitude due to my recent activation, but I could imagine that might not last much longer, particularly if I gave them any resistance or became troublesome.

An image of the Canon giving a little baggie of snacks to Lt. Shepherd flashed to mind.

I sighed and pulled up my schedule and message queue.

There was a priority text from Martinsen, my chief engineer: “Are we still committed to launching in two days?” And my first meeting of the day was with Lt. Francine Sidara, ship’s counsel. After that, I wanted to do a review of our transferred spacers and decide the extent of their administrative punishment. But first I had to deal with this blinking item, a priority voice message from Nizlich.

I tapped it.

“Sir, I’m sorry if there’s been some misunderstanding on my part, but there’s a team here from General Products. They insist they’re authorized to replace the Exploration Pod, but sir, if I let them go ahead, this will obviously conflict with our departure timetable. Swapping pods takes considerable time. Again, sir, I’m sorry if there’s been a mistake on my part, but I need you to tell me what you want done.”

Oh, right. The damn pod.

And having to meet with the ship’s lawyer wasn’t exactly the birthday present I’d been hoping for. No doubt, there would be some sort of inquest relating to the interdiction. Sometimes you ride the bureaucracy wave, and sometimes you get swept beneath it.

“Jacky, record for Nizlich.”

I took a moment to order my thoughts. Nope, I was going to need some painkillers and possibly a few choice stimulants. But then, of course, I’d have to explain myself to Dr. Willin.

No thanks.

“Commander, I apologize for the confusion. Give GP whatever they need to get started, and file an amended departure plan. I half-expected GP not to be ready to start, and we could have scored a non-compliance on the contract. But they are here, and we still need the pod. Make the amendment, match the expected replacement time for the pod, and give them full expedited access. Accelerate anything remaining that can be expedited while in dock. We are the Navy, and we can change our minds when we *frelling* feel like it. Plankwell out.”

I went back to bed and closed my eyes, wondering about the derring-do and exploits of all the fictional Navy Captains I’d seen on the three-vee growing up, all of that ripping of shirts and wooing of local ladies. None of those shows ever depicted the hours spent filling out forms, approvals, and the various minutiae of the administrative side of a captain’s life, like when you make impulsive decisions that need to be walked back later to keep even greater chaos from forming. I half wanted a Zhodani deep strike to occur so that I would have a better reason to pull in the ropes and power off into the dark.

Be careful what you wish for, a soft voice whispered somewhere within my mind.

«Josefeen, is that you?»

But there was no response. I’d been dozing. It was a dream. Nothing more.

I pulled myself up and stumbled towards the fresher, hoping a shower would get me going. Time to get a new day started.

And it’s my birthday! Joy!

In the shower, I couldn’t help but wonder at what point even my internal thoughts had turned sarcastic.

* * *

“Captain,” Lt. Sidara said as she entered. *Don’t salute. He doesn’t like salutes.*

“Have a seat.” I motioned toward the chair Reggie had been in when I more or less took psionic scissors to his brain.

“There are a few items on the agenda,” she said, sitting, “so what would you like to tackle first?”

An image of me flashed through her mind: me and the Snuka grappling in the Marine Pod’s gym. That and the image of me standing in front of her, all flushed and sweaty, had been ping-ponging back and forth between her ears the previous night while she’d stayed up late prepping for this meeting. Likewise, she’d kept replaying a soundbite of me telling her to make an appointment through normal channels. That whole bit about how I would “be sure to give your concern the appropriate attention at the appropriate time” struck her as particularly noteworthy, given that I had just declared Martial Law a few hours previously. But then there was my final dismissal: “As you were, unless you’d like to see me pummeled some more.” *Rash yet self-deprecating*, she’d written in her notes, wondering how that combination might manifest in front of the County’s Magisterial Court.

“The Magisterial Court,” I answered, taking in her thoughts — she was a particularly loud thinker. “That one probably takes precedence.”

She nodded, thinking, *at least we’re on the same page.*

“The local JAG office referred me to a High Court attorney, someone familiar with County procedure. His name is Bilem Faulk, and he’s agreed to meet with us but only in person. He’s in Silver City. Planetary airspace regulations prohibit us going directly, except with a special invitation from the Countess herself, which brings us to item number two,” she said, handing me a piece of paper. On it were written the words, “Can I gracefully get out of the summons?” She wrote the question on actual paper because paper was harder to hack, and my question was clearly sensitive enough for me to encrypt it.

“Aside from being the ship’s legal counsel,” she continued, “I’m also the acting protocol officer. So to correct your terminology, it’s not a summons; it’s clearly an invitation, and so yes, you can say no. As for the graceful

part, that's more interesting, but the question I would first ask is, why do you want to?"

"Well, for one, I am not about to expose myself to civilian authority on the planet again. Will this attorney meet with us at the starport or the Naval Base?"

"I'll check." She made a note on her legal slate.

"There's another reason," I said. "A few more, actually." "Go ahead."

"Each time I've been invited to meet the local nobility, I've been saddled with... uh... local issues. Reviewing a tech replica of my ancestor, for example, or escorting a scion to a business meeting because said scion was misbehaving."

"Oh?"

"I believe the former incident made the news."

"I see," she said, writing the words *Prior News*, which I knew not because I could see the surface of her slate but rather because I could see the words in her mind as she wrote them. She'd been watching and reading all the news broadcasts about the interdiction and the events leading up to it, but she hadn't bothered looking at anything that happened earlier, so she didn't really know what I was talking about.

"I had to apologize to said scion," I explained, "for perceived harm done by said tech replica to prevent the local admiralty from losing face." My reception seemed very long ago, even though it'd only been what... four days? "Then there's the whole matter of my being the target of potshots by someone in the civilian authority operating with or without the knowledge of said local nobility."

"Potshots?"

Cool it, Gus. Cool it.

"I don't know what to call it. All I know is that I don't place much faith in the current nobles to act in a manner that befits a healthy exchange between the Imperial Navy and the Emperor's lieges."

I was perhaps being a little full of myself on this point. But, in my mind, at least, my oath of duty to the Emperor put me on par with the nobles, even if my own person did not warrant the same. I had been disrespected a number of times, and it was wearying. Duty, however, did not care how tired you were, only that the job got done.

"Review for me what this invitation is again," I continued, "and the possible repercussions for declining, accepting grudgingly, accepting gracefully, and accepting but accompanied by full or partial honor and/or bodyguards?"

"It's an invitation to an informal sit-down with the Countess. There will no doubt be witnesses, but the press is not invited, so you'll be able to have as private a conversation with Helena Stavelot as one is ever likely to have. Most importantly, it means she wants to talk to you, which is a good thing. At least, Mr. Faulk thought so.

"The repercussions for declining is you lose whatever favor you might have gained had you accepted her invitation. Accepting grudgingly is right out. If we were in a position to threaten the Countess, then perhaps, but I don't see that we are, so if you accept, it should most definitely be done gracefully.

"As for being attended by a military guard, you'd have to get permission. Certainly, given what happened with the HPSS, it might be warranted *if* you were going to Heron. But Silver City is outside the jurisdiction of the HPSS. And their security, from what I understand, is extremely tight, so tight I'm not even allowed to accompany you. The invitation is for you alone, and there's no time to file a request for a plus one. Best case scenario is they let me wait for you in the shuttle while you get me a guest pass at the palace, so we can go together to Mr. Faulk's office. But if you'd prefer I try to arrange a meeting at the starport, I'll do that.

"Whatever you decide, sir, you need to decide ASAP, as Seventeas will start in around three and a half hours."

This is what happened when I let my schedule get in front of me.

"Acknowledge the personal invitation gracefully and with thanks, and file a flight plan. We'll use one of our shuttles, and you will be on board, so if we manage to get a meeting with Mr. Faulk, we'll take it."

I considered my workday uniform and sighed. I was going to have to break out the other dress uniform I had on hand. If I needed to accept gracefully, an underhanded snub by dressing down would not work in my favor.

"Jackie, message to Lt. Abbonette: Dress uniform and report to Lt. Sidara for a trip down to Silver City. Jackie, send message. Anything else, Lieutenant?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"What?"

"Shattered windows."

"Shattered windows?"

"Due to some sonic booms," she said.

Ah. The percussion at the stadium. No doubt, the locals were plenty peeved.

"We'll discuss it on the way down."

"Aye aye, sir." She turned and left, taking that as a dismissal.

"Jackie, message to Commander Nizlich: I am afraid duty takes me down to the surface once again, an invitation from the Countess. Proceed as per usual operating stance. Jackie, send message. Jackie, message to the head of security: Can you get me some low profile body armor suitable for a diplomatic visit? Time is of the essence. Jackie, send message."

I smiled at the last one. Never stop testing the crew. Maybe they had something that would be of use if things took a turn for the worse. Alternatively, I could go in with my psionic guns blazing.

I thought about the psi boosters that had formerly been in my not-so-secret stash. Did I dare?

«*Josafeen? Should I re-boost for this visit?*»

But there was no reply. The booster's effect was already waning. I used my wristcom to call her.

"Sir, I just received your message."

"Do you think, uh..." — the ship's computer was no doubt recording the call. I could switch to encrypted mode, but that would just raise Blodder's curiosity, and Nizlich did say she was good at her job — "do you think maybe we should bring that thing the Admiral was so interested in, just in case?"

"I'll be sure to bring it, sir," she replied after a moment's hesitation. "I'll bring them both."

Both? Oh. She didn't know if I was talking about the booster or the orb. "Very good, Lieutenant," I said and closed the connection. I still wasn't sure what the psi orb was or what it could do, but it was usually better to have something you didn't need than to need something you didn't have.

* * *

"SCTC to IN Launch 514187. You're authenticated and cleared to land at Iota Eight. Please turn over your flight controls."

"Acknowledged," Sublieutenant Jimenez replied, turning the flight console over to Silver City Traffic Control. In her mind, however, she wasn't too happy about them not trusting her to land.

How I knew all this from the back seat had to do with the *vitamin injection* Josefeen had given me. The moment the psi-enhancer hit me, I could sense everything Jimenez was hearing, seeing, and even thinking and feeling, all despite the fact she was outside my field of view. Hence, I felt her hands drop to her sides, and I could see through her own eyes as the airborne city slowly expanded from a small dot to overfilling the cockpit's window, its multitudinous towers and domes illuminated by floodlights and gleaming against the night sky.

Lt. Sidara, of course, thought it strange her Captain was staring off into space, and injecting his vitamins rather than taking them orally was even weirder, but she understood she was too low in the pecking order to question such things. In any case, she was more concerned about the potential meeting with Mr. Faulk. Not to mention the numerous calls the Naval Base had received from lawyers as well as other annoying individuals threatening to sue the Navy over damages. Damages? Ah, the damages caused by the recent percussion incident. The Base helpfully forwarded these messages to the Jaqueline, suggesting settlements be reached on behalf of the 213th Fleet, "or else it could cause the Navy bad publicity."

I instructed her to send the Naval Form "Redress of Collateral Damages, Non-Combat, to Aligned Noncombatant" and to make sure we noted the exact timeframe of the low-altitude sonic booms, as there was a subsection requiring the applicant to upload proof said damage occurred within the stated time frame give or take five seconds.

That's devious, she thought but said nothing.

"We'll pay the damages out of the Captain's discretionary budget for goodwill and public relations," I told her. "Also forward notices to local building inspectors of claims paid. If the windows can't take a little boom, then I suspect shenanigans. Fight bureaucracy with bureaucracy, I say!"

"Aye aye, sir."

Prior to departure, she had me sign a form, letting the locals know I was bringing two assistants and requesting the appropriate number of guest passes, but she held out little hope of the request being fulfilled on such short notice. Jewell was known for its pollution and its bureaucracy, and it was arguable which of the two was more intractable. So it came as a surprise when, as we landed, Lt. Sidara looked up, eyes gleaming. Her skullcomp had just informed her that the additional guest passes had been approved.

I get to go into the Imperial Palace? And meet the Countess? Wait until I tell Mom and Dad!

"Sir," she said, "I just received word..."

"About the guest passes?"

"Yes." *How did he know?*

"I had a feeling," I said. They must have realized it was my birthday and didn't want to start off on the wrong foot by not letting me bring my two aides.

«I love birthday parties,» Josefeen sent with a smirk, already knowing how I felt about them, particularly my own.

We soon landed, and as we filed out, I again noticed how stiff turning and bending had become with this bulletproof vest under my uniform. Although made of lightweight, interlaced ceramic links, the vest was still bulky enough to make my tailored dress jacket tighter than usual. It was a small price to pay for personal safety, however, particularly since I still didn't know if the attack in Heron was a random event or part of a larger campaign.

Once we stepped onto the landing pad, a security robot fitted us with visitor collars and then directed us toward the turboporters. Oddly enough, I had fewer worries about the metal collars and robots than I'd have had if Silver City's security was being handled by humans. Did this mean I had more faith in automated security? It was something to ponder.

"Lt. Sidara, contact Mr. Faulk and see if he's available on short notice. Let him know we've been invited to meet with the Countess and would be happy to meet with him before or after our appointment."

“Aye aye, sir.”

While Sidara was checking in with Faulk’s office, I sent a quick message to Agidda: “Just landed in Silver City for Seventeas. If you’re here, let me know if you’d like to meet.”

Never pass on allies in the house of your antagonist.

The thought stopped me short. Did I really consider Countess Helena Stavelot my antagonist? An impediment, perhaps, but antagonist was one step from opponent and two steps from enemy. She was the representative of the Emperor, and as such, she deserved respect. That was why I was twisting through all these silly hoops.

Speaking of hoops, I reviewed the message from Kaz. I doubted I’d be in any position to help her, but if I was offered a boon for my birthday, well, that would be a useful thing to do with it.

«*You’d waste a noble favor on a piece of ass?*» Despite being merely in my head, the tenor of Josefeen’s voice carried a certain tartness.

«*There are noble favors, and then there are noble favors with obligations. I would rather firm up someone who did right by me than give this Countess another hardpoint to tug on.*»

I immediately regretted the phrasing as Josefeen’s imagination began conjuring censor-worthy images to go along with my statement.

“Sir,” Sidara said, turning toward me, “Mr. Faulk says we can come now.”

Rescued by the lawyer.

Download the consolidated Plankwell write-up:

<https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/plank.html>

Past A&E zines available at: <https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ>

Jim’s Comments on E&A #1:

Dungeon Economics:

George Phillies (E&A #1, pg. 6): “It was said of Hellsgate that you could readily emerge from Hellsgate as a fourth level character with a dozen magic items and six thousand gold pieces, assuming you went into Hellsgate as a sixth level character with two dozen magical items, twenty thousand gold pieces, and an army of five dozen men. The dungeons were a profit operation for the monsters.”

Will have to remember that one. However, level progression in most of the campaigns I ran was automatic, and except for high level monks and spellcasters at certain

intervals in their careers, I assumed the PCs were ignorant of the very concept of being a certain level.¹ Regardless, it’s still a funny quote.

Medieval Combat Tactics:

George Phillies (E&A #1, pg. 6): “I recall the friend of mine describing watching a group of players attack a reasonably well defended stronghold, and losing their entire party without managing to get through the first room beyond the gate. The friend proposed to rerun the event. He would suggest to the players what they should do at each point. The players thought this was a great idea. After somewhat less long than you would expect, the players entirely cleaned out the entire stronghold and captured the treasure. In the process of doing so they suffered approximately no wounds, took almost no damage to their equipment, and had the gamesmaster saying ‘Not fair! Not fair!’”

I’d be curious to learn what specific tactics your friend had them employ.

Describing Combat and Injuries:

Attronarch (E&A #1, pg. 18): “...looked like strawberry jam spread on dungeon floor.”

Nice imagery.

When the PCs Lose the Battle & Dungeon Economics:

Attronarch (E&A #1, pg. 18): “Then they tied their hands, and dragged them back into the Den.”

Ah, the adventurers are captured. Nice plot twist. Was surprised to see they were later released, all except for the cleric. I might have thought only one would be released, but, of course, that would put a crimp in the game, unless the other players generated secondary characters.

As for bringing back a giant gold crown, it raises a question that’s been lurking in the back of my mind. If dungeon monsters have so much treasure, why not use it to buy food from local villages? The intelligent ones, at least, should realize the opportunity exists. Is this a potential economic niche for half-orcs and other monstrous half-breeds? I’d imagine an enterprising merchant could set up a profitable trade, albeit not without considerable risk.

Knowing one’s alignment in D&D:

Attronarch (E&A #1, pg. 22): “Hey, we are still Lawful, we will come back for you.”

This, of course, raises the issue of whether alignments are known to exist within the game world, as opposed to

¹ For more on this, see my first comment to Gabriel Roark (below).

simply being a concept within the rules. The existence of alignment languages and spells that target specific alignments, such as *Detect Evil*, indicate the former, but I've always played it the other way around, relegating alignment tongues to clerics and denizens of the outer planes, and limiting alignment-based magic similarly. Granted, alignment is so baked into various aspects of the game that this is easier said than done.²

Hemingway & Pessoa:

Mark Wilson (E&A #1, pg. 25): "I made a pact with Hemingway on a train once that, no matter what, we'd meet again one day."

Interesting dream. I can't help but wonder if it's some sort of sign. Maybe you could ask one of the popular AIs to roleplay Hemingway, and in this way you could have a conversation with his facsimile and see what ideas this generates. This might alter your creative trajectory in some way. Just a thought to consider. Another option, of course, would be to simply read Hemingway. I'm partial to *The Sun Also Rises*.

I started reading Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* after seeing your glowing recommendation. Haven't gotten very far, but the writing is brilliant. At times he is laughing at himself. So sad he died never knowing all these passages would be preserved, translated, and then read and appreciated nearly a century later. Well, I suppose that's true to some extent for all writers. Publishing anything is a bit like putting a message in a bottle and then throwing it into the sea. But in Pessoa's case, he had no inkling it would ever be published. Lying on his deathbed, assuming he understood he was dying, he must have concluded this work of a lifetime, then existing only in fragments stashed within a chest of some 25,000 pages, would all be thrown away. It's a miracle it ever saw the light of day.

Dungeon Grafitti:

Patrick Riley (E&A #1, pg. 35): "As you progress through this tunnel, you can clearly make out that the black kobold clan markers have been scratched out and replaced with the symbol of Tiamat."

I like this idea of various monster groups marking territory in this way.

Psychology/Morality of Aliens:

Jim Vassilakos (A&E #592, pg. 68): "I can't help but wonder if an alien species (...) would have a sense of morality similar to our own." (...) "...because they all had to pass certain psycho-evolutionary criteria in order

to build a technological civilization, and therefore there's this moral convergence around certain ideals...."

Patrick Riley (E&A #1, pg. 37): "We observe things like empathy, fairness, and loss in non-human animals. The biological drivers (often in the form of hormones) for these emotions also shape our morals (primarily with our in-group), but an alien species would have different biological drivers. Social insects like ants and bees have often been used as a template for alien species because they are about as far from a mammalian perspective as we can reasonably be expected to imagine and still be 'realistic.'"

My suspicion is that although the hormones would likely be different, the evolutionary drivers would be analogous. For example, I'm guessing they'd end up with the same high-stakes conflict decision tree we have: fight, flight or freeze. Likewise, if they didn't have an empathy circuit, they probably wouldn't be able to cooperate well enough to form a civilization in the first place. And if they didn't love their children, they probably wouldn't put enough effort into raising and educating them to develop a multi-generational culture, allow the civilization to persist and evolve across time. In other words, they'd need to be a lot like us. Not exactly like us. There is still great variation within the human family. But, also, not all human civilizations are equal in terms of their accomplishments, and the underlying values of a civilization's culture may have something to do with those accomplishments. Competing cultures that are part of an alien race's history would have experienced conflicts analogous to some of those we've experienced here on Earth and are experiencing right now. In any case, this is getting dangerously close the politics, so I'll leave it there.

Mausritter Mice:

Myles Corcoran (E&A #1, pg. 41): "The group discussed whether they should investigate Stumpville or Shattered Oak and eventually decided to take a nap in the poppy field and see if sleeping on it would focus their minds. On waking they decided on Shattered Oak. The syrup-coated hazelnuts were hardly a consideration at all."

I like how Hobbit-like the mice are. Enjoyed the write-up and look forward to more.

Published Settings vs. Homebrew:

Mitch Hyde (E&A #1, pg. 45): "Arguably, the best setting to use for a First Edition campaign is Greyhawk." (...) "However, I didn't initially want to use this setting because I felt that most of the grognards I game with know the world's lore in and out, and far better than I do in-fact. This would do little other than kill all verisimilitude in a game where exploration of the

² See my comment to Clark Timmins in A&E #528 regarding his essay, *Reviewing Alignment*, in A&E #527.

unknown plays a large part. If I were running the game for new players, Greyhawk would be the setting to use. But that wasn't the case. I also love world building in and of itself as a hobby and enjoy it."

Big, old, professionally-published settings can be intimidating. I sort of had the same problem with the Traveller Campaign. There's definitely a learning curve involved, even with a setting that you've used before. The problem is that when you're running a PBEM, a lot of details can arise... mundane stuff, and so you really need to know the source material forwards and backwards, so you don't end up contradicting it. The upshot is that no matter how well you think you already know it, you'll figure out how much more there is to learn. No doubt, using a homebrew setting would make things much easier, but all those mundane details still need to be fleshed out in the course of the writing. I was lucky with the Traveller PBEM due to the existence of the Traveller Wiki.³ And Greyhawk seems to have no less than three wikis.⁴ Although it's certainly a large task, if you do create your own setting that you intend to use across multiple campaigns, creating a wiki for it might be good idea.

Testing Alignment in AD&D:

Mitch Hyde (E&A #1, pg. 52): "The clerics were sent away, lest they ruin their honour in the eyes of their gods. And then the torturing began."

This, of course, raises the question of whether the Clerics, if they understood why they were being sent away, are still culpable for breaking their ethical vows.

Mercy & Aligment in AD&D:

Mitch Hyde (E&A #1, pg. 52): "Even though he was a Devil worshiper, the party decided to allow him mercy."

One of the sad facts about D&D is that it often teaches that mercy is akin to stupidity, and therefore Good is a weakness. I wonder if there should be some sort of karma stat, so that when character do good deeds, they can earn brownie points through which they might modify future dice rolls or some such. Probably there are game systems that already do this. Then again, maybe suffering the consequences of being Lawful-Stupid is it's own reward.

Anachronisms:

Mitch Hyde (E&A #1, pg. 54): "...from Bayfry to the coast, and over the Chrome Sea."

3 https://wiki.travellerrpg.com/Main_Page

4 https://greyhawkonline.com/greyhawkwiki/Main_Page, https://greyhawk.fandom.com/wiki/Main_Page, and <https://ghwiki.greyparticle.com/index.php/Greyhawk>

Although derived from *khroma*, the Greek word for color, the word chrome wasn't invented until around 1800, so it would seem, at least on the surface, to be anachronistic for a body of water in what are presumably medieval times to be called the *Chrome Sea*. Granted, given the existence of magic as well the possible existence of ancient technology, the case against such anachronisms becomes somewhat more tenuous. In any case, it's worth questioning how the *Chrome Sea* got its name.

Level Advancement in AD&D:

Gabriel Roark (E&A #1, pg. 62): "...some PCs having insufficient money to pay a trainer, so their advancement was stymied for a session or three."

As I wrote to George (above) level progression in most of the campaigns I ran was automatic, and except for high level monks and spellcasters at certain intervals in their careers, I assumed the PCs were ignorant of the very concept of being a certain level.

My reasons for ditching the training requirement had to do with its tendency to bog the game down in logistics. Basically, we'd have to repeatedly pause the adventuring so various PCs could train. This, of course, necessitated some degree of one-on-one roleplaying. Each of the PCs needed to find someone to train them, and this, in turn, would necessitate breaking up the party, decentralizing everything into a bunch of one-on-one encounters that were ancillary to whatever the overall plot happened to be. All adventuring would just sort of come to a standstill. Realistic, maybe. Fun? Not really.

Bear in mind, spellcasters still had to find scrolls or tutors in order to learn new spells. As for fighters and thieves, however, I decided to rationalize they could teach themselves their trade on the fly, learning by doing.

While looking through some old email for something else, I happened across a conversation I had with my players about this⁵, and one of them wrote, "When rules bog down game play (...), I'd say the wisest decision is to drop the rules and see how it goes." It happened so long ago, I can't remember what we decided in the end, but my guess is that we decided to simply drop the training requirement.

5 This email dates back to 1992. Apparently, I'd decided to give the training rules a chance but quickly got annoyed with them. To quote myself, because it's sort of funny, "I was talking to Chrisman just after the game, giving him a short synopsis of the precious few events which actually transpired (training, James' character dying, more training, Simon's meeting with the king, more training, Lubo's fun with the faerie, even more training...). In short, there was a whole lot of training. Shitloads. Anyway, I thought the game sucked. I mean, I thought it was the worst game I'd GM'ed for years. I mean, I thought it was hideously bad. Horrible. Yucky-foo. Mas Terribles. You get the general gist, I hope."

In addition to this I also gave PCs an XP for every GP of income they earned/stole, so their rate of level progression was somewhat faster than what I'm seeing in your game.⁶ Granted, this meant I needed to find other ways for them to spend their ill-gotten loot.⁷

Acceptable Fonts for Ever & Anon Submissions:

Gabriel Roark (E&A #1, pg. 62): "I kept my zine in Bookman Old Style but wouldn't mind exploring other fonts, too. Do you have a list of acceptable fonts like Lee did? Let us know, eh?"

It's a good question. The problem is that not all of our readers are likely to have the same set of fonts, so it would be best to either stick to common fonts or, if you must use an unusual one, to save your PDF with embedded fonts. Different software will have different methods for accomplishing this, but the downside is that it increases the size of the resulting PDF. I was told that at 40MB, our first issue was already somewhat heavy. But this isn't the 1980s. Hard disk space is cheap enough that I don't see it as a huge problem. Also, we didn't attempt any sort of file compression, and if we take this step, it might help. The only problem I can foresee is that if everyone starts embedding fonts, the file size will probably become a problem, but for the time being I'm willing to just watch it and see what happens.

Adding One's Own Spin:

Michael Cule (E&A #1, pg. 64): "Perhaps I shall have a feast of nostalgia in this space in future where I explain my immense cleverness in the bits of background I've inserted into settings of my own creation and other people's. Next time perhaps the Deep History of Yrth or the nature of the Six Gods of Aegis."

Yes, please!

The Phoenix Nest:

Michael Cule (E&A #1, pg. 64): "I didn't know it was a poetic term for female genitalia..."

Wait. *What?*

Light in the Subterranean Deeps:

Heath Row (E&A #1, pgs. 70-71): "A party of surface dwellers fell into a bottomless chasm on the lowest level of a dungeon while exploring the Dread Halls of the Vampire Countess." (...) "...muted light caused by the noxious vapors."

⁶ See my comment to you in A&E #574.

⁷ See the 2nd page of my article, *Making Magic More Interesting (and Dangerous)*, in A&E #508.

What's the light source? Unless they have some magical lamp that survived the fall, it would probably be pitch dark or nearly so. Granted, those with infravision would be still able to see in infrared, and even those without could probably fumble around in the dark and light a torch. But, of course, that might attract unwanted attention. An interesting part of any dungeon crawl should involve these sorts of dilemmas. If I were playing this out solo, I'd be inclined to write it up in a more novelesque format from the point of view of a single character.

Multiple Characters per Player:

Mark Nemeth (E&A #1, pg. 80): "One thing I'm trying that's a little different than usual is having each player create multiple characters with the expectation that they'll periodically form different groups and we can have multiple interweaving storylines."

I've only done this once, and it was long ago. My vague memory is that most players tend to choose a favorite character, and the others end up becoming quasi-henchmen. It's worth bearing in mind, also, that you don't actually need multiple characters in order to have multiple interweaving storylines. The one big advantage of what you're doing, however, becomes apparent in high-mortality campaigns. If a player's main character is killed, there's usually a backup character he or she can play.

Random Personality Tables:

Patrick Zoch (E&A #1, pg. 89): "Frustrated with the results of random personality tables, I strove to create my own."

Nice work. Thanks for giving me permission to port these into Rand.⁸

The Hero Pulps of the 1930s & 40s:

Brian Misiaszek (E&A #1, pg. 98): "The single-character hero pulps frequently depicted fascist-style coups, invasions, or subversive takeovers of the U.S. government or U.S. state governments, reflecting the rising anxieties of the public during the 1930s and early 1940s."

The Business Plot⁹ of 1933, which you cite, shows that this anxiety was well-founded. There was also the Wilson Plot¹⁰ of 1968. Just because you're paranoid doesn't make you wrong.

⁸ <https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/rand.html>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business_Plot

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Wilson_plot_allegations

Timothy's Comments on E&A #1:

Patrick Riley – Quasipseudoludognostication

I was sorry to hear about your redundancy but glad that it's worked out.

RYC about a "fresh new ridiculous title"... but fun!

RYC on "200 Words" – many years ago I contributed to a blog hosted by another UK university called "International Reflections". Their rule was exactly 500 words, no more, no less. It's a good writing discipline as you make every word count. I adopted it wholesale for my 'Confessions' in *Freelance Traveller* (originally: 'Confessions of a Newbie Referee'). I thought it would rein in my tendency to go on at length. It seems to work.

RYC "I do not like it when DMs run published scenarios" – I was curious about this as my experience suggests that many (at TravCon and other places) do just that, and though I mostly run my own things, I have had a lot of fun doing "scenes from" the classic *Traveller Adventure* which many have enjoyed.

I appreciated your comment about "underestimating how long scenes would take" as I do this myself a lot, so it's good to hear I'm not alone.

And of course, I was delighted to see the library scene and a librarian in *For Family and Home*. What's an adventure without those things?! (And the horror of a chapter missing from a tome! Every librarian's nightmare! Not quite sure I understand where the "there" is that there might be another copy? (and did you mean the title change between *Dragon Cults of Antiquity* (p.8) and *Cult Dragons of Antiquity* (p.9) or is that CLUE? (Sorry, I'll be asking for APA referencing next...))

I really like the NPC introduction of Skydan with Prof Sylva – brilliant way of attaching an NPC to a party.

RYCT Mark Nemeth about "lesser characters" – why are they 'lesser'? Isn't that the fun of role-playing, to not necessarily have the 'best'? Especially as on the next page you go on to talk about designing characters that are "sub-optimal". I'm confused.

Myles Corcoran – Twisting the Rope

Welcome! Or welcome back! Whichever you like.

Michel Cule – The Phoenix Nest

RYCTM about Hivers – yes, definitely a Traveller race I'm not overly familiar with and ought to explore more. I hadn't connected them with the Eroctopi, but good thought.

Mark Nemeth – The Seedling

RYCT Paul H on new words – I add those I come across to a 'collection' (double page spread) in my bullet journal.

Any that I come across that I think might be useful in writing (rather than, say, for Scrabble or crosswords), I also add more formally to my antinet. If I don't write them *somewhere*, I'll never remember them.

Nice use of *sedulous*.

Many thanks for your book reviews. Things to chase up there. I *particularly* liked your review of the reviews. Helpful, interesting and fun.

Patrick Zoch - The Dragon's Beard

A huge thank you for your *Zoch's Big 5 Traits for NPCs*. Having had a go at creating similar [as I'm unsatisfied with my (mostly physical) NPC descriptions] I can particularly appreciate the brilliance of this. Am printing it out to keep for char gen. Nice examples too. Thank you.

You write:

How would you describe the NPC below?

5d100 = O:97, C:3, E:47, A:54, N:69

Artistic, Thoughtless, Restrained, Modest, Self-punishing

Seryn is a deeply imaginative soul, driven by aesthetic beauty and personal vision. Her clothing, speech and even the way she prepares tea bears a quiet artistry. For all her creative brilliance, however, she is nearly incapable of planning ahead. Seryn forgets appointments, misplaces crucial items, and frequently starts new projects before finishing the old.

She speaks softly and with deliberation, often pausing as if weighing every word, yet she rarely seeks the spotlight and deflects praise with self-effacing charm. Her friends admire her modesty but worry about the harsh way she judges herself; she holds onto past mistakes far too long.

Though not unfriendly, Seryn keeps most people at a distance. She prefers the company of journals, paints, and dreams to loud company, though she will listen patiently to a friend's sorrows. She rarely interrupts.

Jim Vassilakos – Plankwell Campaign

RYCT to Patrich Z on role-playing your NPCs. Just occasionally I come up with one that I've managed to design well *and* play well but it's something I'd like to do a lot better. (See my note to Patrick about his Big 5 Traits table.)

Nice note on writing (and essays). A writer's circle sounds great. But only if I could have another lifetime. I need to cut back, not add more!

And well done for, it sounds from others' reports, being instrumental in getting *Ever & Anon* up and running.