RPG REVIEW

Issue #43, June 2019
ISSN 2206-4907 (Online)

Planes and Time

Glorantha Cosmology ... Flashback RPG Designer's Notes ... GURPS Time Travel and Krononauts ... Dr Who Adventures ... Call of Cthulu-Nephilim .. Planescape Torment ... "Us" Movie Review

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EDITORIAL AND COOPERATIVE NEWS

Editorial

Welcome to the 43rd issue of RPG Review. It is, as if often the case, a little on the late side which is very appropriate giving that we've dedicated this issue to time travel and other planes; we must be from a parallel universe where deadlines don't matter so much. Actually they will matter even less for the next issue which is usually slated for September but will coming out in November instead, as we're doing something quite remarkable – running a second RuneQuest Glorantha Down Under Con in two years. Last time there had been a twenty year gap!

Anyway more on that matter when we get to Cooperative News. As a prelude to this issue it was initially going to be just about time travel RPGs. But if one is going to travel through time, why not space? Space = Time. And if the travel through time is going to be contrary to normal physical conventions (time's arrow does apply) then surely it is appropriate that spatial travel is likewise. Hence, time travel and extra-planar travel.

But before we get into the meat and potatoes of the issue, there is nice little piece from Shaun Hately reviewing one of Melbourne's famous Cons, Conquest. As part of the RPG revival that the world is experiencing at the moment, Melbourne now has both its venerable cons back in action (Arcanancon and Conquest). Perhaps it only a matter of time before Phantastacon is back?

In any case, we kick off the topic proper will Shaun again, this time talking about Time Travel in GURPS. We don't actually have a review of GURPS Time Travel per se, but seriously with all the historical sourcebooks in that line, any

consideration is larger than a review of that one publication could justify. Appropriately one will also find part II of the Worldbook for GURPS Krononauts, a multi-GM campaign which has featured in RPG Review a few times before. In between that is the designer's notes for Flashback, a time travel RPG by a local author. It is only fit and proper that we provide space and encourage the design of more new and interesting games.

Switching tack, the matchless David Cake provides a summary introduction to the cosmology of Glorantha which, to be honest, is inspirational enough to get me to put finer to keyboard in writing up a deeply metaphysical piece for the next issue of RPG Review for the Glorantha Convention. Without giving too much away, I think the dragons have worked it out, and one dragon in particular.

Along the familiar theme of extra-planar travels, one will also find a review of the classic Planescape boxed set by Karl Brown, who also provides the cosmology of the Green Isles, his fantasy-faerie campaign, for D&D5e, and also for the same game system, a review of the Drin, a species of "planar ramblers".

Yours truly has contributed two pieces, a review of *Time & Time Again* and *Timemaster,* two time-travel RPGs that both came out in 1984, plus a review of the new *Dr. Who: Adventures in Time and Space* (see that equation?). Plus, and a campaign-kicker which combines *Call of Cthulhu* with *Nephilim*, where the Great Race of Yith *are* the Nephilim. Because mash-ups are fun, right?

Finally, in our not-pencil-and-paper-RPG-but-pretty-damn-close Dorchadas gives a very tasty review of *Planescape:Torment* which is, without a doubt, the most famous game of its sort, whilst bringing right up to the present, the ever dependable Andrew Moshos offers more nightmares with the recently released horror movie, *Us.*

Which brings us to a close to RPG Review issue 43; strange travels indeed through space and time!

Lev Lafayette

Co-operative News

The Cooperative has been continuing on its merry way with its usual set of activities. We still have a dozen or so regular gaming groups that more or less operate in association with us, with games of D&D 5e, RuneQuest, Megatraveller, and Eclipse Phase being particularly prominent. Our library is well over 850 items with some donations from Gareth Hodges and Rodney Brown being particularly of note. In addition we've had a couple of enjoyable movie nights out at The Astor with the Twilight Zone movie, and the throughly weird horror-comedy In Fabric.

In addition to this we have our two main publications generating a few sales; Papers & Paychecks, which brought a 30-year joke to a self-referential conclusion, and The Tinker's Toolkit, which reverse engineers species creation for D&D 5th ed. Could your publication be next? Most certainly, as we have a bulk purchase of ISBNs for use by members. Providing membership services is what we're all about. Well, and providing freebies to the public, such as this nice 'zine and the various resources in our git repository. But information wants to be free.

Oh, and here's some big news. After *years* of operating without one (because we didn't really need it), finally we have our own bank account. Do you want to be a member of the RPG Review Cooperative? Well, it's only $10 year (or $100 for life membership). You can put a deposit in to BSB 06 3114 Acct 1058 0245, and note your name in the transaction details. It will make the world a better place, you know.

CONQUEST 2019 REVIEW

with Shaun Hately

Conquest 2019 was held in Melbourne over the Easter long weekend. Conquest has been running since 1989 and I have attended every Conquest since 1992 myself so I've seen most of its development and evolution over the years both as a player and a long term writer/GM for the convention.

I think it's fair to say that Conquest went through a lean patch a few years ago - there seemed to be a shortage of games and some problems with organisation. I think it always needs to be understood that conventions like this one rely heavily on volunteers, some of who work incredibly hard for the benefit of the gaming hobby and from my perspective those difficult years came when some long term volunteers had had to move away from doing as much as they had done before or who had left altogether, leaving a rump who were trying to do even more than they had ever done before and with a shortage of new people being willing to step up and lend a hand. I admit that in my own case, I cannot ever see me ever volunteering to a ConOrg – I'm happy to do my part writing and running games, and I do think that is

an important contribution – but any successful con relies on the blood, sweat, and tears of people who often don't seem to get the appreciation they really deserve.

Regardless of what happened in the past, I've been very impressed with Conquest for the last several years, including the recent period that it was running at Swinburne University. I'd seen a resurgence in good organisation, and a resurgence in the number of games available, along with some really nice new ideas about some of the administration from a writer and GM perspective. And I am happy to say that with the move this year to the Batman Royale in Coburg, that still seems to be the case.

As I say, I am not a ConOrg, so I'm not in the loop on the decisions they make, but I've heard plenty on the grapevine about it's becoming harder and harder for those who running Cons to find venues that meet all the requirements for running a Con. Facilities, location, costs – I don't pretend to know even a small amount of what they have to do. But I have seen Cons have to move, and Cons shut down and heard that finding venues that work are a big part of the problem. So when I heard in mid-to-late 2018 that 2019's Conquest wasn't going to be at Swinburne after a few years there, I was just relieved to hear that they'd found somewhere else to use.

This is a different type of venue than we'd become used to for Conquest – I've seen Conquest personally at University High School, Melbourne High School, and then at Swinburne. Those venues had the luxury of being able to use classrooms for a lot of games – nice, private spaces. The Batman Royale is different – it is a converted warehouse more or less and by converted I mean clean, safe, but to a great extent, it's still a warehouse. Most games were running at tables within a large open space – I was lucky enough to be given use of one of the sectioned off cubicle like areas at the back of the facility so I cannot personally speak as to what it was like to run games and play in that open area, but it did seem to work well. Space was certainly heavily used but it did not seem too crowded or too noisy.

The Batman Royale in Coburg.

Organisation – again, from my perspective as a writer and GM it seemed great. As a long term writer for Conquest, the worst part of the Conventions for me was always the need for Writers/Organisers of particular games to see at their little table in pre-registration – and at other periods during the Con if you had a shortage of players to try and get people to sign up for your games. So I was really delighted a few years ago at Conquest when somebody came up with the idea of having specific sign up sheets for all (or nearly all) games being centrally handled by volunteers – it made it much easier for players to see quickly what was available and running in a particular session they wanted to fill, and what games needed spaces. That idea was continued this year at the new venue and the registration tables and from my perspective it continues to make easier for those running particular games.

Food – the con crowd needs to eat. We were spoiled a bit while at Swinburne with Glenferrie Road only a short walk away, in addition to the onsite canteen. In comparison, the area around the Batman Royale is limited in terms of food choices. But there were two food trucks on site, being shared (as I understand it) with a boardgames convention that was in another part of the complex and that seemed to provide perfectly acceptable nourishment – in addition, the Con's own small canteen was providing a range of snack foods and had even worked out that they could provide cup noodles without violating any rules – a clever response to the limitations placed on them.

Location – in terms of accessibility by various forms of transport, the Batman Royale seems excellent – on site car parking, a train station on one side of it, a tramline on the other. There were some issues this year due to works on the trainline, but overall you couldn't really do much better in this regard.

I didn't play any games except the ones I was running – but from what I could see people were having a great time. I don't know what the future for Conquest is – but it does seem to be in safe hands with people who know what they are doing and who were able to deliver a good Con.

TIME TRAVEL WITH GURPS

by Shaun Hately

Generally speaking, Steve Jackson Games' GURPS is not one of my favourite roleplaying systems – I find the rules somewhat clunky, and the interactions between skills overly complex. It's not terrible, it's playable enough but there's plenty of other games I would play before it. But where it shines is not in its mechanics but in the huge array of source books available that cover all sorts of different campaign environments for games, including covering many different historical periods of our own real world – and for this reason above all else, it's an ideal source for running Time Travel based games – when you have historical sourcebooks like 'Greece', 'Age of Napoleon', 'Ice Age', 'Imperial Rome', 'Old West', and 'Middle Ages', to name just six, not to mention a wide range of future based speculative science fiction based universes, you have a game rich for leaping back and forth between different periods – you can use the GURPS rules if you want to, but you can also use other rule sets and merely use GURPS for background and adventure ideas. So, it is a rich vein for a time travel campaign, and its made even better by the fact that GURPS also provides specific source materials for Time Travel based campaigns.

In the third edition of GURPS, we had 'Time Travel: Adventures Across Time and Dimension' and its companion adventure book 'Time Travel Adventures'. In its fourth edition, GURPS actually made use of one of the ideas from 'Time Travel' in its 'Basic Set: Campaigns Volume' to create a kind of unified campaign world for all of GURPS for players and GMs who wanted such a thing. This was further expanded on in 'Infinite Worlds'.

In simple terms, GURPS as a whole provides two excellent models for a Time Travel based campaign – or perhaps it is better to say, it provides an excellent model for a Time Travel based campaign, and a second model for a Parallel Worlds campaign that can include time travel by positing that some of those parallel worlds are our own world at a different stage of development – it is this latter idea (referred to in the rules as the 'Infinite World' campaign that GURPS treats as a core (though entirely optional) campaign world for its fourth edition, but it is the former – outlined in the third edition 'Time Travel' book and touched on again in fourth editions 'Infinite Worlds' sourcebook – that I regard as the richer pure time travel setting.

This is the 'Time Corps' campaign. In this campaign, PCs from our own worlds future (2100 is suggested as a good starting point for a campaign) are Agents of the Temporal Control Authority of a United Nations based Project Timepiece given responsibility to protect Earth's history from the consequences of time travel being used to change our world. They struggle against an organisation referred to as Stopwatch that seems to come from an alternative timeline to our own world where world government went down a more bureaucratic path. Stopwatch seems to be trying to change our worlds history and Timepiece needs to stop them.

The game is based around the concept of an 'Absolute Now' – the time which the Agents come from and which travel into the future is impossible from. You can only travel back to fixed windows about eight months apart, and more than 130 years in the past – so from a campaign where the absolute now is 2100, you cannot go back to anytime after 1970, for example. And time passes parallel in both times – normally. Agents who travelled back from 1st January 2101, to

1st January 1951 and stayed there until 30th March 1951, would return back to 30th March 2101.

You can change history – although its somewhat resistant to change – but you need to do it in subtle ways. The consequences of making too severe a change can lead to the timeline fighting back and expelling you back to the absolute now – so a Timepiece versus Stopwatch campaign tends to revolve around the agents of both sides trying to make small changes to advance their cause and undo the actions of the opposition.

The time travel mechanics are very well thought out and are beyond the scope of this review. But they create a model with a lot of freedom for players and which allows for a coherent treatment of time travel which provides in game explanations for the paradoxes that can necessarily result from such activities.

The 'Time Travel Adventures' book provides two adventures for the Timepiece/Stopwatch campaign – one set on the Titanic on its fateful voyage, the other in the Middle East of the 1970s. The Titanic adventure, in particular, has really grasped the imagination of every group I have run it for over the years. There is also a third adventure for the 'Infinite Worlds' campaign, set in a parallel 1990s where magic is a real presence.
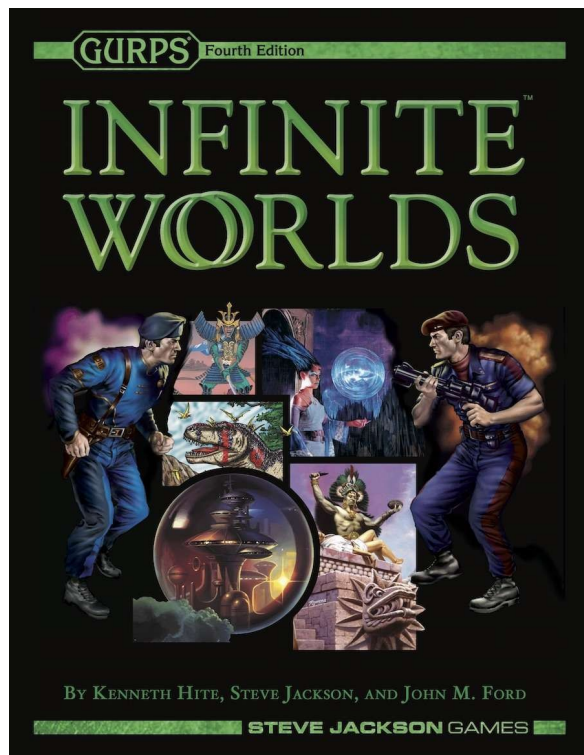
The 'Infinite Worlds' idea as presented in the various books is an intriguing one and certainly represents a playable campaign model – but personally I find it difficult to consider it as a time travel game – it can be if you assume that among those infinite worlds are worlds you can access that are identical to our own simply at a different period of time, but for pure time travel, I'd rather run the Timepiece game. Having said that, once you start bringing in the wider possibilities of infinite parallel worlds, once again the wealth of GURPS sourcebooks is a major plus – a campaign that allows you to move between Terry Pratchett's Discworld, into the world of Bunnies and Burrows, into worlds populated by superheroes… the sky is the limit in many ways.

The rules system isn't bad, but isn't the draw for this game – it's the possibilities, and the wide availability of well thought out source material

FLASHBACK RPG DESIGNER'S NOTES

by Alex Jarkey

Author's Note: The Flashback RPG Kickstarter is LIVE! Please check it out at

https://www.flashbackrpg.com/articles/campaign

Flashback started out as an idea, that grew into a mechanic, that grew into a game.

I grew up in Sydney but moved to Melbourne a few years ago. We made some new friends and eventually managed to persuade them to try out RPGs, having left our regular D&D group in NSW.

When you're an experienced RPG player, it's easy to forget how much there is to take in for new players. Right out of the gate, you need to choose a race, a class, choose spells, skills and items - you barely understand the format of the game and yet you have to read and understand several chapters of content that will lock your character into a path that you may not even enjoy. Then someone throws the whole "Roleplaying" spiel at you. You're supposed to interact "in character" and pick and alignment? 3 hours in and you haven't even started rolling dice yet.

So we tried something different. Forget about coming up with a backstory for now - when the time comes, you can just tell me what skills you think your character would have and how your character acquired them. We just sat down and started playing, and something amazing happened:

It just worked. A whole group of total novice players were coming up with more compelling and interesting characters in a few hours than our old D&D group had created in several years. It turns out, when your primary focus is on classes and weapons then there isn't much incentive to go beyond being a "human fighter with a sword".

What's more, you get to reveal your character's backstory gradually and give other players a chance to contribute ideas. Players build on each other's concepts and the GM gets an endless source of material to connect players to the world and ongoing narrative. From there, Flashback grew around the central idea of providing real incentives for roleplaying instead of just an afterthought. The next innovation came with the idea of defining your character through personality traits instead of physical attributes.
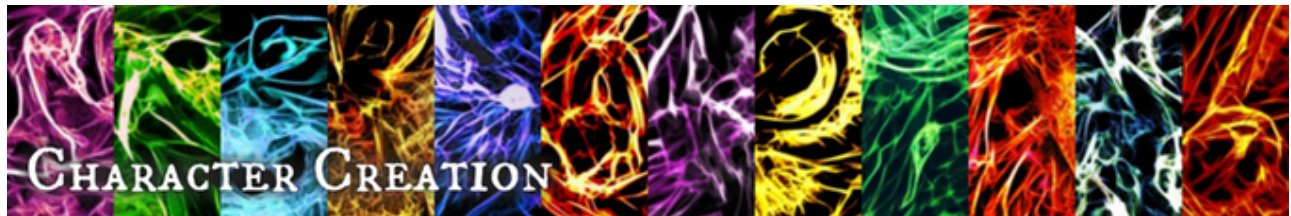
Flashback's Personality Trait system is based on the same features that psychologists use to model the human psyche. It's mind over matter - your physical and mental attributes are actually influenced by aspects of your personality. You might be physically strong because your Disciplined nature helps you to focus and train hard. You might be vigilant and perceptive because your Skeptical outlook makes you question every tiny detail.

By putting the focus on your character's internal nature instead of their external stats, players always have roleplaying at the forefront of their thoughts. What's more, your power and advancement are directly tied to the expression of your character's personality. It's good to be a little Stubborn sometimes - nobody respects a pushover - but if you try to min-max your personality then the other characters will probably start to find you difficult and abrasive.

Throughout playtesting, we constantly refined and added to the mechanics based on player feedback. One interesting side-effect of having such strong incentives for character building was that players were more likely to try and talk their way out of conflicts instead of just murdering everyone. When your game doesn't reward players by giving out XP for killing things, they don't do it as much!

SOCIAL COMBAT

The Social Combat system gave a Flashback a framework for players to take a nonviolent approach to any situation. In a nutshell, characters have 2 kinds of hitpoints: Toughness for tracking physical injuries… and Confidence for tracking emotional ones.

Players can wear down an opponent's confidence - even right in the middle of combat. Instead of siloing the game into "combat encounters" and "roleplaying cutscenes", everything works together seamlessly. You can use your Social skills and attacks to convince your foes to drop their weapons or surrender. Enchantment and charm spells can be used to erode an opponent's Confidence, and some weapons are particularly scary and intimidating.

ABOUT THE GAME

There's so much more to Flashback that I haven't even touched on. A huge amount of work has gone into the worldbuilding and setting, plus the Stamina resource mechanics and I haven't even mentioned Titans!

If you like the idea, you can read all about the themes and setting on the Kickstarter Campaign Page - I hope you'll consider showing your support for indie RPG developers like us.

We set out to make Flashback because we want to introduce more players to RPGs and the joy of social roleplaying. This is a project we believe in and we hope you will help us make it a reality.

GURPS KRONONAUTS WORLDBOOK PART II

by Karl Brown with Lev Lafayette

GURPS Krononuats is a story set in the near future (2092) with timetravellers who attempt to retain the timeline of the past against Revisionists. There is some reference to the TimeMaster game by Pacesetter, especially their use of Significance Ratings and Time Riders by Iron Crown Enterprises, but the primary books used are GURPS Basic Set (third edition revised and fourth edition), GURPS Transhuman Space, GURPS Cyberpunk, GURPS Space, GURPS Uplift, GURPS Ultratech, GURPS Psionics, GURPS Biotech, GURPS Vehicles and, of course, GURPS Time Travel.

Prior publications in this series includes:

GURPS: Krononauts; Transhumanists and Time Travel by Karl Brown et. al.,
http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_5.pdf

GURPS Krononauts: Worldbook 2090 by Karl Brown et. al.
http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_10.pdf

Krononauts: A History of the Future by Karl Brown et. al.,
http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_11.pdf

Krononauts: An Example of Multi-Referee Campaign Design
http://rpgreview.net/files/rpgreview_34.pdf

The Physics of Time Travel

Refer to GURPS Time Travel for the rules this section refers to.

Linearity: Yes; Recency Effect: Yes; easier to travel to the distant past than the recent past; plus nausea effect. 2000s. Slowly deadly if you travel to your own time line.

Observer Effect: Observer effect applies; with sickness plus agreement on resolving paradoxes. Check Significance Rating from Timemaster

Can The Past Be Changed: Plastic with medium resistance

Can You Meet Yourself: Temporal Snarl applies

Can Present Communicate With the Past: Limited forward communication. After first time travel people and gear is 'insulated' from changes to the timeline and retain their memories when the world changes around them. You can leave people and objects behind in the past and drag them back to the future.

What does protected mean?: protected from changes to the past all inclusive from the perspective of the PC's personal present. It is also protected from changes in the (personal) future that effect its personal present. The personal presents of other time travellers (usually NPC's) might create potential universes in some circumstances particularly when players end up playing 'doubles'.

What objects are protected?: everything that has time travelled and time machines including the computer 'brains' that are intrinsic to time machines.

Also the observer effect applies to the rest of reality, that is so as long as you are observing the world as you understand it from your memories, or some other time traveller is observing it from their memories, then it imposes a reality. Then when time travellers stop observing something the changed past time line catches up with it.

When does protection apply?: When any object time travels it has effectively stepped outside of the timeline therefore is protected. The same effect occur to a time machine the first time it is used.

Tachyon Radiation Poisoning

Tachyon radiation poisoning occurs when a time-traveller visits the same timeline that already they exist in. It only affects visitors; the first person there is unaffected. Onset of the radition is delayed by the speed of light. The effects follow the rules for normal radiation (GURPS Space, 3rd edition ,104-105). Characters take 10 rads per day, cumulative. Usually few will survive a couple of weeks. The physical effects are the character slowly "fading away", literally losing parts of themselves at the atomic level.

Changing History

When someone or something becomes a time traveller its timeline is insulated from that of its home time, hence once a time traveller your memories don't change if history changes. This means that if history changes you may find yourself in a strange world. TT88-89 has some example changes to history.

The corporation relies on many historical events and innovations within Europe for its existence. Therefore, Europe is somewhat protected from major interference. The rest of the world may not be so lucky. Since the PCs have a time machine they may wish to undo their own mistakes by travelling back to redo part of an adventure. The following

issues limit the use of 'redos':

o It takes time, electricity to charge the machine, and expensive maintenance for each time trip so Archangel may forbid any redo it deems not worth the expense (i.e. its up to the referee if he wants to let you go back at all).

o Should you be allowed to return the Observer effect, time-sickness-double nausea, and bad ju-ju (should you threaten the observer effect) are all on the cards for vicious refs to use (as agreed in the very first session). As a last resort the universe will disintegrate any person or object that is about breach the observer effect the instant before it does so.

o Tachyon Poisoning could be on the cards (see above)

o Note that the Observer effect applies to any future you. Therefore you cannot ever unexpectedly find a note from yourself. Nor can you use this kind of ploy to help yourself in the past. Any note you find from yourself MUST be a forgery.

o No spontaneous brain imploding is ever necessary.

Time Machine Consciousness

An immobile AC built into the time machine as an integral component. The AC has its own comms and sensors but more often uses drone devices to communicate. For example Archangel uses a hologram projector in the ready room to brief the PC's. This AC was designed using GURPS Robots and the Krononauts worldbook notes on computers. Note the AC is hardend against EMP pulses in-case the huge energies discharged by the time machine escape. Hardened does triple the mass though.

The below is just the machine without programming or experience. Off the factory floor this is as smart as TL9 can make a mainframe (IQ12) but as a sentient machine this can be raised through experience. Also as a complexity 6 computer the machine can install lots of points worth of skill programs. As a computer the machine also has some mental advantages uncommon in humans: absolute timing, doesn't sleep, eidetic memory, lightening calculator, and mathematical ability.

Brain: a TL9 Mainframe computer with hardened, genius, sentient and AC options. Not a robot brain and therefore can carry a full capacity of programs, twice as many as a robot. (750Lb, 15cf, $90000000, 95pt, LC5, Complexity 7).
Comes with Datalink program ($800, complexity 1).
Sensors: basic sensors with no taste/smell (0.8Lb, 0.016cf, $4000, -5pt).
Communicator: Basic communicator with cell phone (2Lb, 0.04cf, $10000, 0pt).
Power: Power requirement 1kW. An rD cell as back-up for the computer only. (5Lb, 0.05cf, $500, 20pt for does not breathe). Endurance 7 hours 30 minutes (0pt). Also can use 'wall' power.
Body Design: houses all components listed in this section (15.106cf).
Surface Area: total surface area 40.
Structure: cheap (180Lb, $2000)

Armor: nil

Biomorphics: note not sealed

Statistics and summary: 937.8Lb, 15.106cf, a cube 2?", $90017300, ST0 (-100), DX 12 (20pt), HT12/60 (260), IQ12* (20), complexity 7, speed 0
(-35), sinks in water light enough but not sealed, LC 4, no arms or legs (-50pt), model point cost -5. Comes with a datalink program. Though the machine has comms and sensor packages it does not come with a terminal. For terminals see V62.

Social Effects: If discovered by the authorities the machine would likely qualify as a citizen. Final Species Cost: -5pt.

Terminal: Archangel has access to a wireless terminal in the time machine room. TL9, 20Lb, 1cf, $500, negligible power compared to the other components.

Power Source: The power source and power consumption are in need of change, these values are thought to be too low. It is likely that the timehouse used ten or so RTG's.

The old RTG reactor (TL7, statistics from reality) produces 230W and weighs 560kg (1232Lb) (the radioactive fuel weighs 5kg). The radioactivity of an RTG at the distance of 0.02 to 0.5 meters is 800 to 1000 roentgens per hour. These radioactive sources can reach temperatures of up to 500oC. I've had to estimate the volume (using Vehicles) at 123cf. So in a month (30days) this generates 596160kWs.

New rules for Vehicles: Time Field Generator

To design a time machine using the background given in this worldbook encase an empty sphere in the equivalent of expensive metal armour (at least DR1), add at least a complexity 5 partially conscious computer (-2 to teleporter's roll). Ideally, use a complexity 6 (-1 to roll) or conscious machine of at least complexity 5 (-1 to roll) or both (no penalty to roll). Per cf of sphere effected. Mass: 0.66Lb, $30 000. Volume is mass/50.

Energy for a typical jump 195kWs per cf of the sphere affected. Jumps to the near or distant past require lees or more energy respectively.

Minimum sphere size 17-TLx120cf.

Uplifted Dolphins

Cetacean(s): Dolphins (orcas?)

Cetaceans have an unusual sleep-state, fairly alien minds. They are a big favourite of the New Age movement who often credit them with paranormal powers.

My suggestion is that natural cetaceans have Astral Projection and Telepathy only. Their telepathy only works on other cetaceans. Their astral forms are unable to influence or contact the 'real' world so we remained unaware of their abilities. Most humans do not realise that Psi is behind the alien spirituality of the cetaceans. Since uplift a few cetaceans claim to have learned to 'tune' telepathy to contact humans. The number able to do this is small and regarded by most as just more

New Age nonsense.

Why? Just opening up a few options and working with permutations unique to this setting. Our use of Psi has already opened up Astral projection and Astral Entities (PSI98). This adds utility to cetaceans as potential plot devices, NPCs, and PCs. I'm not suggestion Psi for any other non-humans only cetaceans.

An astrally projecting cetacean can get its ghost brain into the sphere of the time machine his projected form goes back it time. While in the past his astral form be equivalent to Astral Entity (Compendium I p96).

Dolphin Species Total +71pt

Germ-line engineering has produced two sentient dolphin species with citizen level intelligence. The smaller of the two species is descended from Tursiops truncatus and commonly called dolphins or 'phins. The larger species are orcas. Several unaltered dolphin species have qualified for Minor citizenship. The mental processes of dolphins operate very differently from humanity but still produce workable solutions to problems. The dolphin brain makes greater use of intuition, self-awareness, and the unusual sleep-state of partial consciousness.

Dolphin languages are of sound and sonar images. Dolphin names are whistles communicating lineage on the mother's side. 'Phin names like 'Second daughter of Koombana Bay Pod's Matriarch's eldest sister' translate clumsily into English and 'phins encourage humans to whistle names as best they can. A 'phin calls its own name, varying the pitch, to express emotion instead laughter, crying etc. Some dolphin pods are multi-species with 'minor' citizens, and even animals coexisting with dolphin citizens. However, mixed pods are not as common as those of a single species. Pods consist of a matriarch, her sisters and their children. Adult males form fiercely competitive 'alliances' that are associated with one or more pods. Lone dolphins are usually older males who have out-lived the others in their alliance. Dolphin society makes no division between work and home, pods and alliances live and work as a unit.

Relations between Homo sapiens and Tursiops are many layered. As individuals humans and 'phins can work well

together and lone dolphins often form friendships with humans, but the legacy of humankind's genocide of the cetaceans refuses to be buried in the assemblies of governments, UN and rougher bars. The sexual practices of dolphins are notorious but often dolphin sex has the social connotations of a hug among humans.

Physically 'phins are larger than humans (averaging 200kg). They are indistinguishable from their wild relatives but internal modifications included greater convolution of the cerebral cortex, altered larynx, and improved eyesight. Their modified flippers can double as grasping paws. They are able to speak human languages with a thick 'accent'.

ST +6 (60) DX +2 (+20), IQ ? (-10), HT +2 (+20)

Species Advantages: 3D spatial sense (10), Acute Hearing +3 (6), Alertness +2 (10), Enhanced Move (swimming x1) (10), Extra Hit Points +1 (5), Extra Fatigue +4 (12), Intuition (15), Independently focusable eyes (15) Oxygen Storage (14), Peripheral Vision (15), 3D Spatial Sense (10), Pressure Support (10), Temperature Tolerance +2 (2), Semi-Sleep (10), Sonic Vision (25), Sonar as Empathy within 2 hexes (8), Ultrasonic
Speech (25).
Subtotal: 202

Psionics: Astral Projection 1 (3) Telepathy 1 (limitation dolphins only -40% 2pt)

Psionic skills: Astral Projection (1/2), Astral Sight (1/2), Aspect (1/2), Emotion sense (1/2)

These are the only Powers 'phins ever develop, they can learn other skill within these powers. The limitation on telepathy can be bought
off.

Subtotal: 7

Species Disadvantages: Aquatic (-40), Chummy (-5), Distractible (-1), Dull (-1), Horizontal (-10), Inconvenient Size (10), Increased Life Support* 1 level (-10), Bad Grip (-10), Short arms (-10) Short-life span x2 (-20), Stuttering (-10), Social Stigma Minority (-10), Staid (-1).
Subtotal -138

Genetic modifications added +1IQ, Reduced Alertness by 1, changed Mute to Stuttering, changed No Fine Manipulators for Bad Grip and short arms. I have also removed Bestial. Though the Biotech rules do not explicitly state it can be removed at TL9 raised IQ and allowance of other cultural
changes implies it is removable.

*Life Support Note: no drinking water needed but an additional mass of wet food equal to 2x the usual water requirement needed.

Where technology is used sophisticated speech/sonar recognition and automation has reduced hands to merely an interface option in the society of 2100+. However, some 'phins have employed cybernetics or biotech to enhance their manipulatory abilities or for other reasons. Given the penetrating nature of sonar all such enhancements, including those below, gain the owner a Hideous Appearance (other dolphins only -40% -12pt) as well.

Technologies

Dragonfly Cyberswarm

Gnat sized helicopters with a large sensor array 'head' making them look vaguely like tiny dragonflies. They flit about landing and sampling every few meters. TL9 Move: Fly 6, Crawl 2 Rechargable AA 3 hours/1.5 flying Explorer: samples chemicals and correlates to location thus on returning to the hive a map of the area explored can be created/updated. The tiny drones that make up the swarm can receive transmissions but cannot transmit, they must return to the hive. HT12, IQ 4 (current HT/3)*. Low empathy, reprogrammable duty, slave mentality.

APCS-A9.2
Anti-personnel CyberSwarm Armoured model 9.2. A smarm of what looks like smooth black pinheads. TL9 Armoured crawler Move 2, HT12 IQ at full health 4, Non-rechargable AA 6 hours endurance. $12000. Low empathy, reprogrammable duty, slave mentality. See RO67 for using cyberswarms in combat. Terminator package: 1pt damage to living beings in contact with it unless they are covered in airtight armour. Anyone taking damage must make a HT roll one minute after they are hit penalty equal to the cumulative sting damage. Success 1d damage, failure total paralysis, and 2d damage per hour until death or antidote is received. The orders of the swarm are simple locate living things (within hexes = current HT) bigger than a mouse without an IFF sting for 3 seconds then move on to the next.

Doom-sphere
"A three meter grey sphere a little taller than the surrounding single story buildings suddenly appears." A huge fuel air explosive specifically designed to be delivered by a time machine. This is the most powerful bomb a time machine can deliver at TL9 without resorting to a nuclear weapon. The explosive almost fills the allowed sphere but for a small slot at the bottom. When the sphere appears without the support of the time travel machinery it rolls 180 degrees in the first second. Inside while the sphere is rolling the teleporter slides down a slide to the ground. (the pilot slot makes it top heavy on arrival). This clears it from the departure sphere of effect (which leaves a crater). The act of rolling releases a pressure switch on the bottom, the bomb will go off 3s after arrival. Enough time for 2 return attempts by the teleporter pilot. The bomb is DR60 PD6 with 450 hit points which does a good job of reflecting how difficult the ignition system is to hit when the bulk of the volume is fuel. As per mythbusters shooting a hole in the tanks of fuel/gas does not cause

an explosion. Fuel Air Explosive Volume 282cf, 14100Lbs, 7.05 kilotons! (demolitions role TL9 to work out the numbers) Blast increment 16, see high tech p22+.

To deal with the blast see below steps:

1. Roll for concussion damage do not apply yet and do not subtract DR. See HT23 for blinding rule. Those beyond concussion damage range are unaffected but should flinch.

2. Apply Concussion damage: only sealed armour protects remember I use averaged DR and PD. Double if touching the device.

3. Fragmentation from casing smashed buildings etc might hit those within 250 yards. See HT23 for chance of being hit. If hit does 12d cut.

4. Determine deafness HT23.

Dist. From centre Concussion Damage Chance of 12d frag (cut) modify by

size mod. Dist in yards=chance on 3d6

0-15 141000x6d* 0=auto, 1=17, 2=16, 3=15, 4=14, 5=13, 6=14, 7=13, 6=12,

7=11, 8=10, 9=9, 10=8, 11=7, 12=6, 13=5, 14=4, 15+ =3

16-31 35250x6d 3

32-47 8812x6d 3

48-63 2203x6d 3

64-79 551x6d 3

80-95 138x6d 3

96-111 34x6d 3

112- 127 9x6d 3

128-143 2x 6d 3

144-159 3d 3

160-175 1d 3

To 250 nil 3

*Double concussion damage if you are actually touching the device.

Electromag GL

Electomag GL TL9: using the standard rules for improvement on the TL8 weapon. Have chosen to ignore the shots fired per powercell issue (UTT5). The only change therefore is an increase in range. Weapon Malf Type Dmg SS Acc 1/2D Max Wt. RoF Shots ST Rcl Cost LC Electromag GL TL9 crit spcl spcl 10 8 - 1100 10 1 5 - 0 5000 0

THE COSMOLOGY OF GLORANTHA

by David Cake

Glorantha is well known for many things, but one of them is for being a game universe that unapologetically rejects the mundanities of physics, and defines its world as being a flat, square, lozenge rather than another blue round marble of a planet. It is a solid stake in the ground right from the start that tells you what Glorantha is about - this is a universe that is about mythic reality, not science, and you better be prepared to dive in to that to enjoy it. But there is plenty more to it than that. In this article I'm going to try to run through some of the major oddities of Glorantha as a world, and then through into what really makes it work as a setting.

To be more precise the physical nature of Glorantha is that that the known or habitable area of the world is a roughly lozenge shaped zone, with two major continents (Genertela and Pamaltela) and a number of smaller land masses, floating in the midst of an endless ocean. In the centre of the world is a giant hole in the ocean called Magasta's Pool, like an enormous plug hole, with water continually draining down it in a giant swirling vortex into the underworld. Towards the edges of the lozenge, conditions grow both more mythic, and less comfortable for human exploration. The North (Northern Genertela) is a massive glacier, vast areas of ice with no human inhabitants. To the South (Southern Pamaltela), the climate grows hotter and hotter, mostly arid deserts, until eventually you hit a boiling sea. To the East is the land of Dawn (Vithela), a paradise so glorious that no person who sets foot on it will ever willingly leave. To the West (Luathela) is the land of Dusk, inhabited by giant purple demigods called Luatha that seem hostile to most of humanity, and far too powerful and numerous to defeat en masse. If you manage to avoid those dangers and make it to the open seas, no one has found anything much beyond except a vast current circling the world, sometimes freezing and sometimes boiling, and with winds and waves so powerful no normal human vessel could survive it.

In actual play, this seldom makes a great deal of difference. Most games and published support products are set within a relatively small area of one continent (central Genertela), and certainly the relatively inner parts of the world, mostly inhabited by either humans, or other mortal races that are of relatively comparable status, are full of rich detail and gaming possibilities. Normal people do not try to explore the edges of the world, and even remarkable people such as player characters do so very rarely. But the cosmological oddities of Glorantha do not end there!

In Glorantha the Sky is a literal dome, as far as anyone is able to tell. Its constellations are for the most part stable (and rotating, and tilted in a way that changes with the seasons, appearing similarly to the stars of Earth), but some move around in ways that are most unreasonable. The Sun travels across the sky during the day, and travels through the underworld at night, descending and ascending through great gates in the lands of dawn (Vithela) and dusk (Luathela). There are also planets, which equally show a range of odd behaviour — there are two separate paths across the sky with planets, which is hard enough to explain, but also unexplainable (except mythically) behaviour, such as a planet that teleports to the opposite horizon and rises again as soon as it sets. And there are two bodies known as moons. One, the hard to see blue moon that influences the tides, drops from the Pole Star right down into Magasta's Pool in the centre of the world, on an irregular schedule. Then it rises again, invisible to mortal eyes, outside the Sky dome and does it again. The other moon is red and simply sits somewhere between the Earth and Sky, seemingly a sphere sitting many kilometres up, floating in the air the way bricks don't, slowly spinning in place above the giant crater it made when it rose, revealing its dark and light side in turn to different parts of the world.

Did we mention the underworld? Literally there is a place under the world — also the land of the dead, but you can literally get there physically (or get out) by climbing down (or up), while death typically only gets you there in spirit. It is also the land of darkness, and trolls (or the uz, as they refer to themselves) literally arrived on the surface by climbing out of the underworld.

So Glorantha is a world that, to a first view, has a lot of features that seem at least a little familiar (moons and a sun and stars and the sky), but on closer examination make far less sense from any physical perspective.

The explanation, of course, is that Glorantha has its own internal logic, but that logic is about myth and magic, not science and consistency. The same things that make for ridiculous physics make perfect sense as a mythic story.

The Sun is also Yelm the Sun God, who was once Emperor of the World, but also once died and went to hell leaving the world in darkness. That floating red moon is also the physical body of the moon goddess Sedenya, who was once incarnated in the body of a young girl who conquered an empire, then wrapped a huge chunk of the earth around her like a cloak and lifted herself into the sky. The hole in the middle of the world is because there was once a sacred mountain at the centre of the world, called by most people as The Spike, but when the gods quarrelled it exploded, and the waters of the world (led by Magasta, the most powerful sea monster god) rushed to fill in the resulting hold in the world before the whole universe collapsed into it. The intense heat, and the burning deserts, of the extreme south are because the great god of the South, Pamalt the Earth Titan, once organised a group of gods to tilt the Sky dome and poured some of the fire out onto the Earth to defeat his greatest enemies. Each of the planets has associated gods, and there are many myths about the constellations and other celestial phenomena.

This sense of mythic time is another important feature of the setting. In Glorantha, time is separated into the God Time - the time of the deeds of the gods and other powerful immortals, when the great myths happened and the world was built, in which causality was looser and time was less linear, and many events seem more metaphorical than literal, a period that can be revisited through magic and heroquest — and history or just Time, the period of mortal deeds in which time behaves more as we are used to it. Both are divided into sub-periods, though the God Time much more loosely. The God Time begins with creation myths and the Golden Age, proceeds through myths of interactions of the gods to build the world (such as the Great Flood era when water gods invade the land), and ends in a war of the Gods, culminating in the Great Darkness, when the Sun is in the underworld, the world grows dark and cold and is full of monsters, and humanity barely survives. Once Glorantha was literally a giant cube of Earth floating in an infinite ocean, now it has been inhabited, filled with life and magic, and also torn apart by cataclysms and struggle, to become the far more complex place it is today. The God Time ends and Time begins when the Gods make peace and the Sun rises again in the new Dawn. In the 'present day' of the Glorantha setting, that Dawn was over 1600 years ago, and history has gone through three great Ages since then. The First and Second Ages ended in multiple great historical and magical confrontations and disasters, with Empires falling and great clashes of powers — and the Third is just about to do so, maybe with your player characters in the middle of the action.

Every bit of the physical oddness of Glorantha has a mythic and magical explanation (often, much more than one), and this is why to fans of the setting it seems much less a collection of geographical and astronomical quirks, and much more a setting whose rich narratives and spiritual depths are written into every aspect. The cosmology of Glorantha can really only be understood as a world made of myth and story.

And not just one story, or one cycles of stories, but multiple cycles, and while each has its own unique perspective, they interact and interlock to make a complex layered world in which the ultimate truth is never simple. Glorantha has a very conscious plurality, different cultures may have different myths about the same event, often that disagree. There are many hints that there may be one underlying reality of the magical world - but if there is, it is beyond mortal understanding, and there are always multiple competing ways of understanding of the world.

When compared to a cosmology like, for example, the 'Great Wheel' multiverse of *Dungeons and Dragons*, Glorantha may seem simple. Beyond the mortal world there is the Underworld, the Sky world, the Spirit world and so on. What makes it complex is that all of these basic components of the physical and magical world are understood in different ways by each of the different cultures, some basic commonality but some huge differences.— and even when they see contradictory, they mostly all seem as valid as each other.

This is kept coherent and understandable by a few core concepts, shared by most Gloranthan cultures, chief among them the idea of the Runes. The Runes are, at their core, a way of understanding Gloranthan magic that allows us to classify magical powers and beings by reducing them to a few core concepts. One group of Runes is the elements, the

basic building blocks of physical reality. Another group is the Powers, different ways of talking about the effects and interactions caused, grouped into opposing pairs. And there are other runes such as Condition runes, relating to different forms of mortal experience.

The five major elements are Earth □ , Air or Storm Ϭ , Fire ☉ Water ♒ and Darkness ● . Moon ◑ is considered a sixth element by many, and an interloping aberration by others (often associated with mystery and madness). There are obviously a few unusual features in this system, Darkness (which includes cold and is associated with the underworld, and powers of fear) is more than simply the absence of light. Storm is considered latest of the five, and associated with disruption and conflict, beginning the war of the Gods. Many gods are associated with particular elements, some entire cultures are dominated by a particular element or two (the most common player character culture, the Orlanthi, is dominated by Storm worship for men, and Earth worship for women), and some entire intelligent races are associated with a particular element, notably the trolls (or Uz) with Darkness, and the various Mermen people with Water.

The Power runes are more about abstractions than materials. There are eight in four sets of opposing pairs. Truth y and Illusion ∴ Life ✕ and Death ✝ (not a cross, but a sword), Stasis ⌂ and Movement ↻ , Harmony ||| and Disorder ✗ . Normally, magicians can use magic from only one of an opposing pair of Power Runes. Then there are Form runes, most of which describe some form of life or existence, Runes like Plant p(and elves in Glorantha are literally plants not animals, though humanoid), Man ⚤ , Beast ▽ , Dragon ※ . A few extra Runes represent Conditions, which show how another Rune is reflected, Runes like Magic ⟑ or Luck ⫪ or Fate ✳ .

An important Rune is Chaos ⟆ , which is often associated with some of worst monsters and more evil religions. Glorantha is not a Moorcockian duality (mostly). Chaos and Law are not dueling external forces, rather Chaos is the influence of whatever lies outside the cosmos, an intrusion of wrongness or alienness, while the Law rune a represents something more like nature or the laws of natural philosophy. Chaos is usually associated with horror and wrongness — but still has its adherents, some who see it as a mystically liberating experience, some who embrace it through pure nihilism or selfish desire.

All these runic powers give us some raw bones around which religions, magic, myths, stories, cults and cultures are built. And those are the things that make Glorantha come to life.

One of the things that distinguishes different cultures in Glorantha, besides the Runes the esteem and the level of culture that have reaches, is the magic they use. And here we see another Gloranthan pattern reappear. There is more than one perspective, and they are all equally correct. There are four basic approaches to magic that coexist, and each is based on a particular viewpoint of the world.

Some magic is animist spirit magic, based on the idea that the world is full of spirits, and everything in the world potentially has a spirit, and anyone can perform magic based on having a spirit. There are spirits of animals, and spirits of places, and spirits of the dead, and spirits of every other kind. The most powerful animist magicians are shamans, who are able to leave their bodies behind and send their spiritual half travelling through the spirit world.

Some magic is theist or divine, based on worship of, and emulation of, the gods. The gods are considered not just powerful, but worthy, and divine magic requires not just worship and sacrifice, but following their ethos. Gods have associated Runes, and particular magic powers (that their worshippers can also access) based on their nature and mythology. Some gods are local to a particular area or culture, but many of the powerful gods may show up again and again, with minor variations, across many cultures.

The third common form of magic is sorcery, based on the idea that magic has laws that may be logically understood, and thus magic performed by magicians directly without the need for the aid of spirits or gods. This form of magic is slow to cast and slow and difficult to learn and master, as it depends on the knowledge of the individual, but has advantages in being able to be more tailored to the needs of the magician, including effects that last a long time and can be pre-prepared. Many sorcerers are called 'atheists', a term that doesn't apply as we would normally understand it in a

world in which 'the gods' are provably real, but instead means they consider the gods something like very large spirits with no moral authority. To the purist sorcerers, 'gods' are confused anthropomorphisation of powerful magical powers. The dwarves, known as the Mostali, go even further, understanding the world as a giant machine, one that needs a great deal of repair (that is their duty to perform) and that the other races are constantly breaking further.

A fourth major branch of magic is mysticism, which considers the world as we understand it (even the world of the gods) as an illusion or distraction, and seeks to understand the deeper nature of the world. The magic granted through mysticism is, by itself, very limited or subtle, but can change the way other forms of magic work, mostly by removing constraints on it, profoundly — such as removing the constraints that require divine magicians to obey the ethos of their deity, or allowing the use of normally incompatible magic such as opposed Runes, or coming to accomodations with Chaos — and so the subtle magic of mysticism can have profoundly destabilising and threatening implications.

A few other forms of magic exist in the world, but are largely beyond the reach of humanity, especially the mysterious powers associated with dragons, who in Glorantha are so large and powerful (though mostly sleeping) that they can be treated more occasionally animate geography than traditional 'monsters', like an active volcano but intelligent and incredibly magical. There is also a race known as the dragonewts associated with the dragons, like magically reincarnating lizard people who gradually change form as they spiritually evolve, but whose culture is so alien few humans even claim to understand its practices and simply consider dragonewts behaviour confusing to the point of absurdity.

On these foundations, four main approaches to magic, five Elements, eight Powers and many other variations, is Gloranthan magic, and spiritual and religious practice constructed. The religions and sects (usually referred to as cults in Gloranthan writing) are the bases of whole societies, each society with their own myths and stories about both how their society works and how it interacts with others, stories explaining both myth and history. From the combination of these building blocks we get hundreds of cults, sects, practices and minor spirits, many unique, but many clearly reflections of the same magical 'entities' viewed by different cultures.

And so essentially Glorantha gives us multiple, culturally specific, cosmologies. A useful example are the two great overlapping cultures of central Genertela, where many games are set. The Orlanthi of central Genertela can explain the world in as being ruled over by the Storm god Orlanth and his wife the Earth goddess Ernalda, and can explain the whole world, telling you what is evil (eg Chaos, sorcerers, the Red Moon goddess), what is necessary but troublesome (eg the Sun Emperor, trolls), and have their own social rules (in some ways like a combination of Celts and Vikings). The great Solar culture to the North is far more centralised and conservative, with many elements like the bronze age middle eastern river civilisations, and treats Orlanth as an outlaw and rebel god who once killed the great Sun Emperor Yelm and sent him to hell, condemning the world to darkness and misery for many years (both acknowledge that eventually Orlanth reversed his error, and the Sun rose again). And to confuse it further, in recent centuries the Solar Imperial culture has been internally conquered by a spiritually liberating and mystic religion of the Red Moon Goddess, a religion the Orlanthi despise for its tolerance of Chaos. Their cultures can usually compare myths and have some understanding of shared events, but retain huge gaps in cultural practice, ethics, and point of view — which inside a game, leads to opportunities for both richly detailed character backgrounds, and nuanced conflicts make it easy to avoid simplistic conflicts between dualities such as good and evil.

These stories are what gives Glorantha its richness as an RPG setting. Because the stories don't just tell you what you can do, but why you should do it, and explain the conflicts and drives that your characters experience.

And that is the real Gloranthan cosmology. The first thing most people will say about the setting is that it is a flat floating lozenge on an endless sea. But the most important thing about Gloranthan cosmology is that, in a very real sense, Glorantha is made of stories.

COSMOLOGY OF THE GREEN ISLES: D&D5e

by Karl Brown

This article is requires the D&D 5e rules (Wizards of The Coast) for full use. Page numbers refer to specific books: Players' Handbook (PHB), Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG), Monster Manual (MM), and Xanathar's Guide to Everything (XGE).

Playtesting & help from Noah Mekawy, David Clarke, Mark James Platt, Jason Bird, Craig Sanders, Elizabeth A Bowman, Tyrone McElvenny, Nebulous/Sir Gawain, Marisa Clarke, Gus Cowling, Evie Cowling, Claire St George, and Paul Bladon.

Quotes: throughout the text are some quotes from "English Fairy Tales" and "More English Fairy Tales" which are out of copyright collections curated by Joseph Jacobs.

The Green Isles is a campaign setting for D&D 5e set in the world of British Fairy Tales. An short player's summary for the setting can be found in issue 28 and a more extensive guide to generating characters in issue 31. Future issues will contain further material for this setting. There is a forum thread to discuss the setting here: http://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=18430&hilit=%5Bgreen+isles%5D

The Green Isles Campaign does not use the standard Great Wheel cosmology of D&D. The cosmology seen in the fairy tales of the British Isles probably has roots in Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Christian beliefs. In turn the cosmology of the Green Isles takes the oral tradition of fairy tales themselves as its primary source as recorded by scholarly folklorists. Readers are encouraged to seek out the works of Katherine Briggs, Joseph Jacobs, and others. The universe then consists of the mortal World, Heaven, Hell, and Elfland. These are all what modern readers would call 'planes of existence' or 'dimensions' but the people of The Green Isles universe never use these anachronistic terms, not even noble learned wizards. Various methods of moving between these planes of existence are described in the fairy tales.

The World

The mortal world is 'The World'. The World is home to humans, giants, mundane animals and plants, some monsters and occasional magical people, animals, and plants. The Green Isles setting only details a fantasy version of the British Isles that unlike the real British Isles is in the middle of a vast ocean far from other lands. However, the Green Isles, the seas around them, and the skies above them are divided into numerous small kingdoms some of them very magical. During the Age of Myths elves invaded the Isles from Elfland. In the Age of Heroes humans drove the most of the elves back into Elfland. However, some faerie kingdoms remain these include the Kingdom of Undersea, the Kingdom of Mice, the Kingdom of Frogs, and the Kingdom of Birds of Every Kind. In addition some giant castles are built in the air on clouds and there is the wandering cloud-borne elven Kingdom of the Sky whose knights ride giant eagles. The Kingdom of the Sky is said to be a pleasant green land of pastures and crops on rolling hillocks broke here and there by what look like mist shrouded valleys and tall white formations of cloud.

The Green Isles are modelled on Britain around 1300CE, just before the introduction of gunpowder weapons. Historical references can be mined for details of life in this era. However, this is not a historical setting. Part of the reason for this is that most fairy tales were first recorded much later than the Middle Ages and the setting mimics these in preference to history. It certainly does not reflect a Medieval Christian's pre-occupation with sin and obedience to the Church nor the cultural schisms between Celt, Saxon, and Norman. Why? Because these facets of 13th to 14th century Britain are entirely absent in fairy tales.

Compared to Elfland and Heaven, much of the World is a squalid place. The wild places of the Green Isles are full of wolves, bandits, and evil giants. Fortunately, most of the land is tamed and most of the people work on farms.

However, not all the land is productive and even on good land ruined harvest can see serfs and peasants starve. The cities with their high walls and sky-scraping cathedrals are perhaps the most impressive accomplishment of humanity yet the stink of mortal cities of can be smelled miles away, and beggars and cutpurses target travellers so desperate they not discouraged by the gibbets of hung criminals just outside the city gates. All this suffering causes many souls to linger as ghosts or revenants until some hero gives then rest or oblivion.

Heaven

Heaven, the realm of Jhoeda and the Moon Goddess, is simply the sky above. The celestial lights are not worlds in their own right. The moon is a manifestation of a goddess. The other celestial lights were put in place by the one god Jhoeda when he created The World. Jhoeda is often equated with the Sun, whether he *is* the Sun is a matter ignored by most and hotly debated among clerical scholars. Jhoeda's angels are stars. Angels that wander relative to the other stars are called planets or portentous comets with their tails of white-hot fire. The spirits of the repentant faithful dwell among the angels and gods as insubstantial spirits.

The canon of Jhoeda tells us it is a place of peace, rest, and love but we know only what the god has revealed in his scriptures, no-one but the spirits of the worthy dead travel to Heaven and if someone returns from the dead they have no memory of the Heaven. The heroes of the fairy tales never have adventures in Heaven.

Long ago in the Great War some of the kingdoms of Elfland allied with the Devil against Jhoeda's faithful. For this reason the spirits of all dead elves and other fey creatures are barred from Heaven and never know its rewards for a good life. Dead fey either linger as ghosts, dissipate into nothingness, or if evil, are dragged down to Hell to be tortured. In game terms it is generally assumed that killed PC fey (including elves) have lingered out of sight as ghosts until any resurrection magic is used.

Hell

No-one in their right mind travels to Hell while alive so little is known about it. Hell is said to be a universe of fields of fire, burning deserts, frigid glaciers, and poisonous swamps; the environments of Hell are varied but uniformly hostile to normal life. Hell is inhabited by the devils who torture the spirits of the evil dead, powerful witches, and vast armies of goblins and other bogies. Hell is ruled by 'The Devil' the ultimate enemy of the Great War of the distant past.

Devils speak the Infernal language. Knowledge of this language is forbidden by Jhoeda's canon and Church Law in human kingdoms punishable by branding and banishment. However, high-ranking devils that deal with elves and mortals often speak Elvish and the Common with fluent charm. Bogies speak a corrupted version of infernal called 'Goblin' or 'Gutter Infernal'.

Elfland

Unlike the distant realms of Heaven and Hell, there is considerable traffic of elves and faeries back-and-forth between the kingdoms of Elfland and the mortal World. However, everyone knows that, for mortals, travelling to Elfland is risky and most mortals never return. Elfland is really a misnomer, it is not one realm but actually hundreds

of pocket dimensions ranging from the size of a small cave to that of a large continent. There are many kingdoms in Elfland most are ruled over by Faerie Lords, unique Fey almost godlike in power. Some kingdoms have been usurped by devil rulers, and a few are ruled by less potent fey such as elves. Faerie Lords vary greatly in appearance and behaviour but are always Chaotic in alignment (CG, CN, or CE). Though not true gods the Faerie Lords are the patrons of many Warlocks and Paladins. The worship of the Moon is also practiced in good Elfland Kingdoms. After some kingdoms of Elfland sided with the Devil during the Great War Jhoeda's church does not accept elves and fey. Mortal visitors will note the absence of cathedrals and churches common to mortal towns.

Elfland kingdoms are incredibly varied but all have three things in common. First, they are highly magical places. Second, the kingdoms are all filled with fine things and riches, or at least seem to be. Third, they are all perilous to mortals no matter how fair most seem.

All the kingdoms of Elfland are highly magical places inhabited by magical creatures. The magical conditions of Elfland vary from kingdom to kingdom, often reflecting the nature of the ruling Faerie Lord. One kingdom might be a wild forest of giant trees some animated and aggressive, another might be cloaked in an illusion of splendour, and yet another in an enormous cave lit by a great white gem. All Elfland kingdoms have a prohibition that if broken prevents the offender from leaving and time is magically affected in many. These two common magical conditions are described later. The population is magical, elfland is populated mostly by elves, faeries, and other fey. Even the most common elf peasant has unearthly beauty, is never gets old, and might know cantrip. Many elves are even more powerful than this. Over centuries of life inborn powers might grow or the elf might learn to become a powerful wizard. Those kingdoms that sided with The Devil during the Great War also have populations of devils and bogies within their borders. Most elves speak the Common tongue in addition to Elvish. However, a visitor who intends to deal with other inhabitants will find knowledge of the Sylvan, Goblin and Infernal tongues useful. The animals and plants of Elfland Kingdoms are usually magnificent, healthy, and often magical. Animals domesticated by elves are often snowy white and move with unearthly grace. The magical nature of Elfland makes talking animals and animated trees quite common. In addition Elfland is the home to many monsters that sometimes cross over to the mortal World. Giants however are almost never encountered in Elfland.

Most kingdoms of Elfland are incredibly rich by mortal standards, they are blessed with rich soils, verdant forests, and abundant game. Also crops and domestic animals are incredibly productive. Furthermore most elves are wealthy by mortal standards. They dress in fine clothes, wear jewels, and generally live better than humans of the same social rank. Even in wild areas where only wood elves live as hunter gatherers they dress in precious ivory and luxurious furs. Those elves who cannot afford such fine things try to disguise their poverty under illusions of splendour if they can. These treasures draw mortal adventurers to Elfland hoping to earn treasures on quests or more often rob elves. Some evil Elfland kingdom are beguiling places that use their riches to lure in mortals to be enslaved or captured as tribute to be sent Hell.

Elfland is perilous for mortals because of its history. Long ago the elves and faeries came out of Elfland and conquered the Green Isles. In the Age of Heroes humans and giants took back most of the Green Isles in a bloody war. Later some kingdoms in Elfland that once sided with The Devil against mortals and good Fey in the Great War. Given elves, faeries, and other fey are unaging, bitter feelings from that war are still fresh in Elfland long after mortals have consigned them to distant history. There are also numerous more recent tales of so called mortal heroes travelling to Elfland to murder and loot themselves a fortune. Therefore, most kingdoms of elfland, including most otherwise benevolent kingdoms, ban free humans and giants from their lands on pain of death. In some kingdoms an exception is made for humans enslaved by elves or for those who are bound by oaths to powerful Faerie Lords. Many elves and fey will kill mortals seen in Elfland on sight. It is perfectly legal to someone to murder a trespassing mortal in most elfland kingdoms. These laws themselves perpetuate the tales of violence done by mortal travellers as humans and giants kill elves and faeries in self-defence.

Time in Elfland

In most kingdoms of Elfland time passes just as it does in the Mortal World. There are however kingdoms where this is not the case. Where a kingdom deals with time differently it always does so consistently. For example in the Kingdom of Winter it is always winter, days and months pass normally but winter never ends. In other kingdoms it may always be nighttime, daytime, or twilight. Another rarer kind of anomaly is a difference in the passage of time. While days seem to pass normally a traveller may return to the Mortal World and find for each day a year, minute, or decade has passed.

Some of the many kingdoms of Elfland

Only fragmented knowledge of the king does of Elfland finds its way into the World of mortals. People might glean second hand knowledge of a few Elfland kingdoms with nearby gates from elf and faerie traders. Rarely, adventurer's who quest into Elfland return and their tales are told for generations, growing in the telling. Mortal scholars gather information from all these sources but handwritten books on any topic are rare and expensive treasures.

We do know that each kingdom has a prohibition that if broken prevents visitors from leaving that kingdom by any gate. Where a prohibition is listed as 'unknown' below the DM should secretly invent one before introducing the kingdom into play. The prohibitions apply only to visitors and not to natives of that kingdom. Prohibitions might include things like eating or drinking, hearing the voice of an inhabitant and then not killing them, or dismounting.

The players information below was unearthed during our campaign traveling the Green Isles between 13/4/2015 and 18/05/2018.

The Kingdom of Bloodied Swords

Prohibition: Unknown.

Gates to the Kingdom of Bloodied Swords are usually wells and require rituals glorifying Marlzebaal the Devil Lord to open. Once the gate is open looking down the well the warlocks see a red sky as if lit by fire. The trees are made of steel blades that drip blood and the air is filled with screams and the sounds of battle. Few pass through gates to this realm after these first impressions. Instead imps or spined devils emerge to serve the covens.

Those who venture further find a kingdom overrun by Hell. The Kingdom of Bloodied Swords sided with The Devil in the Great War serving as a staging post for Hells legions to cross into the World. Since then this kingdom has been infested with devils and evil fey ruled over by Marlzebaal the Devil Lord. The Kingdom of Blooded Swords employs massed legions of goblin and bogy soldiers. Devils of all kinds serve as officers and agents of Marlzebaal. Even worse for visitors, murder is legal in this kingdom, in fact the victor inherits the slain's property and position in society. Note that it is the killer herself that inherits, a detail that makes hired assassin's rare.

Marlzebaal is an ambitious fiend who frequently nurtures covens of witches in the Green Isles promising them arcane power and sending spined devils and imps to gather treasure by murdering and robbing on behalf of the witches.

The Kingdom of Fabulous Feasts

Prohibition: Do not eat any food while here. A difficult proposition with the natives offering delicious feasts to entrap mortals and fatten them up before sending them to Hell as tribute.

" I was hunting one day, and as I rode widershins round yon hill, a deep drowsiness fell upon me, and when I awoke, behold ! I was in Elfland. Fair is that land and gay, and fain would I stop but for thee and one other thing. Every seven years the Elves pay their tithe to the Nether world, and for all the Queen makes much of me, I fear it is myself that will be the tithe."

- Tamlane

A faerie kingdom where it is always harvest season and the inhabitants enjoy plenty. The Kingdom of Feasts occasionally exports food to mortal markets. The Kingdom of Feasts has made many deals with human lords. During times of famine the King of Feasts provides food in exchange for a tithe to be paid yearly until the end of time. However, the Kingdom is not entirely benevolent, The Kingdom of Feasts sided with The Devil during the war and sends a tithe of fattened slaves to Hell each year.

The Apple Tree Gate is the best known passage to The Kingdom of Fabulous Feasts. The Apple Tree Gate is a huge wild apple tree on the top of a forested hill within Sir Jon's hunting reserve between Seaford and Karford on the Southern Isle. The tree is lightning blasted creating a hole in the trunk which once a year opens through an identical tree in Elfland into an apple orchard that stretches to the horizon. Day and night occur in reverse order to the mortal world, as the sun sets it shines through the gap in the apple tree trunk then as the world gets dark those viewing from the east see the setting sun through the tree reverse its course and slowly inch upward again. Sunlight streams through the natural arch creating a bright beacon on the hill.

The human village of Karford pays a tribute of four barrels of mead through the Apple Tree Gate on the first new moon of every spring. There is an old local story of a boy who tried to steal the mead left for the faeries and how his mother found him on her doorstep the next day… broiled in a huge bronze bowl of soup! Knowing this old tale most people in the local area are too scared to steal the mead.

Running widershins around Widershins Hill on the Northern Isle will also take you to a similar hillside in this Kingdom.

The Kingdom of Fabulous Feasts has a social hierarchy built on magical power, wealth, and fear. At the bottom rung are talking animals who are treated like brute beasts of their kind to be hunted or enslaved and then eaten. Slightly better off are an underclass of well-fed fat goblin labourers. Above these are elves and fey. The kingdom is ruled by a Queen.

The Princess of Roasted Meats

The collection of mead from Karford is often supervised by the Princess of Roasted Meats. Unlike most fey, she appears to be in her 40's but remains a great beauty; tall lean with long deep red hair and long long red fingernails. In one hand she carries a magical flaming carving knife that roasts as it cuts in the other she typically holds a roasted suckling pig leg or other food because although thin she is always hungry. The princess is a 'quasi-diety' who can turn people into animals that are traditionally roasted. The limits of these curses are arbitrary but require an action from her and a single save roll is granted. The princess can undo these transformations as an action or have the curse linger and be triggered when a specific bargain is broken. In Karford you might meet one of her victims Lady Edlin the Chicken. Lady Edlin was Sir Jon's teenage daughter who decided to share last year's tribute of meed with her friends instead of giving it to the 'goddless faeries'. To undo the curse Lady Edlin the Chicken must be the lowest servant of the lowest serf for a year and a day, serve *faithfully* or be a chicken forever!

Use Green Hag stats (MM177) but note that this IS her natural form she is not a hag and she tends to use her magic carving knife rather than her claws. Alignment CE. **New Actions:**

Carve!: once drawn and willed on (free action) the carving knife sizzles, drips meat juices, and bursts into flame. The knife is a magic weapon +1, total +5 to hit damage on a hit 1d4+5 slashing and 2d6 fire damage. Disturbingly wounds from this knife smell like tasty roasted meat. Note: against dead flesh carving a slice off cooks the slice as you carve it. Item requires attunement.

Transform!: Action to polymorph any one creature within 10ft into a harmless tasty animal such as a chicken. Wis save to avoid. The transformed character retains the power of speech and their own voice. To make matters worse the princess can curse people to transform at a later date if a condition is not met.

The Kingdom of Mischief

Prohibition: Unknown

Little is known of this mysterious kingdom except that the Queen of Mischief lives in the Unfindable Palace attended by her imp servants. Stories say the Queen rewards those who perform notable magical pranks with a life of ease in the palace drinking fine wine and eating cake all day.

There are no mapped permanent gates to the Kingdom of Mischief and it is not well known if it can be travelled to from any other kingdom of Elfland. The location of this kingdom is a mystery to mortal scholars. Rumours tell us that mortals who intrigue the Faerie Royalty of this kingdom might be housed in a luxury castle somewhere in the kingdom. This Kingdom played both sides of the conflict during the Great War with the Devil.

The Seasonal Kingdoms

There are four Seasonal Kingdoms each trapped forever in one season of the year. The Seasonal kingdoms share a disk shaped dimension of Elfland as large as a continent with a sea in the centre. The four Seasonal Kingdoms are The Kingdom of Spring and the Kingdom of Winter, The Gold Kingdom of Sunner, and the Red Kingdom or Ortum named after their Immortal Faerie Kings. Each of the seasonal kingdoms is easily large enough to take 3 months to cross on foot.

A major gate to the Seasonal Kingdoms is the Giant's Stone at Karford on the Southern Isle. The Giant's Stone is a huge, 20 feet across, grey boulder in the river Til carved with concentric circles that that function as gates to the Elfland Kingdoms of Spring, Sunner, Winter, and Ortum at the corresponding season of the mortal year. The gates open onto other rivers in Elfland and much river traffic comes through the Giant's Stone gate to trade up and down the River Til. Opening the gates of the Giant's Stone require 'keys' but the elves and faeries that come through keep the identity of these keys secret.

The Kingdom of Spring

Prohibition: Do not romantically kiss any native nor fall in love with a native.

Spring traders bring hardwoods, flowers, meed, fine cloth, cut flowers, lambs, woollen jumpers, fine shoes, woodcarvings, fine furniture and spring vegetables before the mortal crops ripen through the Giant's Stone onto the river Til. These the elves and faeries trade for grain, winter vegetables, pickled herring, kippers, scotch eggs, and other goods not available in their homeland.

Mortals rarely pass the other way into the Kingdom of Spring because the penalty for a mortal entering the Kingdom is death. The penalty for any elf or fey caught smuggling a mortal into Spring or divulging the secret key to the gate is also death. However, sometimes great mortal heroes can gain the patronage of one of Spring's nobles in exchange for an oath to complete a deadly quest then travel freely under that patron's banner. Passing through the Giant's Stone gate the river on the other side is the Clearwater, crystal clear and filled with bright fish with iridescent dragonflies as big as birds buzzing overhead. First it flows through a green wood. It is soon obvious that Spring is a kingdom infused with life, plants are verdant and trees sometimes awaken and walk about, animals and people are healthy and fertile, furthermore many animals and plants grow to giant sizes. Spring is inhabited primarily by elves and faeries. The Kingdom of Spring has a fair share of Leprechauns who like the warm days and easy living in perpetual Spring. Spring is home to many powerful Fey and Faerie Nobles. *Ri na Earraigh* is the King of Spring, ruler of this huge kingdom but unlikely to be encountered.

From the tales of river elves more is known about the Kingdom of Spring, at least its lands near the Giant's Stone gate, than most Elfland kingdoms.

Travelling down the river visitors might encounter one of the temporary camps of elf lumberjacks. Logging in Spring can be risky as it is likely to awaken trees who react to the loggers with violence. The trees sometimes even attack traders' boats.

The river emerges from the green forest into a broad valley. The fields are a patchwork of red and yellow flowers (marigolds mostly) and green hay and pastures. The pastures are teeming with sheep and lambs. The next village after the gate is Marigold Valley. The lord is the Golden Knight who is an absentee landlord who relies on his reeve, an elf veteran and local hero Greenboots. Greenboots is named for his high slick Greenboots which are magical boots of springing and striding made by the another inhabitant of the village, Sean the leprechaun cobbler. Visitors will probably dine on lamb. Spring has a constant supply of young animals. Lamb is commonly eaten. On the other had wheat never ripens here so there is no bread.

Beyond Marrigold Valley is a swamp. Though the reeds, willows, flowering lily pads, , and iridescent dragonflys make the march a pleasant place. However, it is also home to elf bandits, frogs large enough to swallow a pixie whole, cart-horse sized crayfish, a pack of wolves and, recently, rumours of a river dragon or other terrifying beast deep in the march.

On the other side of the marsh travellers emerge into farmland this time fields of lavender and pastures where the elf shepherds carry spears as well as crooks. After a few more miles you reach the small village of Lavender Fields.

Further along the river is the walled city of Flowermarket with it's palace of rose marble and gold rising about the city walls. Approaching the city mortal travellers are surprised to smell a faint whiff of blooms, not the stench of a mortal city. It is from here that many of the riverboats destined for mortal world depart.

Near Flower Market is the Forest of Mosswood. Rumours claim a pair of standing stones at the heart of the forest are another gate to the mortal world but these stones are guarded by a powerful woodland fey.

A few days travel from Flowermarket passing the verdant forest of Mosswood, there is the village of Haybrook. Here is a simple shrine, a 5ft tall pedestal of white marble with a box of the same material. Wooden shutters on the front of the box conceal a mother of pearl hair comb that belongs to the Moon on a gold stand. It is here that warriors devoted to the Moon are knighted. Moon knights are ardent foes of evil.

Off the road in the wild forest beyond Flower Market is the White Tower. The Knight's of the White Tower serve the Lady of The White Tower a powerful elf oracle who promotes the welfare of all Fey regardless of alignment. However, the White Lady does not value mortal lives and coldly kills mortal illegal immigrants or offers them patronage in exchange for undertaking suicide quests to benefit Fey-kind.

Spring is at war with Winter Kingdom. The War of the Seasons is believed by many to determine if Winter is short or long and cold in the mortal World, others say the seasons of the World follow the will of Jhoeda. The army of Spring is composed mostly of elves and sprites.

The Kingdom of Winter

Prohibition: Unknown.

Also known as the White Kingdom. The Kingdom of Winter becomes increasingly cold as you leave the border behind. The heartlands of Winter are have the weather of an unending Arctic winter.

Winter sided with The Devil during the Great War. Winter wars against Spring and Autumn. Winter's army is composed of evil elves, bogies, and devils. Winter's most terrible weapon is The Ice Dragon, a terrible 60' long flying monster with white hot fiery breath. The dragon patrols the frontline looking for elf heroes and other major threats to the forces of Winter. Spring had a good supply of heroes but none of these has been able to withstand the Ice Dragon of Winter. Among those slain by the dragon includes the Verdant Knight and his companions. The Verdant knight was a great hero who once slew a 60' tall giant and even he fell to the dragon.

Travelling

Whether The World or Hell travel to other locations within the same dimension is usually by regular walking, swimming, and flying. Powerful magic users might employ *teleport* or other magical means but these are not necessary. Elfland is a little unusual because although people generally to Elfland as if it is one place it is common knowledge that it referees to a lot of separate 'pocket dimensions'. In character no-one of the Green Isles would say 'pocket dimension', if pressed they might refer to Elflands and treat the inquirer as an idiot for not understanding what everyone else learned from childhood tales. Within a pocket dimension, whether a small cave or a continent of many kingdoms mundane travel can get you there. However, travel from one pocket dimension of Elfland to another requires the traveler to use magical means to transit to The World or Hell and then magic again to transit to the next pocket dimension of Elfland. The pocket dimensions of Elfland are *never* directly connected and you cannot use *teleport* to travel between them.

There is only one way to get to Heaven; worship Jhoeda, die, repent, and be judged worthy. Those who return from the dead have all memory of Heaven wiped from their minds. Some Elfland kingdoms are neighbours of Heaven and can see a golden light on the horizon but try as they might they can never reach it.

Hell is also a difficult place to get to and rewards those who make the effort with torture and death. Devils from Hell can reach the World if summoned by magic fortunately they can be magically banished back to Hell too. However, some escape to roam the World. For mortals who want to get to Hell there are two methods. The first is to worship Jhoeda but live a life of sin or sell your soul to a devil then die. Unlike Heaven souls can be returned from Hell and remember the terrors of it. The second way is to travel to an Elfland that has gates to Hell. However, most of these Elfland were allies of Hell in the Great War and still send tribute including slaves to Hell. Hell is never directly linked to The World because Jhoeda intended it to be an inescapable prison for damned souls.

Elfland can be reached by circling a temple of Jhoeda widdershins (counter to the circular path of the Sun), this however is dangerous thing to do since these 'widdershins gates' typically lead to kingdoms of Elfland antagonistic to mortals and are one way. This act symbolises the antagonism of Jhoeda towards the Elves who refused to worship him when he demanded it. A better method is to locate one of the many 'gates' to Elfland that are two-way. Gates vary greatly from newly grown faerie circles of mushrooms to lightning blasted oaks, and many other kinds. Many burial mounds and standing stones from the pagan Age of Heroes contain gates to Elfland. Gates typically have requirements to open them. At gate may open require a specific action to open, or a 'key' which could be anything from a bluebell to a fresh corpse, only at a particular time, or require more than one of these things to open. A DC15 religion check can often reveal how to open a gate; if you have the Fey Type you get advantage on this roll. As already noted some Elfland kingdoms are also linked to Hell by faerie gates. Gates never connect two places in Elfland. There is no geographical relationship between a the two connected points. Fey travellers in the know often use this feature to take short cuts. Elf trade routes often travel short distances in Elfland to reach gates connecting distant place in the mortal world or visa versa. On the other hand you could pass through a gate travel thousands of miles to another gate which opens up right next to the first. Gates never connect different places or kingdoms of Elfland. However, by passing briefly through the mortal world fey who learn the locations of many gates can travel to distant locations very quickly.

As already noted, every kingdom in Elfland has one or more magical prohibitions that if broken prevent the characters from leaving Elfland from within that Kingdom. Most Elfland pocket dimensions contain a single kingdom. However, some Elflands, like the Seasonal Kingdoms, contain more than one kingdom. In those instances if you violate the taboo of one kingdom you can escape the Elfland by travelling to another kingdom.

In game terms, the Religion, not Arcana, skill provides knowledge of the pathways between the mortal World and Elfland as well as between some kingdoms of Elfland and Hell. Arcana and Religion both provide knowledge of banishing and summoning devils. The Horizon Walker's (XGE42) Detect Portal power detects gates to Elfland, stone circles, gates to Hell, and summoning circles. In the Green Isles there is no ethereal plane but a ghost's perception of the World functions exactly like the border ethereal in other D&D worlds.

A religion check can reveal information about a kingdom of Elfland from the below list up to the roll result. If you have the Fey Type you gain Advantage on this roll.

DC5: Every Kingdom in Elfland has its own prohibitions. If you break one of these rules all the gates back to the mortal world in that kingdom block you out.

DC10: Whether the inhabitants are generally hostile or friendly.

DC15: What kingdom the gate leads to, general conditions in the kingdom, and something about its interactions with the Mortal world. How to open a particular gate.

DC20: Where the Kingdom aligned in the Great War with the Devil. A little more information on who/what lives there.

DC25: The prohibition for that kingdom and another interesting fact.

DC30: the PC has a detailed knowledge of the kingdom.

Treasure

If using the tables in the DMG encounters in the mortal World or Hell have one quarter the numbers of coins, objects, and gems indicated (round down). In Elfland do not reduce the amount of treasure.

In a Green Isles campaign, magic items should be very rare. Ideally, one per tier of play (PHB15) per PC. If using the tables in the DMG136+ ignore assigned magic items. Enchanted items are often gained during trips into Elfland. No matter how much gold you have you can't just buy a magic sword. You have to go out and find one in an adventure. Magic items are not for sale. The exception is healing potions; there are a number of magical wells providing healing waters scattered around the Isles. These wells are usually claimed by powerful individuals, but vials do find their way into town markets where they command a high price (typically 50gp as shown in the PHB).

TWO TIME TRAVEL RETRO REVIEWS

by Lev Lafayette

Time & Time Again (1984)
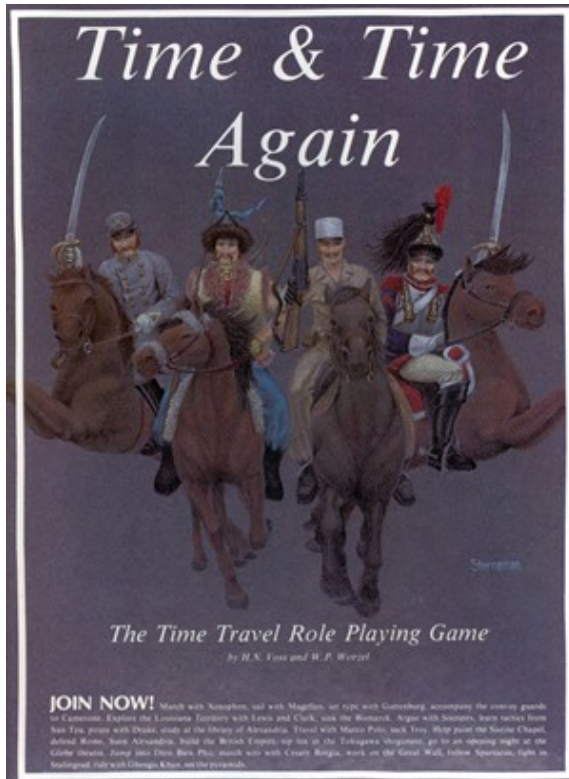
Introduction and Physical Product

As the title implies *Times & Time Again*, with the custom T^2 game system, is a time-travel RPG, with the back-cover blurb proclaiming: "stand beside Napoleon at Borodino, watch the pyramids be raised, journey down the Mississippi with Sam Clemens, travel with Marco Polo to Far Cathay, join the legions and cross the Rubicon". The blurb boasts that the game includes "the most realistic combat system", which is a big ask, and has "physics of Temporal Translation (time travel or T^2) are presented in sufficient detail to allow for easy use while preventing paradox", which an ever bigger ask. "This is what you've always wanted to do .. this is the game you've been waiting to play". And, to be sure, if they live up to those promises, they're probably right – and deserve a Nobel Prize.

The physical product consists of a good stock cardboard box, a 52 page and 48 page books, cardstock covers, saddle-stapled, 8 pages of charts and tables and three 4 page scenarios. The box itself is not exactly a work of beauty, a dark brown background and a "four (military, different times) horsemen of the apocalypse" which shows skill in technique and a modicum in creativity. The internal art is mainly black-and-white public domain material, which is well selected and is usually contextually appropriate. The writing style is formal, although often verbose (which grates with such a short publication), the text two-column justified in a smaller serif font. There is a chatty set of stories from travellers at the end of the first book. Each book has its own table of contents.

Background, Chargen, Combat and Skills

A historical background is provided from a fairly weird conservative worldview; apparently western liberals don't complain enough when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, and combined with post-Vietnam doldrums led to an rise in relative Soviet power. However, the Soviet economy ran out of natural resources, invaded Hokkaido in northern Japan in the early 90s, and sparked a world war. In the course of that war one mad genius Japanese scientist discovered the principles of time travel which led to the establishment of a World Government in the 21st century and the "Bureau of Temporal Affairs", with their time-travelling Voltigeur staff. Time-travel itself is expressed as a type of energy, and subject to Newtonian-like laws. There is no time-travel into the future, objects can't co-exist in time, organic objects only can be transmitted, and history can't be changed (it has already happened, and reality will conspire to prevent agents changing history), although due to our lack of certain knowledge of the past, there can be new inclusions.

Player characters Voltigeurs work for the Bureau which is organised through the World Federation of Colleges and Universities. The primary purpose of travelling back in time seems to be to study history and collect artifacts for museums. Voltigeurs are expected to have an advanced degree in history and fluency in several ancient languages, and field experience in archeology, which limits the number of potential applicants – although, curiously, none of these are skills.

This said, starting PCs are generated by 4d6K3 (i.e., keep highest 3d6) for Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Intelligence, Attitude (read conviction, force of personality etc), and Luck. The hit point system is Structure Points/Blood Points, and is determined by (Strength*Constitution)+100, and distributed by body percentile (e.g., the head gets 6%, the torso 38% legs and arms are differentiated into portions, etc) for Structure Points, but Blood Points is kept as a single pool. If the head is reduced to zero SP, the character is unconscious and half again they are dead. If the BP is reduced to 50% the character is unconscious, and if reduced to 0% the character is dead. If any limb or portion of a limb is reduced to zero SP, the limb is disabled. Fortunately in the 21st century, we are told, there is regeneration of limbs! But you'd better get your character back quickly before such wounds become permanent.

Skills are differentiated into different disciplines; Survival, Knowledge, Social, Weapons, Unarmed, and Itinerant, with about 10-15 separate skills in each discipline, except Weapons which has about twice that number. Some are quite specific, such as "Identify Edible Plants", and others are incredibly broad, such as "Doctor". Characters receive starting skills from basic training from the BTA, usually around a level of 20-30. There is a bonus to starting levels for each group is derived from the character's Intelligence; they are able to start with their Int*5 in bonuses across a number of skills equal to their Int, in 5% increments. Skills themselves are sparsely described, from a single line (Hide) to multiple paragraphs (Drinking, apparently very important). Resolution is based on a D200 (that is not a typo), roll-under method with experience gained on the BRP-styled "use skill, roll above" method. Weirdly, there is no explicit modifier for most skill resolution tests.

Combat rounds are five seconds long with a variable number of actions depending on skill level. Initiative is determined by "obvious advantage" or skill level. There is a fairly normal procedure (roll to hit, roll to block or dodge, roll damage, roll location, subtract armour), but with a few quirks. Firstly, unarmed damage to armoured opponents means that the attacker will also take damage equal to rolled value or the maximum value of the armour, whichever is lower. Damaged caused by throws is quite impressive (a Strength 10 character will do 10d6 versus 1d12 with a strike), but requires a preceding grab attack. Called shots to a location depends on a modification to the skill level based on the size of the region being attacked. Missile weapons cause a flat value of damage based on their Effect Factor, a calculation based on the diameter of the object multiplied by the speed in feet per second, the total divided by 25. There are modifications to armour depending on armour type; for example, crushing weapons (e.g., a mace) does half damage against plate.

Environment and Scenarios

The first book will see extensive use in actual play, the second is more reading for giving the GM a sense of creating an environment, covering climate, terrain, animals economics, technology, transportation, government and politics, ethics and etiquette, playing the game, and designer's notes. Each section is a handful of pages and, for the most part, divided into theory, practise and application to the game. On the more factual topics, the authors do a fair job with various potted examples; properly referenced they would receive a passing grade in an introductory courss. However there is an absolute dearth of useful information that can be integrated into the game in a useful manner. For example, the discussion on climate is just that – a discussion. The section on animals makes a number of unexciting observations about the relationship between humans and animals, but there is absolutely no statistics.

On matters of where there is a larger degree of interpretation, the opinions are perhaps a little too confident and often completely contrary to reality. For example, the authors make the remarkable claim that Keynesian economics was responsible for the move to fiat currency, and it is fiat currency which led to a the collapse of international trade and the

Great Depression due to innate inflationary effects. Sometimes one has to wonder whether they are time travellers themselves from a parallel timeline.

Finally there is the three short scenarios, "Rescue in the Sacred Valley" (end of Tutankhamen's reign), "Quiet Days in Birka" (Sweden, 830 AD), "Just Moments Before Dark" (Saigon, 1975). The same applies here as the essays; they provide a lengthy introduction to the scenario, usually a page or so of background and setting material, and then an almost a complete absence of actually running a scenario, with the exception of random encounter tables and descriptions of major NPCs.

Overall

The core concept of Time & Time Again is quite reasonable, and the production qualities are certainly reasonable for the time it was produced. The standard background doesn't offer too much, and certainly no dramatic push in its own right – it exists as a conceit and a convenience for the opportunity to engage in time-travel. The physics is an amusing interpretation and one must admit that they've satisfied their claim of producing time-travel without paradoxes – by disallowing forward travel and by disallowing historical change. It's an interesting epistemology; the more one knows about a particular point in the past, the less freedom one has when engaging in a temporal visit. Thus, to maximise such freedom one would have to engage in a "Snow White" campaign to rid the public knowledge of past events.

The game system is not too bad when it's following conventional wisdom, but tends to go off the radar when it tries to be innovative; for example, d200 ((d20*10)+d10, where d20 is 0-19), as a core resolution mechanic has just engaged in unnecessary weirdness with no benefit. The lack of actual support material that isn't discussion or opinion is likewise less than optimal. In a nutshell, despite some interesting suggestions, the game isn't quite ready for play as it is and, especially with alternatives available, has to be assessed accordingly.

Style: 1 + .5 (layout) + .6 (art) + .4 (coolness) + .5 (readbility) + .4 (product) = 3.4
Substance: 1 + .3 (content) + .3 (text) + .3 (fun) + .3 (workmanship) + .4 (system) = 2.6

Timemaster (1984)

Introduction and Physical Product
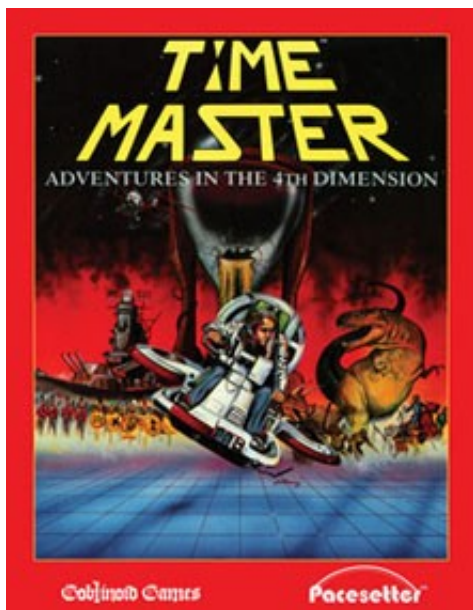
There must have been something special about 1984 that saw the release of two relatively major time-travel games, as significant as this minor sub-genre is, and with FASA's Doctor Who following within a year. Timemaster, as a product of Pacesetter games, made up of TSR employees who were "let go", owes a great deal of similarity to their point of origin. The game comes in a slightly more flimsy box, and consists of two main cardstock cover books, saddle-stapled, a 64-page Timemaster Traveller's Guide, a 32-page Guide to the Continuum. In addition there is a 16 page introductory adventure, maps, counters, and dice.

The cover artwork is not exactly striking, an individual fleeing – on a grid no less – various antagonists from time's past. The internal art makes extensive use of public domain material as well as abstract content to illustrate game mechanics. The layout of the books is very similar to the TSR style at the time; three-column justified with a serif font. There's a table of contents and index, with chapter titles and page numbers clearly marked. The text itself is quite wordy and really

pitched at the same level as the Basic D&D set.

Setting and Chargen

The setting of Timemaster is unabashed B-grade cheese. The player-characters are members of the Time Corps, with ranks and regulations, established in 7192AD to protect the integrity of the continuum against the nefarious shape-shifting alien Demoreans who manipulate the past for their own wicked ends, and keeping various Renegades, time-travelling pirates, in check. Central to the Time Corps is T-0, the official pure timeline of the Corp; where history is changed there is a range of variations, or parallel time-lines, which are assigned values T (twin parallel to T-0), M (parallel moderately different to T-0), R (parallel radically different to T-0), and A (parallel alien to T-0). Time Corps members travel into the past with a chronoscooter (featured in the cover art), but are subject to a few time-travel rules. Firstly, only one version of a thing can exist on the same timeline, timelines try to repair themselves, the timeline will conspire to prevent grandfather paradoxes, there is a barrier to future travel, and dead is permament.

Chargen consists of selecting two background skills in addition to Historical Speciality and Stunner, which all characters have, at +15; skill resolution is typically based on roll-under percentile with use of an Action Table for some activities and cross-referenced results. Basic ability scores are generated on ((3d10)*2)+20, assigned according to player's choice, to Strength, Dexterity, Agility, Personality, Perception, Willpower, Luck, and Stamina. Derived scores include Unskilled Melee (average of Strength and Agility), Strength for Penetration bonus (against armour in melee combat), Stamina for Recovery Rate and Wounds. Characters may also select one paranormal talent, in addition to Paranormal Memory which comes for free. Most paranormal abilities have a Willpower cost and range from relatively subtle effects such as Telepathic Probe, Adaptability and the like, to more obvious actions reserved for the Demoreans such as Shape Shift.

Character advancement occurs by gaining ranks in the Time Corps, and by improving their abilities, skills, and talents. For each successful mission they gain a grade in the Corp. Successful missions also provide "Success Points": which are used to raise existing abilities etc, or introduce new skills an talents. Adventures in Timemaster have a significance rating of 1 to 1000; if everything goes exactly to plan (unlikely) then the significance rating equals the number of Success Points. If they fail in their mission *or* change history, they receive zero Success Points. A determination of historical change is made by adding up "mistakes" and comparing this with a d1000 roll, with a higher roll indicating no problem. If history has been changed then a chart is referenced to determine the severity and what happens whne they return to the Time Corps. As for success points, these can be used to acquire new skills (50), talents (200), or raise skill levels (100, 150). Notably all of this could be divided by 10, but I guess orders of magnitude are more interesting.

Combat, Skills and Talents

Combat is very important in a game of this period and is presented before skill resolution. A surprise check is made against Perception to determine if this has occurred. The game uses 5-second melee rounds with declaration of actions, a d10 group initiative roll, and then ordered by each group by paranormal talents, missiles, movement, and finally melee. As writ, each side gets two missile attack actions per round; this is very clumsy in actual play and is best ignored. Attacks and declared defenses are cross-referenced on an Action Table which determines if any Wounds are received. Attacks are based on skill and margin of success, whereas Defense on 1d10 plus Luck expenditure. There are various modifiers to these actions, including various types of movement, use of burst weapons, position, etc, differentiated by the attack type. Damage is applied to both Stamina (being battered about) and Wounds (which can kill). Two result tables are applied for weapons and unarmed combat; unsurprisingly the former cause more Wounds. Damage much be greater in Stamina damage than the Armor Rating in order to penetrate; this is an all-of-nothing affair, and is differentiated by hit location. Once armour is penetrated it is useless ("crumpled") in that location. There are special rules for called shots, and particular types of damage (falling, catastrophes, exposure etc).

Heavy weapons, from cavalry to tanks and beyond, have their own chapter, as does battles which, when added to the normal combat chapter ("basic action") and the fact that over 50% of skills are based on combat actions, really does

suggest the emphasis of the game. Heavy weapons operate on a different scale (10 yards per hex, as opposed to 5 feet) and get their own set of counters. A chart cross-references whether an attack type has any effect against a target; unarmoured infantry would be pleased and surprised to know that they are not effected by ATWs, AA Guns etc. Most heavy weapons due "catastrophic damage" against normal people. As for Battles, this runs on a scale of 10 units for 1 with 10 yards per hex for skirmishes (and up to 100s for larger scale Battles), with a range specific battle combat modifiers. Unit morale is added in Battle situations which can lead to routing or elimination if things go badly.

As mentioned, most skills in the game are combat orientated. A base level is determined from ability scores, often an average of multiple scores, with a odd progression bonus added depending on the character's skill level (+15 specialist, +30 expert, +55 master). Skill checks are made on d100, rolling against column 3 of the Action Chart, whereas Abilities use column 2. Many of the skills, especially the combat skills, are in fact, groups of skills. Thus there are actually five skills (Axe, Dagger, Dart, Javelin, Spear) that make up the Thrown Weapon skill group (and one skill for Outdoor Survival, or Mechanics, or Stunt Driving). Notably, there are no skills for various types of sciences and the main knowledge skills is "Historical Specialty" (which is a group of skills in 100-year blocks). The paranormal talents consist of some fifteen abilities with somewhat reduced base rating (two abilities divided by 3, for example). They have differentiated range, duration, and Willpower cost.

Equipment, NPCs, and Scenarios

There a couple of very short chapters on equipment and NPCs. The equipment chapter, all of two pages, has a half-dozen items that are particular to the Time Corp, and apart from that pick what is appropriate to the setting. The NPCs chapter is just over three pages and includes status ratings as a rough indication of connections, and a random and linear progression Situation Check table which can have some fairly significant modifiers to Direct Action Checks (e.g., requests for aid etc).

There are two booklets that can be represent "scenarios". The first is the cardstock-covered "Guide to the Continuum", which basically gives an annoyingly chatty introduction to several settings, a military summary, a political summary, and the stats for a few major NPCs. The settings are Ancient Athens, Ancient Rome, Angevin England, Tudor England, Napoleonic France, and Occupied France, which is hardly a particularly diverse range. There is some information about Earth, 7192 and the Demoreans, a bit of GMs advice as well, and a section on military formations. The scenario, "Red Ace High", which includes pre-generated PCs, involves preventing some Demoreans from making some particular changes to WWI and involves a lot of crawling through trenches.

Conclusions

There are a handful of positive aspects of Timemaster which are quite good; the fact that the game comes with a introductory scenario with pre-generated characters is one. The B-grade cheese, with wicked time-travelling aliens and Time Bandits-like Renegades is another. The concept behind "significance ratings" is a third. And, whilst not subject to this review, the published scenarios were sometimes quite entertaining.

But there is much in the game which falls far short. The game has a fairly clunky game-system, which has great variation for the type of action and where it strives to be generic, (the Action Table) it simply isn't that great, a skill system that lacks breadth and content, and an emphasis on military actions that borders on being a wargame with the addition of some single-unit features under the guise of being a roleplaying game. The proposed settings themselves indicate a lack of imagination and knowledge on the part of the designers. Plus, the entire product is not helped by being somewhat difficult to read, despite a reasonable layout of the individual pages themselves. In summary, look elsewhere as better games are available.

Style: 1 + .5 (layout) + .4 (art) + .6 (coolness) + .2 (readbility) + .4 (product) = 3.1
Substance: 1 + .1 (content) + .2 (text) + .2 (fun) + .2 (workmanship) + .2 (system) = 1.9

DR WHO: ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE

by Lev Lafayette

Introduction and the Physical Thing

Once upon a time, FASA produced a Dr. Who roleplaying game, which was a bit odd, but did include a good amount of source material. Since then the good folk at Cubicle 7 have released a new Dr. Who Adventures in Time and Space, initially in 2009 – and with a wealth of award nominations in the following year – with different editions of the game as new Doctors made it on to the scene. For example, the first edition came out as a boxed set, then in 2012 an 11th Doctor Boxed Set was released. In 2013 a number of supplements were released for each Doctor, a remarkable activity in its own right, and in 2014 the Limited Edition Doctor Who rulebook was released as a single volume hardcover book. It is that product that is reviewed here.

Physically, it is a work of great beauty as are many contemporary RPGs that are not being deliberately retro. The cover art is not exactly highly creative, but it shows skill in technique. The internals, full-colour throughout, consist of a variety of film stills and collages, and are usually placed in good context with the rules. The layout of the book is in two-column justified with a sans-serif font with page numbers and chapter headings clearly marked. The writing style is accessible, although sometimes verbose, largely formal without seeming distant. The game, all packed in at 256 pages, starts with an introductory chapter, characters and skills, the game system, time travel, alien species, GMs advice, adventures, and an appendix with character sheets. The game comes with an index, and a fairly well-organised single table of contents, which is necessary as the chapter titles are incomprehensible. For example, the chapter on the game system is entitled: "I Walk In Eternity".

The introductory chapter has an obligatory "what is roleplaying" section and outlines the basic and well-trodden path of players, game master, and game sessions. Core concepts in the game are introduced here; the use of D6s exclusively, the use of Story Points for more than a dash of narrativism, and an outline of what is to come. A rather cute component is pointing out the British peculiarities; the use of Imperial measurements and Commonwealth English. As should be expected there is also an example of play.

CharGen and Skills

CharGen begins with sorting what sort of campaign is being run; this can range from everyone being Torchwood operatives (all humans, no aliens, no time-travellers), to the classic Dr. Who and Companions, and all other variations. The game deftly deals with the "you can't all be the Doctor" issue with the character either being allocated according to the GMs desires, or shared among the players in different sessions, or changed in each generation. Although not stated explicitly, The Doctor could also be a NPC, providing both useful hints to the PC companions and leading them into all sorts of trouble.

Characters are defined by Attributes, Skills, and Traits. Attributes are the more-or-less innate abilities, skills are what the character has learned, and Traits are abilities. Attributes and skills have cardinal values, rated from 1-6. A point-buy system is used with 24 character points (Attributes and Traits), 18 skill points, and 12 story points. There are six attributes; Awareness, Coordination, Ingenuity, Presence, Resolve, and Strength. Character points can be increased by taking Bad Traits, and excess can be transferred to skill points.

Traits (good or bad) cost 1 or 2 points and include things such as Boffin, Empathic, Friends, Resourceful Pockets, Run For Your Life, Screamer, Time Traveller, as good examples and Amnesia, Dark Secret, Impaired Senses, Outcast etc, as bad. In addition there is special traits, especially good and bad; such as a truly alien appearance, or various psychic powers. Each Trait is provided with a description of the game mechanic and as a result, they've ended up quite balanced.

There are 18 skill points to assign to the 11 skills in the game. If 11 seems woefully inadequate, this applies to skill levels up to three; after that you can select an "Area of Expertise" where, with the cost of one skill point, there is a gain of +2 to skill checks. The top level skills are; Athletics, Convince, Craft, Fighting, Knowledge, Marksman, Medicine, Science, Subterfuge, Survival, Technology, and Transport.

The usual filler information concludes character generation; name, background, etc, although there is the inclusion of Technology Level of the character's background, ranging from 1 (Primitive - Stone Age) to 12 (Beyond Comprehension). Time Lords at at 10, contemporary Earth at 5.

System and Story Points

The game system, in a nutshell, is Attribute + Skill + Trait + 2d6 versus Target Number. Attributes and Skills are not tied to each other. Unskilled attempts are at -4, or unrelated skill attempts are at -2. Target numbers are provided with some examples. The value greater than the target number indicates the degree of success, with very high degrees of success providing additional benefits at the player's initiative. In combat, high degrees of success cause additional damage. An alternative to degrees of success is to use an additional "drama die" (Yes/No but, Yes/No, Yes/No And). Story Points can be used to modify degrees of success. Additional time can add a bonus to a task, based on the normal period it normally takes. In conflict scenarios, the Target Number is the opponent's roll. Modifiers to tasks are "complications". For multiround conflicts initiative is carried out in order of Talkers, Movers, Doers, and Fighters.

Damage is applied against attributes as a numerical value; some weapons do S (Stun) or L (Lethal). "You shouldn't go face to face with a Dalek", for example. There is even an optional hit-location system. A decent shot with most guns will incapacitate. Other sources of damage include the classic drowning and falling, crashes, fire, radiation, vacuum, and any manner of the usual causes of pain. The game also has a mental damage system, which operates in roughly the same way; damage is applied to mental characteristics, and social conflicts can lead to a loss of Resolve. Healing, depending on the degree of success, can heal 1-3 wounds. Special rules apply if a character is reduced to 0 in an ability. If three or more attributes are reduced to 0, the character has *probably* died.

Movement is a good example of the effective simplicity and speed of resolution in the game system. A character's move is equal to their Coordination (plus or minus Traits). Add a vehicle and it's the vehicle's speed plus Coordination. Add an obstacle, and you have target numbers for tasks against the Athletics or Transport skill. A chase is treated as an extended conflict, with bonuses to distance (called "areas") added for good results on the task check, with the option of adding stunts, resolved in the same manner.

In addition to the aforementioned use of Story Points for modifying results on tasks, they can also be used for clues, bonus dice, reducing damage, unusual use of gadgets, and so forth. A table of guidelines suggests how many points should be spent. It's basically a narrativist currency on this level, and is also available to NPCs. Story Points are gained for adding drama to the story, roleplaying in character and so forth. Characters can lose story points through killing, apparently keeping within the theme of behaviour (Dr Who fans may note that the eponymous character has not exactly kept to this). Character gains through experience is very much hand-waved.

Normal equipment is distinguished from gadgets which cost Story Points (from 1 to 4) and have gadget Traits (positive and negative), and can even be created in the middle of an adventure, using Ingenuity and Technology. Interestingly, gadgets can also hold Story Points. When a gadget runs out of story points it is out of power, broken etc. A selection of gadgets is provided as examples and from the series.

Time Travel and Aliens

The chapter on time travel begins on some of the classic issues and solutions. Paradoxes get additional flavour insofar that there are the "antibodies" of breaks in the space-time continuum with the Reapers, who "consume" the cause of breaks so space-time can return to a non-paradox state. Not every action of a time-traveller creates a paradox; the actions of time-travellers on history actually generate known history. Localised paradoxes create spurs, which are cut off from the normal space-time continuum, whereas continuous attempts to rewrite the past will lead to the fabric of reality losing its elasticity and becoming more rigid. Minor actions by time-travellers creates neither paradoxes or spurs; the metaphor of time being like a river is used, which may work around small barriers but keeps the same general flow. Issues may create ripples, with perhaps notable localised effects, but losing their power the further they are away. Alternate timelines and universes are available, but they're not a good idea - and getting back from one is a significant issue.

The chapter on time travel also has requisite discussion on the Time Lords, which is noted as being no affectation. The biological differences (e.g., the famous two hearts) is also explored, along with resistance to environmental effects, including radiation. A series of regeneration tables is provided for changes in attributes, appearance, and occasional new abilities is provided for those required moments. And no discussion of the Doctor and time travel would be complete without a review of the TARDIS and similar such devices. These are amazing gadgets-cum-NPCs in their own rights, with some spectacular powers well beyond the simple functionality of getting from point A to B. They exist outside of space and time, effectively nowhere at all, and therefore capable of being anywhere. The numerous sub-technologies are described, such as the ability to change the genetic structure of a Time Lord to fit a local environment, the warning system, the famous control console, the weapon deactivation system, the special key required for entrance; "a

transdimensional key to a mathematical equation, whether they look like one or not". The TARDIS is sentient, capable of some psychic powers (especially for translation), and as it ages, more sapient.

The aliens chapter includes a good portion of the various species that one encounters in the series, plus select NPCs. The chapter title, "All the Strange, Strange Creatures" is not quite right, as it explicitly states that not all the strange creatures will be included. The descriptions tend towards quality and detail rather than quantity, with all the classic favourites included. This includes the cybermen, the daleks, ice warriors, The Master (capitalised definite article required), the silence, slitheen, sontarans, and weeping angels, but lacking in the ood, and the judoon, for example. Each being is typically are given a 2-3 page write-up and a stat-block. In addition to this there is a discussion on aliens as NPCs and an extensive list of traits for aliens.

Advice and Adventures

The advice chapter is quite extensive, ranging from the well-known and obvious to the novel. The section suggesting that players shouldn't treat amusingly notes that GMs might fudge a few die rolls ("don't cheat, unless you're the GM"). The section headings give some indication of the advice and also how they can contradict each other, suggesting a happy medium; "Get Involved" but "Don't Hog It", "Rules are meant to broken" but "Don't Cheat". The chapter also notes some recurring themes in the series, and again reiterates the emphasis on pacifism, which in many ways is quite remarkable considering how impressive at military prowess species like the daleks and cybermen are. A Gamemastering section outlines the multiple roles of storyteller and referee, along with a checklist-like approach for game preparation, which is not a bad thing, and running a game ("be prepared", "be flexible"). There is a listing of type of players (and problem players) that the GM can encounter; metagamers, powergamers, the rule-monger etc, we know the sort. Notable, the hand-waving approach to experience is reiterated; this is something that really could do with some rules around it, which shouldn't be too hard. It's a strange omission.

The chapter is dedicated to story design, seems a little unnecessary given that the content could probably have gone in the GMs section of the advice chapter, and does suggest the need for tighter writing. Unsurprisingly, it does follow a fairly standard narrative path for scenario design, and likewise for the wider campaign story with its multiple arcs, and side-quest "specials". Finally, a selection of a dozen adventure seeds is provided, each providing, with minimal sketching, an evening's scenario in the own right.

Conclusion

Overall Dr Who : Adventures in Time and Space is an excellent product. It is an attractive book whose content accessible to newcomers to roleplaying games. It has an excellent game system which is quick, easy, intuitive, and effective, albeit a little incomplete in some regards. The source material stays true to the themes of the series and the capsule adventures, with a little work, will provide for several sessions of play. It must be said, in actual play itself all the expectations (and issues) do come to fore. The game is very quick to pick up and is surprisingly well-suited for group play, although to reiterate an earlier comment it is worth considering using The Doctor as a sort of GM PC and having a party of companions. This aside however, the are many good things about the game and very few bad things, making it highly recommended overall.

Style: 1 + .7 (layout) + .7 (art) + .7 (coolness) + .7 (readbility) + .8 (product) = 4.6
Substance: 1 + .6 (content) + .4 (text) + .9 (fun) + .8 (workmanship) + .6 (system) = 4.3

CALL OF CTHULHU-NEPHILIM TIME TRAVEL

by Lev Lafayette

RPG mash-ups are fun, right? At least when they are an appropriate tangent from the core rules and setting. An appropriate mélange in such a style takes elements of the Call of Cthulhu and Nephilim roleplaying games which have roughly the same game system, and ties them with one of the enjoyable setting features of the Lovecraft mythos, The Great Race of Yith. Discussing two of these major elements (Great Race of Yith, Nephilim) in turn:

The Great Race of Yith: The Great Race of Yith are a species that transferred their minds to earth and adopted enormous cone-shaped bodies for their earthly existence. Hundreds of millions of years ago, they ruled a large portion of Earth, centred in Australia, whilst the kin of Cthulhu and the Mi-Go ruled other areas. Some fifty million years ago they were largely exterminated by the Flying Polyps whom they had imprisoned after their first arrival. However, being time-travellers, they projected themselves into the future with new, beetle-like, bodies, as the successor species of humanity. The name "Great" is affixed as they are the only species to master time-travel. To quote from *Call of Cthulhu* (6th edition, p163):

"A member of the race can send its mind forward or backward through time and across space, pick out a suitable subject, and trade minds with it; whenever a member of the Great Race takes over the body of a being, that being's mind is put into the body of the Great Race individual, there to stay until the being now inhabiting its old body sees fit to return and trade places once more.... Keen students of history, an individual exchanges places with a select individual in the era it wishes to study. The minds are switched for about five years."

Nephilim: The core premise of the Nephilim RPG is that there are elemental spirits, the Nephilim, who inhabit the body of a human and use it until it dies, then try to find another body, taking the skills and experience with them. Each elemental type, or Ka, has different strengths (e.g., Fire for strength and aggression). Some human groups know of the Nephilim (e.g., The Templars, the Rosicrucians), mainly in an antagonistic manner. Over time, a character will metamorphise into a being appropriate to their Ka element. A Nephilim seeks Agartha, a level of spirital fulfillment where a body is no longer required, such is their mastery of magic.

These two aspects can be successfully combined, with some care. The first proposition is that the Yithians and the Nephilim are one and the same. Of course, this does require some alterations to the proposed settings, of which the scientific world-view of Call of Cthulhu conflicts with the particular astro-magical world-view of Nephilim. On an aesthetic level, the setting of Call of Cthulhu has a richer literally tradition, with an extensive shared history over several authors, whereas that of Nephilim is syncretic and unique, and with particular biases toward certain axial-age civilization and western Europe. The past lives of the core rules list four past life incarnations from Egypt, one from Persia, one from Judea, one from Italia, one from Germania, two from France, and one from England. The rest of the

world and history, misses out, and certainly the same can be said about the magic system. For this reason the Major Arcana of Nephilim are perhaps best dispensed with, or converted into a culturally-specific role, which various form of divination, astrology etc would serve as an alternative.

Hit and Yith: This is not to suggest that one should just adopt the *Call of Cthulhu* wholesale either. Often it does not engage nearly as deeply with Earth's rich mythological sources in favour of shoe-horning the world into the Lovecraftian mythos. In any case, to combine the story of the Yith with the Nephilim RPG, the following is suggested:

1) The Nephilim and the Yith are one and the same. Apart from being students of history and masters of time travel, certain Yith have also started to manipulate chemical phase states to try to test the limits of bio-chemical endurance (such a fascinating topic, don't you think?). These can be mapped to Nephilim Ka; Eath for solid, Water for liquid, Wind for gas, and Fire for plasma. Alas, as part of this experiment the foolish Yith have trapped themselves in various human bodies and cannot return to their great city of Pnakotus, whereby they can escape into the future before the Flying Polyps destroy them. As the Nephilim Yith arises within the human body they increasingly seek Agartha, the freedom to escape from the human body and transfer their mind home.
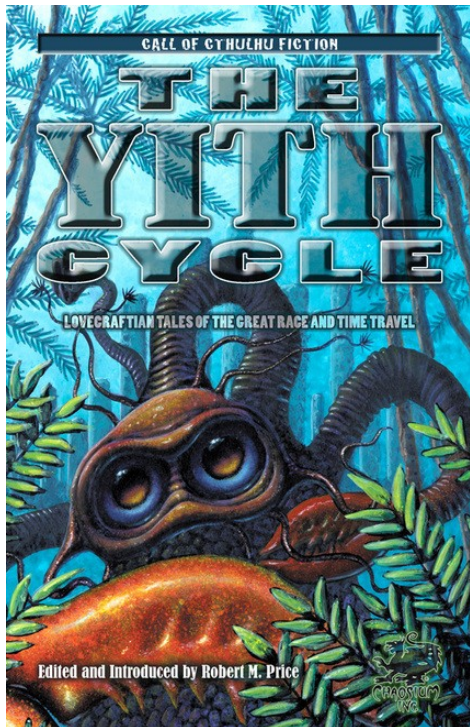
2) As a result of these phase state experiments, In contrast to both *Nephilim* and *Call of Cthulhu*, the human subject is dominant, at least initially. They do experience flashbacks and skills and knowledges for which they have no rational explanation. As a result they are drawn to the role of the *Call of Cthulhu* investigator as they have drives, both conscious and unconscious, to discover their true nature. This is, of course, has quite a powerful effect on the psyche. It is not simply a matter of, "oh, I have a skill in this". It is the rising of another life inside one's mind, where the character finds that they are both experienced in another time as they are in their contemporary time.

In the course of a normal Call of Cthulhu game, and for the purposes of narrative enjoyment, allow a player to determine whenever they have an inexplicable historic or even future skill. A 1920s CoC character may suddenly find that they are fluent in ancient Sanskrit, despite having never studied the language. The same character may find they have a degree of competence using UNIX-based operating systems. When a player takes advantage of this opportunity they are determined to have had another (part or future) life. The flashback will immediately require a SAN check (0/1d6) but they will be have their new skill. This should be applied this as a new life for the Simulcrum, as per *Nephilim* – reduce Ka by 2, determine age, distribute skill points. The skill points

will be provided a series of additional flashbacks at appropriate points determined by the Keeper Gamemaster, with increasingly weak SAN checks (0/1d4; 0/1d3, 0/1d2) as the character becomes increasingly aware of their past life.

Strange Aeons: The Strange Aeons supplements for Call of Cthulhu are particularly appropriate for this cross-over. The Yith will seek a means to transfer between different times, bodies, and minds, for short periods as necessary or extended periods of time (it is the latter than generates the past lives previously described). Certainly the first supplement has only three settings, and two of those are only a few years apart and are relatively close, geographically! The second, larger, supplement has a much more extensive range of scenarios in setting and time. Ample use can also be made of supplements such as *Cthulhu Now* (a rather dated game title), *Cthulhu Invictus,* and *Reign of Terror*.

It is appropriate from the Yith perspective to seek out turning points in history as that will be where there is the greatest opportunities exist to find a way out of their current state. Whilst the idea of "turning points" is mainly for aesthetic and educational purposes, it is relatively thematically sensible to fit such moments of high human drama as correlating with moments of near (or actual) success in the struggle between various factions of the Cthulhu mythos, and those few and brave investigators and their unexpected allies (perhaps including the Yith?) who work with them. Thus for the Second World War products like *Achtung Cthulhu*, and *GURPS WWII* will provide opportunities. From the AD&D line one may consider supplements like *A Mighty Fortress*, as the Protestant Reformation and the Religious Wars certainly represented a dramatic change to European and world history and along the same line the d20 supplement, *Testament* will provide a familiar and somewhat influential story. Mark Morrison's recent *Call of Cthulhu* supplement Reign of Terror, set in the French revolution is certainly on the cards as well, although Zhou Enlai, first Premier of the People's Republic of China, quipped with regards to its significance "It is too soon to say" (ignore the aesthetic spoilsports who argue that he was actually might have been talking about the May 1968 revolt). Whilst on the topic of China is the irrigation network developed by Yu the Great simply a successful means of taming Yellow and Wei rivers? Or is an act of epic-scale geomancy? The Yith of course must find out.

Thematically, the opportunity exists in such a campaign to explore the many and diverse critical moments of human history, whilst at the same time delving into the very alien personalities of the Yith. One particularly good sourcebook and stylistically inspirational is *The Yith Cycle* which includes various short stories by Lovecraft, Derleth, et al. The use of parallel relevation is particularly recommended in this sort of combined game setting and system. Initially, the player-characters should start as standard characters, without any special abilities or realisation at all. Like in the beginning of a Call of Cthulhu campaign they are introduced to issues which are "not quite right" and gain additional knowledge of the world as it really is. From there it is opportunity to provide the first flashback at a critical juncture, distriburbing for the character but also the sort of event which helps them resolve a scenario. From their it is a constant trickle (and occasional short downpour) of revelation; the discovery of Ka abilities, the rise of previous Simulcra, and eventually the realisation of the terrible truth that they have an alien soul within them, that needs to go back in time, in order for them to go forward in time. How that is done is a matter of the individual Keeper Gamemaster.

DRIN, THE PEOPLE OF NO PLACE

by Karl Brown

A new species for D&D 5th edition for both players and DMs. D&D 5th edition by Wizards of the Coast.

Drin PCs

"You cannot leave" commanded the angel at the gleaming gates of the White City "Your souls are burdened and your spirits unruly. Our Lord will have you stay and, in time, be happy."
"You think you can keep us here?" Velnen challenged the deva "No home can hold us, no lord can bind us, for we are truly people of no place."
The angel looked down on the small band of vagabonds. Their bright clashing colours and the way they flickered like a mirage made them look like a dream among the matte silver and white of the heavenly city. "You will stay, the worlds beyond the gate are full of peril, let us…"
"You are not listening" interrupted Velnen "I said no home can hold us" an arcane word followed and a quick gesture. The small band vanished.
The deva sighed and cried a single perfect tear.

Drin are also known as planar ramblers. They are infused with the energies of countless planes of existence yet belong to no place. Never entirely present where they stand, they shimmer and fade in waves like a mirage. Drin families wander the planes of existence that are not innately hostile to humanoid life. Only able to take what they can carry with them, they sleep in small colourful tents, in inns, or under the open skies. They love to explore the wonders of the multiverse and treasure the songs and memories they take away from those places.

Unearthly Diversity

Not belonging to any place the drin shimmer like a mirage, only ever partially existent. This dreamlike appearance is enhanced by their colourful appearance. Once the Drin were human and scattered bands of Drin contain all the physical diversity of humanity as well as exotic coloration caused by generations of exposure to planar energies. Virtually any colour can be found in the hair, skin, or eyes of some drin somewhere. Like the humans they once were, most drin range from 5 to 6 foot tall and mass 125 to 250 pounds.

Their choice of clothing is an odd statement of identity. They have no styles of their own but instead collect items from every culture they encounter, the more these assorted styles and colours clash the better the drin like it. Drin wear clothes until they wear out then toss them without regret, ready for the next new garment.

Born Travelers

The innate abilities that enable the drin to travel the worlds of existence only allow them to take what they can carry. Therefore they have come to value that which cannot be left behind: memories, tales, and songs. When two drin meet they sit down to relate their experiences, sing songs, and tell sagas of their ancestors. Soon they know all each other's boastful exploits and determined which distant ancestors they share.

Though driven by wanderlust and curiosity, drin also have a pragmatic side. They claim to be the multiverses greatest travelers but most families planeshift to locations where their children will be safe and they can earn coin. Drin survive by their good name providing services as trusted messengers, couriers, caravan guards, news-mongers, and day labourers.

Wandering families

Millennia ago when mortals reached the other planes of existence they found the fertile and pleasant places already crowded with the souls of the dead, angels, fiends, celestials, and others. Some mortals settled in barren places, others learned to live beside other entities, but the ancestors of the drin decided to wander. Generations of exposure to the energies of the many planes of existence has made them truly people of no place, in touch with the ebb and flow of energies that binds the multiverse together but never belonging to any plane.

The most travelled of these rambling people become connected to the whole multiverse to the point of being able to planeshift small groups between the planes. These individuals are called zelverit. Drin families linked by blood and romantic love are formed around a zelverit essentially limiting groups to eight, the number a zelverit can planeshift. While a respected person whose opinions are heard, the zelverit is essential to the family's survival and therefore is not allowed to leave but protected at all costs, including the lives of the other adults. However, with a zelverit present to Planeshift the group away from danger this sacrifice is rarely needed.

The drin can only take with them what they carry. They build nothing that lasts and live out of small tents or other temporary lodging. Some cosmopolitan planar cities provide specialized inns or a camping area with amenities for drin families.

Going Further

Every drin grows up among the wonders of the civilized multiverse and listening to the tales of ancestors who ventured further still and saw sights even more incredible. It is no surprise then that among some young adults pragmatism loses and wanderlust wins out. Soon these wanders realize they need coin for food and for passage without a zelverit.

Adventurous drin might earn coin as couriers, messengers, scouts, and caravan guards. Any occupation that keeps them moving is acceptable. However, the multiverse is a jester. All this travel often awakens the powers of a zelverit early in the young traveler. At first this is a great boon but when discovered by other drin they are expected to retreat into the safety of family life. This great irony is a common ending in the sagas of drin culture.

Drin Names

Drin most often steal names for their children from other cultures they encounter. Sometimes without regard for gender or other social states, though they tend to chosen words with familiar sounds. In fact sometimes words that are not names are chosen. They also have their own language and naming traditions. The name given by her parents follows a drin throughout life accumulating tales of their travels. No drin would willing change her name. Family names are often derived from a past or present zelverit's name which is then extended and the vowels changed to harder vowels suitable for a family name. Dren do not change their family name if the group's zelverit changes.

Borrowed names. Dain, Damakos, Danger, Dench, Diero, Dog, Doorknob, Dormouse, Drawbridge, Rain, Rake, Reed, Road, Tap, Termite, Turtle, Thava, Thunder, Torc, Valanthe, Vase, Volume, Viola, Virtue, Zebra, Zebu, Zook.
Male names. Den, Div, Drin, Driv, Rel, Riv, Tiv, Tel, Vel, Vin, Vit, Zel, Zin, Ziv.
Female names. Denit, Driliv, Reliv, Revit, Teler, Terlit, Vilit, Viniv, Ziner, Zivit.
Family Names. Danotvan, Davroltol, Donovan, Dralovzan, Rake-votal, Ravotdrav, Torlatrol, Tormatov, Thandorlat, Volotvot, Vortatol, Zabratov, Zanordal, Zonvalat.

Drin Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Charisma score increases by one.

Age. Drin reach adulthood in their late teens and live for a little over a century. They often travel through planes where time passes differently which can extend or reduce lifespan.

Alignment. The importance of family security and the tendency to raise children in the safety of the heavenly celestial planes leans the race towards good. Wanderlust and rootlessness produces a tendency towards chaos.

Size. Drin vary greatly in build and range from around 5 to 6 feet tall. Your size is medium.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 35 feet.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write, Common, Drin, and any one other language of your choosing.

Worlds Wise. Your are proficient in the Arcana and Religion skills.

Songs and Sagas. You are proficient in either the Performance or History skills.

Never in one place. You shimmer and fade, never entirely in the place you stand. This has several benefits.

Your natural armour class is 13+Dexterity modifier. If you have multiple sources of armour class calculate each separately and use the best one.

You have advantage on all dexterity saves against magic and on strength saves to escape magical effects. You have advantage on saves against physical traps (excludes hypnotic sigils and other mental traps, also excludes saves against poison). You have advantage on rolls to avoid or escape the Restrained or Grappled conditions.

Planar Traveler. At first level you can cast Misty Step once. This spell is recharged by a short or long rest. At 15th level you become a zelverit able to cast Etherealness and Planeshift once each. These two spells are restored by a long rest. Your spellcasting ability for all these spells is Charisma.

NPCs

Several NPCs are given. Together these can make up the members of a typical family. When faced with a fight most drin families prefer to gather around their zelverit and planeshift away. If this isn't an option they will use Misty Step and their high speed to stage a fighting retreat while protecting the zelverit with their lives.

Drin Rascal

Drin children have a feisty independent streak. Those aged ten or above will fight fiercely if cornered. A hero's challenge might be to not harm a child who is trying to kill him.

Small humanoid (Drin) Chaotic Good.

Armour Class. 13 (partially non-existent)

Hit Points. 3 (1d6-1)

Speed. 30 ft.

STR 7 (-2) DEX 10 (0) CON 8 (-1) INT 8 (-1) WIS 8 (-1) CHA 10

Skills. Religion +1.

Senses. Passive Perception 9

Languages. Common and Drin.

Challenge. 0 (10 xp)

Never in one place. The drin has advantage on all dexterity saves against magic and on strength saves to escape magical effects, on saves against physical traps (excludes hypnotic sigils and other mental traps, also excludes saves against poison) and on rolls to avoid or escape the Restrained or Grappled conditions.

ACTIONS

Dagger. Melee weapon attack. +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit 3 (1d4+0) piercing damage.

Kick. Melee weapon attack. +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit 1 bludgeoning damage.

Planar Traveler. Can cast Misty Step once per day as an innate spell.

Drin Rambler

Drin commoners spend their time working as couriers, messengers, entertainers and news-mongers or carving for the family's children.

Medium humanoid (Drin) Chaotic Good.

Armour Class. 13 (partially non-existent)

Hit Points. 4 (1d8)

Speed. 35 ft.

STR 10 (+0) DEX 10 (+0) CON 10 (+0) INT 10 (+0) WIS 10 (+0) CHA 11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +2, History +2, Religion +2

Senses. Passive perception 10.

Languages. Common, Drin, and one other, often Celestial.

Challenge. 0 (10 xp)

Never in one place. The drin has advantage on all dexterity saves against magic and on strength saves to escape magical effects, on saves against physical traps (excludes hypnotic sigils and other mental traps, also excludes saves against poison) and on rolls to avoid or escape the Restrained or Grappled conditions.

Defend the Zelverit. The drin has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that has made an attack on a zelverit until the attacking creatures next turn.

ACTIONS

Dagger. Melee weapon attack. +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit 3 (1d4+0) piercing damage.

Planar Traveler. Can cast Misty Step once per day as an innate spell.

Drin Tough

An itinerant life can be tough especially when wandering the planes of the multiverse. Every family has a few rough individuals who don't hesitate to face threats to their loved ones and the zelverit. Toughs also hire out as planar caravan guards and sellswords.

Medium Humanoid (Drin), Chaotic Good.

Armour Class. 13 (partially non-existent)

Hit points 32 (5d8+10)

Speed 35

STR 15 (+2) DEX 11 (+0) CON 14 (+2) INT 10 (+0) WIS 10 (+0) CHA 12 (+1)

Skills Arcana +2, History +2, Intimidation +2, Religion +2

Senses Passive perception 10

Languages. Common, Drin, and one other, often Celestial.

Challenge ½ (100 xp)

Never in one place. Has advantage on all dexterity saves against magic and on strength saves to escape magical effects, on saves against physical traps (excludes hypnotic sigils and other mental traps, also excludes saves against poison) and on rolls to avoid or escape the Restrained or Grappled conditions.

Defend the Zelverit. The drin has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that has made an attack on a zelverit until the attacking creatures next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The tough makes two melee attacks.

Hand axe. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one creature. Hit 5 (1d6+2)

slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. Hit 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

Planar Traveler. Can cast Misty Step once per day as an innate spell.

Drin Saga Keeper

Drin culture values songs, sagas, and storytelling. Drin also often work as messengers and entertainers. It is therefore unsurprising that most drin families contain at least one professional entertainer and keeper of their history. Saga keepers are often the leaders of a drin family.

Medium Humanoid (Drin), Chaotic Good.

Armour Class. 15 (partially non-existent)

Hit points 44 (8d8+8)

Speed 35

STR 11 DEX 14 (+2) CON 10 INT 12 (+1) WIS 13 (+1) CHA 15 (+2)

Saves Dex +4, Wis +3

Skills Acrobatics +4, Arcana +3, History +3, Religion +3, Perception +3, Performance +6

Senses. Passive perception 15.

Languages. Common, Drin, Celestial and any one other.

Challenge. 2 (450)

Never in one place. Has advantage on all dexterity saves against magic and on strength saves to escape magical effects, on saves against physical traps (excludes hypnotic sigils and other mental traps, also excludes saves against poison) and on rolls to avoid or escape the Restrained or Grappled conditions.

Defend the Zelverit. The drin has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that has made an attack on a zelverit until the attacking creatures next turn.

Spellcasting. This drin is a 4th level spellcaster. Her casting ability is Charisma (spell save DC12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): friends, message, viscous mockery.

1st level (4 slots): charm person, healing word, heroism, sleep, Thunderwave.

2nd level (3 slots): shatter, suggestion.

Song of Rest. The saga keeper can perform a song while taking a short rest. Any ally who hears the song regains an extra 1d6 hit points if that ally spends any hit dice to regain hit points at the end of that rest. The saga keeper can enjoy this benefit herself.

Taunt. (2/Day). The saga keeper can use a bonus action on her turn to target one creature within 30 feet of her. If the target can hear the saga keeper it must succeed on a DC12 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the start of the saga keeper's next turn.

ACTIONS

Scimitar. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

Shortbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Planar Traveler. Can cast Misty Step once per day as an innate spell.

Drin Zelverit

In her travels the zelverit has survived many dangers and seen numerous wonders. Her vast knowledge of the planes ensures that her advice is heeded before every decision. The family fears being stranded by the loss of their zelverit and therefore will defend her with their lives but also do anything to stop her from leaving.

Medium humanoid (drin) Chaotic Good.

Armour Class 16 (partially non-existent)

Hit points 72 (11d8+22)

Speed 35

STR 16 (+3), DEX 16 (+3), CON14 (+2), INT 10, WIS 11, CHA 11

Skills Arcana +2, Athletics +5, History +2, Perception +2, Religion +2.

Senses passive perception 12

Languages. Common, Drin, Celestial and any two others.

Challenge 3 (700 xp)

Never in one place. Has advantage on all dexterity saves against magic and on strength saves to escape magical effects, on saves against physical traps (excludes hypnotic sigils and other mental traps, also excludes saves against poison) and on rolls to avoid or escape the Restrained or Grappled conditions.

Innate spellcaster. Can cast Misty Step once per day. Can also cast Etherealness and Planeshift once per day each. Your spellcasting ability for all these spells is Charisma (DC12).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The zelverit makes two longsword attacks and, if holding a hand axe, one hand axe attack as well.

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. Hit: 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage or if used with two hands 8 (1d10+3) slashing damage.

Hand axe. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one creature. Hit: 6 (1d6+3) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d10+1) piercing damage.

Cast Spell. Using the innate spellcaster trait above.

AD&D PLANESCAPE REVIEW

by Karl Brown

Planescape by David 'Zeb' Cook for TSR 1994.

There are already lots of reviews of this product, why write another? The Planescape boxed set has been around a long time and is the foundation for a very active fan base that has kept the setting alive despite there being decades without a new release for the line. Fans write reviews; those reviews are positive and often detailed. To give you something new I have to go deeper. Here I take you on trip through time giving you the context of D&D pre-Planescape to re-capture why it was so radical at its time of release. I'll describe what the box set contains, reviewing it as a stand-alone product before all the supplements. I vividly remember my impressions on reading this boxed set for the first time and what I hoped future releases would add. How the rest of the line didn't quite live up to my expectations. Finally, I'll discuss the legacy of Planescape on later D&D products.

Before Planescape.

The early D&D settings tended to portray environments much like the Feudal European Middle Ages, Greyhawk and early works for Mystara and the Forgotten Realms being typical. Dragonlance with its strong overarching story showed innovation beyond a simple gazetteer of places and people was possible for campaign settings but remained a medieval fantasy . The mould was broken by AD&D 1e Oriental Adventures which was inspired by Feudal Japan. This changed in the 1990's when TSR released a number of innovative settings for AD&D 2e moving away from its European Medieval Fantasy roots. These included Dark Sun, Ravenloft, Al Qadim, Birthright, and Council of Wryms. Ideas from these settings influenced all future editions of D&D.

The origin of Planescape begins with the diagrams for the planes of existence in AD&D 1e. These were detailed further in the AD&D 1e supplement Manual of the Planes (1987, Jeff Grub TSR). Planescape however changed how we think about D&D's multiverse forever.

Everybody hates a tourist.

Planescape took the planes of existence described in AD&D 1e and extended them based on one key idea: everybody hates a tourist. OK that's not actually a quote from the boxed set but it sums it up nicely. Previously, the other planes of existence were places that only high-level adventurers went after the mundane world was having trouble challenging them. High-level heroes seeking a change of scenery would undertake a perilous quest to a dangerous place on another plane, which usually involved burning the scenery and slaying a large number of the natives. Planescape flips this and looks at these antics through the eyes of the locals who live on those planes. People for whom the afterlife, heavens, and hells hold little mystery. It is telling that the planar slang for natives of regular D&D worlds is 'Clueless'. Not everywhere on the other planes is a perilous death trap and in those places people live their lives surrounded by a network of travel and trade that spans all of the multiverse except the hard-to-reach other D&D worlds of the Prime Material Plane. The degrees of available safety available provide challenges for every level of PC, even first level novices, as well as places to rest and celebrate. From a jaded planar's point of view the other D&D worlds are parochial backwaters. To reflect the idea of a more knowledgable and advanced setting Planescape created an urban cosmopolitan environment, the huge city of Sigil with magic doors to everywhere, natives are a cynical lot and fractious along philosophical divides who speak a slang taken from Elizabethan sources, and the costuming in the illustrations also had a renaissance rather than medieval feel. The idea of primes not even understanding the local lingo making them obvious as 'Clueless' was a great idea but at the table the use of unfamiliar slang was a barrier to some players. Being British and growing up in a Commonwealth nation much of the slang was still in use around me so this was less of an issue for me.

What you get.

The Planescape boxed set came in a study box that was also our first exposure to the Planescape line's distinctive style. The box cover illustration by Robh Ruppel shows a broad avenue with few buildings in a canyon. Various figures are sparsely scattered along the road including some non-humans. The purplish sky and mist evoke an otherworldly dreamlike feel. While evocative, this doesn't look like the bustling crowded city of Sigil the boxed set introduces. A rocky overlay across the top of this scene is dominated by the face of a cruel looking woman with blades for hair. Against all of this the title text 'Planescape' in the distinctive Exocet font (Barnbrook 1991) used for headings throughout almost looks like an afterthought. The sides on the box feature a greenish rocky texture like verdigris on copper ore. This background was used throughout the Planescape line (though sometimes with variations in colour) giving the line a stylish and distinctive look on the shelf. It is used on the two books within the box. The back blurb does a very good job of summarising what's within in terms of both physical objects and ideas. So much so there's no need to re-write the wheel so here it is…

"Glory? Majesty? You don't know the dark of it!

Discover the multiverse! Enter infinite universes of infinite variety, worlds beyond the prime-material settings of the AD&D game. Explore Sigil, the City of Doors, filled with portals to every layer of every plane. All you need is the right key, including. . .

A Player's Guide to the Planes: A 32-page primer that introduces DMs and players alike to the grand design of the multiverse. A DM's Guide to the Planes: A 64-page book of valuable information solely for the Dungeon Master.
Sigil and Beyond: A 96-page gazetteer that introduces Sigil and its surrounding plane as the starting point for planar adventures. From Sigil all the Outer Planes may be sampled by novice and veteran explorers alike.
Monstrous Supplement: a 32-page, full-color Monstrous Compendium booklet.
Four poster-size maps depicting the planes.
A four-panel DM screen designed especially for planar campaigns.
Until now, only the most powerful wizards could peek into the magnificent multiverse, but no longer! Gone are the unimaginable distances and the insurmountable obstacles that only the ultrapowerful could hope to overcome. Now even the greenest adventurer can enter the planes, though surviving long is another matter . . . .

Have at it, berk! Powers, proxies, planars, petitioners, and wondrous monsters await just beyond the portal. Step through and partake of the infinite excitement of Planescape."

Note how the blurb specifically points out that even starting level characters can explore this setting. The books and posters are colour. The posters have black and white secondary illustrations on the backs. The physical quality of all components is uniformly good except the Monstrous Supplement disappointingly does not had a card cover, just paper pages. The distinctive style of the interior illustrations and maps by DiTerlizzi became integral of the line's style. The books contain extensive good advice on running a campaign on the planes which is rich in opportunities for roleplaying and exploration. In addition it provides aid to a referee trying to capture the cultures of the planes including why philosophy is so important to natives of the planes; a populations beliefs can shift towns from one plane to another! Actions intended to change the beliefs of a town drive adventures and can cause bloody conflicts.

Impressions and Expectations

A key point of differentiation of Planescape was philosophy-based factions. Every planar PC would be a member of a faction, all factions provided resources based on rank (not class level) and each faction had a special power described with a game rule. This was the first time I had seen this kind of roleplaying hook backed by mechanics in AD&D, though I had seen a similar idea in White Wolf's Vampire. Council of Wryms had the Dragon Clans and the Custodians but these were not backed by specific game rules. Though ho-hum nowadays, when Planescape came out the idea hadn't been used much in RPGs and was still fresh.

With its doors to every Plane Sigil was an obvious home-base to explore the myriad adventures that could be had out in the multiverse of planes. The player's book spends only a quarter page on Sigil, the same amount spent on the Astral plane, concentrating instead on describing the structure of the multiverse and the people who live there. The factions PCs belong to all have a Principle Plane of Influence. Similarly, the DM's book barely mentions Sigil instead concentrating on how to travel the planes, how spellcasting is affected on every plane and spend 41 of 64 pages on descriptions of each plane except the 'Outlands'. The planes called the Outlands, which includes Sigil, does have a whole book, "Sigil and Beyond" in the boxed set but at I took this to be an example of how the other planes would be worked up. I therefore expected that future releases would draw adventures from all over the multiverse and treat Sigil as a mere transit point. The pages 5-7 of the DM's book in the boxed set support this conclusion. As promised in "A DM Guide to the Planes" and "Sigil and Beyond" in this boxed set, the large expensive boxed sets (that I could not afford until decades later) did add setting details to all the planes of the multiverse. However, many published adventures and sourcebooks focused on Sigil including Uncaged: Faces of Sigil, In the Cage: A Guide to Sigil, The Factol's Manifesto, and The Eternal Boundry. The line was ended with a story arch of adventures that was very focused on Sigil. I feel the opportunity to explore the great variety of the multiverse was under-utilised and I was somewhat disappointed in the line as a whole.

I think it is also worth mentioning that magic works differently on other planes of existence. There is an underlying logic to the changes to spells and other magical effects but even so I found using the ten pages of rules governing changes to magic, different for every plane, very cumbersome in play.

Legacy

I should mention my history with D&D by way of explaining the gaps in this discussion. I was an avid player and referee of AD&D 1e and 2e. However 3e just wasn't the game for me. I wandered away from D&D and did not return to it until the 5th edition. However, in some ways my perspective makes the survival of ideas from the 1990's setting bonanza more stark to me.

When Sigil was discussed in the 5e Dungeon Masters Guide (2014) with an accompanying illustration, a default cosmology drawing heavily on the AD&D era, and the modron illustrations in the 5e Dungeon Masters Guide and Monster Manual really looked like those depicted in Planescape products these created a hopeful stir in the Planescape fandom. Five years on there is still no Planescape setting for D&D 5e. However, the enduring influence of Planescape has ensured that fans have many of the elements to run a Planescape game in 5e if they wanted. Certainly, much of the

detailed setting information regarding the planes and their inhabitants has made it into 5e releases including the Dungeon Masters Guide and the recent Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes.

I gather factions were embraced by organised play at some point but I don't think there were faction specific powers (I've never been involved with organised play). Certainly, factions with rules for benefits for gaining faction ranks are in the 5e DMG and are mentioned often in Forgotten Realms adventures for 5e. However, these factions lack a specific faction related power as seen in Planescape.

One of the points of difference that made each of the AD&D era settings unique was each had a selection of player character races only available (at that time) within their respective settings. Planescape added three setting specific choices the bariaur, githzerai, and tieflings. Coming back to D&D at 5e I discovered that the Forgotten Realms had pillaged the other settings and stolen all their cool stuff including PC races. Among these 'stolen' races were tieflings. Inclusion of tieflings in the 5e Player's Handbook has seen them spread to many D&D worlds. While its nice to have choices, I personally feel D&D has lost something; this homogenisation has taken away some of the uniqueness of the AD&D era settings. Tieflings have evolved away from their varied appearance and mysterious and varied origins as described in Planescape. The tieflings of the Forgotten Realms, and therefore the default for the race in 5e, is a single racial appearance and origin tied to the devil lord Asmodeus. I'm disappointed that 5e chose to restrict player creativity in this way. Perhaps enough other fans were disappointed too, because a degree of variety was reinstated for the race in the new supplement Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes. The githzerai had first appeared in AD&D 1e as a monster in the British produced Fiend Folio. They regained their PC status in Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes for 5e but thankfully remain a race based firmly in the planes.

Assessment

The Planescape boxed set was somewhat revolutionary in its day and is still an intriguing setting for your adventures today. The factions and races provided are rich in roleplaying possibilities for players and the varied environments of the planes and faction goals and interactions will provide many entertaining hooks for the referee. Referees should consider simplifying or ignoring the rules for changing spells and magic for each and every plane. However, if you use the published adventures in for the setting the focus on Sigil in many of them might feel like a lost opportunity to fully utilise the diversity of the multiverse, or is that just me? Even if you play the most recent 5th edition of D&D the amount of material from Planescape that has found its way into the 5th edition books should greatly help in using Planescape in that edition; though for some players the adoption of Planescape races and ideas into other settings might reduce the novelty of the setting for 5e players.

# COMPUTER GAME REVIEW : PLANESCAPE TORMENT

by Dorchadas

Alright, let me get this out of the way first:

Other possibilities: Being Chaotic Neutral, the Deck of Many Things, Dual-Classing, or Polymorph Other.

I'm not actually sure why I never played Planescape: Torment back when it was current. I certainly knew about it, since I was hugely steeped in the Infinity Engine games and I loved (and still love) Baldur's Gate to pieces, but I never picked it up. Thinking back on it, it honestly might just be that my sister never bought it. She was the one who asked for a lot of the video games that we ended up owning, and I leeched off her purchases and finished more of those games than she ever did. I'm not sure she ever got very far at all in Baldur's Gate II, but I know that we owned it and the expansion even though I was the one who got the farthest, and that was only to halfway through Act IV.

Checking the Wikipedia article on 1998 in video gaming, I was probably playing Starcraft I with [livejournal.com profile] sephimb and [livejournal.com profile] uriany, or playing Might & Magic VI, Baldur's Gate, or Fallout 2, or Homeworld. Regardless, I've known I had missed something for a while, and since I finished off my highly-modded Baldur's Gate playthrough earlier last year and since I hadn't played a good traditional WRPG in a while, and since I had friends who have been suggesting Torment to me for months, it was time.

This is not your standard RPG.
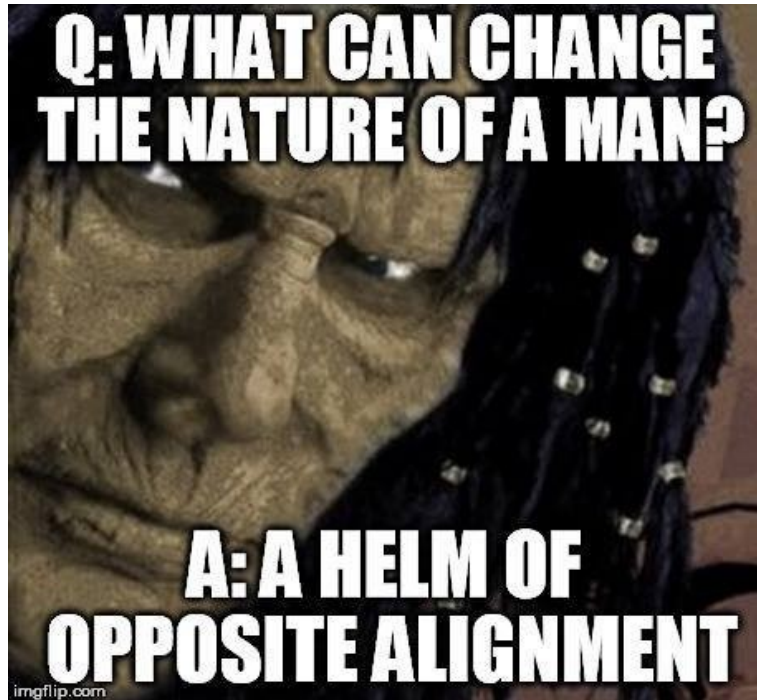
The main draw of Torment is the setting. My favorite D&D settings are Dark Sun, and to a lesser extent Birthright, but from my time on the internet I can tell that Planescape is one of the most well-loved. I never really knew why before, but then again, before Torment my main exposure to Planescape was through owning a copy of the Planescape Monstrous Manual (which had awesome DiTerlizzi art) and through articles in Dragon Magazine, neither of which did much to explain who the factions were, what Sigil was, or why everyone was speaking in this weird jargon.

Now I can see why. Planescape is a kitchen sink setting that works. It allows everything to exist but doesn't destroy the setting in doing so, since while there's always some part of the multiverse that might have what you're looking for you have to find out that it exists and then find out how to get there. It actually makes sense of D&D's ninefold alignment structure and then adds a few more planes on top of that to cover the shades of grey. It has the belief-creates-reality component that makes Mage: the Ascension such an interesting universe, and all that provides a wonderful basis for Torment to weave its story together.

Where belief is power, the nameless amnesiac is unbound by any chains.

As an example, your character is called the Nameless One, because he's forgotten his name. But when you meet people, it's possible to give them a false name. Say, Adahn. And if you tell enough people that you're called Adahn, across a wide enough swath of existence, you can actually go to a bar in the City of Doors and meet a man named Adahn who wasn't there the last time you visited the bar. They talk a lot about jink in Sigil, but in the planes, belief is the real currency.

The most interesting part of Torment specifically for me is how it straddles the usually-more-rigid line between WRPGs and JRPGs, especially as they were in the 80s and 90s. Like WRPGs, you start with character creation and get to define yourself, but like JRPGs you're always playing a specific character with a specific backstory. Like WRPGs you recruit a party to accompany you in your adventures, but like JRPGs the party spends a lot of time talking amongst themselves and with you. Like WRPGs there are dialogue choices available and plenty of tactical considerations in combat including positioning, but like JRPGs the battle and story sections are poorly integrated and make basically no sense when put up against one another. Zing!

More on that later. One of the things I knew going in was that Torment is quite possibly the only D&D game that has ever occurred where the most important stat for any class is Wisdom, and where Charisma is more important than Dexterity and Strength combined. Wisdom governs how often the Nameless One can recover the memories of his previous lives, and Charisma helps with the talking. And oh, what talking there is--there are around 800,000 words in Torment, about as many as the Bible, which isn't a bad comparison when the Nameless One can get into philosophical debates with both angels and demons. The conversations are really where Torment shines, and the first part of the game

that lets you loose in Sigil to run around and talk to everyone is definitely the best part.

This is definitely an appropriate time for an ICE BURN

You can resolve a dispute between a psychic gestalt composed of thousands of semi-sentient rats and a group of peaceful undead who are annoyed that their bodies are being stolen. You can intervene in a gang war, debate with the prostitutes of the Brothel of Slaking Intellectual Lusts, help a pregnant alleyway give birth, buy weapons from a golem dedicated to destroying existence, and shift the beliefs of an entire town. You can join a half-dozen factions, or join the Anarchists who hate all the faction backbiting and want to bring the whole system crashing down. You can learn what it is that can change the nature of a man.
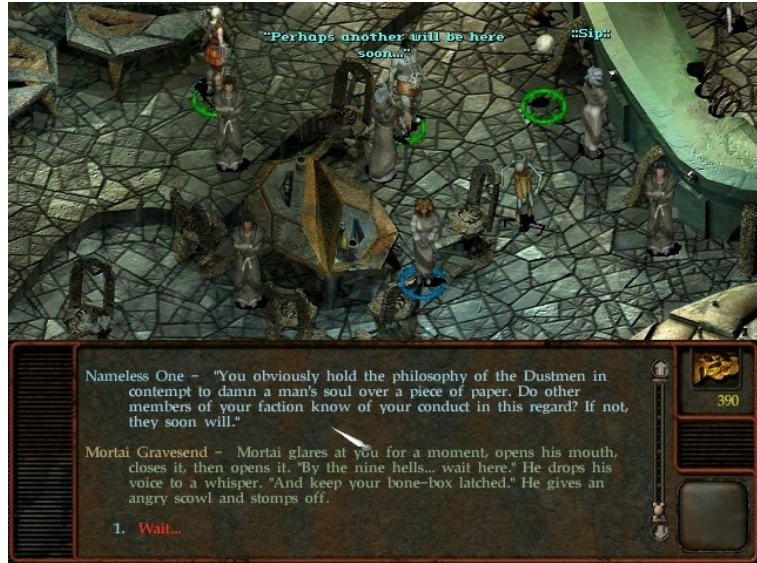
Torment is certainly the most expansive RPG I've ever played in the variety of what you do. I mean, just look at the words "pregnant alleyway" I wrote there. That's really not an exaggeration, nor am I making a joke. That definitely happens. In the infinite expanse of the Great Wheel, anything can happen, and usually it will at some point or another. With all the games that tread well-worn paths out there, Torment is a great counterpoint. It uses the worn-out trope of the amnesiac protagonist, but it does so in order to allow the player to interact properly with the nonstandard setting. It's

not elf-dwarf-orc fantasy, but the player can ask nearly everyone out there what is going on, and talking to everyone is a great way to pick up quests, which leads to talking to more people, which leads to discovery. Torment is quite possibly the second RPG I've ever played after Morrowind where being told to go talk to someone else actually made me excited about what I would learn, rather than annoyed that I had to trek across the map instead of just completing the quest now.

Alright, now here come the problems.

"It had no wings but still, it was unmistakably an angel."

-Neil Gaiman, Neverwhere

The first is that Torment really drove home to me what an incredibly bad fit for Planescape the rules of AD&D Second Edition really are. This was true of several of the famous settings--Dark Sun works a lot better with something like Runequest or Exalted mortals level, for example--but Planescape, with its focus on belief changing reality and the infinity of the multiverse containing nearly everything, fits a lot better with something like Mage: the Ascension, as indeed someone already realized.

That's the high concept level, but the way the rules are implemented in Torment are also odd. D&D relies on an equipment treadmill, but the only party member who can meaningfully replace most of their equipment is the Nameless One, and even then he can't really find much new armor. Black Isle had to implement a tattoo upgrade system in order to provide an extra treadmill path for the characters to follow, which is neat and it does expand on the Nameless One's own tattoos, but the tattoos are effectively pieces of paper that are slapped on to skin rather than anything permanent. It's very odd.

Furthermore, the Nameless One breaks almost all D&D rules. He can freely change classes by talking to trainers rather than being locked into the choice he picks at character creation, which is good because you start out as a fighter and as anyone who's played D&D knows, fighters don't get nice things. He gets free stat increases every level, which does allow for a better sense of progression and helps to meet the ludicrously high stat checks some conversation options take--seriously, there are checks in the script that require 24 Wisdom or 24 Charisma, which is higher than most statted gods have--but 2nd edition had basically no way to improve ability scores short of a Wish spell and that advantage is not extended to any of the Nameless One's companions.

It's good that talking to people is so interesting, because combat is incredibly dull. There are very few places to rest--unlike Baldur's Gate's possibility of wandering monsters, Torment just flat out bans you from resting, so I was pretty reluctant to use my spells at any point because I never knew when I'd be able to rest again. That meant that basically every fight was box-select party, left-click on enemy, repeat. I'm glad that one of the mods I installed after following this guide automatically maxed out everyone's hit points when they leveled. The Nameless One can die and live again, and sometimes that's necessary to proceed, but his companions drop all their gear on death and even with the ability to raise the dead, re-equiping them and healing them back to full is just annoying.

A duel between mighty wizards devolves into a slapfight.

That's why I said above that the first part of the game is the best part, because most of the second part is an on-rails trip through parts of the planes, but while you go to Carceri and Baator and the Outlands, they're mostly empty wastelands filled with packs of enemies that jump you every 15 meters. Also you can't rest, so hopefully you have enough healing items to make it through. I nearly quit the game in disgust and

watched a longplay, but the knowledge that the ending was very good and that I needed to play through it because it was important that I'd have the chance to make my own choices kept me going. And the ending was very good, but it was 15 minutes of great after six hours of disappointment.

I actually hold that against Torment, because one of the draws of the setting is the sheer variety of the experiences and sights out there in the planes. But when you leave Sigil and get to explore it's all deadly dull wastelands with demons everywhere. No lush forests of Arborea, no climbing Mount Celestia, no endlessly-turning gears of Mechanus...

At least you can solve the final battle multiple ways, including talking the boss to death, so that already puts it one up on Vampire: the Masquerade: Bloodlines.

"Meh, I never liked those guys anyway. I'm out of here."

I'm tempted to say that Torment should have been a point-and-click adventure game the same way that Bioshock: Infinite should have, but I don't think that would have worked either. The best part of Torment is the dialogue, but the option to commit violence and do evil deeds at any time is an important part of the game. Maybe it should have been some kind of adventure/RPG hybrid like the Quest for Glory series. We've had tragically few of those, and it would have perfectly fit Torment's style.

Torment is a game where I don't think that watching a longplay or reading a Let's Play provides the proper experience. A major part of the game is determining what kind of person the Nameless One is--his nature, if you will--and if you watch it you won't necessarily get the sense of the other possibilities. Having played through as a good guy who keeps his word, there's a completely different experience there if I would be willing to be Neutral Evil like the Practical Incarnation was. There are entire characters I missed and factions I didn't join. I'm sad I left it so long to play this game, because it really is the perfect game for me. Just, maybe next time I'll play it through with an infinite health cheat. The combat is basically just a distraction from the real game. Which in a CRPG, is a really nice change.

Now I'm looking forward to Torment: Tides of Numenera a lot more. If they can learn from the lessons of Planescape: Torment, carry forth the importance of exploration and conversation, make the setting weird and interesting, and make every conflict meaningful so that there's no dull slog of random encounters, I might have a new favorite story-based RPG.

Play Torment, everyone. It's so good.

# MOVIE REVIEW: US

by Andrew Moshos

dir: Jordan Peele

2019

That was…something.

The shadow self, the dark Jungian version of our unexpressed ourselves that might have up until now lurked in the depths of our consciousness; right now, for plot reasons, comes to the fore, scissors in hand, ready to take our place.

I… am not going to pretend that I actually completely understood either the text, the subtext, the literal meaning of stuff or the allegorical meaning of what actually transpires in this horror film that starts off looking like a family under siege in their own home kind of story, and becomes something very much more complicated.

It starts in the 80s, as a young girl called Adelaide watches an ad for Hands Across America, an effort that came after the whole We Are The World fiasco to raise money for charities including homelessness. Also maybe to prove that Americans could stand up and hold hands, doing two things simultaneously. In retrospect it seems bizarre that anyone would do such a thing, but when I looked up that it raised probably around $100 million, but only about $15 million went to actual charities, it makes perfect sense.

Although, let's be honest about this, after that, there was no homelessness or poverty in America or anywhere else for that matter, ever again, so it was all obviously worth it.
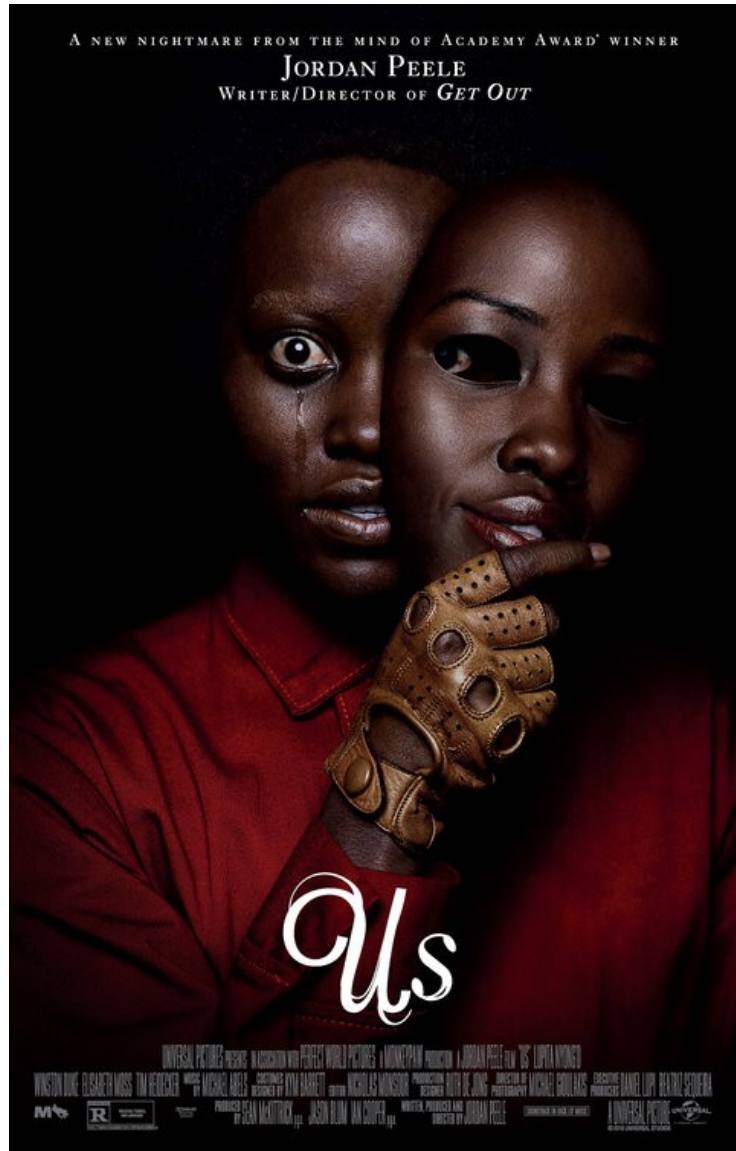
This phenomenal poster is more disturbing than anything in the film. Plus, where did they get all the fingerless gloves from?

Adelaide watches this bizarre ad on the telly, and then it cuts to her and her parents going down to the Santa Cruz boardwalk, to celebrate her birthday with candied apples and games of chance, as her parents bicker. She observes her parents from behind, but observes all the people around her, including a strange chap holding a sign that says Jeremiah

11:11. This number and this wordless character keeps cropping up throughout the flick. I had to look it up, because I'm a godless heathen, and it talks about the Lord God visiting evil upon a bunch of people for no good reason.

Young Adelaide wanders into a hall of mirrors which is never not creepy. Unfortunately for her, something worse than just seeing an unflattering angle of yourself occurs: she sees someone who looks just like her, but it's not her reflection.

Plus, like all shadow selves or any person's reflection, it's EVIL, clearly.

And it haunts her all her life. As a grown up, Adelaide (Lupita Nyong'o) seems to have been deeply traumatised by her encounter, but eventually recovered enough to have a family and live in relative comfort. From wherever it is they usually live the family are travelling back to near Santa Cruz in order to enjoy the long weekend or something. Everyone else is just doing their thing, but Adelaide is apprehensive.

Her husband Gabe, fellow *Black Panther* alumnus Winston Duke (who played the scene-stealing M'Baku, leader of the Jabari tribe), is a goofy enough chap but seems nice enough. Her daughter Zora (Shahadi Wright Joseph) is checked out and surly because she's a teenage girl growing up in a middle class milieu, and Jason (Evan Alex) is a little mask-wearing weirdo, but other than that they're fine, this is fine. Only Adelaide seems out of sorts.

When Gabe starts indicating that he wants to get some, Adelaide goes into barely restrained freak out mode, expressing her deep, deep misgivings about being back in Santa Cruz and how a black cloud hangs over everything here because of her experiences as a child. That prompts Gabe to say everything's fine, calm down, blahdie blah blah, until a family appears in their driveway.

There are other signs and portents leading up to this, but none that you could predict unspoiled. When they meet at the beach with some friends (white friends, I might add), the strangest part is that the couple is played by Elizabeth Moss of *Mad Men* and *Handmaid's Tale* fame, and Tim Heidecker of multiple instances of awkward comedy fame. Moss's character especially spends every scene expressing her loathing for her partner or asking for or drinking more booze, which is, what it is. I think she may have decided she was going to be Elizabeth Taylor from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* just for laughs.

You may ask yourself why this "family under siege" movie would need other characters. Well, it's a horror flick, so there need to be more victims. Many more victims.

When Adelaide and Gabe and the kids are confronted by a group of people who look just like them, except they wear red jumpsuits and brandish gold scissors, it's understandable that they are a bit confused. The doppelganger of Adelaide's, who I'll call Red here just to differentiate, we are pretty sure must be the duplicate she saw as a child, confirming that her memories aren't deranged. Red explains (somehow), through a tortured voicebox, which makes it sound like she can only speak when breathing inwards, that they, this family in red, are the Tethered.

It is torturous listening to her. Almost as torturous as it must have been for her to do that voice. There's no mistaking the differences between them. With minimal makeup differences, there's never any confusion as to which one is speaking, because of the alien expression Nyong'o creates on that face, to contrast it with Adelaide's helpless terror.

When they are asked who they are, Red's first response is "We Are Americans." How very patriotic.

Red tells a story about every good thing that happened in Adelaide's life resulting in its opposite in Red's life, two lives lived in parallel, but also with inverted results. Adelaide's life, and everyone on the surface's life is mirrored in some subterranean realm where the Tethered suffer so that the privileged may continue in their privilege. But the Tethered want this no more. They wish to sever the link, to become untethered, and seeing as this is a horror film and they're all carrying scissors, you can probably guess how they intend to manage this great unravelling of America.

If there is some intellectual merit to pondering the meaning of the shadow selves, of these Others, rising up to take the place of their favoured doubles, would it be churlish and ungrateful of me to say that making it literal and explaining it somehow through practical terms and literal structures diminishes the intended impact and effect? I don't think it's possible to overthink what they're going for here, because it's definitely meant to be something far more complicated than a slasher film or a survival thriller. It's just that, Jordan Peele is incapable of allowing for a sweeping cinematic moment or a punch line to go to waste. It's not in his nature.

When the primary "good" family somehow manages its escape, with nods to Haneke's **Funny Games** and Spanish horror flick **The Orphanage**, and try to make their way to their (white) friends' lakeside mansion, we see that this premise is about to be exploded outwards in a way that doesn't really help the film, but does lead to some supremely chilling scenes with Elizabeth Moss doing some of the most terrifying face work you've ever seen unless you've watched *Handmaid's Tale* in which case you know it's just par for the course. Elizabeth Moss with a pair of scissors and a maniacal grin on her face is more terrifying that a million Jack Nicholson's in **The Shining** trying to axe their way through any door that you'll ever see.

Thus, and here I would argue is where I really get into spoiler-heavy territory beyond just discussing the basic what's what of the plot, it is revealed that it's not just Adelaide and her family suffering at the hands of their shadow selves: it's all of America. It's a national epidemic of shadow selves in red jumpsuits and clutching scissors rising up to kill their oppressors, so it's not just the African-Americans suffering this time.

And you might think – how did these moronic, non-verbal cannibalistic human-like underground dwellers organise in their millions the production and distribution of millions of sets of jumpsuits and scissors? You'd be asking the wrong questions. Sure, they had to go and make the underworld literally a place filled with escalators and rabbits, like the delusional imaginings of a schizophrenic, but if you start wondering how they've been feeding the rabbits or maintaining the subterranean escalators for so long, like at least since before the mid-80s, you've missed the point.

I actually don't think the allegorical stuff necessarily works as well as intended beyond providing strong visuals, because most of our motivation is meant to be coming from a family trying to survive and not be killed by another family that looks just like them. And that you can do easily enough, especially if you're a director as talented as Jordan Peele.

The strength of Lupita Nyong'o's performance as either character is the backbone of the entire film beyond the jump scares and the fake outs, or the reversals of expectation or the striking manner in which Peele uses composition or perspective to amp up proceedings. She manages to show a whole array of facets to both characters and make us care about whether they survive or not, in spite of the apocalyptic craziness going on. It's just a shame that it is in service of a cheap twist in the end, telegraphed multiple times throughout the flick, which at the very least keeps it on track with earlier horror classics, but, goddamn. I saw this in a cinema with M. Night Shyamalan (not really) and, upon the revelation at the end, he spat out his popcorn and screamed "that twist is some grade A bullshit".

And, for once I'll admit he wasn't wrong. It wouldn't have been worthy of the *Twilight Zone* reboot that he currently is in charge of, and it cheapened the flick again for me, rendering it ever more unbelievable even as it strove for tying up loose ends and explaining everything that didn't really need to be explained.

I love Jordan Peele's movies generally and the incredible instincts he has for both drama and comedy, but that doesn't mean I find everything he does completely successful. **Us** is visually striking and incredibly well made, incredibly, but in some ways, on first viewing, it felt both overthought and underdone.

7 times I loved the joke about N.W.A. and trying to call the cops on an Alexa-like device called Ophelia out of 10

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"Is this some kind of fucked up performance art?" – you tell us, you're part of it - **Us**

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