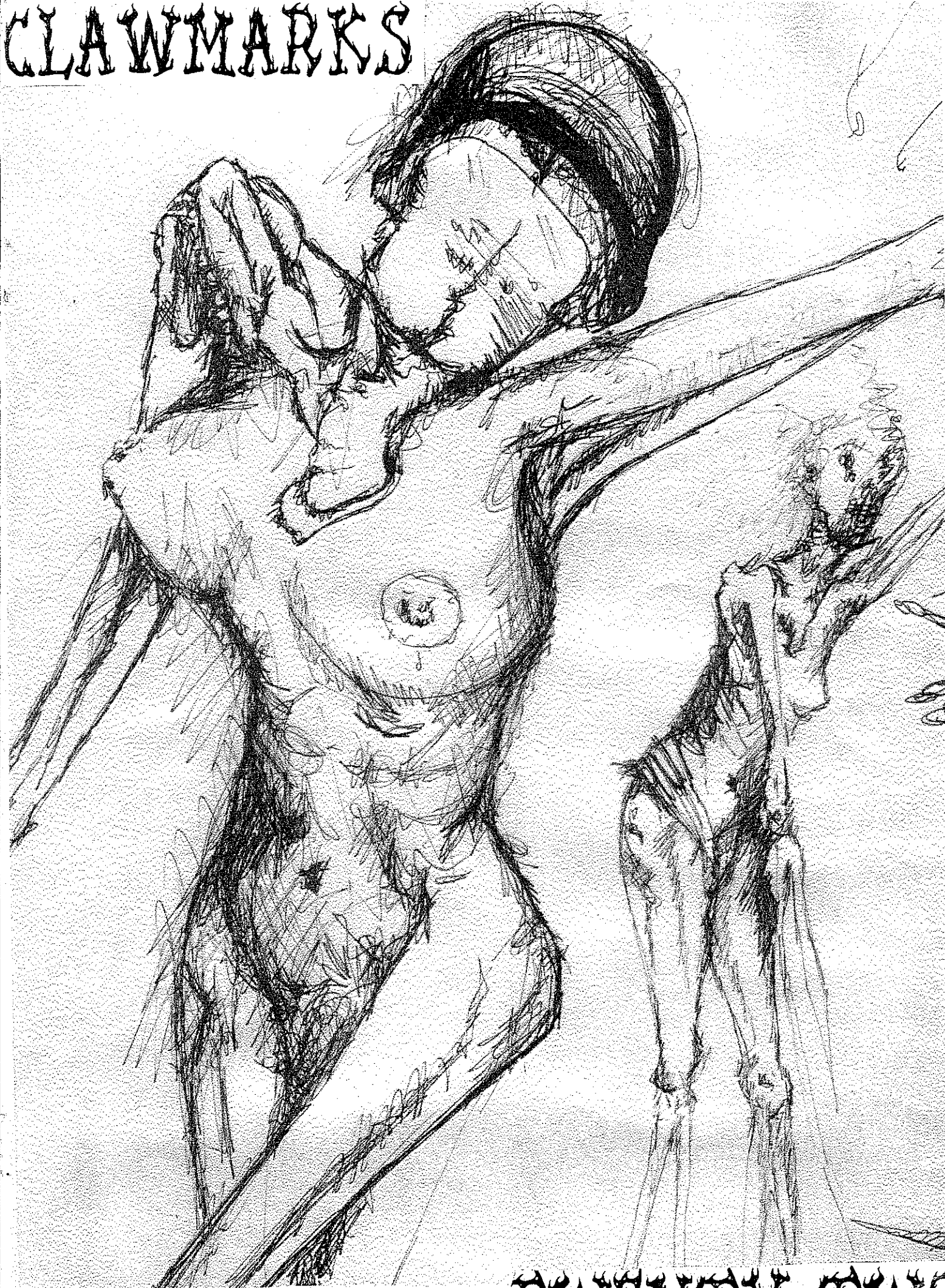
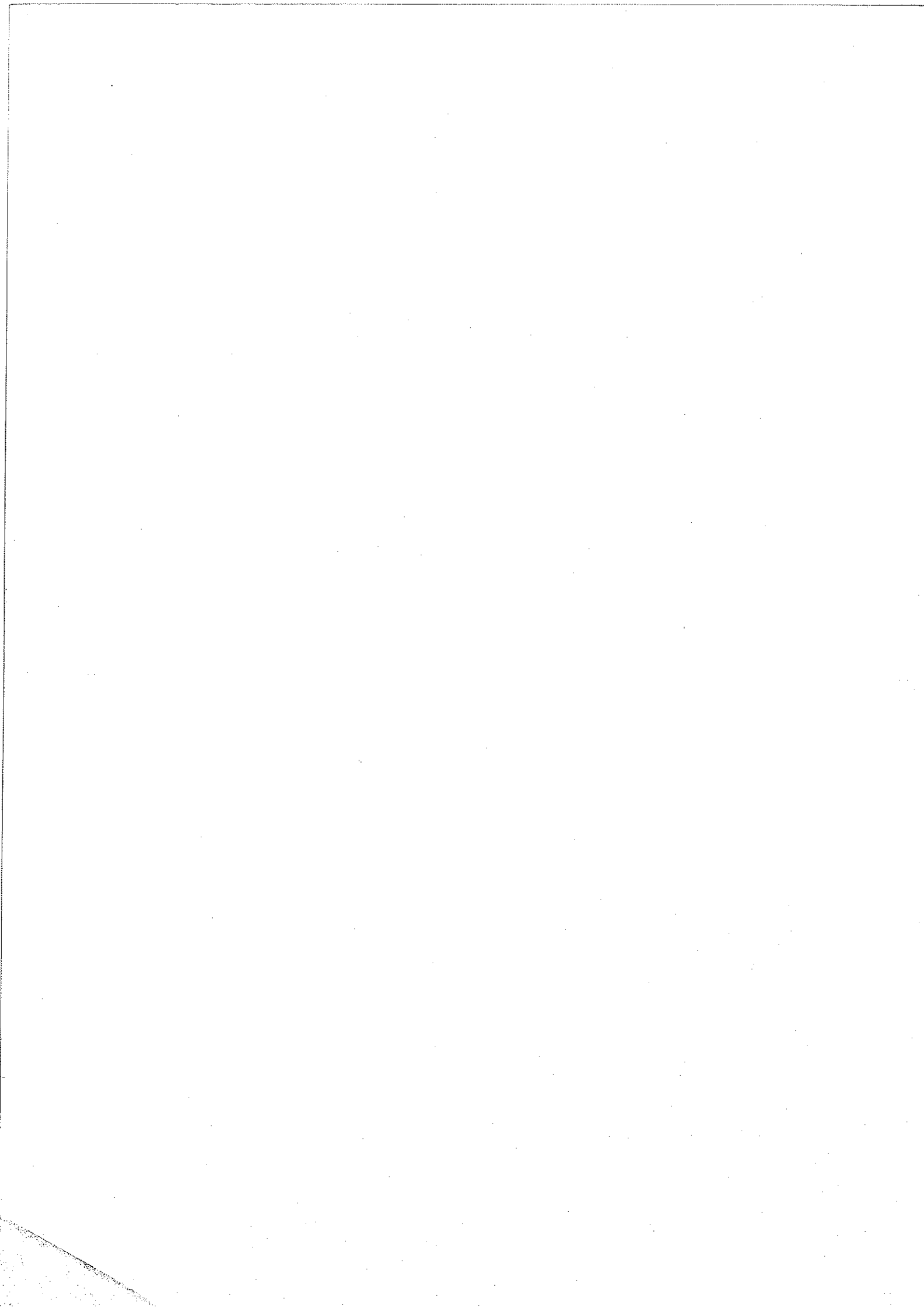


CLAWMARKS





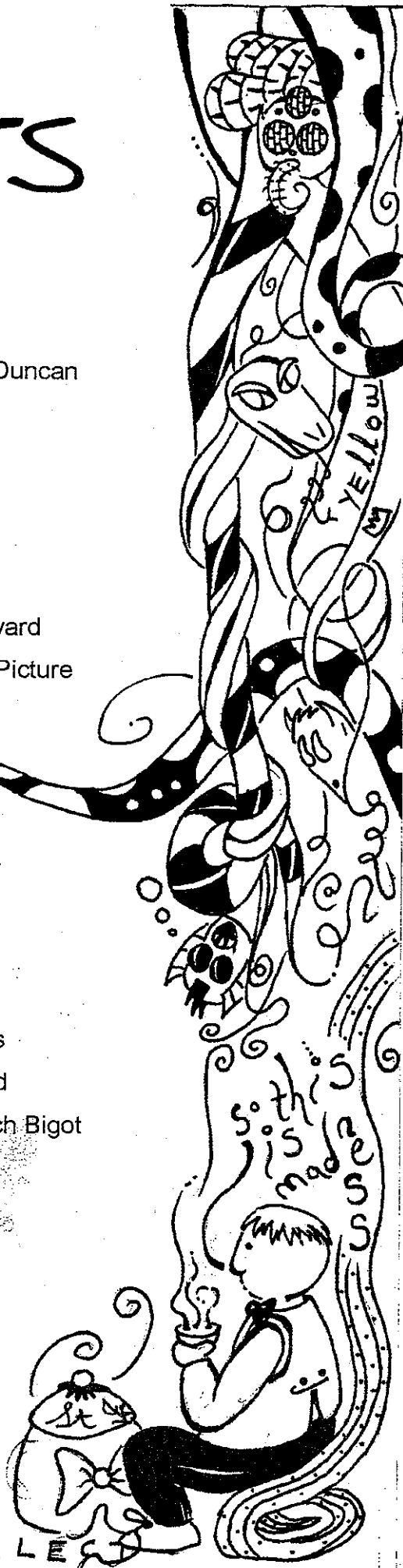
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COLLECT





IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Giles Lochner Kipps

7.12.1974 - 20.3.1999

Claws has always been a home for those who are a little different, people who love fantasy, myths and legends, strange music and a preference for black clothing. Giles was all these things and a lot more. A Clawthing in his time with long hair, a black trench coat, docs and endless supply of black T-shirts, his passionate intensity for fantasy, role playing, reading, things martial and so on made him one of the best clawthings claws had ever seen. But he was also a lot more than that, He was an intensely sensitive and compassionate person, protective over people he loved he was in all things the perfect gentleman. But this is not to say that he did not have a rogue side, which he did, and the number of young ladies that he seduced helped cement the reputation of Giles's everywhere. The pentagram party he organised at Llandudno is still a legend in Claws, including the fine he had to pay to the police.

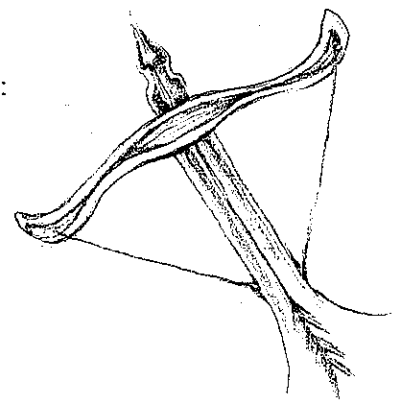
Giles was an intensely complex person, with many sides to his character and all of us who remember him will remember some of those sides, but perhaps no one will really knew all of them and that is one of the reasons we all find it so difficult to understand why he took his life. He was a hopeless romantic who loved with a great intensity. He was a Paladin, both in his life and in his role-playing, not a stuffy religious bigot, but a Knight in fine plate armour, looking for foul demons to slay and perhaps the odd princess or two to rescue as well. He was also a scientist (his majors were chemistry and computer science) and an intensely practical person, always willing to get involved in practical projects, from building bookshelves to laying networks and cabling. (My house will fall down long before the bookshelf we built will). He had a strong irrelevance for authority and beurocracy, something that was a great asset during his time as Clawthing, but at the same time when it came down to getting the job done he was always the first in line to help.

His parents and sister Donna, and well as all of us his friends will sorely miss him. We gave him a Viking send-off as befits a warrior on his way to Valhalla, sending his ashes off on a burning long ship down the Breede river a place he deeply loved. But in his own words in the note he left,

“ This is not to remind you that I'm dead but as a memento of the good times when I was alive. I love you all
Giles”

He always loved poetry and these words sum up some of the person that was Giles:

*“Strange friend I said here is no cause to mourn,
None said the other save the undone years
I went hunting wild after the wildest beauty in the world,
That lies not calm in eyes or braided hair
But mocks the steady running of the hour
And if it grieves, grieves richer than here.”*



Robanne Miller having almost gotten by without having to write anything rants for a few minutes on the birth of a monster.

FIVE MINUTES OF FAME

OK, enough of the flowery speeches here's the damn editorial. Just to rub it in--it is my last time. Ok so I am a little nostalgic, and this Clawmarks birthed like a slippery eel, so its not even as if I can say it was a terrible experience.

Hmmmm, grumble, grumble

Well no animals were harmed in the creation of this magazine, some my have been upset, but none where harmed. Although who can really say if they where upset, I mean do frogs mind if you lick them, in the hopes that they may be mildly hallucinogenic.

Also no CLAWmembers where harmed in the creation of this issue. Strangely enough people all gave articles--lots of them, hence the fat bumper edition you fellows are receiving. A special thanks to David, who knows when to leave me alone and quietly, does what I say. To Mark despite his Valentines Day worries and an instant dislike my computer seemed to take to his face, he did a good job. TO Duncan whose PC sat on my lounge table and made my life a walking dream. To Adrienne and Simon, more for all the work they did for orientation week but their additions to Clawmarks where copious and well appreciated. To Ivan who pointed out that we were no better than Neanderthals hammering with stones on a cave a wall. To Dylan, Perry, Adeeb, Stuart, Lara and everybody else who wrote and article or sent pictures, we love you.

Welcome back, and good luck to everybody this year.

Have a smashing day (smash the table, smash the chair) (actually don't do that, but you get the picture)

Robanne

Steel Wire, Cold Glue and Duct Tape: How We Created a Monster

A Thesis by A Pinska

Late last year Simon & I decided that nothing would draw crowds to the CLAWs stand like a giant tentacled beastie, and vowed to create a largish model of the Great Cthulhu in time for O-Week. At the time of writing (Friday 11th) it appears that we are going to succeed.

A month ago, our first attempted construction of wire frame ended in a wobbly, dismal failure. Last week we purchased thicker wire and work began in Ernest [at least we won't have to watch any more of those ghastric movies - ed]. A few days and multiple abrasions later, we achieved the desired result.

The following day we coated the skeleton with plastic bags and brown packing tape. Unfortunately our supply of bags dried up a few tentacles short of completion, and we had to purchase some from the Shoprite at 11c a unit. Yes! Only the highest quality materials for our favourite evil god! [er, we think the pedants may want to verify Cthulhu god/priest/thing-hood, we dunno - ed collective]

Today we applied a coat of cold glue and Cape Ads. Having mildly disturbed some of Simon's room-mates whilst drying on the stoep, Cthulhu has been moved inside and now awaits further paper coating, paint and varnish.

By the time you read this article, he should be sitting on a table in all his green tentacled glory, glaring balefully at the firstyears and swatting at advancing toy soldiers.

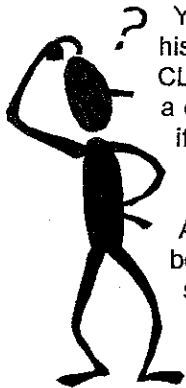
Next year we hope to make a bigger one. We will probably resort to kidnapping some CLAWmembers and forcing them to do all the hard work



SO HOW DOES IT ALL WORK...

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ROLEPLAYING (FOCUSING ON THE CALL OF CTHULHU SYSTEM)

A.Pinska



You saw the stand, and went to have a closer look at the strange fat man with the octopus on his head. You discovered that all those strange people belong to a roleplaying society called CLAWs. You tried to find out what this "roleplaying" thing was, and someone probably gave you a confused speech about dice and character sheets and DMs and LARPs and dressing up. And if you didn't back away hurriedly at that point they gave you this magazine, as if it was supposed to explain everything...

All that you will need to participate in your first roleplaying game is a little imagination. You will be able to borrow some dice and a character sheet will be given to you. It will probably look something like the picture on the adjacent page. Don't be discouraged by its complexity - it will grow to make perfect sense.

This particular sheet is a Call of Cthulhu sheet which is being used for a Delta Green character. Delta Green is a setting which uses the Call of Cthulhu system, and this article describes roleplaying using that system. If you play using another system (e.g. Ars Magica, Altermity or White Wolf) your character sheet, the dice you roll and the way you calculate your score will differ. The general idea is, more or less, the same though.

This article also relates to campaign roleplaying (playing in a game that is continued in regular sessions) as opposed to once-offs (single session games that begin, end and are never heard of again). If you are going to play in a once-off, ignore all references that happen over a long period of time.

Now for the guided tour:

1. This block is fairly self-explanatory. Your name, what you do and so forth.
2. This block tells you more about our character.

The mysterious abbreviations:

STR	Strength
CON	Constitution
SIZ	Size
DEX	Dexterity
APP	Appearance
SAN	Maximum Sanity
INT	Intelligence
POW	Willpower
EDU	Education
Idea	Your ability to have insightful ideas
Luck	How lucky you are
Know	How much you know



SAN and the last column have scores expressed as percentages. Your other scores in its block are usually multiplied by some number before you make a roll. They work very much like skills (see point 6).

Present



Investigator Name: Ryan Robinson
 Occupation: RAF 452 Recon Team
 Colleges, Degrees: RAF Academy
 Birthplace: Birmingham, UK
 Mental Disorders: _____
 Sex: Male Age: 26

1

Characteristics & Rolls

STR 12 DEX 16 INT 16 Ideals _____
 CON 12 APP 14 POW 12 Luck 50
 SIZ 13 SAN 50 EDU 14 Know 90
 99-Cthulhu Mythos: 99 Damage Bonus: 1.24

2

Present Day Investigator's Sheet

Player's Name: Ryan Cross

Sanity Points

Insane	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65
	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82
	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99

3

Magic Points

Unconscious	0	1	2	3																				
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11																
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19																
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43

4

Hit Points

Dead	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43
------	----	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----

5

Investigator Skills

<input type="checkbox"/> Accounting (10%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> History (20%)	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Anthropology (01%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Jump (25%)	<u>25</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology (01%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Law (05%)	<u>5</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Art (05%):	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Library Use (25%)	<u>25</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pilot: Civ. Prop.	<u>40</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Listen (25%)	<u>25</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pilot: Recon	<u>30</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Locksmith (01%)	<u>0</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Astronomy (01%)	<u>10</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Martial Arts (01%)	<u>5</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Bargain (05%)	<u>5</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Mech. Repair (20%)	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Biology (01%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Medicine (05%)	<u>5</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry (01%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural History (10%)	<u>10</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Climb (40%)	<u>40</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Navigate (10%)	<u>10</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Computer Use (01%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Occult (05%)	<u>5</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Conceal (15%)	<u>15</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Opt. Hyv. Mch. (01%)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Craft (05%):	_____	Other Language (01%):	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Carpentry	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish	<u>10</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Dressmaking	<u>5</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Swedish	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Credit Rating (15%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> SCUBA	<u>10</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Cthulhu Mythos (00)	<u>51</u>	Own Language (EDUx5%):	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Disguise (01%)	<u>5</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<u>90</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Dodge (DEX x2)	<u>25</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Persuade (15%)	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Drive Auto (20%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy (01%)	<u>5</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Electr. Repair (10%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Photography (10%)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Electronics (01%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Physics (01%)	<u>0</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Fast Talk (05%)	<u>30</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Pilot (01%):	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> First Aid (30%)	<u>30</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heavy Weapons	<u>15</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Geology (01%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Hide (10%)	<u>10</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Psychoanalysis (01%)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Psychology (05%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Ride (05%)	<u>5</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ride (05%)	<u>5</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Sneak (10%)	<u>10</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Sneak (10%)	<u>10</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Spot Hidden (25%)	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Spot Hidden (25%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Swim (25%)	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Swim (25%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Throw (25%)	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Throw (25%)	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Track (10%)	<u>10</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Track (10%)	<u>10</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Navigate: Air	<u>20</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Navigate: Air	<u>20</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Navigate: Land	<u>10</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Navigate: Land	<u>10</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> UFF Proxy	<u>30</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> UFF Proxy	<u>30</u>	Firearms:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Firearms:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Handgun (20%)	<u>50</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Handgun (20%)	<u>50</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Machine Gun (15%)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Machine Gun (15%)	_____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rifle (25%)	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rifle (25%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Shotgun (30%)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Shotgun (30%)	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> SMG (15%)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> SMG (15%)	_____		

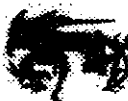
6

Weapons

melee	%	damage	hnd	rng	#att	hp	firearm	%	damage	mag	rng	#att	shots	hp
<input type="checkbox"/> Fist (50%)	<u>50</u>	1D3+db	1	touch	1	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> Brownie	<u>50</u>	1d10	99	20	3	13	8
<input type="checkbox"/> Grapple (25%)	_____	special	2	touch	1	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Head (10%)	_____	1D4+db	0	touch	1	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Kick (25%)	<u>30</u>	1D6+db	0	touch	1	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Knife (20)	<u>50</u>	1D6+3db	1	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> RADS	<u>300</u>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

7

CALL OF CTHULHU
Horror Role-Playing



3. This block tells you how your sanity is doing. You start off at your maximum sanity, and your mental health deteriorates as you are exposed to disturbing things. Horrible monsters from other dimensions, for instance. If your sanity drops very low you may develop strange mental disorders, and eventually be reduced to a gibbering idiot. This, of course, is to be avoided, so it is a good idea to attempt to regain SAN points. You can do so by visiting a (cleared!) psychiatrist, succeeding in missions and thereby gaining confidence, or simply relaxing by the pool between missions.

4. Although anybody can use magic in the Cthulhu / Delta green setting, your character probably won't unless they are a cultist, or have special metal powers. If this applies to you, read on.

5. This box tracks your physical well-being. Whenever you are injured you lose hit points. If you lose lots of them you begin to function badly, and may be put temporarily out of action. If you lose all of them, you die. This, obviously is a bad thing, so try not to do it.

6. Ha! This is the really important bit. This large block lists all the things you can do, and how well you can do them. Each skill is expressed as a percentage. When you attempt to do something, you try to roll a number less than your skill in that category.

Instead of rolling a hundred sided die (they do actually exist but they're hideously impractical) you roll two ten-sided dice (d10's); one for the tens and one for the units. The lower you roll, the better you fare.

If you get under a fifth of your skill you "impale", and do really well. The best possible roll is an 01, which guarantees you jaw-droppingly amazing success.

The worst possible roll is 00, the dreaded botch. It guarantees that not only will you fail utterly in whatever it is you were doing, but you will probably inflict grievous bodily harm on yourself in the process.

A high ninety (unless of course it is under your skill) indicates a fumble, which is not quite as serious as a botch but still a very bad roll..

Whenever you impale a roll you get to tick the relevant skill. During the period of relaxation between missions you roll to improve all the skills that you have ticked.

7. Ha again! This is the other important bit. This block contains information about your weapons: your skill in the use of each weapon and the damage that it does. There is a category for hand-to-hand combat and one for firearms.

In brief, when you attack frequently happens), you skill. If you succeed, you damage you have done to

Right! So you have this some dice. What happens You sit down with a bunch floor. Or anywhere, as a arrangement. All the players like you. The other

Each player controls their equivalent of a narrator players' characters. It is what the DM is saying, so



someone (or something, as first roll like you would for any other roll to determine how much your opponent.

character sheet and you borrowed now?

of people at a table. Or on the matter of fact. In a vaguely circular people except for one will be person will be the DM.

own character. The DM is the and controls everything except the vitally important to be able to hear make sure you sit really close (but

not so close that you are able to see over their protective screen onto their secret notes. They tend to react adversely).

The DM will set the scene and explain the situation which your characters are in. This is where you actually start roleplaying. You decide what you want your character to do, and tell the DM. The DM will tell you what roll you need to make. You roll your dice and tell the DM what you got. Then the DM will tell you what you got. Then the DM will tell you what happened.

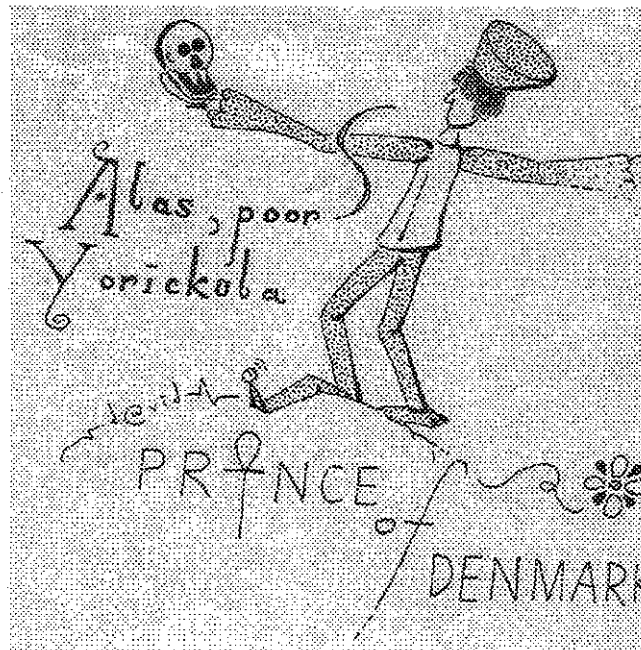
This is repeated indefinitely (until the DM gets tired and wants to go home).

During the game you can, of course, interact with other players - your character can talk to their characters. You can also talk to various non-player characters (NPCs), who are controlled and embodied by the DM. You can also talk to the DM and other players out of character on matters concerning the game.

At some stage of a campaign your character will quite possibly die. This does not mean you're out of the game - you will be given a new one. The turnover rate depends largely on your DM, and their inclination to kill characters off wantonly. Although character loss is a sad occasion, try not to take it too hard. Attempting to strangle your DM is definitely an overreaction.

And that's about it, then. Now that you know what's going on, sign up for a demonstration game.

Go on. What are you waiting for?



HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE ROLEPLAYERS

The Newbie's Guide to CLAW roleplaying

For all the newbies in CLAW, Duncan Sellars provides a survival guide for getting past the roleplayers.

Despite the fact they all worship the high god Lucky Dice, the tendency to bunch all roleplayers as "the same" can be a dangerous assumption. For some, roleplaying is a way to get away from life for a while; for others, roleplaying **is** their life. Attitudes such as this are reflected in the roleplaying games they play. (Newbies not familiar with roleplaying games should be aware that many hundreds exist, and more are spawned each month.)

So to give the naïve intruder who doesn't know a Netrunner from a Muckraker a chance to respond sensibly when challenged by a roleplayer, this article provides a brief examination of roleplayers, using the most common games they play.

The Ars Magica Player:

Probably created by somebody who failed to see the point of any character class besides mages in AD&D, Ars (pronounced *Arz*, **not Arse**) Magica places the characters as authentic sorcery-wielding mages in historical Medieval Europe, where seraphs, fairies, demons and all the other contemporary beliefs actually exist. Without so-called "character classes", the characters must instead choose magical Houses to belong to, each with their own specialty. An Ars Magica player generally spends hours debating the right techniques for creating spells. Apprentices to Ars Magica can appease experienced players by mentioning how sucky 4th Edition is. Further favour can be won by producing your own copy of 3rd Edition (available at Outer Limits, Cape Town).

The Cthulhu Player:

The two words to instant accreditation amongst Cthulhu (generally pronounced Ka-thoo-loo) players are: *Cthulhu stagn*, which means "Cthulhu sleeps." Newbies should

repeat this often. The game is generally set during the early 20th century. The entire Cthulhu system is built on the works of a 1920s American horror writer called H.P. Lovecraft, whose dislike of seafood turned him to writing tales of people getting involved with multi-tentacled, extremely ancient, insanity-inducing, generally hostile, godlike aliens. Cthulhu characters are given the onerous opportunity to overthrow these overwhelming opponents. Acolytes to Cthulhu gaming can win friends amongst Cthulhu players by being extremely paranoid and creating original phobias for their characters. Optophobia (fear of opening one's eyes), leukophobia (fear of the colour white), or sinistrophobia (fear of the left side, or things to the left), while a tad inconvenient, can be interesting to play.

The Cyberpunk Player:

Cyberpunk positions players in the near-future science fiction worlds of William Gibson and others. In these dark settings, mega-corporations control the world, nearly everybody has cybernetic body implants, and somebody is always out to get you. Cyberpunk players are often very technology-minded, and like their cousins, Delta Green players, always have a number of conspiracy theories on hand. For the new player, start by reading *Neuromancer*, by W. Gibson. If this is too much work, at least watch *Johnny Mnemonic*, the Keanu Reeves flick. Cyberpunks value appearance highly - so ensure you wear a lot of black, have one of those ear-mounted microphone phones, and carry at least one weapon with you always. When writing, always put @ for the letter 'a'. If anyone asks you questions about Cyberpunk, bluntly tell them to "go read the 'effing FAQ" (pronounced Fa-k). Incidentally, the term Netrunner refers to a character who specialises in computers and computer hacking.

The D&D/AD&D Player:

Generally believing himself to be a mythical elven mage, the experienced D&D/AD&D player is skilled in intricate arithmetic (from having to continually calculate THAC0s, damage, Armour Classes, and more), and generally carries a large rucksack containing the players' guides, DM guides, area source books, module books, monster compendia and spell tomes she needs. He or she can cite the defensive bonuses provided by any medieval armour. Newbies can win favour with these roleplayers by reciting the Twelve Things No AD&D Character Should Be Without (50ft rope, oil lamps, oil, flint, dagger, rations, caltrops, small stones, parchment, holy water, lock picks, and Sword of Evildoer Slaying, +3/+3). The uninitiated should be aware that AD&D characters can often be flat, unrealistic types who never take a bath, show much understanding of the opposite sex, or find it incredible that a magical rat skull can kill a dragon. This goes for the players, too.

The Deadlands Player:

If Falkenstein (see below) is the game for an alternate Europe in the 1800s, then Deadlands is definitely the game for a very alternate America in the 1800s. Without

giving too much away, the USA of Deadlands is a strange place, still populated by gunslingers, sheriffs, and shoot-outs, but with magical creatures, dark forces, and a strange mineral called ghost rock added in. All the usual scenarios are also there: barfights, shootouts in the main street, and Apache raids. The DM is called the Marshall and the party is called the Posse. Some Deadlands players get a kick out of using cheesy Western accents. Being able to name the deeds of Wyatt Earp, Jesse James, Doc Holliday, Pat Garrett and John Wesley Hardin will get you massive street credit. Also ensure you know what did and didn't really in the Old West. And a Muckraker is the term for a reporter or newspaperman.



The Delta Green Player:

A crossbreed of the Cyberpunk and Cthulhu players (see above), the Delta Green player is a generally a fan of the X-Files, believes the world is run by the secret society of Illuminati, and knows the best way of survival is through acquiring bigger firearms. In Delta Green, characters are usually members of a governmental task force charged with taking care of unusual or supernatural cases. Delta Green employs the same mechanics as Cthulhu, although it is set in modern times, and can be a lot of fun. To be a respected Delta Green player, access to the Internet (the communications link of the resistance) is vital. Extra points can be garnered by creating one's own paranoid conspiracy theories (the Russians conspiring with the Atlanteans, for example), and super bonus points are awarded for possessing one's own firearm.

The Feng Shui Player:

Seen "Hard Boiled", or watched any movies starring Jet Li? Then you know what Feng Shui is about.

The Feng Shui character can often be known for pulling off spectacular physical stunts rarely seen within our laws of physics. This is due to the fact that Feng Shui is set in an incredible world where ancient Chinese warlocks, the Japanese mafia, and Hong Kong-style kung-fu action meet. The Feng Shui player is often a follower of Hong Kong action movies starring people with names like Jonny Wong; hence, knowing all the works of Jet Li, et al. is sure to impress him. Within Feng Shui, no action or stunt is too outrageous, so an imagination for the impossible is also extremely useful.

The Falkenstein Player:

The Falkenstein character epitomises style, wit, derring-do and all the other desirable properties of Victorian heroes. In Falkenstein your characters are set against the backdrop of an alternate 19th century, where Elves visit the Queen for tea, Dragons sleep under the

mountains, and greedy merchants vie for control of all Europe. Falkenstein players find crushing people with clever repartee a real turn-on. If you dig stylish games, Falkenstein can be lots of fun, and its system using playing cards is nothing short of spiffing. If sending off bitingly sharp retorts to your villain while at the same time dexterously grappling with him on top of a zeppelin flying over the English Channel is your cup of tea, then you will make a fine Falkenstein player. Recommended reading: Stephen Baxter's *Anti-Ice* or anything by H.G. Wells or Jules Verne.

The MERP (Middle-Earth Role-Playing) Player:

The MERP player, an off-shoot of the Rolemaster player (see below), combines her love of Tolkien's Middle-Earth novels with roleplaying to create a fantastic world populated with dragons, hobbits and the other intricate characters Tolkien devised.

As they are a rare sight these days, little is known about the MERP player, except the fact they often knows things about Tolkien's universe that would put former members of the Tolkien Society to shame.

Speaking Hobbit would probably impress them; at least make sure you re-read all the *Lord of the Rings* books before approaching them.

The Macho Women With Guns Player:

Exclusively female, the Macho Women With Guns player may seem like a timid kitten, but can become a raging tigress given a machete and a machine gun with armour-piercing rounds. Roar.

MWWG can be played in any setting, from modern to far future. Your character could be a female soldier of fortune, or a nun with an Uzi. The DM of Macho Women With Guns is usually hard-pressed to keep down the level of anti-male feelings. So let's not forget, guys, MWWG groups are not a good place to pick up women, unless you are willing to risk soft

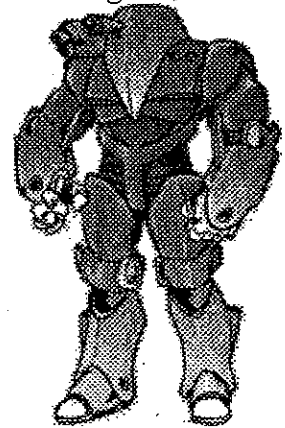
body parts. MWWG is not an official publication; it was written and printed by one person: the source books, although outstanding, are thus very scarce.

The Rolemaster Player:

A superior form of the AD&D player, the Rolemaster player has mastered the ability to memorize hundreds of page numbers, each referencing a particular table needed to play the game. Unlike AD&D, Rolemaster is not confined to medieval/fantasy settings only, but can be suited to any background, even into outer space (SpaceMaster; please don't ask me). Despite its drawbacks, Rolemaster is quite a versatile system, and nicely covers all possible actions players can make. Newbies can curry favour by mentioning the number 66 (a critical failure) and any particularly gruesome, intricate death scene they can think of. Rolemaster types are generally more mature, patient people than AD&D players - they have to be, given the average 5 hours it takes to create a character.

The Shadowrun Player:

Apparently unable to decide if he wants to play a fantasy or science-fiction game, the Shadowrun player enjoys the advantages of both. In Shadowrun, mythical races such as elves exist alongside cyber-enhanced mercenaries. Characters can choose to destroy their opponents with military or magical might. Hence combining Cyberpunk with Rolemaster-style games, this combination of state-of-the-art and sorcery can be quite potent. Don't forget, however, your opponents also have these resources.



The Twilight 2000 Player:

Showing its age somewhat these days, the T2K player (as he is known) bases his roleplaying in a kind of postapocalyptic (or at least, gone horribly fucking wrong) world, where the remnants of mankind toil to survive the elements, nuclear fallout, and roaming psycho

militia. Where other games place character development as a game priority, in T2K, just surviving is considered remarkable. This game often attracts survivalist nuts, the kind that really can hunt and survive in the woods for days, but are liable to paint their faces with woad and scream at anyone wearing yellow clothing - basically, your average Boy Scout gone bad. To win their respect, being able to make anything useful out of some branches, bandages and an AK-47 is a good start. If you know how to drive an M-1 Abrams tank, all the better.

The Vampire: The Masquerade Player:

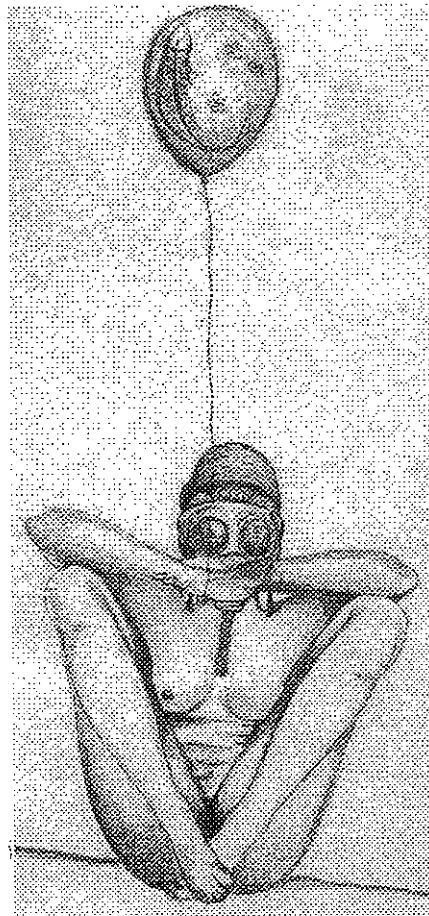
Vampire: The Masquerade players have a reputation for being pretentious individuals who would just die to have preternatural powers, immortal life and perfect skin. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with that, in my opinion. The game casts players as ageless vampires, competing with other vampires for power, wealth, and the blood of the mortals, or Kine, as they are known. An entire vampire hierarchy is postulated, placing characters as merely a rung on a very high ladder. Freshly Embraced (that means "new") players to the game should read Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles before they do anything else. Then, go out and buy some black candles. Sharpening your incisors to points is **not** recommended.

The Werewolf: The Apocalypse, Changeling: The Dreaming, Mage, Mummy or Wraith Player:

Once, long ago, there was a roleplaying company called White Wolf. And they produced some really good games, like Ars Magica, and yea, even Vampire: The Masquerade. Then one day long ago, when they realized lots of other people were buying their games, they said to one another: "Let us produce more games such as these, so that we may prosper, and buy shares on the Nasdaq." And this came to pass. But the games they produced were shoddy, and merely pale shadows of the ones before, and soon, the people came to realize this, and cried out into the desert in disgust.

These systems all place the characters as supernatural beings of some kind or other. Collectively, Vampire and these games are

known as the World of Darkness games, and are compatible, thus allowing for mixed parties of characters. This can lead to megalomaniacal parties of super-warriors, nearly unstoppable by any force. Despite being supernatural-based, these games have been accused of stretching even believable fantasy beyond all form. Nevertheless, should newbies be interested, a keen knowledge of powerful weapons can be a useful tool, should your character's already fearsome abilities not be enough.



DRAGONFIRE X

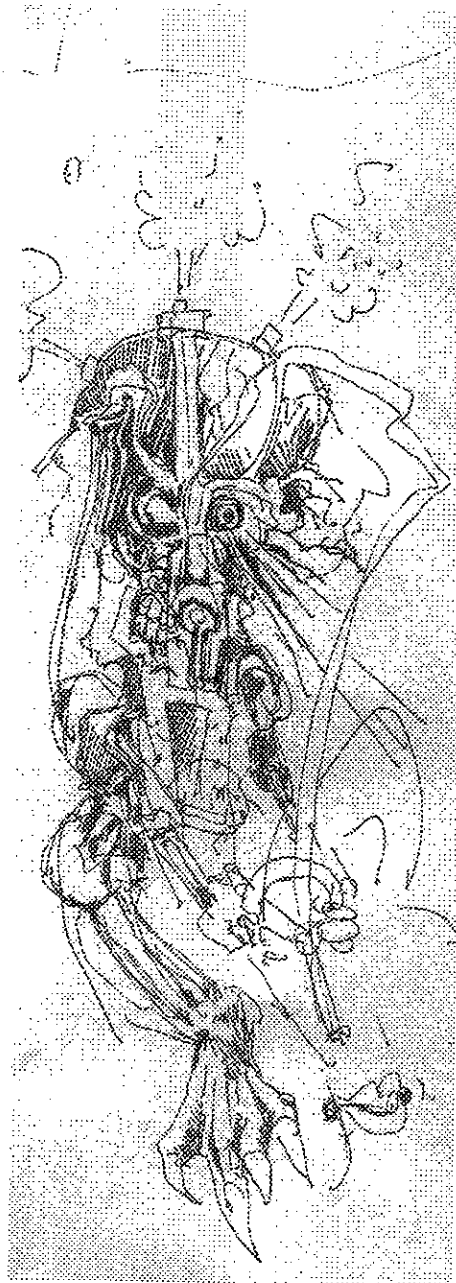
d@vid seaward gets biblical as he looks back on the tenth anniversary of CLAWs' annual tournament

¹In the Beginning there was the Tournament, and the Name of the Tournie was Dragonfire. ²And yea, it was the Oldest and yea it was the Greatest of the Land at the Foot of Africa. ³Well, mayhap Gencon was Greater, but Dragonfire was Groovier. And generally all was Good.

"And into the Fold came a Neophyte, and yea his name was written strangely and it was "d@vid". ²And thus he spake, "Enough with the yea's already!" Although he had been within the Fold already, he had slept through a select proportion of last year's Tournament, and thus was he not Prepared for what was to Come. ³And I say unto thee now, brothers and things, this Psalm shall Prepare Thou in Reflecting and for Tournaments of the Future. ⁴And yea, even the one this Year.

^{III}Preperation fozzled around until the Great Day of Reckoning, but before that it was the Party of Cock's Tail at which even the Spawn of the Evil One were

present, and they had Badges so that one might recognize them, if one knew what one was



Looking for. ²And I say to you now, Beware!

Beware, for it went off so well these Servants of the World of Darkness, yea from Cape Town and yea from the mythical Jo-berg, may even come again! ³And elsewise there were many in Costume who disguised themselves from each other, and a Red Horned Divvil walked amongst us, and so did a Raven-Haired Warrior Princess, showing on teevee even now. ⁴And such did they astound the crowd that they were Awarded! ⁵And the people said that this was good and they Mentioned Honourably a Man that they did not even See.

^{IV}And such did it come to pass that the First Day dawned. And there was the scurrying of little feet in preperation for the Crowds. And it was good, or at least hectic.

²There was Magic my brethren! Yes and there was Gambling by the same name, and even did the infidels use Cards! What hapless world is this that such events might even take place, even though they did but call themselves "Peons"? ^{2.1}And in the

other corner was War Mongered! And even as the Card Sharps did their mana burn, did Orcs fly and Marines fry in that little entrance area where the coke machines are.

^VAnd in the central area Swashes were Buckled, and feet Pinned to the Deck with Harpoons, "Six Fathoms Deep". And many an 'ar me 'arties was heard as Players of Role did begin in this 'ar-PGA module created by the neffible Dylan of the Craig. ²They say even a Maiden of Myrrh was spotted.

^{VI}This was followed by a dread Sound, a sound that quaked the Crowd to their very Souls! Yes, you too may quiver even in thought of the Call of Cthulhu! ²And such it was that during this module our Protagonist did appear, for he had been doing some Last Minute Typing and boy was he tired. The contestants did quiver as mysterious circumstances drew them into a canyon of "Shifting Sands", created by the eldry Chamberlain Austin and Jessica t'Fin of the court of the King in Yellow! ³Bwahahahaha! ⁴And yea it is noted that the style should settle down a little.

^{VII}And all this while, while Cards flew, Ships

warred, and explorations were made in the depths of Sea and Mind, was the Committee (mostly) at the Stand of Reconstitution and Replenishment. ²And there were hotdogs and there were chocolates and there temptations aplenty. And yea were they gobbled. They even managed to organize Lunch, sort of.

^{IX}But then Night did fall and LARPs did begin. What strange psychedelics must have been procured that players saw "Black Coffee Blues", and two mysterious Jee-ems did ponder around and they were the Jewess Davison and some Greek called Philip Anastasiadis. ²What mysterious goings on went on in that Establishment of Ill Repute (for yea can one find Coffee and other Instantiations of the God Caffeine there, and what could be worse, no, not even Penguin Mints). ³And more cannot be said, 'cause I wasn't there...

⁴Meanwhile in a Future not unlike our own were Biscuits scoffed and Academics ruffled and it is even reputed that even the Skull of Zeus was on display! For sure, were they pagans or wot? ⁵And as Security Caterers of the school of Grievous Mutilation, did

the Ward of Seas and the Miller's daughter, Robanne, preside over this "Past Imperfect".

^{IX}And the Moon did set and the Sun did rise, and it was the Second Day. ²And the Gamers warred and those Cardie people had a Proper Open Type II Thing. For even still do they squander within the Wizards' vile productions, but who are we to pass judgement but the Righteous and the Mighty. ³For did I not mention that we had a T-shirt? And it was good, because it generally is. ⁴And even in the Shadows did they Run... for the Earl of Quinlivan, he that is known as Brendan, had produced a curious and intriguing module, for even did the players not know who they were, mayhap that he too has consorted with the Muse of Dystopia? ⁵For even thou may knowest, as long as thou recalls "The Trick Is Not To Close Your Eyes". ⁶And merry hell did play before Alternity, and there was nailing and washing of teeth because Shops of Copy are damn hard to find open on the Day of Rest. Lazy bums. But in the end it was taken to be Played on the Third Day, and they said "For even, is this good, 'cause shucks it's a long ruddy module, wot?"

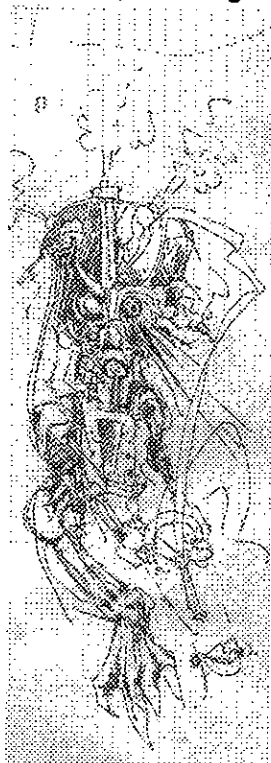
^XBut before we get ahead of ourselves, must we peruse the Events of That Eve Which Came After. For as we gaze at the stars do they not "Twinkle, Twinkle"? ²The Chamberlain Austin returned enconsorted with Robyn 3-Saul of the Detritus System. And Space Operatic shandigs did go down, and there are rumours of ghastric horror too...

³And alas, was the other sky phenomenon postponed, for the "Aurora" was not auspicious that night, and it was held a little later, and by the way it still went rather well and was the better for it. ⁴For the chessboard of the Court of the Maimed King does tazzle the mind greatly, and even make it whirr a bit.

^{XI}But what is this? For back at the Leslie at about this time were more Cards dealt of an even more sinister manner, for they depicted the Children of Kain. ²But gee are they cool...

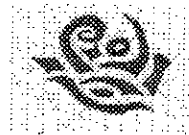
^{XII}And even as this misbegotten daemons screamed and fell to dust with the rising of the sun, it was the Third Day, the Day of the Wimmin (in general, at the tournie they Rule the Roost always, yeesh). ²Games were demoed, well, apart from those playing at the "Downtown Station", were the players were Taken for a Ride indeed. And what would thou do in such confines as the Tube?

^{XII.5}And in that little entrance area we mentioned earlier did the Mundanes Necrotic take over from the Hammer's of War, and bits did fly and things melt and go boom. ²And, you guessed it, it was good.



^{XIII}For even this Riotous Weekend did wind to a close, and they said unto one another, "When is the prize giving going to start, this is almost as bad as Gencon, but not quite..." ²Prizes were indeed given, even though some of them were merely the mysterious inscriptions 'IOU'. And everyone tottered off home before re-rendevousing at the Pizzazz Place of Pizza (now defunct due to a misfired curse, legend tells). ³And they did scoff pizza and shout around the tables and generally Have a Ball. And this Protagonist did resolve even to do it again next year, perhaps he is mad or perhaps it was just the rush?

^{XIV}And, yea, did the Dust Settle and, yea, the Leslie did not Burn, so perhaps they will let us Use It Again this year. ²For more details checkest thou out <http://play.at/dragonfire/>



A GUIDE TO QUAKE PLAYERS

Stuart Winter

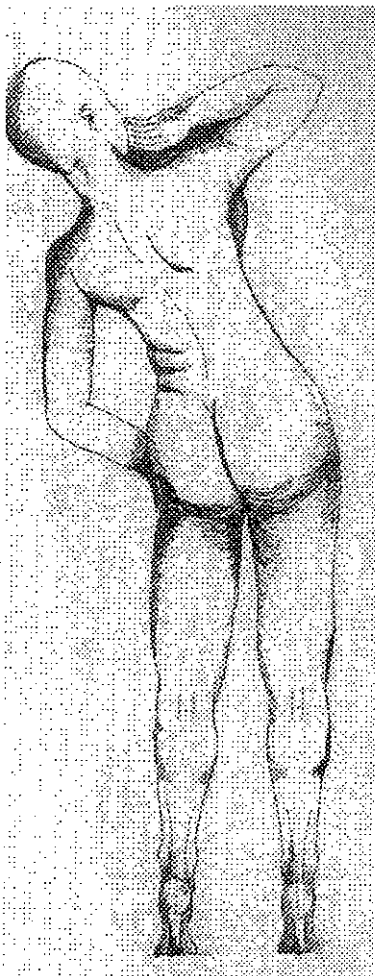
And then spoketh the great Id and said unto them: "Let there be Quake". And there was. And Id saw that it was good. And then said Id unto them: "Multiplayer anyone?"

Gospel of Id, Chapter 1, Verse 3¼

The Lava Magnet:

"Dammit."

This unusual species (*Spontaneous Combustus*) has the remarkable ability to locate any and all pools of lava within a particular level. The discovery process usually involves plunging feet first into any suspiciously lava like substances. The burning death of the player is generally considered a good sign that the substance was indeed molten rock. Among this group of players is a particularly rare breed which does not fall willingly into the lava, but rather is pushed in by any rockets that explode even remotely close by. This breed has a distinctive call of "Yew-nocked-mee-inagen!".



The Camper:

"I'm not camping!"

By far the most loathed of the Quake species, *Chickenus Shitus* is usually found in dark areas near rocket launchers, armour and other useful items. Scientists believe this is because their small brains are attracted to shiny objects. The presence of a Camper is usually denoted by a sudden lack of health on the part of the victim. Trying to explain to a Camper that it is actually camping is rather like trying to tell an Orc that peaceful co-habitation is a far better alternative to bashing things with a big stick. In both cases as well placed rocket has a far greater impact.

The Gummi Bear:

"Will you stay still!"

When you enter into a one-on-one combat and all of a sudden your opponent is jumping around more than a raver on E you have undoubtedly come across *Bounsus Upendownus*, or The

Gummi Bear. This species survives by using a continuous jumping motion to both avoid incoming fire, and induce sea sickness in its opponents.

With their hapless attacker in fits of nausea they can move in for the kill. Not as furry as their cartoon counterparts, but just as sickening.

The Rocket Man:

"Hey, why is self damage on?!?"

This particular animal seems unhappy with its inability to fly and so uses blasts from rockets to propel itself to ever greater heights. Described as "a Gummi Bear on steroids" this species copes well in the friendly confines of a "No Self Damage" universe. However, the whole breed looks headed for extinction in a regular match. The *Blastus Propellus* can be spotted either by the way it successfully lands on very high ledges, or by the way that several bits of it successfully land on very high ledges.

The Lemming:

"Hey, why is self damage on?!?"

This creature is named the Lemming due to the fact that it seems to share the lemming's extreme suicidal tendencies. *Blown Own-Ass-Apartus* is a very unusual inhabitant of the Quake universe. It is usually discovered indulging in its favourite past time, ie. spreading chunks of its body over as large an area as possible. The rather self destructive streak of these creatures is particularly well illustrated when one of them gets hold of a rocket launcher. Despite all attempts to shoot other players, the poor things always seem to hit the nearest wall or floor and succeed in dispatching only themselves.

The Server Setter:

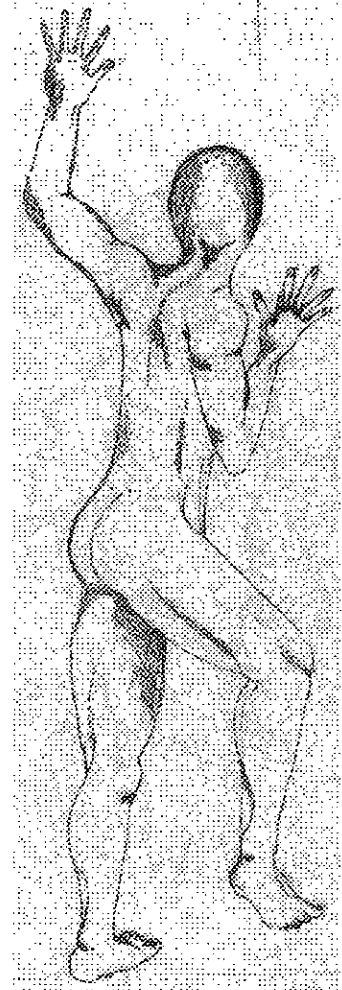
"Hang on, let me just change these settings..."

This odd species seems completely unprepared to adapt to any type of match. Instead these players decide that the match shall change to suit them. A game with *Rigus Matchus* as the server will typically involve numerous pauses and restarts (which coincide, completely coincidentally of course, with the exact point when the Setter starts to lose). Careful study of a Setter playing against bots usually reveals that the bots are set to the lowest skill level. Something like "Drop dead at the sight of me" is generally appropriate. While annoying for other species within the Quake environment, the Setters seem, er, well, set to far outlive their rivals.

The Janitor:

"I had no freakin' health left!"

It's the battle of the match. A gruelling one-on-one confrontation

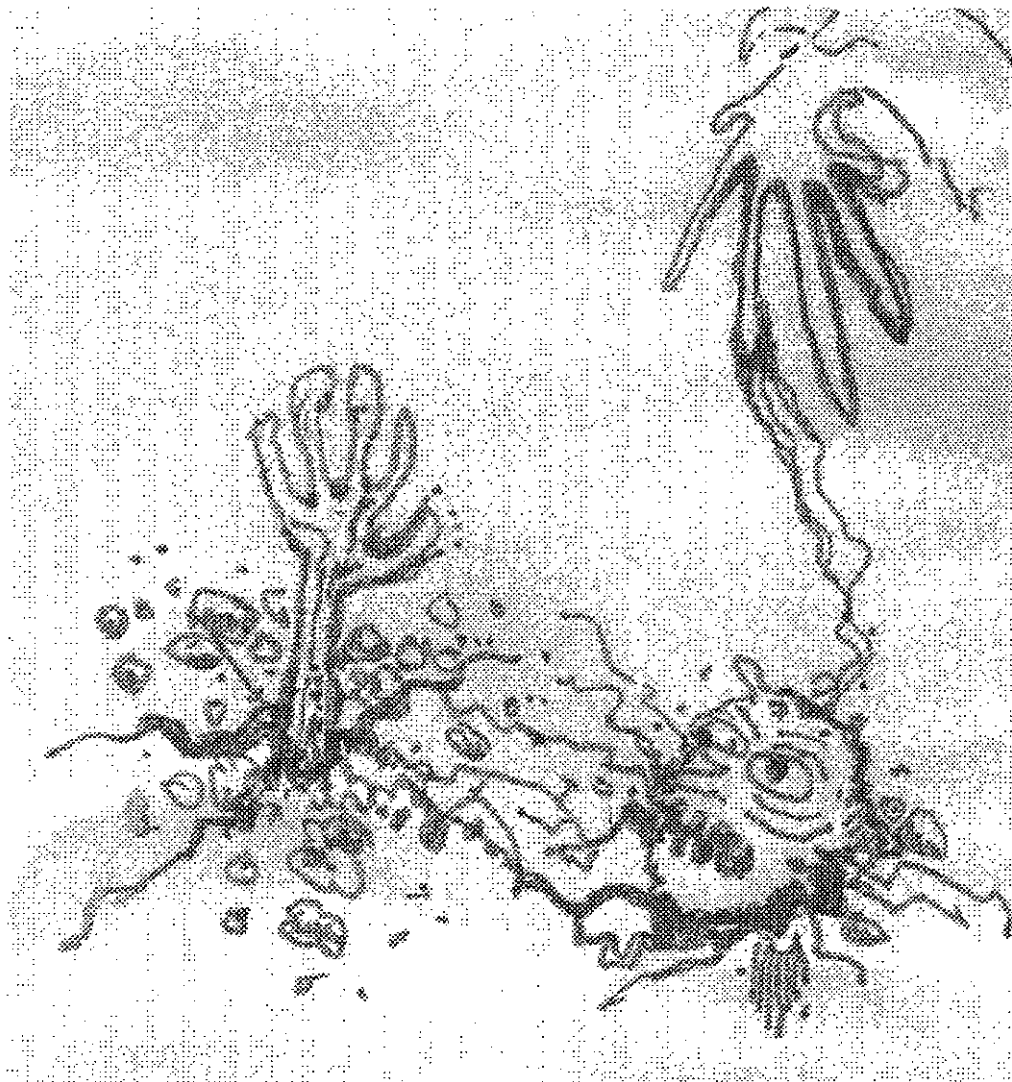


and you finally blow away your opponent with a well aimed rocket. Health critically low, you stagger desperately to the nearest health pack. It's right about this time that you notice your stagger has turned into something rather more horizontal. An action more along the lines of being a corpse. The Janitor has cleaned up again. These particularly annoying buggers always seem to walk into a room right when one player has just died and the victor has about as much health left as a very sick ant. *Annoyingus Bastardus* then simply picks off the winner and walks off with a frag. These players display an advanced form of selective hearing and seem to be deaf to any arguments involving low health levels or lucky timing.

The Newbie:

"What's Quake?"

Also known as Cannon Fodder, *Freeus Fraggus* is usually to be found in someone's gunsights. These creatures display an almost unnatural accuracy and can hit a rocket with the full force of their bodies nearly every time. It's often said that you can't look into the face of a Newbie without smiling. This is true only because the head is usually sitting in amongst a pile of gibb that previously comprised the Newbie's body. Known for their repetitive call of "Shiteye-dyed-agen, Shiteye-dyed-agen, Shiteye-dyed-agen".



STICKING TOGETHER

Some Reflections on Party Composition and Cohesion in Role-Playing Games

Dylan Craig



Trying to come up with a believable reason why a RPG character would leave the safety and boredom of their home¹ and go out "adventuring" with a bunch of other characters is one of the big, nagging dilemmas of character creation, both from a player and a DM's perspective. It's important to have the answer all figured out before the character is introduced into the game, because it lets you relax and get on with adventuring² without unnecessary hand-wringing every time the group hits a junction where your character has an opportunity to go its own way.

DMs are always tempted to use the big Circumstance Stick to hold the party together. An example of this is the old "Start the party in jail" chestnut. In this well-worn cliché (and its analogues), the characters — without ever having met before — are incarcerated³ together and must band together to escape or survive. This tactic always seems to be an easy way to introduce the party members to one another and get the wheels of party interaction

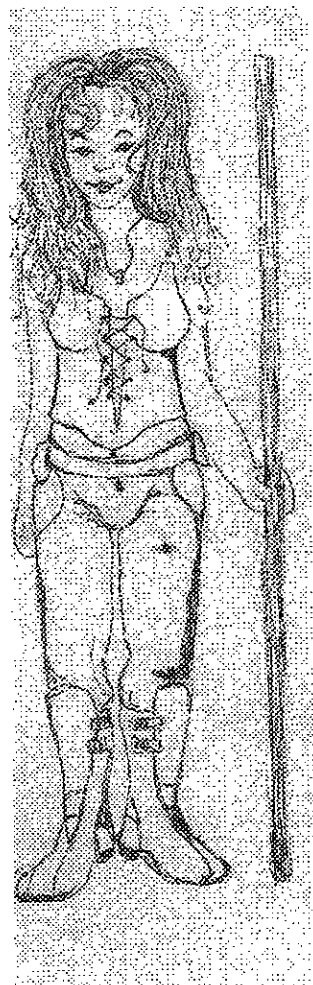
¹ Hobbit-hole, missile bunker, cardboard box in an alley, cryogenic capsule, underground survivalist lair_

² Shadowrunning, orc-slaying, conducting the Tet Offensive, hijacking the Death Star, exploring Tut's tomb_

³ Thrown into the hoosegow, hired by a Mr. Johnson, approached in a tavern, mistaken for pirates_

going, but in the long term it actually creates more work than it avoids. This is because whatever the movies may say, being thrown into uncomfortable circumstances with someone only makes the urge to get them the hell out of your sight afterwards stronger.

Additionally, as will be more fully explained below, no character likes being told "OK, you all start in a jail cell_" especially if the character is particularly tough⁴ and is likely to have been able to evade the capture. This situation invariably leads to a "No, I'm not_" "Yes, you are_" dispute, which is not the most auspicious



way to begin a campaign. Soon the DM is forced to use more unlikely

⁴ Well-armed, sneaky, connected, attractive, bloodthirsty, in the habit of wearing heavy disguise, ethereal_



circumstances to stop the characters scattering to the four winds, and so it goes on.

I'm not saying that outrageous circumstance doesn't have its place in getting disparate characters together, just that it must be accompanied by real, useable reasons why the characters would *want* to stay together as opposed to *having* to stick together. In my experience, lasting party cohesion must satisfy the following three criteria:

1. The reasons must be believable
2. The reasons must be suited to the characters and the theme of the game, and
3. The reasons must be generated largely by the players themselves.

Believability is an easy one to assess. Would the circumstances happen in real life? Remember, some kind of bond between two or more characters which occurs in the game world but not in real life isn't going to feel real to the players. Being someone's Spirit Twin in some fantasy setting where all magical abilities function in pairs doesn't engender as strong a bond as simply being that person's sibling. It's true that one of the fun things about non-contemporary settings is the wealth of alternate experiences they open up, but it's us who have to role-play

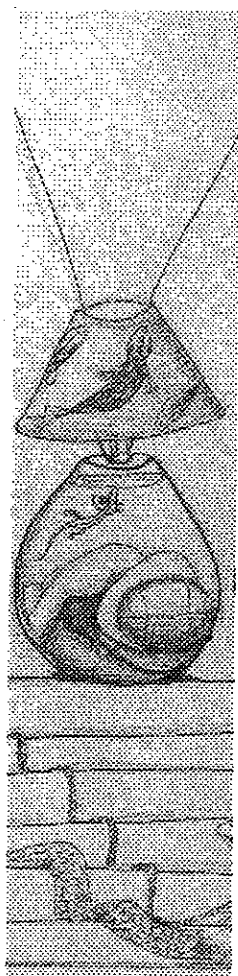


these relationships and if they have no real-world analog, it makes it that bit harder. That doesn't mean that, in the example above, the Spirit Twin thing should be discarded; just that one shouldn't pin all one's hopes on it as a cohesive force. History and fiction, after all, are littered with examples of people who gave up the benefits of a relationship because of the negative circumstances they found themselves in. Thus, my conclusion is that the links used to bind characters together should be appreciable and easy to role-play. Good examples are familial bonds, membership of an organisation⁵, a shared dream or debt, mutual friends/enemies, a shared long-term destination (in a travel-based game), and so on. Make 'em real, and make 'em meaty and detailed.

Fitting the reasons to the characters is slightly more difficult, and is the reason my most DMs prefer to use *deus ex machina* tactics rather than sit down and work out something more tailored to the party. The dilemma is often the result of characters being created in isolation, and ending up as a bunch of people who would almost never be found together naturally. One example is the so-called "loner sociopath gunfighter" phenomenon, often found in *Cyberpunk* or *Deadlands* games. Because this character is a staple of so many

⁵ The FBI, the Masons, an Ars Magica covenant, Two Squad, the Beauchamp family, the Drakewhistle coven.

movies and books from these genres, people like to create characters in the same mold. But, the problem is that while it's only moderately unlikely that one of these types might choose to travel with a group instead of on their own, increase that number to two or three, while chucking in a few other characters who operate in a totally different manner, and the implausibility factor skyrockets. At best, the game is



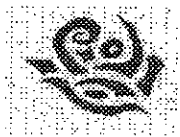
headed for a bloody Reservoir Dogs-style shootout⁶; at worst it fragments in-game and sessions devolve into a series of time-slices with no one talking to each other except to bicker at each other's choice of methods.

The knee-jerk DM response is to whip up the ol' Circumstance Stick to force the party to stick together. In one sense, this is better than having no game at all; but in another sense, it robs the DM of the joy of watching a self-motivating group roll around making its own adventures. Every

plot thread has to be laboriously introduced and the party are usually too busy acting like a bunch of wild cats sewn into a bag to notice them.

⁶ I say "at best", because at least that puts the game out of its misery, and let's you settle all those "whose character is most hard core" questions you've secretly been nursing since Day One.

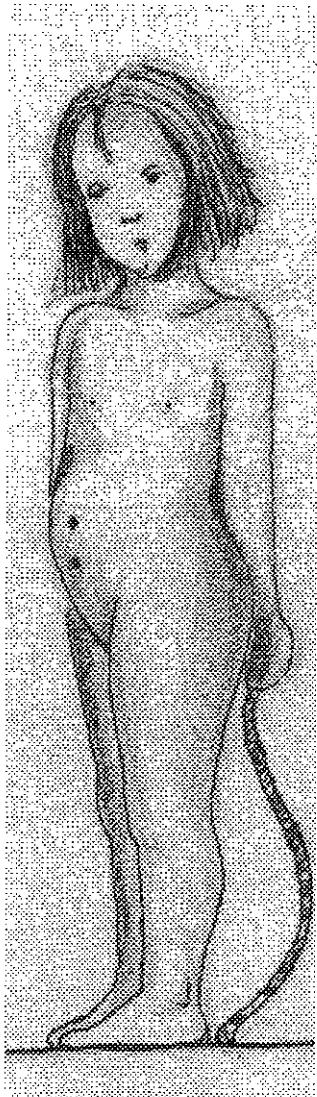
I've found that this whole mess can be avoided by tailoring the character's entrances into the game more closely to the game itself. This does mean sitting down with them and discussing character background, etc., with them quite extensively. If the gunfighter mentioned above has but one goal and that's to hunt down the man who shot his brother⁷, then the only way you are going to tie the player into the game is to work that thread through the other characters' stories as well. Most crucially, you should make sure that whichever avenues the party choose to take in their wanderings, there is always a good chance that it might bring the target of the gunfighter's "affections" that bit closer. This doesn't have to become predictable; mostly, you just need to throw in the occasional crumb while making sure that the gunfighter never, never, never has to choose between participating in the party's adventures and pursuing the quarry.



Finally, I am a firm believer that each character's backstory should feel to the player as if it was largely their creation. I've watched games where the DM has taken control of the characters backgrounds away from the players, and except in the most shameless beer-'n-pretzels games, it's really subtracted from the degree to which the players felt a part of the setting. This kind of situation represents one extreme of backstory tailoring, the other extreme of which is letting the players come up with everything in complete isolation, without any input from the DM. Both approaches will end up putting someone — either the players or the DM — into a world o' pain. The DM

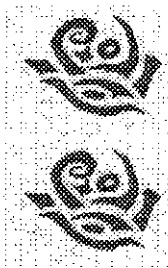
⁷ Sister, hound dawg, partner, wife, porch light, chances at becoming Chief of Police, arm off, favourite toy_

needs to be present when the player is coming up with their ideas, to correct misconceptions and to make suggestions, but most importantly to link aspects of the characters' stories together. If, as the DM, you've just come from talking to player A about his gunfighter's tragic past and the bad guy who was responsible, and player B expresses an interest in being a crusading holy man who wanders to lands preaching against some evil organisation, you should be able to go "Aha! How about Omnexcorp⁸? They're this really nasty bunch of guys who_". In your mind, you're busy linking the bad guy to Omnexcorp, and thus Player A to Player B, all without messing with what each player wants to do with their character. In conclusion, the players supply their history with a bunch of blank spaces in which you can insert names and events which provide reasons for them to stick together. Now, in the example above, Mr. Bad Guy's link to Omnexcorp might not come out until much later in the game, but when it does, it unites the two players very nicely in



⁸ The Rail Barons, the witches of Spiritwood, Majestic 12, the Templars, U2, WOTC, the Guiding Hand_

terms of their shared objectives. It's a good idea to fiddle these links



so that they keep cropping up throughout the game; if they all come up in the first session, their lasting impact is minimised, and it looks contrived. Ration them out whenever some unity is needed.

With all this in mind, I propose the following system for character creation. Mostly, it involves making sure that the characters' backstories and plans for the future mesh together, but it also involves a few other important processes which make party cohesion a surer thing. As far as individual characters go, it's obviously important to make sure that there aren't going to be more factors pushing prospective characters away from each other than there are pulling them together, and this is where these extra tasks come in.

The first thing you need to do is have a good n' coherent setting worked out for your game. Whether it's all in your head or in full-colour player handouts is a matter of personal style, but either way you need to have the "big picture" well worked out before you charge into character creation. I've found that it works well to get all the people you want to play with together over coffee⁹ and hand them a nice background handout to get them well briefed on where the action is going to be happening. At this stage, you just want to answer questions and get your players thinking about what kind of character they could choose to play —

⁹ Tea, fizzy beverages, whatever. Why not tailor the setting to your game; Tex-Mex for *Deadlands*, crumpets and tea for *Castle Falkenstein*, bread, cheese and beer for *MERP*, Ukrainian vodka and diet pills for *Cyberpunk*, etc.

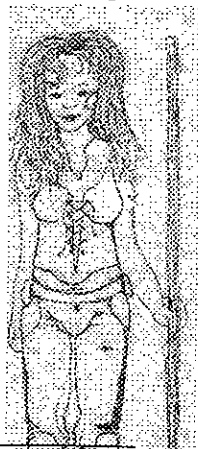


and, to a lesser extent, other people are planning to play. If anyone is unfamiliar with

the system that is to be used, now is a good time to get some of its details across. Especially those rules pertaining to character creation - like what kind of a score in Strength¹⁰ one should have to be as strong as, say, Boromir from *Lord of the Rings*. This is also a good time for the DM to show their cards about any house rules, character restrictions, or prerequisites for the characters. Examples might be that all characters must play ex-criminals who have served hard time (for whatever reasons); that only male characters are allowed; that all characters must be between the ages of 12 and 16; that all characters should have high combat scores, and so on. The DM can also hint at the major themes of the campaign; what the balance of combat, interaction, humour, and puzzle-solving is likely to be, for instance. This lets everyone know what they are getting into.

The next phase can be handled by email or in person; in this stage, the players each come up with their character concept, a rough history, and some

suggested skills and possessions. The DM collates and begins where links between the characters be established, what might to be amended



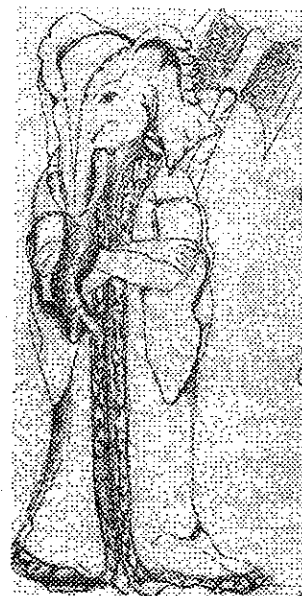
and The these, noting

could and need in

¹⁰ Insert relevant statistic name here. Actually, it's interesting how many RPGs have a Strength characteristic when you consider the many and varied names given to the stats that involve dexterity or co-ordination.

each character proposal. If a player wants their character to be a wandering Albanian princeling with a personal fortune worth millions, and the DM is dead set on having one of the themes of the game be the acquisition of wealth, they need to find some kind of compromise that will suit both parties¹¹.

This is also a good forum for discussing any secret agendas that a player may want their character to have, but doesn't want the other members of the party to know about¹². After this phase, the DM should have a good idea of just what everyone wants to play, and how they characters could be linked together.



A nasty pit-trap awaits the unwary here, and that is the problem of specialty overlap. Some kinds of character work well no matter how many of them there are in the party; like those with high combat skills. No matter whether there are two gunslingers in a party or



¹¹ It's crucial to winkle these things out straight away. They become a problem if you try to ignore them or script them out later ("What do you mean, my kingdom *burned down*? It's a whole *kingdom*!").

¹² The old rules apply; nothing disruptive, so nothing which could cause a terminal clash of interests, unless it's a really crackerjack idea that would add great depth to the story. Primarily, nothing that may cause the other players to want to stave your head in with a brick when you gloat about it after the campaign comes to an end.

five, none of them is ever going to be left out of a fight because they are redundant. But the same rule doesn't apply to medics, mechanics, computer hackers, and researchers. Some tasks can only really be done by one person, and attempted once; that means that surplus specialists (typically, the less skilled ones) will sit around being bored while the pro handles the job. On the other hand, think of the case of someone who is a hot-shot pilot and driver¹³ but has few other skills; what are they going to do while the rest of the party isn't in a car or plane? Conversely, what are the rest of the party going to do while they are dogfighting, chasing taxis, or getting to Baltimore?

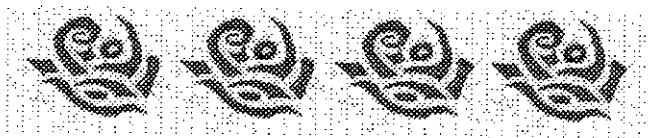
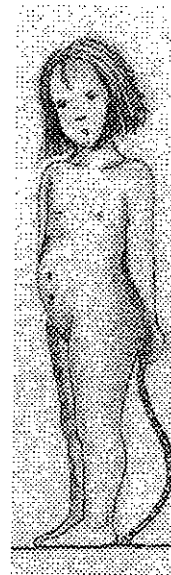
The DM, as facilitator, must make sure that the players are aware of the skill distribution and that they create their characters in such a way that they will neither be frequently excluded or frequently exclusive during the normal course of game play. This is a real art, and almost impossible to pull off satisfactorily — that's why we have time slices — but pains should be taken anyway to make sure that the maximum number of characters can participate in the maximum number of scenes.

Finally, the characters can be rolled up and written down; this can be handled singly or in a group situation, as the DM sees fit, but by this stage all that should remain to be worked out are the numbers.

For DMs, the last trick for keeping your party together is to give them good war stories. Their own tales of heroism and infamy are the strongest glue you can use to hold them together. Just like in

¹³ Or any of the other specialities mentioned previously. Anything that excludes the rest of the party.

real life, it's having a shared history with someone that counts more strongly than the influences and attractions of the present. The best way to achieve this effect is to run games with big triumphs and massive failures instead of little ones; to go totally Hollywood, and make sure that you intersperse the "stocktaking"¹⁴ sessions of low-drama with real blockbuster adventures - ones that leave your players stunned and wanting more. In the final analysis, the party that plays together, stays together.



¹⁴ Lab time, practising at the shooting range, recuperating in hospital, journeying between towns, keeping an eye on the 'Help Wanted' classifieds, pestering Special Collections librarians, earning money on the faro tables_

CLAWS PURITY TEST

In the last couple of years it has become one of our more unwholesome traditions to subject freshers (and us older folks) to hours of deep personal sharing via a public taking of a purity test. This has varied from spending most of a day doing the 1500 question version including questions about bestiality, golden showers and the Rocky Horror Picture Show (!?) to the Dr Zeus version...Have you done it in a box? Have you done it with a fox?

While this will no doubt serve as yet another distraction from lecturers this year, I feel we should kick-start it with a purity test custom designed for Claws and accordingly I bring you the

Section One: Roleplaying

When involved in a role playing game have you ever done any of the following:

- Played D&D or AD&D?
- Been in a campaign focused on killing monsters that sat around in rooms waiting for you to open the door, collecting their treasure and getting experience points?
- Witnessed or committed the DMG effect? Or the reverse DMG effect?
- Broken the code of Hermes?
- Gone cyber-psycho?
- Betrayed/killed other party members?
- Secretly been a time traveller/ alien/ priest/ cultist?
- Caused the deaths of over 50 people/ beings in a session? Over 100? Over 1000? Over 10 000?
Wiped out a species?
- Ingested/ shagged or had penetration attempted by an alien species?
- Battled a Great Old One? An Elder God? Shit you're hard core!

Section Two: The Clawroom

In the inner sanctum or antechamber have you ever done any of the following:

- Slept on the couch?
- Been sucked into the couch to the extent that you miss lectures that you really need to go to?
Done this while also complaining how uncomfortable the couch is?

- Broken furniture? Windows? Brooms? Freshers?
- Stolen furniture for the Clawroom? (This is a completely daft question as we have no reason to suspect that this ever happens.)
- Set off small explosions?
- Incited anyone to behaviour that got them yelled at by a committee member? Got them yelled at by Dylan?
- Watched questionable videos (like the Spice Girls Movie!!)
- Engaged in meaningful and serious conversation that did not degenerate into arguments about the hyperdrive problems in Star Wars?
- Role-played?
- Used it as a place to crash while pulling a comp-sci all nighter?

Section three: Sex

For a comprehensive questionnaire see another purity test, but for Claw Purposes have you ever:

- Shagged a committee member?
- Shagged the Clawthing? (WARNING: If you do this you may become one.)
- Shagged under the pretext of a committee meeting?
- Shagged only Claw members / ex-Claw members?
- Married a Claw member? AARGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!

Section 4: Varsity Work

You may wonder what the hell this has to do with Claws, but has your dedication to us ever caused you to:

- Fail to hand in a tut assignment/essay/ project?
- Fail or completely forget about a test or exam?

- Get DPR'd?
- Get DPR'd for English?
- Fail maths 1 or 2?
- Fail comp-sci 1 or 2?
- Fail engineering?
- Fail first year completely?
- Fail a year more than once? Fail first year more than once?
- Be kicked out of Varsity permanently?

Section 6: Parties

When getting into the true party spirit have you ever?

- Worn fancy dress?
- Dressed as a member of the opposite sex?
- Worn something uncomfortable, impractical and possibly dangerous for the sake of looking cool?
- Got falling down drunk? Got falling down and puking drunk?
- Looked after someone who was puking drunk?
- Been left in the neighbours' drive- way to fend for yourself when puking drunk?
- Left your bra with a nice young man?
- Had the police arrive?
- Had the cops say, "nice outfit" or something to that effect?
- Been involved in anything regarding flaming pentagrams on a beach? (Wayne was there, he can tell you all about it!)

Section seven: General

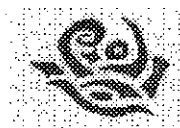
Have you ever:

- Been accosted in a graveyard by security guards?
- Watched all the Star Wars movies in a row?
- Lied to your parents about your membership to Claws?
- Had a nice His People member try to convert you?
- Spent significant period of your life playing computer games? Network games?

Well kiddies you can add up your scores now, if they're embarrassingly high, (as they tend to be in first year) just consult your *friendly* committee members and rest assured they will endeavour to everything in their power to improve your score. After all there are traditions to uphold...

It Ain't Over 'til Carrie Fisher Sings

*d@vid seaward takes a look at TSR's generic Space Opera system, ALTERNITY, and the accompanying Star*Drive setting*



Introduced at ICON 98 not with a whimper but a grumble, the ALTERNITY system has been with us for a while now. While nobody was greatly impressed with the intro module, seeing as we won some books I began dabbling with the system and over the past year have found it both comprehensive and easy to use.

THE SYSTEM

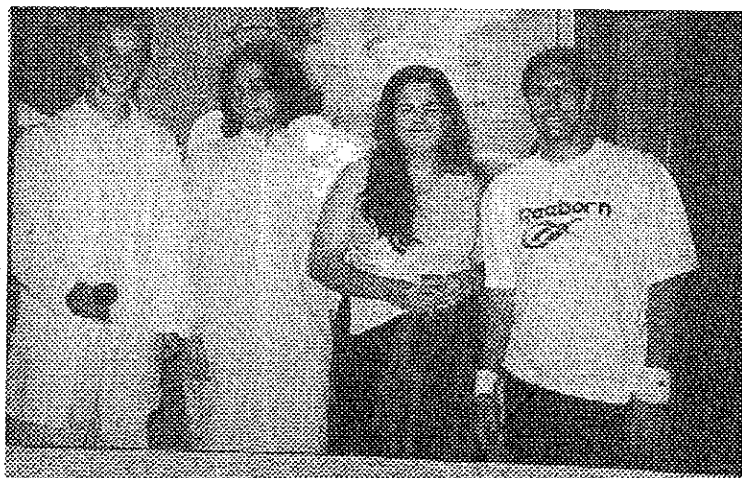
Leave your d10's at home, but bring everything else.

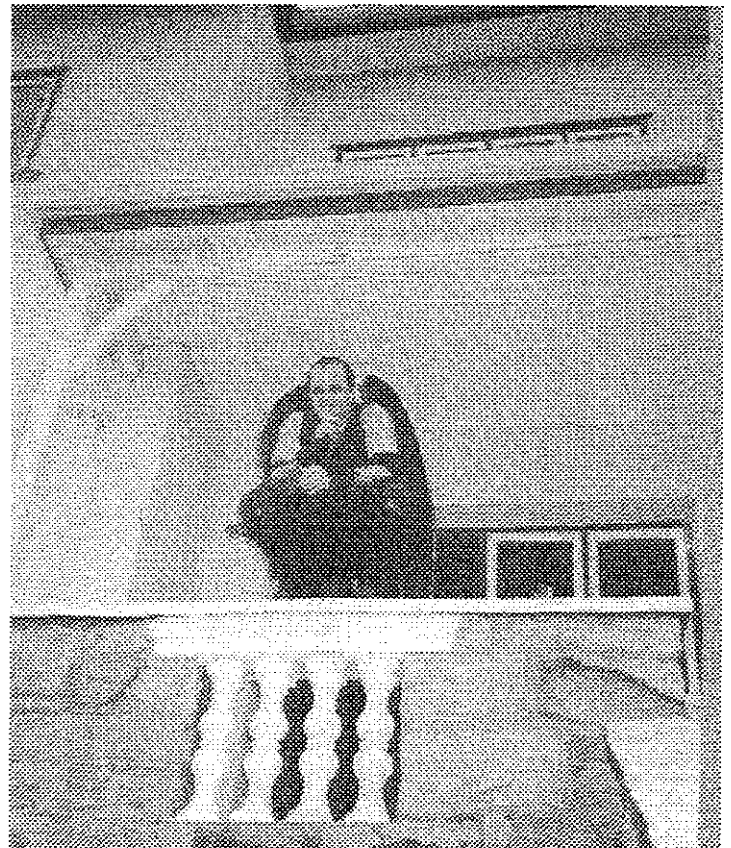
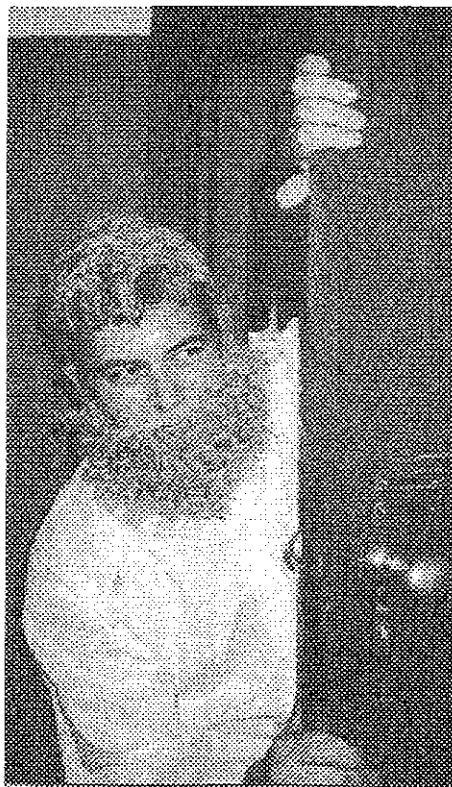
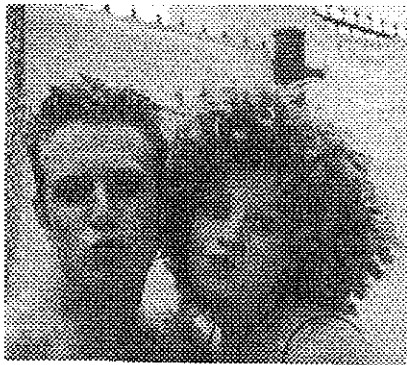
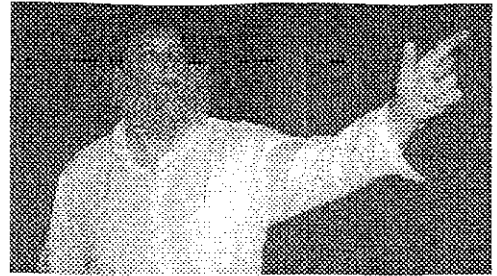
The system mechanics of ALTERNITY are intuitive and, in their own way, quite realistic. Everything is centred around a skills-based roll-under system and difficulty modifiers. In "average" conditions a player simply rolls a d20 against his skill, but the GM may rule that he should take a penalty or bonus die depending on conditions. For example, a sniper shooting at a target in the black of night in misty conditions has a far worse time of it than someone aiming under full moon(s) with an Infravision 3000. Difficulties are ranked in "dice steps" from d4 to d20 and considered accumulative, so that someone who has the shakes may permanently have a step penalty for all motor-based rolls, and this may effectively negate the bonus of the Infravision.

Essentially, this allows the GM to construct her world in terms of difficulty "ranges" rather than levels. If scaling the side of a spaceship is ranked at d12 and someone manages a success rolling a 1 on his difficulty dice, he probably found some asteroid pock-marks to hang onto, while the unlucky adventurer who failed by due to rolling 12 probably fell because her foothold gave way.

I find it easiest to compare ALTERNITY with Cthulhu, mainly because on the surface the systems are so similar. (And the not-just-a-slight-similarity between the Dark*Matter setting and Delta Green) As I will explain, though, the differences that I point out are as a result of the difference in foundations and emphasii :) of the two systems.

**CLAWMEMBERS PARTY LIKE IT WAS
THE END OF 1999--WELL IT WAS.
ANYWAY...**





Most importantly for me, in CoC basic attributes seem to have little to do with your actual skills, something that my exposure to systems in general reads as a flaw. I mean what's the point?! Really?!! Ahem. **ALTERNITY** skills are derivative and even have speciality options, which suits my tastes much better. **ALTERNITY** is also has far greater opportunities for skills-development and all of that add-on roleplaying stuff like Perks and Flaws, level bonuses and whatnot. What we arrive at here (calm down frothing Cthulhoid masses) is the basic difference in focus between the two systems, and something to bear in mind before embarking on an **ALTERNITY** project: it is, in essence, a heroic system. In my experience Cthulhu character gen shouldn't include thoughts like "I'll improve that as I go along" or "hmmmm... I'll leave that and maybe fiddle with it later if necessary": skills-wise your character is as s/he is going to be for some time (apart from that high SAN, of course). While Cthulhu's emphasis is on real people delving into Knowledge Man Is Not Wont of and maybe making a few rolls to look around the office of your mad uncle ["ooh, impale on spot hidden!" "lose d6 SAN, you notice that his face is on backwards" - ed], **ALTERNITY** definitely focuses on the kicking-alien-hiney, rolling-jump-with-my-2-step-"agile"-bonus and going-up-a-level side of things. I wouldn't discard **ALTERNITY** if what you're looking for is near-future realism, but you'll have to make conscious steps to stop your players from teching-up, leaping between stars and pooh-poohing your carefully designed Superior Race because the rulebook lets them. (Give them lower starting points and give out less XP for starters)



Players of Cthulhu and the like will be familiar with the concept of "impales" within a roll-under system. In **ALTERNITY** rolling under half your skill counts as a "Good" success, and half again as "Amazing" (or "Groovy" in certain futuristic quasi-sixties campaigns). This allows the GM to perhaps release increasing amounts of The Plot for investigative rolls, or simply give one PC an edge over the others. Most importantly for **ALTERNITY**, the levels of success are an important component of the combat system: one of **ALTERNITY**'s strongest points.

A specific Action Check roll is made by all players (and NPCs) on officially entering combat, the rank of success determining which round of combat you can enter into (Amazing, Good, Pass, Marginal). Each character is allowed a certain number of action rounds, but these may be wasted if he or she does not have access to them all. For example, Major Jax the highly trained ex-soldier has 3 actions per turn, but rolling only on "Pass" gets to use only two of them.

Simple to understand, the combat system allows for snappy action as the GM calls down the rounds and shouldn't keep everyone out of it for too long before rolling Action Checks again.

Apart from the fact that I tend to draw mine out a tad...

Astute readers probably noticed mention of "levels" and "XP" in the previous paragraph, rabid purists may well be frothing, and yes, I need not remind you that this is, after all, a T&R product.

Naive and innocent as I was, and pandering to years of wisdom, I started my "Far Out" campaign(1) with a simple "oh, and just ignore levels and character classes and that because it's all Evil TSR Pap". Very soon, however, I found that the system is quite dependent on its various tables and things for pushing up skills, allowing for new Perks, gaining new combat bonuses and so on. In the end, I have decided to let it pass: my players worry about the levels and such between games, we may discuss how we're going to role-play gaining a new Perk, but I usually don't worry at all about the details and leave the number-crunching to them.(2)



Having had a look at the ghastly skills pricelist and level bonus table, I can say that they do serve a purpose, which is to give structure and balance to character advancement, I just find them too klunky and unreal. As I suppose one could argue for even AD&D, treating them as the abstract tools that they are rather than the focus of the game means that, I hope, more roleplaying than roll-playing happens.

(1) A touch of the sixties, the seventies, B-grade sf and in-session inspiration.

(2) Not to say I ignore it, I just don't care that a Tech Op must spend 3 points at level 4 to go up in Spaceship Operation while a Combat Spec should spend 4 but take into account yadda yadda bonus at that level, or whatever. My players are big enough to take care of themselves.

But now that we're talking about tables... Boy does **ALTERNITY** have them. While I still tend to say things like, "It's a d8 penalty of a rope-throw away! Do you want to try or not?!", my players take care to point out that, yes, there is a distance-step table, and they'd like to know whether the wind conditions give them a bonus, please. I really need to invest in a GM screen. Anyway, yes, there are tables for everything from poison to gravity effects if you want them, all theoretically carefully balanced with the rest of the system. As with character advancement, to me it all screams "Automation!", and one of these days Tim will hopefully write an article about how he developed his **ALTERNITY**-system-based game (still in progress).

Perhaps because of GM-newbiness I prefer to think of things in terms of their difficulties, so, yes, fine, I'll get a GM screen, think "hmmm... they'll have to work to get this.. d12..." but do a backwards-lookup and say "30 metres or thereabouts, and no the wind is not in your favour, monkey-boy".

What **ALTERNITY** is great for, and definitely flashing its Space Opera focus, is random planet creation. While I haven't had call to use them to their full extent yet (yes, I said

"yet", quiver in your bell-bottoms Far Outers!), these tables and the associated GRAPH system (Gravity, Radiation, Atmosphere, Pressure, Humidity) are a fine example of the step penalty/bonus system in action. As well as being able to generate said random planets, it is a piece of nutrosweet cake to calculate their effects when your PCs decide to go walkabouts. Because everyone knows the funnest part of sf is figuring out how much you weigh on Tatooine and how long you would last on the Vulcan homeplanet without a waterbottle.

Seriously, while I might still be getting to grips with effective use of tables in-session, the various "creation" tables in the Gamemaster's Handbook are great for both random-auto-creation and ideas for when I actually plan a session extensively.

SUPPLEMENTS

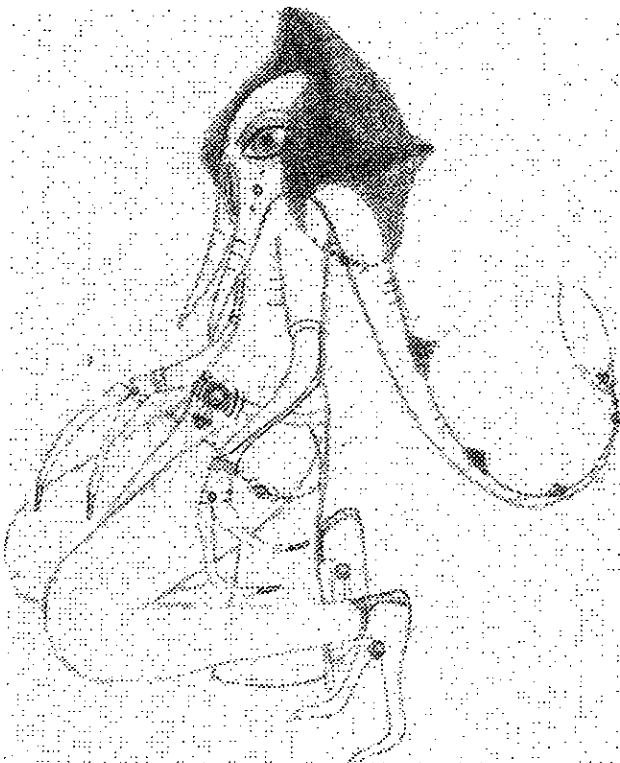
Separating the Player's and GM/Keeper/Marshal/Whatever's books seems to be coming back into fashion, and **ALTERNITY's** are comprehensive... but not quite.

You can certainly survive without supplements - I have - and as I pointed out above what is provided is quite good, but they can't hurt.

Without a doubt, I would recommend getting hold of "Arms & Equipment" (a raised eyebrow and suggestive nod to the librarian). It promises a lot more detail and examples of the various tech levels hinted at in the main books.

"Dataware" is an interesting read, although I dislike its approach to computers and networks intensely. If you're looking for source material for VR and the like, it's here, as is the usual strange programming/data-storage/computing-in-general rules that roleplaying systems seem to come up with. The alternate worlds "Tangents" sourcebook brings some focus to what **ALTERNITY** is all about: that "roleplaying different tomorrows" thing. Some interesting summaries of multiple-universe scenarios, some interesting plot thread possibilities, but, like the other source books I find it too simplistic without providing enough meat to do things with. So I'm glad I just browsed through them in bookstores. Now if I could just find that spaceships supplement...

CLAWs purchased the "Outbound" scenario book in 1999 to complement the "Star*Drive" sourcebook and I'm currently in the middle of one of those ever-expanding-once-offs that is now officially a mini-campaign. As well as bringing a few new bits and pieces into the system (some Perks, some Flaws, some equipment...) dealing with the exploration theme of the scenarios, it has meant I've been able to experience the system from a player's perspective and begin to explore TSR's first official **ALTERNITY** setting. An obvious bias for the system, even in the Handbooks, "Star*Drive" seems to have a great amount



of detail for a GM wanting to run a campaign in a predefined sf setting. Already boasting sub-expansions for key elements like "The Lighthouse" and other scenario sourcebooks, "Star*Drive" is a rich and entertaining setting focussed on the hyperspace drive of the same name (well, as far as I can make out: I'm just a Fraal chef looking for the next exotic alien beastie to roast).

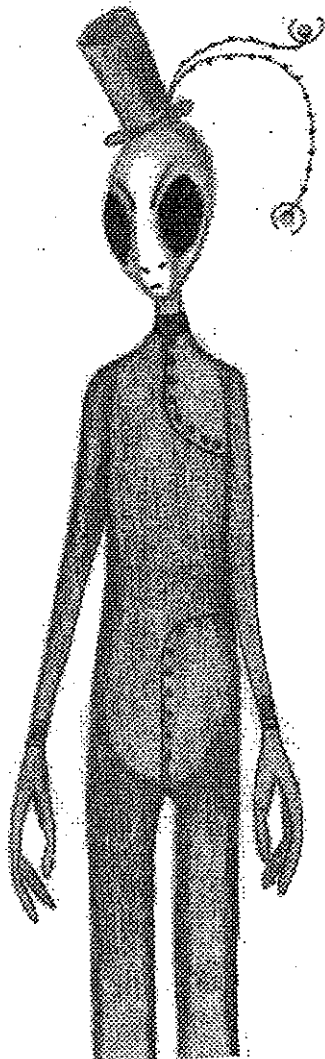
Whether you want spaceships and swashbuckling, careful alien politicking or paranoid trips through hyperspace, there's both detail and enough gaps for you to fit in.

ADAPTABILITY

What **ALTERNITY** promises, in title, slogan and concept, is adaptability to setting. I believe that it delivers in this respect quite competently.

Returning to the glorious GM's Handbook, we find chapters and sections expanding on Psionics, Mutants, Magic, "FX": generally giving you the basics for whatever plans you may want to put into play in your campaign (and subtly promising more in further expansions, of course). The relevant concepts are reproduced or expanded as necessary in the Player's Handbook as well.

Furthermore, **ALTERNITY** has been used, to my knowledge, in a quirky sixties future, a science-fantasy module and a true Space Opera setting as well as TSR's sf baby, Star*Drive, in each instance allowing the respective GM's/creators to worry about important things like getting afros into space helmets, PCs out of train stations, three-sex aliens into some semblance of biological reasonability and hairy lizards to do whatever it is that hairy lizards do.



SUMMARY

ALTERNITY has biases, specifically towards heroic, Space Operatic campaigns, and more than a nod at the setting TSR would like you to invest in, but overall I have found it easy to get into and well-founded system-wise. A bit of tinkering would possibly get rid of those throwbacks everyone complains about, but they are well thought out (within their paradigm) and can be ignored in-game. Naturally, there are also aspects of the system that I haven't covered, such as an extensive look at combat (damage, armour, all that stuff), which you will have to read over yourself before choosing to use **ALTERNITY**.

As a generic system, **ALTERNITY** suffers as I would guess all systems of this type might. Supplements provide a good spectrum of possibilities, and some are quite extensive, but I can't help but feel that I'm not getting "Luke, I am your father" for my buck. (Such as it is that I am spending it...)

Having said that, I would venture to suggest that with a little surface repainting and buffing, **ALTERNITY** could be made even more generic. Call "prestidigitation" "sleight of hand", wangle some new character classes, change the character sheet font and you could have a system for the genre of your choice.

But perhaps this is just an obvious projection of my hopes to eventually get my paws on GURPS... sigh...

Links for the webcrawler...

Alternity - [wizards.com/alternity]

Call of Cthulhu - [chaosium.com]

Carrie Fisher - [carriefisher.com], [geocities.com/carriefisherpage/starwars.html]

Dark*Matter - [wizards.com/darkmatter]

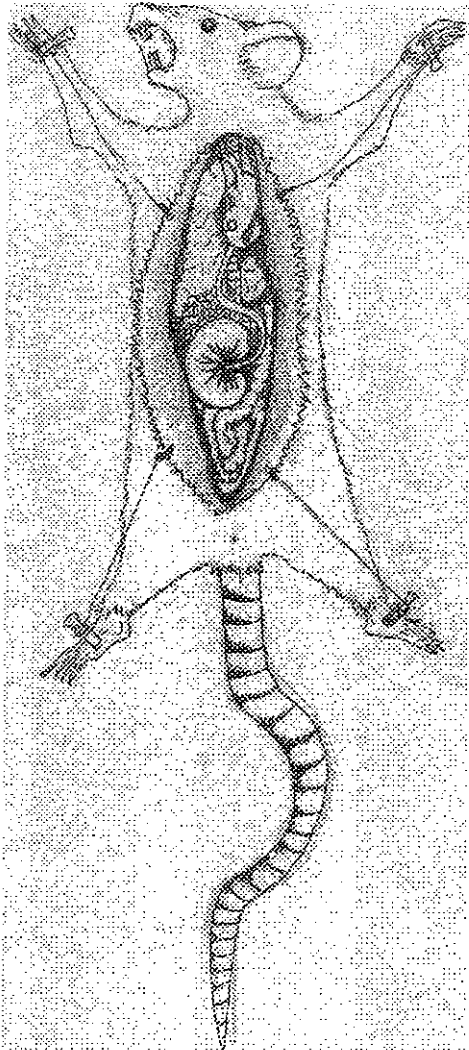
GURPs - [sjgames.com/gurps]

Star*Drive - [wizards.com/stardrive]



STANDING AROUND

DISSECTING NPCs



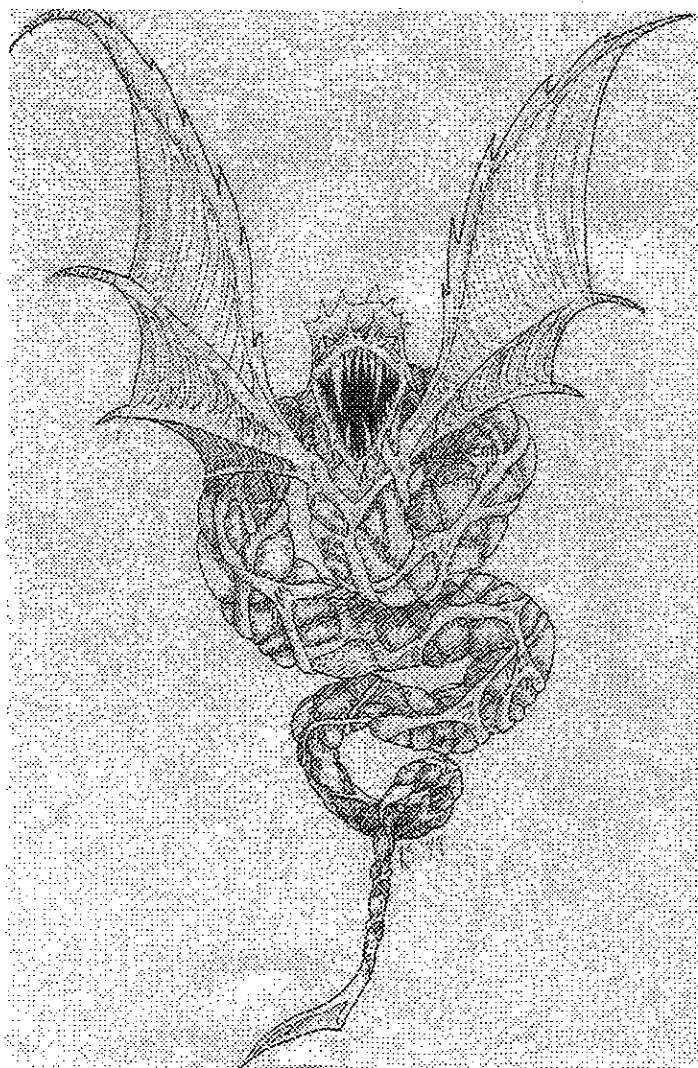
In many games NPC'S are seldom mentioned unless they are relevant to a plot line. When they are mentioned they are often very obviously relevant and don't present much of a challenge for the players to spot. If one wants to be realistic one has to keep in mind that there is a world of intrigue and mystery going on around the players that have nothing to do with them and in real life we often get side-tracked by people and events that are not crucial to whatever particular mission we are on.

Thus for the sake of realism every now and then the party should come across an NPC doing something damn interesting that is in no way relevant to the plot. It may well distract them for a while but it forces the players to think before they act and not just run after anything interesting that the DM waves in front of them.

Here is a list of NPC's you can use to add that touch of paranoia and hysteria to a game to help keep your players on their toes and safeties off.

1. A redhead in a red dress stops to run her fingers through her hair. She could be looking at you.
2. Two men in neat grey clothing walk past with impassive expressions.
3. A young man with long wavy blond hair stares at you gormlessly.
4. A little girl, her black hair tied back severely, eyes you with what may be fear as she holds her mothers hand.
5. There is a muscular man with a crew-cut approaching. He is rummaging in a large bag he has in front of him.
6. A guard/security personnel stares intently in the direction of your feet.
7. A pale, lean youth dressed all in black keeps glancing your way.
8. Three teenage girls point at you, look behind them, then giggle and run off.
9. A fair-haired man suddenly thrusts his hand into his coat, then withdraws it ... still empty.
10. A grey bearded man walks slowly by staring intently at something cupped in his hands.
11. A tense woman swiftly takes a draught from a small bottle, then conceals it.

12. There is an unnaturally tall man, with no eyebrows and a grey hue to his skin.
13. Two little boys walk by hand in hand, smiling, but with bleeding knees.
14. A blond woman is trying to hide the fact that the bag she is carrying is extremely heavy.
15. A swarthy man finishes reading a piece of paper, lights it and holds it till it is burnt away.
16. A man with a cap pulled low over his face limps past, then switches the leg he is limping on.
17. A lean man walks past with a peculiar gait; he appears to have something concealed down his trouser leg.
18. A woman's jacket blows open, revealing a blood stained blouse.
19. A smallish man glances past you, then hurries away with a panicked expression.
20. A petite young lady suddenly grabs at her stomach and winces.
21. An exasperated man advances on you, then suddenly his expression changes and he turns away.
22. A bony man spits on his hand and then slicks back his sparse hair.
23. A plump young man sweeps a blond girl up in his arms and they totter off laughing.
24. A very concerned looking man walks past counting on his fingers.
25. An old woman staggers past holding a cloth against her face.



TRINITY:

a review

Perry Dace

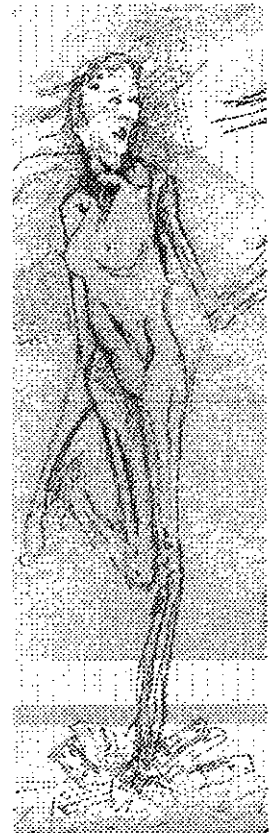
Trinity is the science fiction game published by White Wolf Games studios that some of us may remember picking up as a free quick start rules pack back at Gencon '98. Its developer, Andrew Bates, is, like Ethan Skemp, active on the discussion list and keeps on close creative terms with the fans.

Although this is a WW game it does not take place in the World of Darkness, but rather in an Earth of 2120. The standard character generation rules are for the players to take the parts of psions, psychically active humans who have had their latent powers detected and developed by one of the psi orders scattered around the planet.

A Brief Timeline

The orders came into existence to fight a threat out of Earth's past. Starting in the late 90's certain humans started to arise with tremendous powers, called Novas, they became a law unto themselves, taking over parts of the world and fighting terribly destructive wars as their powers drove them mad. The results of their actions are still felt in such areas as the blasted wasteland that was once the American Midwest and, since the explosive suicide of one such, became a desert producing withered crops poisoned with his taint.

Eventually in desperation, the Chinese launched their orbital defence missiles, threatening to sterilise the surface unless the Novas left. This they did, leaving an ominous promise that they would return. The game begins fifty years after their return began. As the Novas, popularly renamed Aberrants reattack, the psi orders blast into the public eye as one of them, the Legions stage a dramatic defence of Sydney spaceport. At this point the other orders decide that they are



ready and reveal their world. At the same another also come to prominence as it for the first time in its 200-year body and unite the orders.

Humanity has also made The enigmatic Qin (Chen) relations with us and endeavours but their motives

The reptilian Chromatics have and have high degrees of the seen in one of the orders. completely hostile.

Far less is known about the travelling in a space ark about will arrive in human space in a has been terrifying and



existence to a desperate organisation, the Aeon Trinity emerges from the shadows history to form an umbrella

contact with three alien races. have established diplomatic collaborate on some scientific and goals remain mysterious.

been attacking orbital stations same photokinetic abilities They can only be seen as

third race. The Coalition is 2/3 the size of the moon and few years. Contact with them uniformly lethal.

The Orders

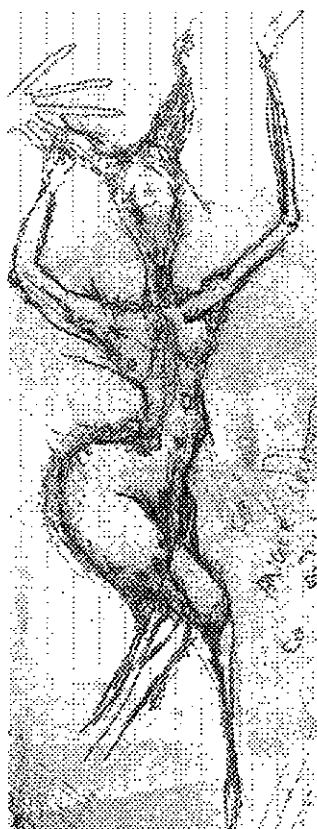
The psychic powers awakened in the characters are determined by the order that awakens them and each order has a different vision for humanity and political position. The biokinetic shapeshifters of the Norca control the South American drug cartels that fund their biological research and espionage activities. Headquartered in New York, Orgotek functions as a massive corporation leading the field of biotechnology and electronics and provides a home and employer for the electrokinetics. Europe has the healers of the professional society of the Aesculapian order. The Chinese government has established the telepathic Ministry for Psionic affairs to help maintain peace and order. Australia has the headquarters of the telekinetic army comprising the seven Legions. On the moon is the Interplanetary School for Research and Advancement, a college of clairsentients, whose senses break bounds of time and space.

There are also two lost orders. The teleporting Upeo waMacho disappeared from their African headquarters after conflict with some other orders, and the quantakinetic Chitra Banu whose

powers mimicked the quantum powers of the Abberants were accused of collaboration and annihilated.

The orders were founded by eight tremendously powerful psions who provided the biotech devices needed to activate latent humans. Each "Prometheus Tank" activates the particular psionic mode of its order in a latent psion.

The World



The world of Trinity is a tremendously rich one. The game provides a multitude of possible settings and game types. For starters there is the basic function of the psions which is the war against the Aberrants. There are also more subtle conflicts. There are secret societies dedicated to "human purity" (read wipe out the psions) and those who serve their Aberrant masters still. The players can take part in the rebuilding of the shattered nations of Europe or in the rebellions against the fascist Federated States of America. Corporations engage in industrial espionage and out in the extra solar colonies there are struggles for independence from Earth. They may make contact with strange aliens or confront the hidden faces of the psi orders and the mysterious Aeon Trinity.

System

This game uses a modified and streamlined version of the standard Storyteller system. This helps with flow and speed of the game especially in combat, which has been a problem in other White Wolf games. There are two systems offered for running psi use. A simple system with set effects in the main rulebook and an optional freeform system in the players guide for those who know the psi effects slightly better and want more diversity in their psi use. This does slow the game down a little but does make the powers more interesting. I recommend it for those who know the game well because some aspects of the new system do need to be tweaked.

Comparisons

Trinity will inevitably draw comparison to the WOD games and to other near future games of the Cyberpunk/Shadowrun genre.

The character generation system with its orders and separate powers follows the familiar WOD pattern but the feel of the game is very different. Despite the problems and dangers fighting humanity and the secrets of the orders there is a sense of hope, if not complete optimism. Humanity is rebuilding its world and the psions can be a part of ensuring its future. The game does confront issues of what it means to be human and of freedom and coercion but it isn't laid on with a trowel. There is also scope not to be a part of this though, to go off as just about anything you could think of.

The game can fall into the trap of being a gore fest of the bad cyberpunk variety but the published adventures do avoid this and a little imaginative GMing will prevent it. Despite its SF setting one advantage this game has over the genre is its lack of the immersive net/matrix/whatever. This leads to problems with hacker characters going off doing stuff while the rest of the party is in stasis. In Trinity this problem is avoided by characters having "agents", programs designed to gather information etc, rather than having players entering the computer networks themselves. There are characters, electrokinetics, who can interface with technology but it does not have the VR environment that creates a divisive separate scene

The scope of trinity is also grander than these games with casts of thousands and stuff.

General Impression

The layout of the main rulebook is fairly logical, which is a nice change for WW.

Try and get the ring bound rulebook as the glue binding of the player's guide does fall apart. The main rulebook has enough information to get well into a campaign but the sourcebooks become increasingly valuable as you go on. One nice aspect is that the order sourcebooks and regional sourcebooks

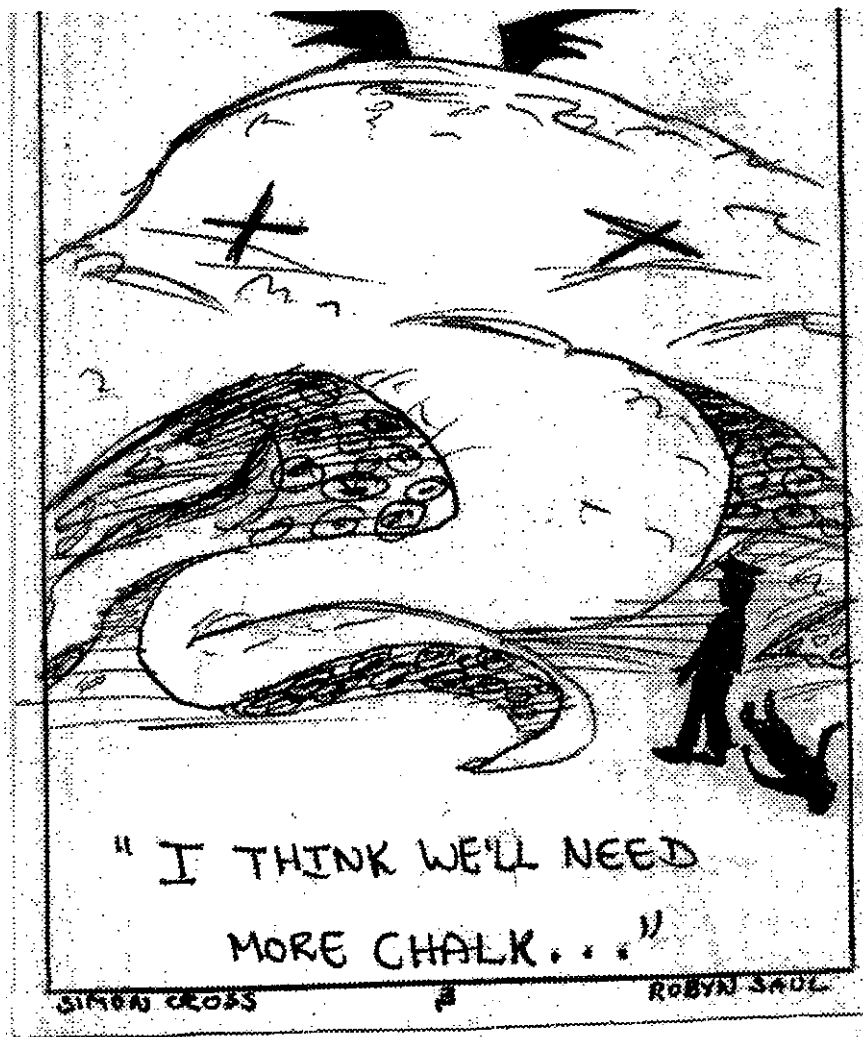


have been combined. E.g. Shattered Europe includes the Aesculapian sourcebook.

I have no hesitation in recommending this to anyone who enjoys SF role-playing. It successfully avoids the angsty poseur stereotype of White Wolf so those who this puts off will enjoy it. Like all WW games though if you choose to continue the canon story of the world you will have to keep up with the supplements and adventures but all of those I have seen have been worth it in terms of expanding the Trinity universe.

In Short

Play and enjoy. For those who are interested I understand Nenad has a copy.



If you haven't read something that made you say "What?!" or "And..?" this week, you've probably cut a few DOH tutorials. But, never fear, a remarkably similar effect may be achieved in the perusal of...

A Politically-Correct Werewolf in O-Week OR:

BIG WOLF ON CAMPUS

(or any other textual CLAWmarks component, especially editorial-type-stuff)

[A note to the Ed: you'll have to paragraph this yourself as I don't have a whole lot of paper]

[A note from the Ed: Will do; by the way, who are you?]

Oh and those with batteries of knowledge about garou &c. should take a deep breath & a step back.

He stepped a little closer to a column as the sun moved, as if to hide his shadow. His brow was furrowed, and something more than stubble mottled several parts of his face. The world of noise & strange light had sprung up as surely as ever and, today, he was a part of it.

It remains to be wondered of: what trail of consequence had brought & kept him here but something, more awkward than heavy, grindingly unformed itself in his belly as he slunk from shade to shade.

A second figure, pale and elegant, yet somehow more similar to the first than to anything else, came similarly tacking through the chaos. A small and uncertain paradox spirit popped up when he asked a certain society what a rainbow was, & looked disgruntled when he tactfully refused his signature to a group that worshipped celestial bodies & ate only certain vegetables. The uniform stirred some memory, but he let it go. The smell of hot meat, pervasive to him even inches from the doughnut stand, vied for attention with various HP graphics that littered the walls.

They met before the last flight of steps & ascended by unspoken mutual choice. Both were having daylight problems, and their respective cloaks were beginning to feel conspicuous. The garou patted his reassuringly as they moved into the hall.

(A line of stars meandered thoughtfully across the page, escaping mortal notice) They had picked up the mage around queue 4 & she kept rolling things like subterfuge/dex & thus Actually Moving Forward. The vampire tried to clean his raybans without taking them off. The garou hiccuped discreetly & wondered whether he really needed Xhosa Intensive and "Colour in Nature: a socio-political perspective" to major in Philosophy and Architecture.

Two girls behind them were commiserating on the loss of Princess Kayri III of the Saromarquatort to a backward Cthulhu cult, & the difficulty of dreaming up a suitable replacement. The vampire thought of telling them he'd lost 3 generations of contemporaries, but reconsidered when the small & uncertain paradox spirit gave him a look and got busy with a calculator (the old sort that turns off without "second function"). Fortunately, this made the SUPS too pre-occupied to notice piles of forms 21K thru 24BC perform a fluttery Mexican wave as the mage moved down the row. She offered to open a portal to a point just steps away from the Curriculum Advisers. The garou declined politely, deciding he trusted the terrors of modern admin more than he did magi intent.

Hours later, somewhere between queues 12 & 14, he was to regret his decision infinitely. One of the commiserate girls asked if she might try on the vampire's raybans. He nervously refused; the SUPS had a definite gleam in one eye.

The garou finally got a curriculum advisor, who explained that UCT was now really tolerant & open & didn't he want to help redress imbalances by preying only on dark virgins with high IQs & short fingernails. The vampire explained that the situation in filmic representations was grossly oversimplified [especially in the godawful "Kindred: The Embrace" - ed] & that in real life, predators of their sort didn't really discriminate that much. The curriculum advisor looked gratified & added "Misrepresentation & the Media" to both their timetables.

The commiserating girl who wanted the raybans became insistent, and the mage opened a portal to Someplace Dark for her and the vampire. Another line of stars crossed the page, again generally unseen, in cynical analogy to some weary queue.

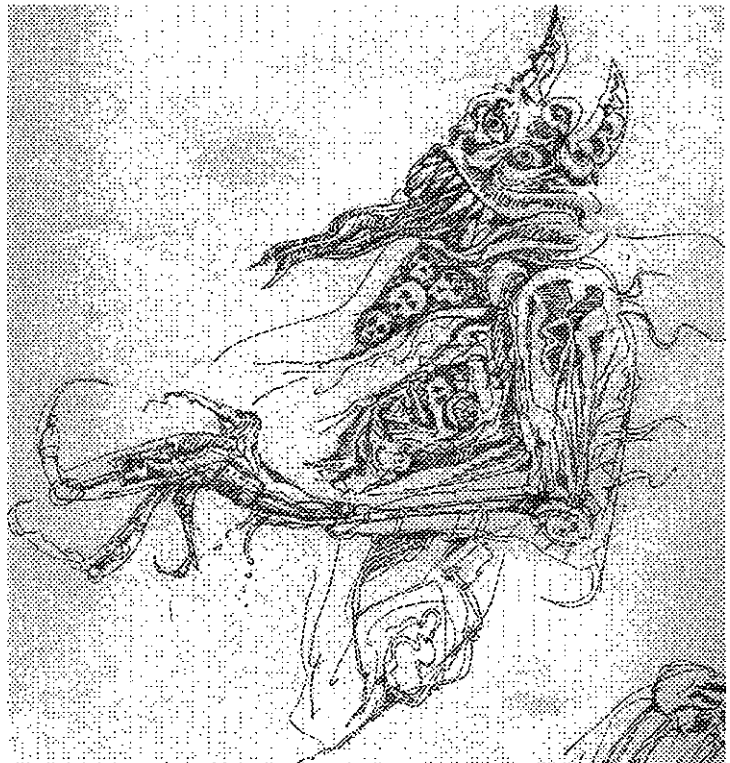
They gathered on the roof in the early-fallen night. The mage suggested a game of marbles, with a rather obvious "weighted-bets-of-my-blood-vs-your-quintessence" look in her eyes. The garou knew little fear by this stage. He drew himself to his full height & gave a laugh born of tightness in the gut.

The dice and/or bones. (delete as applicable to your cultural heritage) were now cast & not uncastable, as far as he was concerned. Then he felt a bit stupid & sat down & combed himself with his knuckles.

The mage plucked stars one-for-one and rolled them expertly between thumbjoint and fore-finger. They closed into empty, glowing spheres & the juice that left them ran down her hands and forearms like something that excited the other two very much. Fortunately the garou had a good measure of self-control and the vampire, um, well he just ate, remember? (But he had had the decency to leave her the raybans).

The SUPS glowed greyly and osmosed a few star-marbles.

From far below, there came a repetitive metal clinking & a flutter of canvas as a few diehards prepared to lead the next day's student-card-queue. The garou shifted & considered going down for dinner. The mage captured 3 of the vampire's marbles. Beneath the dome of rapidly-regenerating stars, the small & uncertain paradox spirit was silent. Its skin had acquired a mellow, luminescent quality and, through the haze of its insides, bright worms of many blue and reds could be seen, curving & tunneling through the mass of each other. Clouds gathered perceptibly closer as they set up again and rolled. The SUPS' hands were tense on its swollen ankles as it rocked from side to side, as if waiting for a dawn of which it had never been sure.



ABERRANTS

A REVIEW.

- By I Adeeb Balla

"It is 2008 and the age of the Nova is upon us. Ten years after the explosion of space station Galatea. Superhuman Nova are part of everyday life. Under the Aegis of Project Utopia and and it's Team Tomorrow Aids, Cancer, pollution and deforestation have been conquered. The media, technology, crime rates and methods of war have all been radically altered.

But the golden age is over. An international secret agency, the Directive prepares to take a stand against Utopia's power. In the shadows the Nova supremacists, the Teragen, plot and scheme. Criminal cartels begin a Nova fuelled resurgence and Utopia itself is rocked by accusations levelled by the dissident aberrant movement, accusations of a secret agenda called Proteus and the murder of prominent Novas."

Welcome to the White Wolf superhero role-playing game Aberrants . Fanboy geeks rejoice!!!

BACKGROUND

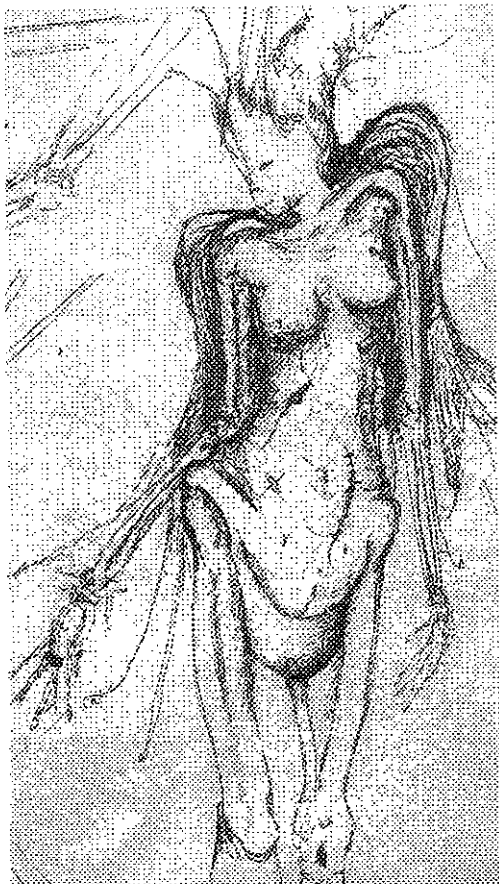
Set 100 years before Trinity, Aberrants chronicles the rise of the race that will become mankind's worst enemies. Each Nova possessed the ability to tap, store and manipulate quantum force, thus giving them "super" powers.

The world is divided between five major players. Utopia is the UN sponsored agency dedicated to using Nova abilities to benefit mankind. The Directive is an international security agency that keeps tabs on rogue Novas and threats they pose to world security. The Teragen espouse Nova supremacy and generally perpetrate evil for their own purposes. The criminal cartels have been throwing their weight around, and then there are the Aberrants, a faction claiming the existence of Project Proteus, the covert agenda at Utopia's core.

As player you are not obliged to become a member of any of those groups and can operate as an independent making a living as a merc, corporate spokesman, tycoon, scientist or film star.

The world is one of great contrasts, with the first world awash with Nova fuelled tech and the third world, of course, a barbaric battle field awash with blood. Cool huh?

THE SYSTEM.



The Aberrant system is standard White Wolf, with the only real change being that successes are now achieved on 7's, with botches only occurring if no successes are rolled, thus allowing for a smoother play and fewer catastrophes.

The superpowers system is divided into Mega attributes, super versions of attributes, and Quantum powers. Mega attributes logarithmically increasing statistics provide extra successes and specialist abilities. Quantum powers are "super" powers of which White Wolf provides a huge variety to choose from. Character's abilities are controlled by three variables. Quantum points, which are straight forward power points, Quantum pool which is like a Vampire "blood pool" for boosting powers and Taint, the accumulation of disorders and deficiencies that warp your body every time you botch.

Character creation is as quick and easy as any WW. Nova points allow you to upgrade stats and skills and buy powers. Beginner characters start out at about X-men strength but can develop to Superman level given a lot of time and experience.

The pros of this system are that it is flexible, easily customised and pseudo- scientific as well as setting rich with paranoia and conspiracy . However it is also the type of system that encourages munchkins. The characters can become seriously overpowered to the extent that they can soak up to 26 health levels of damage and keep going. This means that combat can drag on forever. If your players are prone to min max keep them the hell away from this system, it's just not worth the aggravation, it may be best kept for a once off. It is also woefully short of the details that make Rolemaster and COC such fun to play. (What the hell did you expect, it's White Wolf! -ed)

Despite the munckin factor I recommend this system to all those that think JLA rules, Astro City kicks ass, Watchmen is the best book ever written and that Alan Moore is God. It's the best superhero system yet, but not the best one ever. So grab your spandex and go kick some bad guy but.

PS; No Super villains were killed during the writing of this article, we just roughed them up a little.

A VERY CTHULHU CHRISTMAS

Campfire songs for an a very un-Brady family

O COME ALL YE DEEP ONES

Lyrics by A.H. Leman, to the tune of "O Come All Ye Faithful" by John

Reading:

O come all ye Deep Ones,
Mi-Go, Ghouls and Nightgaunhts;
Come foul Shub Niggurath and all Ancient Ones.
Come Great Cthulhu, rising from the ocean.

CHORUS:

O come, let us abhor them,
O come, let us abhor them,
O come, let us abhor them,
Scream, run and hide.

Their old dominion
Mankind now rules blithely,
Stars turning overhead to bring forth his doom.
They will return here, greedy and malevolent.

CHORUS

Which can eternal lie,
And with Strange Eons even death may die."
The Great Old Ones will rule once more
And all will be destroyed.

CHORUS

RUDOLPH THE RED NOSED CULTIST

By Bryan M. Ball

Rudolph the Red Nosed Cultist
had a few insanities
and if you ever saw him
he'll be chanting with great glee
Cthulhu fthagn la - aa
He is sleeping 'neath the foam
as he stared out the window
through the bars where he made his home
Then one foggy moon streaked eve
Cthulhu came to say
Rudolph with your mind so brave
won't you be my eternal slave
then all the other cultists
joined together in a prayer
Rudolph the mighty high priest
has joined Cthulhu in his lair.

GOD REST YE SCARY GREAT OLD ONES

Words by Sean Branney, Philip Bell, and Darrell Tyler, printed in the H.

P. Lovecraft Historical Society Solstice Carol Song Book.

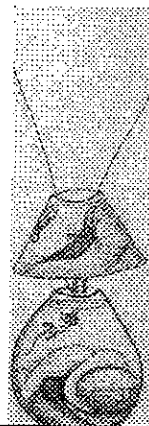
God rest ye scary great old ones;
Let everything dismay.
Remember Great Cthulhu shall rise up from R'lyeh
To kill us all with tentacles
If we should go his way.

CHORUS

O tidings of madness and woe, madness and woe
O tidings of madness and woe!

In Yuggoth and in Aldebraan
The Great Old Ones were spawned
Imprisoned by the Elder Gods to wait for eons,
Enticing humans to release them,
Chanting dreadful songs

CHORUS



WONDROUS WEB-COMICS, BATMAN!

d@vid seaward stops trawling for long enough to discuss some of his finds...

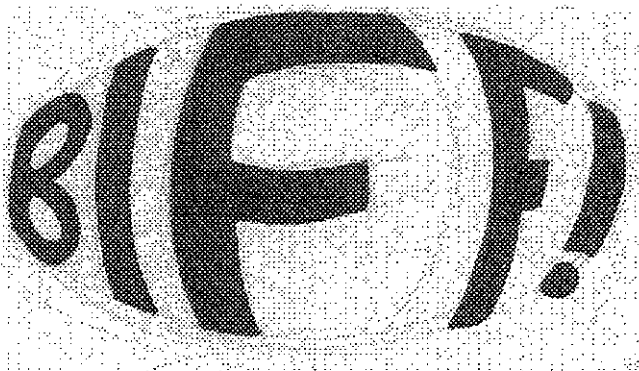
Web-published comics are growing in popularity, exposure and diversity. As well as being able to find the latest Dilbert and other commercial comics within the garbage heap that is the web, you can also find the growing "independent" movement which values exposure over profit: because every decent industry has independents.

Now, of course, they're beginning the "sell-out" phase where you can buy book collections for actual money, or so pessimists would have you believe. In actuality, the fact that these cartoonists have the will to keep going until they reach a point where self-publishing is viable is admirable. Just as long as they keep their stuff onna web, I'm happy...

Sluggy Freelance [sluggy.com]

A well-lauded example of web-comics, I remember the joy of being one of those who voted Sluggy to number one on the top homepages list, and saw it maintain that title continuously for over a year. Created by Pete Abrahms, Sluggy is a daily strip (with longer, colour Sunday supplements) featuring humans, bunnies, aliens and parody in extremus. Although Pete is almost always behind in giving the site itself the updating it deserves, the strip comes out like clockwork. Over the past years Pete has experimented wildly with the strip (which has featured animations, stick-figure week(s) and gold foil editions), tweaked the site for ease-of-use and perusal, and generally maintained a good relationship with his fan base.

Everyone else reads it, you know.



Goats [goats.com]

An example of the web comic that has just begun to "make it". Jon Rosenberg has a section of his website devoted to the rejection letters he has received from syndicates, and another of the strange mail he receives from fans, which goes to show

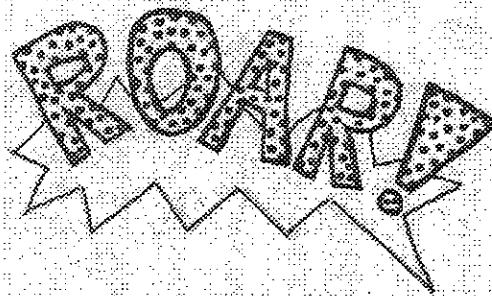
that just because its unpublishable doesn't make it unpopular. Featuring humans, beer, only one goat, a satanist chicken, beer, aliens with questionable habits, guest stars, beer, waitresses, beer, waitresses and beer, Goats has finally started bringing in some cash with T-shirts, mugs and other paraphernalia. In the pipeline are promises of a book and some sort of 3D animation thing. Most impressive are the spin off web sites [moistpaper napkins.com] and [brains4zombies.com].

The Gifted [thegifted.com]

A site that annoys me greatly. Over a year I have waited for the continuation of this graphic novel that shows promise in story, graphic style and just general coolness. When will it come?!!

Ahem. Definitely with more grit and punch than the strips, The Gifted has plenty going for it, apart from artist-lag. However I am sure that when Stephen Rice starts up again it will be worth the wait.

(Update on publication: Stephen has updated his page as of January (I assume he made that just-after-New-Year's mistake dating it 1999) with promises of more for mid-February... we can only hope. He also includes a link to the new site of comix guru Scott McCloud, author of "Understanding Comics", have a look at [scottmccloud.com])



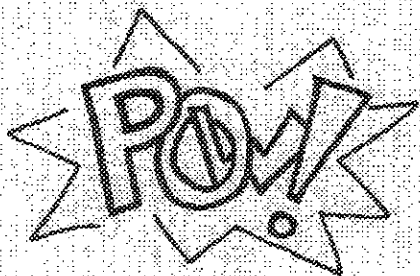
Nosferatu

[museoffire.com/Nosferatu]

An interesting 3D animated experiment by some experimenters of 3D animation.

A growing cartoon rather than a comic strip, the pre-generated plot promises a battle between a juvenile vampire hunter and his petit foe. Overdone and anime-esque storywise, it has been great fun so far and promises an intriguing ending.

Quicktime movie player required:
[apple.com/quicktime/download]



User Friendly [userfriendly.org]

Enough pandering to fantasy/gothic mentality. Earn your propellor beanie points and read the comic every other geek must read. Featuring the staff of an ISP, a Dust Puppy and an AI, UF sells both

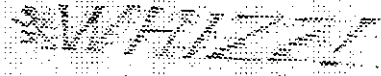
standard humour (all your favourite Microsoft jokes probably started here), its own quirkiness (how does the Dust Puppy stay together anyway?), and the occasional single-panel of sociopolitical commentary.

Space Moose

[spacemoose.com]

In my opinion an example of all that is bad in web comics. Scanned in and spat out, I dislike the mindless style and content of the comic, and am perhaps tiring of the varsity student theme. Evidently, there are some who don't, so you may want to check it out.

Red Meat [redmeat.com]

A stylized, hand-drawn word "WHIZZ!" in a jagged, blocky font. The letters are black with a white outline. To the left of the word are several curved lines suggesting motion or sound, and a small starburst is at the end of the word.

No web comic summary is complete without mention of Max Cannon's creation. Quirky is too tame a description for this strip. Brilliantly done in terms of content and art; I will never look at a dead clown the same way again.

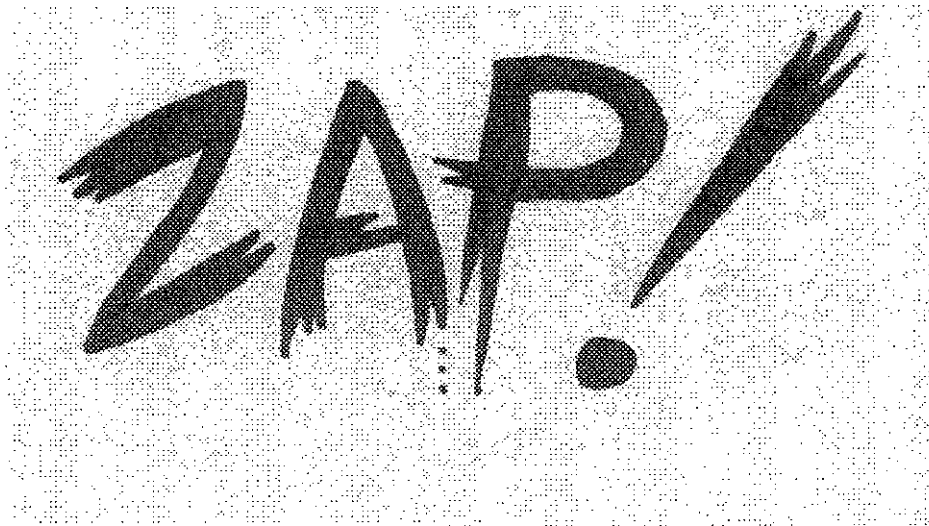
Remember, there are a growing number of web cartoonists out there, including some great, though obscure, strips that I haven't touched on. There is a growing atmosphere of interconnectedness between them, a natural development of the web as a publishing tool. Jon has a variety of comics links on the Goats page, and several web comics, including Sluggy, took part in a collaborative Halloween project in 1999.

And here's as good a place as any to mention sweet.com (at [\[sweet.com\]](http://sweet.com) funnily enough) an impressive and growing collection of South Park renders, a must for the fan or even occasional viewer.

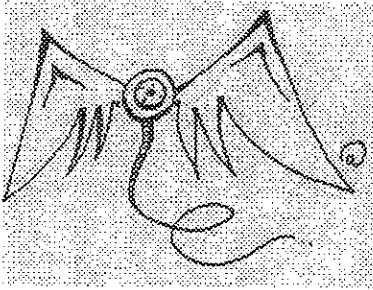
Before diving in, though, I should warn you to make your selection carefully, and that *was* in the singular.

Most comics have a year or two's backlog that you should catch up on for full appreciation, and with the plethora available you could easily find yourself trying to keep up to date with all of them.

Well, I know I am.

A stylized, hand-drawn word "ZAP!" in a jagged, blocky font. The letters are black with a white outline. To the right of the word are several curved lines suggesting motion or sound, and a small starburst is at the end of the word.

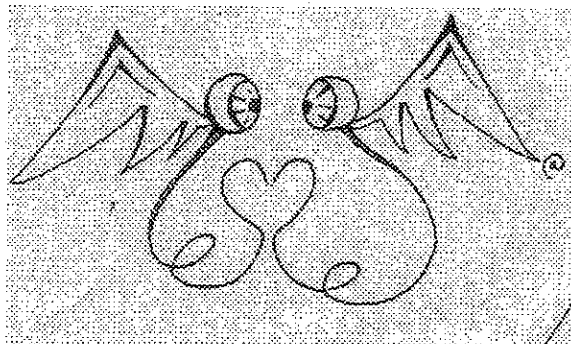
Who is this Arch-Bigot? Where does he come from? Which Internet cafes does he use? All becomes clearer in this, the first rant and flame laid upon a tool of CLAWmarks editing...

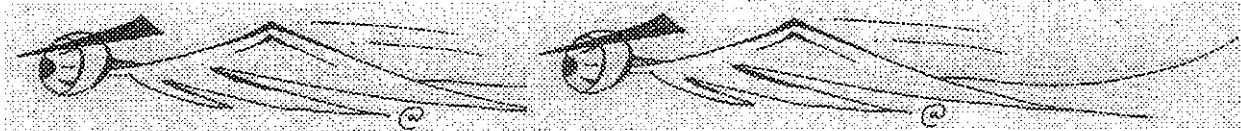


THE ARCH BIGOT SHARES WITH US...

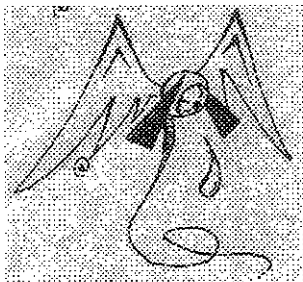
66.7 Reasons Why HE Hate Robanne's Computer

Her brother uses it
It eats bananas
It has freckles
Her brother has freckles
It blows goats
It probably has pictures of goats... somewhere
It's about as slow as trying to masturbate an ox
It's not logical
It's too logical... captain
It has files of NOTHING... that take up too much space
Mp3's, nuff said...
...On a toooooo small HDD
It's a hunk o' junk
It has pixels
Technoprimates couldn't tell it was so bad
Bananas find it tasty
It randomly deletes well-used files
It has a sense of humour
It has the file you're going to be looking for, until you look for it
It has no pubic hair
It must be alive
It may have a brain, but no-one's home
Everyone knows how bad it is, but no one does anything about it
It's temperamental, sometimes
Nothing's where it should be
Everything is stored in "games" file
It has no games
YOU CAN'T FIND ANYTHING!
It **EATS** folders
...And doesn't burp
It burps
It asks for more!
There's no space
There's too much space
You couldn't understand it if you tried
Where's "pipe"?
The keyboard is funny
...and it's not even dvorak
It couldn't even say dvorak properly
Where's the "any" key?
It's an artificial unintelligence
It has pixels
It eats bananas
It has a mouse...**VERMIIIIIN**
It has mice living in it...**VERMIIIIIN**
You **HAVE** to use it if you want to scan



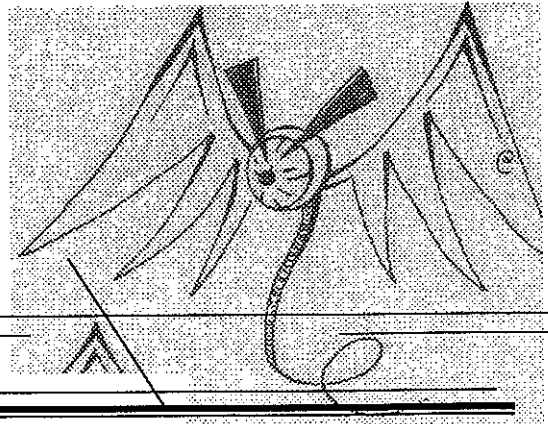


If you refuse to use Word 6 it won't understand
If you use notepad they won't understand
IT doesn't understand
You don't understand
It has tiled backgrounds
It features Offspring :o~~~
It eats bananas
It would never make it in a Cyberpunk movie
There are no Cyberpunk movies
The 486 is better!
...And it doesn't even have Word 6
...And it crashes
It doesn't respond to pleading
It doesn't respond to anger
It doesn't respond to goats
Goats don't respond to it
It doesn't respond to typing
It doesn't respond



No demon would bother possessing it
Only a sledgehammer would fix it
It's weird
You're weird
Why is Delete Block ALWAYS on?
You always forget NOT to press Ctrl-Home
It couldn't even supervise a network of one
You can't send an article in a DECENT format
You can't send an article
You can't send

You can't
*nix users use it as an argument against MS
Technoprimates use it as an argument against MS
Real live monkeys use it as an argument against Microsoft
Macintosh users use it as an argument against
Microsoft
A typewriter has more personality
It has too much personality
It has no personality
It will never say, "I don't think you can do that Dave"
It wouldn't recognise HAL9000 if he formatted its HDD
It needs to be reformatted
...And left like that
It's not on speaking terms with the printer
It has spread its influence to the printasd*@@*
If you don't save off



[NO CARRIER]

[SEGMENT FAILURE]

Easy Listening

d@vid seaward drags the Bard kicking and screaming into the 20th century, because this is the second-last chance he's got

Books-on-tape. It's a concept that smacks of process-fast process-easy mentality, and more importantly, cheating. Over the past vac, however, I have had a chance to listen to a range of audio books and have come to the conclusion that there is a lot that can be said for the medium, perhaps even to suggest that it brings something that we have lost to story-telling...

Mostly I listened to old favourites, the first being *Wyrd Sisters* by Terry Pratchett, read by Tony Robinson. As any Pratchett-iano knows, Discworld audio books come in two flavours, the Trafalgar Square abridged versions read by Mr Robinson (of *Baldrick* fame) and the Isis full-length versions. Literary snobbery suggests which one should prefer, but pop appeal notes that the chance of a Pratchett character coming up with a "cunning plan" is too good to miss. (Not that they do, <sigh>)

As expected with an abridged version, Mr Robinson skipped out what were some of my favourite scenes from the book, but overall evoked what I felt was the right atmosphere in tone, inflection and all that, although I'll rant later about men doing women's voices.

Continuing in the Pratchett vein (and then no more, I promise), I... hmmm, I can't say "perused", damn this medium... in any event, it was the *Colour of Magic*, unabridged.

Here we come to the quandry of "translation" from one medium to another. While abridging is sacrilegious, it allows the editor-types to work in elements that rely on visual or literary practices. I am not sure if it is a typically used Isis convention, or reserved for 'wacky' Discworld novels, but I found the jingly footnote indicators irksome. As I'm reading, a footnote brings to mind a change in tone, not a fanfare and weird background music. Overall, though, I haven't a bad thing to say about the interpretation, and I will keep a look out for more Pratchett audio books in particular to see how they manage with the MitBH's Asterix-style language fonts and other idiosyncracies.

And also because I'm an addict.

Turning away from fantasy for a moment, we look at, er, listen to, a selection of PG Wodehouse. Thank you, *Jeeves and Aunts Aren't Gentleman* are Chivers audio books read by an actor who played Bertie Wooster in some TV show whose name may well be instantly forgettable, because I forgot it. "A Pelican at Blandings" was read by Nigel Lambert under Chivers, so maybe he did the others too. Never having read Wodehouse before, I took this as an opportunity to listen to something new. While I am sure I would have picked up on the silly British atmosphere quickly enough, it was well introduced by the respective voice actors, who also did brilliant things with the characters. Wodehouse's stories themselves were great, although by the end it wasn't hard to pick up on his formula, and I gained a lot from the roleplaying-upper-class-ponces side of things; except that St John was recently kidnapped by Hastur...

Jurassic Park was a definite favourite of mine just before the movie came out, and my introduction to Michael Crichton, a broadening in my horizons or fall in taste according to your preferences.

Here is a prime example of a voice actor who added great atmosphere by virtue of his own character. The gravelly narration of John Heard (reading for Random House) had my attention captured from the beginning. It was just a pity that I had only found an abridged copy.

Dune. Yes, that one by Frank Herbert. Yes, unabridged. An Isis audio book read by George Guidall. 32 sides. Yes, that's what I thought too.

What do I need to say? Guidall was excellent, the theme music and quotations were done well, and there were no jingle-jingle footnotes. Great stuff.

And finally, for most dramatic effect, HHGTTG.

Actually, I lie, I have no idea where my tapes are and search in vain every time I go home, but this is made up by several years of listening to them continuously. The original broadcasts are of course must-listens for all Adams afficiandos, but even those with only a vague interest should be intrigued by an excellent example of the lost art of radio shows. While *War of the Worlds* had American hicks putting paper bags over their heads and the poncey British comedies had poncey Britons guffawing, *Hitchhiker's* broke ground by making the show more than "custard pie splat B followed by audience laughter track, next one-liner starting in

background where you can't hear it". In stereo too. If you can't get a hold of this, or the unabridged audio books read by the author, at least get hold of the Original Radio Scripts, or rather, get a hold of them anyway, because they tell you what colours things turn as well.

In all, being used to wading through text myself, I found a grand selection of audio books a refreshing look at the story-teller's art. I doubt one would ever find a particularly bad voice actor chosen, unless one has personal biases, and I had the good fortune of listening to a few quite excellent readers who managed to bring a variety of characters to life. For that reason I would recommend tapes to interested GMs who are interested in seeing how much one can do simply with voice to characterise NPCs.

My only complaint is that, while some could pull it off, women's voices typically sounded mostly contrived, or at least took some getting used to. Without turning to the radio show approach there is not much one can do about this, but that would probably also give more weight to the tapes' already hefty tag; also the reason why I would suggest avoiding abridged versions: pay a little extra and go the whole hog, is my advice.

Audio books, though, stand in a strange position between novels and radio drama. While occasionally the tools of the latter are used, essentially the publisher's focus is on re-creating the book which, as we have seen, sometimes results in peculiarities. Personally, I would prefer an approach which recognizes the medium it is working in, but that's probably those years of Hitchhiker's talking...

Ideally, I would like CD-ROMs with text, pictures and effluvious data on track one and audio tracks to follow, and that's the technojunkie talking...

Actually, I wouldn't mind little holographic devices that say "Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope!"

er...

That was the end of Side 3.

Please turn the tape over to continue...

Links for the webcrawler...

Adams - [douglasadams.com],
[h2g2.com]

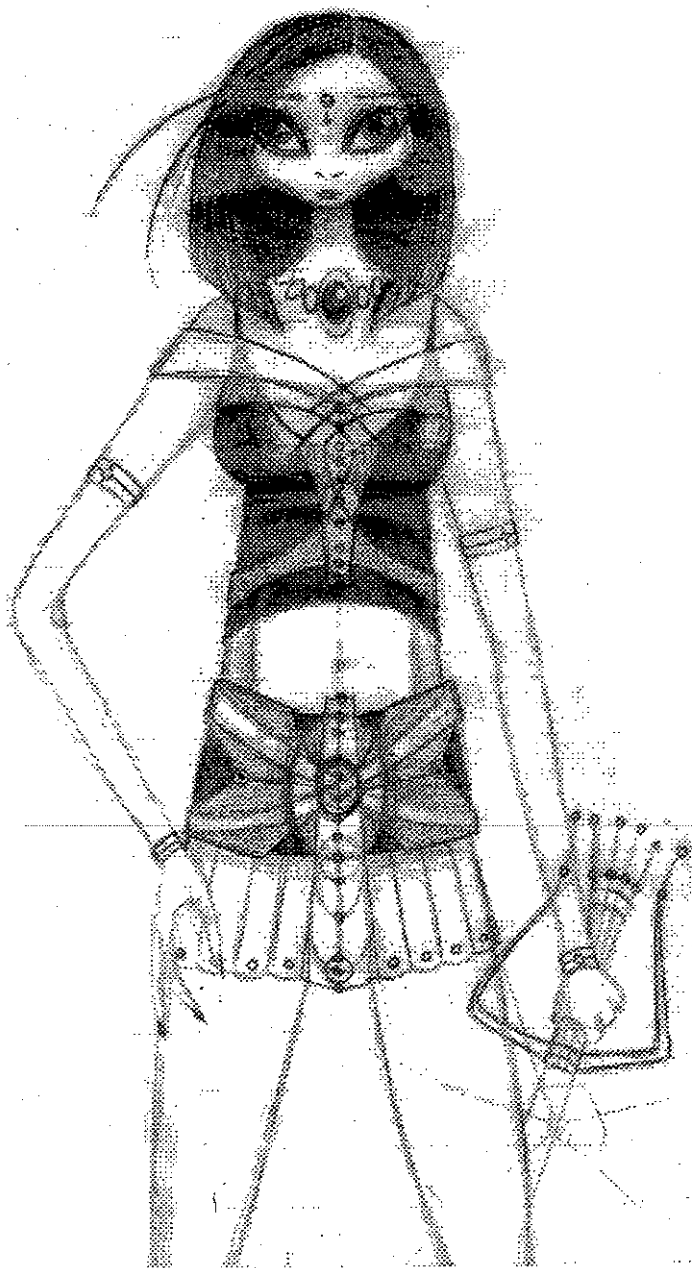
Books & Tapes - [amazon.com]

Crichton - [crichton-official.com]

Herbert - [fremen.org]

Pratchett - [lspace.org]

Wodehouse - [smart.net/~tak/wodehouse.html], [serv.net/~camel]



CLASSIFIED

Beware

Goldilocks (Duncan) do you realize you are moving IN with the three bears?

Births

To Adrianna and Simon - a bouncing baby Cthulhu.

For Sale

Miniature M1 Abrahams. Only used once. Heavily modified. Suitable for all terrain. Apply Nellis Airforce base.

For Sale

Ornate Revolvers. Voloric Repeating rifle, Derringer, unwanted gift.

News Flash

Smoky powder can be hazardous to the honourable sport of duelling. If it can't be seen it can't be hit.

Notice

Cousin Elrand is a hairdresser!

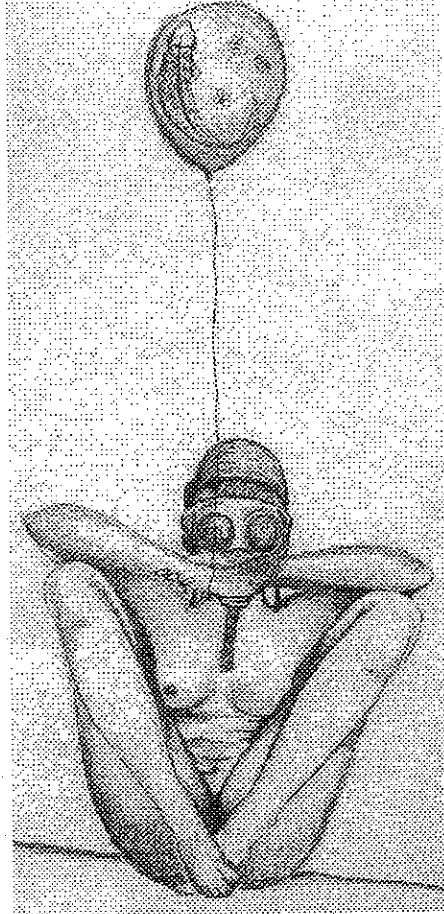
Notice

Experiment #1138: Further observation required, amend background story and return to Rebel Base.

Yith Overlords

Notice

It's Not The Damn Millennium!



Notice

I can't produce Rights of Passage for every city governed by evil overlords. This is important!

Little Stevan

Notice

Having a MAN servant does not mean you are gay! We just have a close friendship.

Alexis & Hans

Notice

Unidentified Floating Objects appear over cities across the globe! Ejected from Sanfrisco, worshipped at the Brahamas, two in Lost/Vegas, gunned down over Newark...

Consultants suggest the Regeneratrons are testing a new form of weather balloon.

Notice

The CLAWSite! It's happening on an extended and to-be-updated basis... [play.at/CLAWS/]

Notice

I can do it with my eyes closed, so there :P

Spirit-Summoning Stevan

Notice

Truths are revealed by black of night, and will be confirmed in methane depths. But just who can you trust, "Mr Julian"?

Mysterious Voice In Your Head

Notice

Perfect Triple Luck 9!

Lost

Lucky hat

Found

A trail of new born babies leading from east to west across the Americas and Russia. Information concerning this puzzling phenomenon will be rewarded highly.

Looking For

Waaashing-ton - last seen naked and running for the hills.

Looking For

Nubile young love slaves for beloved brother Apply Simone de Beavioure

Seeking

Doctor to enter into correspondence concerning the preservation of bodies for transportation. My family just don't seem to understand.

Contact Simon de Beavioure

Seeking

An elusive chimp in a purple dress uniform with moustache. Last scene clutching a woman called Evita and looking proudly

over a crowd of enthusiastic loyal supporters.

Wanted

Someone to shake up our social environments. Things have been boring for... oh... about 5 minutes.

Wanted

New members for PISCES team. Only trained professionals need apply.

Starts immediately.
Send encrypted CV to Los Angeles British consulate.

Wanted

Party willing to save the world.

Apply Stevan Kane,
T=1899

Wanted

Visibility!

Lord-Monsieur Pebble, somewhere near Neptune

Wanted

Skydiving instructor. Preferably with some knowledge of Hermetic magic.

Apply at the Covenant of the Grey Moon.

Wanted

Excuse to leave salon and see the world.

Cousin Elrand,
[insert convenient location here]

Wanted

Mad typist-slaves to transliterate ancient tomes. Dunreeb al-Kazaar, webmaster@clawsm ail.zzn.com

Wanted

Ancient tomes to transliterate (particularly the single digit ones). Dunreeb [see above]

Wanted

Ghost Rock! My kingdom for Ghost Rock!

Stevan, T=1899

Wanted

Things going down in the Yellow Submarine! Care to join us, Coghill?

John, Paul, Ringo & George

Wanted

Someone to save my ass

Elizabeth Spencer

Wanted

Specialist plastic surgery.

Apply Colin Lawrence Douglas.

Wanted

Exterminator to remove nasty alien from voodoo priestess' lounge. Heavy weapon a plus.

MIA

Ryan and Xavier, PISCES agents on a black-ops mission. We hope the grey men don't torture you too much.

RIP

The whole world in Biblical Apocalypse. Nineteenth century dudes didn't care.

RIP

Blue-eyed vigilante. The words on his lips were filigreed...

RIP

The virtue of many young women

RIP

A sad, lonely dryad tormented by mankind for aeons. Put out of her misery by a kindly druid.

Almost RIP

Kindly druid while attempting to euthanase dryad. Damn that swamp.

Damn those slippery rocks. Damn that 30 ft Hydra. Damn those 14 botch dice.

RIP

One Time Machine. Several million components later...

RIP

One G-Ray Collector. Damn you snivelling Victorians!

RIP

Sanity. You too will be missed. St John

RIP

Dr Elizabeth Spencer - Kidnapped by the King in Yellow

RIP?

St John? Kidnapped for good? Engage emergency backup NPC! Cuthbert-in-mourning-with-vengeance

RIP

Lawrence's genitals. Well, not quite. Bunsen burner's and sulfuric acid may drive away nasty aliens, but damn that shit burns.

RIP

Lots of Deep On... uh, fish things. Will you ever learn - don't mess with PISCES.

RIP

Innocent Rabbit... served as host to nasty daemon goat blood sucking alien.

RIP

Nasty daemon goat blood sucking alien. It was trying to escape, dammit!

RIP

Farmer MacDonald, his wife, a bunch of sheep and various bystanders & cops. Meteor shower my ass.

RIP

Loose plot threads. Everthing is coming together 4 billion years in the future. Hang on to your bell-bottoms!



RIP

One Giant Axylotl.
What amour?

RIP

Some church knights. Never underestimate a perdo specialist & a mad faerie with a penchant for random destruction.

RIP

Arch Mage Horavan. We hope. Maybe we can open that herb shop after all.

RIP

Nazi death scientist. You and your machine parts should have achtunged!

RIP

100's of SS stormtroopers - or should we say storm bloopers.

RIP

Two flea bitten alley cats, pecked by the birds.

RIP

Perseverance Wellbegood. Chopped and diced in two quick hand motions. Denial and righteous outrage didn't save him.

RIP

Rudolpho

RIP

Nigita Harvey, his cork screwed right off, not a good vintage we take take it

RIP (not)

Diego - a crispy critter for the Lord.

RIP

Rattler Jack Military, our camouflage death Russian beat your Ace up the Sleeve.

RIP

The kids. Even your shiny new scattergun couldn't save you from Man Mountain.

RIP

Curly Edwards - killed a lot

RIP

One Mexican War Machine - curse the self destruct button

