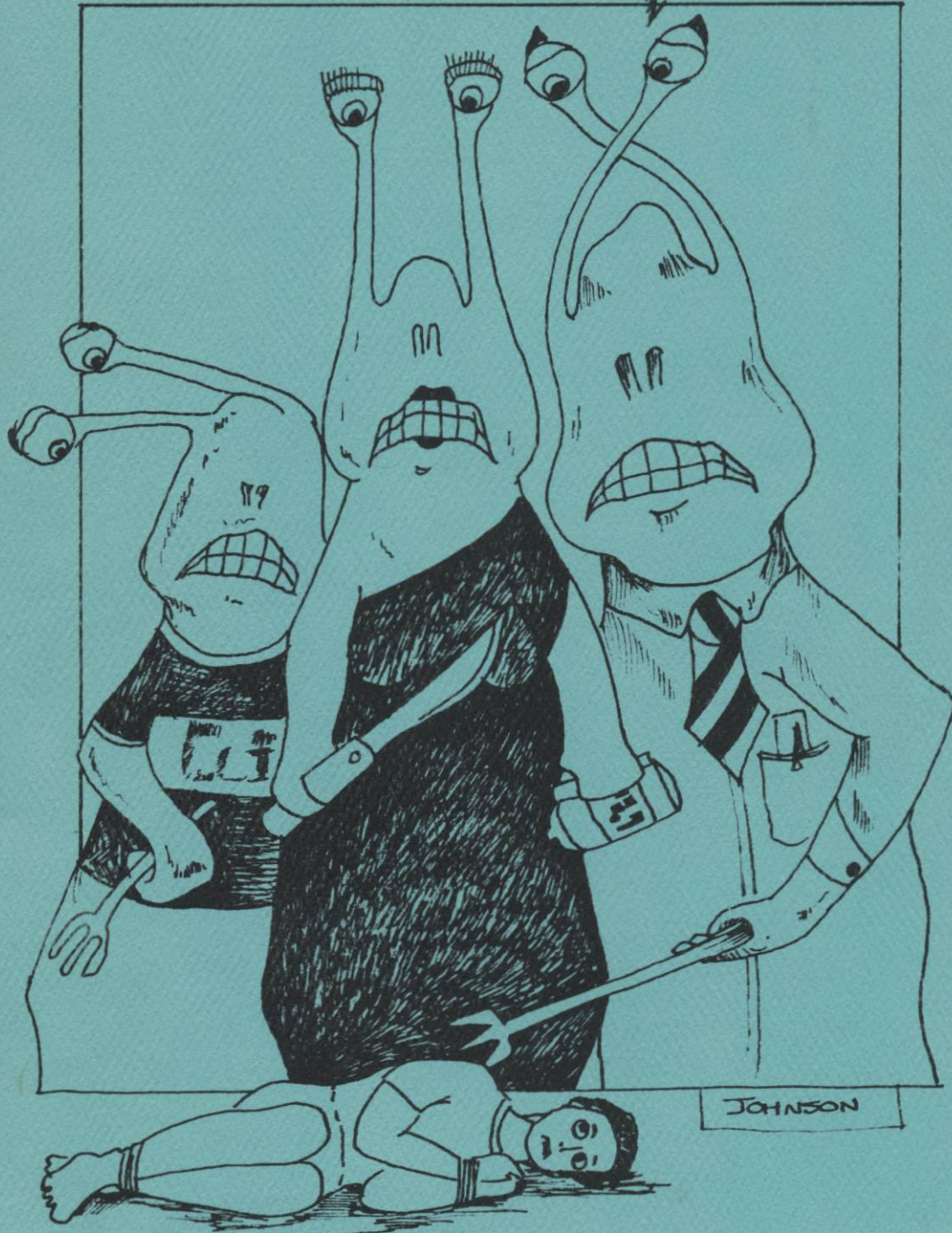


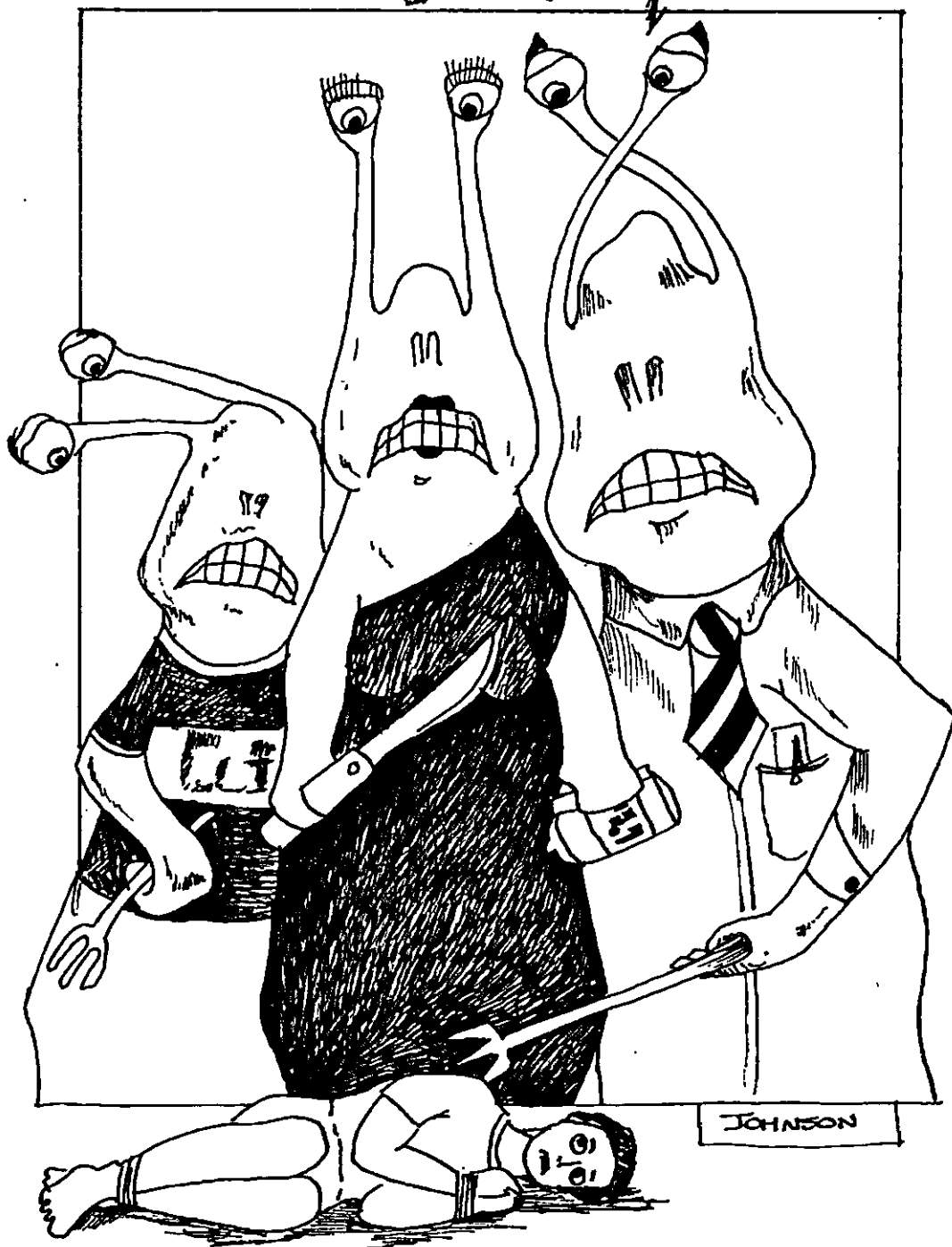
# The GUILDSMAN



JOURNAL 2  
FALL 1990

UCC GAMERS' GUILD

# The GUILDSMAN



JOURNAL 2  
FALL 1990

WCR GAMERS' GUILD

# UCR Guildsman #2

## Contents

---

Cover Design	<i>Paul Anthony Johnson</i>	
A Word from the Editor	<i>Jim Vassilakos</i>	1
UCRGG Constitution		1

### Serious Stuff

UCRGG Reference Collection		5
Crime & Puzzlement	<i>John Perry Barlow</i>	8

### Fiction

Navero V-X	<i>Daniel Parsons</i>	23
Harrison 3 & 4	<i>Jim Vassilakos</i>	36
An Interview with Michael Harrison	<i>Jim Vassilakos</i>	45
One Smelly Gerbil	<i>Frank Lemire</i>	53
On Humanity	<i>Steven Mays</i>	54
Kingdom of the Mind	<i>Daniel Lee Rouk</i>	58

### Usables

Xodiza	<i>Jeffrey Horne</i>	61
The Smuggler & The Smith	<i>Michael Sellers</i>	67
Advanced Character Generation for 2300AD	<i>Shawn Dudley</i>	70
Doubly Blind	<i>Brian Yip</i>	74
Combat Vehicles for Striker	<i>Brian Yip</i>	75
Rangers in AD&D	<i>Wayne Wallace</i>	76
Ed's Guide to Dragon Skinning	<i>Edward Zeamba</i>	78
Colin's Guide to Killer Characters	<i>Colin Kameoka</i>	78
Magic Items for AD&D	<i>Aaron Sher &amp; Jim Vassilakos</i>	79
Riddles	<i>Dan Judd</i>	83

### Shared Stuff

Species of the Gamester		84
The Infinite Ways in which IT is Done		89
Bits & Pieces		91

Advertisements		99
----------------	--	----

# A Word from the Editor-dude

jimv@ucrmath.ucr.edu

*Greetings, salutations, and felicitations one and all and welcome to the UCR Guildsman. The editing of #2 has been somewhat less loathsome a venture than our previous piss-in-the-mouth to apathetic conformity, however, for better or (more likely) for worse, the dirty deed is now complete. As the indomitable consequence, your eyes shall be brutally harassed by my now infamous spelling (or rather lack thereof), my inability to type and chew giant-booger at the same time, and worse yet, my bitter and pointless editorial comments with which you are presently mesmerized.*

*Before pressing onward I must give many thanx to Jason (tonto) Bishop for his technical assistance with respect to his lisp-work on the emacs editor which is basically what made this publication possible in the first place and Wayne (lord\_zar) Wallace for sorely-needed proofing, and of course to Ray (way wrong) Wong for his additional help in keeping me up late at night so we could L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X this monster.*

*Those of you who are not entirely brain-dead will note our change from single to double column format of which we are distinctly proud. If this addition is too confusing for your ladies and lordships, we'll be all too happy to revert, or to invert and quite possibly pervert, whichever the case may be more enjoyable and thus lead to more efficacious merry-making, or something to that effect.*

*Finally, sparing any further glib and quite possibly lethal tirades by the editor upon the expected readership, we doth scamper forth with all due salivation and drool and then some.... Let the show begin!*

— jimv

## UCR Gamers' Guild Constitution

### Preamble

We, the Gamers' Guild of UCR, under contempt of the Regents with purple mushrooms majesty and looney-toons and fornication for all... blah blah blah... do hereby unite for the purpose of promoting gaming and consequentially having lots of fun. yea!

...and there was much rejoicing...

### The Honorable Offices

We hereby create five (i.e. one less than six but not less than four) honorable, pompously-ignoramus and highly-noble offices, invincible before all save the dreaded rust-monster, most lordly and enviously powerful of powers, known and revered throughout the land of UCR. The means of management are therein bestowed.

The first and foremost of these offices is to be known as the *One to Rule them All...* the chief executive deputy marshall directorship of "FlakeSpanking." yea!

The FlakeSpanker's duties *art as followeth*:

- to spank flakes (i.e. to institute progressive disciplinary measures by which the other four officers and their administrative cohorts can be encouraged to perform at a greater capacity through the use of whips, chains, barbed wire,



and left-over tofu),

- to form overall policy on club direction (hopefully with the consent of the top management team) and to be suspended by toe nails over a bottomless pit of warm marshmallow cream when suspected of leading the club in circles,
- to interpret this constitution and *bend* it where appropriate with the consent of the other officers for the purpose of expediting Guild projects,
- to call for the ousting and replacement of officers should that need ever arise,
- to pompously & jismatically preside over club meetings, and
- to keep a paranoid eye on the receipt and expenditure of club funds over which the Miser is responsible for accounting.

The second office is that of the Gamesmaster who's responsibility it is to coordinate games and to keep up-to-date records on existing campaigns and gaming groups within the club membership. The membership is herein accorded the right to split this office into numerous genre as is deemed appropriate and is further accorded privilege to review and modify this functional division on a quarterly basis.

The third office is that of the Miser (known also as the office of "Missing" which is likely to happen to club funds). The Miser's duties are the following:

- to keep all club financial records up to date,
- to modify the club's system of accounting as is believed warranted with the consent of the FlakeSpanker,
- to personally hold club funds and signature authority for all club expenditures except in cases where individual is illiterate in Common,
- to hold all receipts pertinent to club expenditures,

- to propose club dues when deemed appropriate,
- to present a financial report to the general membership at the end-of-quarter meeting,
- to keep membership records particularly with regard to dues collected and receivable, and
- to approve all asset outflows keeping careful watch for outbreaks of the hershey-squirts.

The fourth office is that of Crying. The Cryer is responsible for the promotion of club activities including flyer's design and approval, news advertisements (including but not limited to Highlander notices), mass-mailings, and t-shirt design.

The fifth and last of the honorable offices is that of the Bard who's responsibilities include the following:

- to design and produce club-sponsored publications,
- to appoint a selection committee (with the confirmation of the Flake Spanker) which will aid this office in the selection and editing of publication submissions,
- to record the outcome of all votes at club meetings,
- to record all *bends* & amendments to this constitution, and
- to hold the FlakeSpanker's statement of objectives throughout the the quarter and evaluate this officer's performance at the end-of-quarter elections.
- to call for the ousting of the FlakeSpanker should that need arise.

...and so endth the fifth, last, and final of the glorious, malodorous, most-high offices...

## Quorum

Ten (i.e. eleven less one, being the tenth number or that cardinal number following the ninth) guild members constitute a quorum given that the meeting time and place was made adequately public in the judgement of the majority (three-fifths) of the management team.

## Elections

Elections for each of the five offices are to be held at the final general meeting of each quarter. The chosen representatives of those elections may not assume office until the beginning of the following quarter. If they should try to assume office before that universally defined date, they shall be dunked repeatedly in rancid orc-drool until they cease and desist from all leaderly activities. Individuals may only serve a maximum of four-quarters in a given office. If they should attempt to serve more, the membership may make up a sufficiently silly punishment to expel such ideas in the future.

## Order of Offices

The offices will be elected in the following order:

Flake Spanker, Gamesmaster, Miser, Cryer, & Bard (i.e. this, of course, being the preferred and holy order... amen).

## Order of Election

For any given office, the following order shall be maintained. First, candidacies may be declared either in writing or in person. Candidates must nominate themselves for office in order to be considered eligible. Candidates which feel too shy to nominate themselves must be stripped of all personal belongings and photographed repeatedly until such feelings are properly extinguished.

Second, individuals running for office who are present may be allowed a short period of time to summarize their intent in holding office. For the office of Flake-Spankers, "may" becomes "must" (i.e. Flake-Spanking candidates must not only present their po-

sition in words but must also present a written statement outlining their objectives of office, and these statements are to be held by the Bard for end-of-term evaluation). At this stage, a short, moderated discussion may ensue consisting of much fervor and blood-letting if anyone has anything to add for or against the candidacy of the individual in question. The Flake-Spanker is expected but not required to evaluate the performance of candidates seeking re-election on the basis of pre-established criteria.

Third, the election (by simple counting of hands) may commence with two appointed individuals keeping separate tallies, after the candidates have left the room. If there is no room to leave, the candidates may simply stick their heads in the sand in preparation for public office. In the case where more than two candidates are running for an office and no single candidate holds a clear majority of the quorum, two rounds of voting are held for that office. The first eliminates all but the two most popular candidates, and the second decides between those two.

## Voting

Candidates may not vote in the election governing their intended office unless, of course, they are truly pompous, and even then they must be duly punished with a multitude of silliness until they declare themselves reborn and promptly stick their heads in the sand. Flake Spankers, whether running for re-election or not, may not vote in the election governing the office of Flake-Spanking, lest their mighty and wrathful opinions be considered either mighty or wrathful. Abstentions and no-votes are not counted as part of the voting-bloc lest the guild be ruled by indecision.

## Ousting & Succession of Officers

The FlakeSpanker may call for the ousting of other club officers or appointees at any general meeting. A two-thirds majority of the quorum may strip an officer of all invested titles and authority. The Bard is responsible for calling for the ousting of the FlakeSpanker should such a need ever arise. Special meetings may also be called specifically for ousting purposes, but if the meeting is not general, then it must be advertised in the Highlander at least three-days in advance of the event with the word "Yuchy-Foo" contained within the ad to signify the nature of

the meeting to the membership.

If an officer voluntarily retires or is replaced before the term of service has been fulfilled, the FlakeSpanker is responsible for finding a replacement and must conduct the duties of that office until such time as a replacement has been found. Such replacements may be appointed without the formalities of an election. If the FlakeSpanker should retire or be removed mid-term, then the Gamemaster-elect is responsible for assuming this office. If it is the case that the Gamemaster has previously been replaced, the appointed Gamemaster may not assume the duties of FlakeSpanking, and so these responsibilities pass to the Miser and so forth by the Order of Offices.

## Expectations of the Member

Guild members, known henceforth as *gamesters*, are accorded a variety of implicit rights and privileges, and concordant with these are the following responsibilities:

- to attend general meetings, lest the gamester be accused of sloth. Members so accused shall be mercilessly flatulated upon until such time as the lazy slug gets up off that sedentary, posterior portion of precious anatomy, thus facilitating the retaliatory flutterblasts so rudely expected,
- to attend all gaming sessions to which the gamester finds him or herself committed, lest that individual be pummeled into unconsciousness by boiled leaks, and
- to pay all club dues promptly and with zeal.

## Interpretation of the Constitution

The FlakeSpanker is charged with the overall interpretation of the constitution for purposes of expediency, however, on points of contention, these interpretations must be rendered to the Bard in writing and may be contested at any meeting being overturned by a simple majority of the quorum and reinterpreted

as thought appropriate by the voting membership. The FlakeSpanker may also take luxury in a varying degree of *Constitutional Bending* whereby both substantive and procedural points of the constitution may be dispensed with for the greater efficacy of Guild operations. Such *bending*, however, must be done with the concurrence of the entirety of the top management (i.e. the five officers), and may be again shot down at any meeting by a simple majority of the quorum. All such *bendings* must be made known to the general membership, and all must be recorded in writing with the Bard. In this way, constitutional amendments may be tried out before being permanently enstated.

## Amendment

This constitution may be amended at any general meeting in which a quorum is judged present. This constitution is amended on a two-thirds majority.

## Dissolution

The Gamers' Guild may be dissolved by a three-fourths majority of the quorum at any publicly announced general meeting. In the case of dissolution, creditors of the Guild are given *first dibs* on the Guild coffers. Any remaining monies must then be refunded to the general student body of the university through ASUCR.

# UCRGG

## Reference Collection

August 1990

The UC Riverside Gamers' Guild Reference Collection was established in August of 1990 with a grant of two dozen source materials for GURPS & Car Wars by Loyd Blankenship. The collection is housed within the Eaton Room of the Rivera Library and is open to public scrutiny. The publications within the collection are listed as follows:

- **GURPS: Space (Roleplaying in the Worlds of Tomorrow)**  
by *Steve Jackson & William A. Barlow* ©1988-90 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-079-6 SJG 01695-6005
- **GURPS: Japan**  
by *Lee Gold* ©1988 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-108-3 SJG 01195-6006
- **GURPS: Bestiary**  
by *Steffan O'Sullivan* ©1988 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-087-7 SJG 01195-6011
- **GURPS: Conan**  
by *Curtis M. Scott* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-148-2 SJG 01695-6012
- **GURPS: Ice Age**  
by *Kirk Wilton Tate* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-134-2 SJG 00795-6014
- **GURPS: Supers**  
by *Loyd Blankenship* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-112-1 SJG 01495-6017
- **GURPS: High-Tech**  
by *Michael Hurst* ©1988 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-107-5 SJG 01495-6018
- **GURPS Supers: Wildcards**  
by *John J. Miller* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-151-2 SJG 01695-6026



- **GURPS: Cliffhangers**  
by *Brian J. Underhill* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-150-4 SJG 01295-6027
- **GURPS: the Prisoner**  
by *David Ladyman*  
ISBN 1-55634-161-X SJG 01295-6030
- **GURPS Basic Set Third Edition [hardback]**  
Game Design by *Steve Jackson* ©1986-89 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-159-8 SJG 02995-6031
- **GURPS: Ultra-Tech**  
by *Davin Pulver* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-164-4 SJG 01695-6032
- **GURPS Space: Stardemon**  
by *Greg Porter* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-142-3 SJG 00595-6109
- **GURPS Horror/Cliffhangers: Chaos in Kansas**  
by *James R. Hurst* ©1989 SJG inc.  
ISBN 1-55634-155-5 SJG 00695-6110
- **Gurps Autoduel & Car Wars Supplement**  
**The AADA Road Atlas & Survival Guide**  
**Volume One: The East Coast**  
by *John Nowak*  
ISBN 1-55634-080-X SJG 00695-6301
- **Gurps Autoduel & Car Wars Supplement [missing pages]**  
**The AADA Road Atlas & Survival Guide**  
**Volume Three: The South**  
ISBN 1-55634-088-5 SJG 00695-6303

- **Gurps Autoduel & Car Wars Supplement**  
**The AADA Road Atlas & Survival Guide**  
**Volume Four: Australia**  
 by *Greg Rickards, Gary Makin & Steve Reynolds* ©1987 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-095-8 SJG 00695-6304
- **Gurps Autoduel & Car Wars Supplement**  
**The AADA Road Atlas & Survival Guide**  
**Volume Five: The Midwest**  
 by *Craig Sheeley* ©1988 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-105-9 SJG 00795-6305
- **Gurps Autoduel & Car Wars Supplement**  
**The AADA Road Atlas & Survival Guide**  
**Volume Six: The Free Oil States**  
 by *Stephan Beeman* ©1988 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-111-3 SJG 00795-6306
- **Gurps Autoduel & Car Wars Supplement**  
**The AADA Road Atlas & Survival Guide**  
**Volume Seven: Mountain West**  
 by *Jeff George* ©1989 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-153-0 SJG 00795-6307
- **GURPS Supers: Supertemps**  
 by *Mark Johnson & Sean T. Delap* ©1990 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-169-5 SJG 00895-6406
- **GURPS Space: Space Atlas**  
 by *Steve Jackson & William A. Barton* ©1988 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-108-3 SJG 00795-6500
- **GURPS Space: Space Atlas 3 (The Worlds of the Confederacy)**  
 by *Dale Kemper & Creede Lambard* ©1990 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-176-8 SJG 00895-6502
- **GURPS: Space Bestiary**  
 by *Chris McCubbin* ©1990 SJG inc.  
 ISBN 1-55634-181-4 SJG 01495-6503

# CRIME AND PUZZLEMENT

©1990 John Perry Barlow  
barlow@well.sf.ca.us

June 8, 1990

*This is a LONG article on what I think of as Government involument in the Net, where the net is all of Cyberspace — be it a BBS, Usenet or even just the pc in your home. Many of us have tryed to keep the goverment out of our lives in the net, but it looks like a lot might be happening very fast soon, and the people who make up the goverment are scared. They will want In, in a big way.*

*The challange is to keep ahead of the the mess, if we are fighting to get back 'rights' we will have missed the boat. Maybe we can even put some of the bite back in the Constitution if we are VERY lucky.*

## Desperados of the DataSphere

So me and my sidekick Howard, we was sitting out in front of the 40 Rod Saloon one evening when he all of a sudden says, "Looke here. What do you reckon?" I look up and there's these two strangers riding into town. They're young and got kind of a restless, bored way about 'em.

A person don't need both eyes to see they mean trouble... Well, that wasn't quite how it went. Actually, Howard and I were floating blind as cave fish in the electronic barrens of the WELL, so the whole incident passed as words on a display screen:

**Howard:** Interesting couple of newusers just signed on. One calls himself acid and the other's optik.

**Barlow:** Hmmm. What are their real names?

**Howard:** Check their finger files.

And so I typed !finger acid. Several seconds later the WELL's Sequent computer sent the following message to my Macintosh in Wyoming:

Login name: acid      In real life: Acid Phreak

By this, I knew that the WELL had a new resident and that his corporeal analog was supposedly called

*Acid Phreak.* Typing !finger optik yielded results of similar insufficiency, including the claim that someone, somewhere in the real world, was walking around calling himself *Phiber Optik*. I doubted it.

However, associating these sparse data with the knowledge that the WELL was about to host a conference on computers and security rendered the conclusion that I had made my first sighting of genuine computer crackers. As the arrival of an outlaw was a major event to the settlements of the Old West, so was the appearance of crackers cause for stir on the WELL.

The WELL (or Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) is an example of the latest thing in frontier villages, the computer bulletin board. In this kind of small town, Main Street is a central minicomputer to which (in the case of the WELL) as many as 64 microcomputers may be connected at one time by phone lines and little blinking boxes called modems.

In this silent world, all conversation is typed. To enter it, one forsakes both body and place and becomes a thing of words alone. You can see what your neighbors are saying (or recently said), but not what either they or their physical surroundings look like. Town meetings are continuous and discussions rage on everything from sexual kinks to depreciation schedules.

There are thousands of these nodes in the United States, ranging from PC clone hamlets of a few users to mainframe metros like CompuServe, with its 550,000 subscribers. They are used by corporations to transmit memoranda and spreadsheets, universities to disseminate research, and a multitude of factions, from apiarists to Zoroastrians, for purposes unique to each.

Whether by one telephonic tendril or millions, they are all connected to one another. Collectively, they form what their inhabitants call the Net. It extends across that immense region of electron

states, microwaves, magnetic fields, light pulses and thought which sci-fi writer William Gibson named Cyberspace.

Cyberspace, in its present condition, has a lot in common with the 19th Century West. It is vast, unmapped, culturally and legally ambiguous, verbally terse (unless you happen to be a court stenographer), hard to get around in, and up for grabs. Large institutions already claim to own the place, but most of the actual natives are solitary and independent, sometimes to the point of sociopathy. It is, of course, a perfect breeding ground for both outlaws and new ideas about liberty.

Recognizing this, Harper's Magazine decided in December, 1989 to hold one of its periodic Forums on the complex of issues surrounding computers, information, privacy, and electronic intrusion or "cracking." Appropriately, they convened their conference in Cyberspace, using the WELL as the "site."

Harper's invited an odd lot of about 40 participants. These included: Clifford Stoll, whose book *The Cuckoo's Egg* details his cunning efforts to nab a German cracker. John Draper or "Cap'n Crunch," the grand-daddy of crackers whose blue boxes got Wozniak and Jobs into consumer electronics. Stewart Brand and Kevin Kelly of Whole Earth fame. Steven Levy, who wrote the seminal *Hackers*. A retired Air Force colonel named Dave Hughes. Lee Felsenstein, who designed the Osborne computer and was once called the "Robespierre of computing." A UNIX wizard and former hacker named Jeff Poskanzer. There was also a score of aging techno-hippies, the crackers, and me.

What I was doing there was not precisely clear since I've spent most of my working years either pushing cows or song-mongering, but I at least brought to the situation a vivid knowledge of actual cow-towns, having lived in or around one most of my life.

That and a kind of innocence about both the technology and morality of Cyberspace which was soon to pass into the confusion of knowledge.

At first, I was inclined toward sympathy with Acid 'n' Optik as well as their colleagues, Adelaide, Knight Lightning, Taran King, and Emmanuel. I've always been more comfortable with outlaws than Republicans, despite having more certain credentials in the latter camp.

But as the Harper's Forum mushroomed into a boomtown of ASCII text (the participants typing 110,000 words in 10 days), I began to wonder. These kids were fractious, vulgar, immature, amoral, insulting, and too damned good at their work.

Worse, they inducted a number of former kids like myself into Middle Age. The long feared day had finally come when some gunsel would yank my beard and call me, too accurately, an old fart.

Under ideal circumstances, the blind gropings of bulletin board discourse force a kind of Noh drama stylization on human commerce. Intemperate responses, or "flames" as they are called, are common even among conference participants who understand one another, which, it became immediately clear, the cyberpunks and techno-hippies did not.

My own initial enthusiasm for the crackers wilted under a steady barrage of typed testosterone. I quickly remembered I didn't know much about who they were, what they did, or how they did it. I also remembered stories about crackers working in league with the Mob, ripping off credit card numbers and getting paid for them in (stolen) computer equipment.

And I remembered Kevin Mitnik. Mitnik, now 25, is currently serving federal time for a variety of computer and telephone related crimes. Prior to incarceration, Mitnik was, by all accounts, a dangerous guy with a computer. He disrupted phone company operations and arbitrarily disconnected the phones of celebrities. Like the kid in *Wargames*, he broke into the North American Defense Command computer in Colorado Springs.

Unlike the kid in *Wargames*, he made a practice of destroying and altering data, including the credit information of his probation officer and other enemies. Digital Equipment claimed that his depredations cost them more than \$4 million in computer downtime and file rebuilding. Eventually, he was turned in by a friend who, after careful observation, had decided he was "a menace to society."

His spectre began to hang over the conference. After several days of strained diplomacy, the discussion settled into a moral debate on the ethics of security and went critical.

The techno-hippies were of the unanimous opinion that, in Dylan's words, one "must be honest to live outside the law." But these young strangers appar-

ently lived by no code save those with which they unlocked forbidden regions of the Net.

They appeared to think that improperly secured systems deserved to be violated and, by extension, that unlocked houses ought to be robbed. This latter built particular heat in me since I refuse, on philosophical grounds, to lock my house.

Civility broke down. We began to see exchanges like:

**Dave Hughes:** Clifford Stoll said a wise thing that no one has commented on. That networks are built on trust. If they aren't, they should be.

**Acid Phreak:** Yeah. Sure. And we should use the 'honor system' as a first line of security against hack attempts.

**Jef Poskanzer:** This guy down the street from me sometimes leaves his back door unlocked. I told him about it once, but he still does it. If I had the chance to do it over, I would go in the back door, shoot him, and take all his money and consumer electronics.

It's the only way to get through to him.

**Acid Phreak:** Jef Poskaner (Puss? Canker? yechh) Anyway, now when did you first start having these delusions where computer hacking was even \*remotely\* similar to murder?

Presented with such a terrifying amalgam of raw youth and apparent power, we fluttered like a flock of indignant Babbitts around the Status Quo, defending it heartily. One former hacker howled to the Harper's editor in charge of the forum, "Do you or do you not have names and addresses for these criminals?" Though they had committed no obvious crimes, he was ready to call the police.

They finally got to me with:

**Acid:** Whoever said they'd leave the door open to their house... where do you live? (the address) Leave it to me in mail if you like.

I had never encountered anyone so apparently unworthy of my trust as these little nihilists. They had me questioning a basic tenet, namely that the greatest security lies in vulnerability. I decided it was time to put that principal to the test...

**Barlow:** Acid. My house is at 372 North Franklin Street in Pinedale, Wyoming. If you're heading north on Franklin, you go about two blocks off

the main drag before you run into hay meadow on the left. I've got the last house before the field. The computer is always on...

And is that really what you mean? Are you merely just the kind of little sneak that goes around looking for easy places to violate? You disappoint me, pal. For all your James Dean-On-Silicon rhetoric, you're not a cyberpunk. You're just a punk.

**Acid Phreak:** Mr. Barlow: Thank you for posting all I need to get your credit information and a whole lot more! Now, who is to blame? ME for getting it or YOU for being such an idiot?! I think this should just about sum things up.

**Barlow:** Acid, if you've got a lesson to teach me, I hope it's not that it's idiotic to trust one's fellow man. Life on those terms would be endless and brutal. I'd try to tell you something about conscience, but I'd sound like Father O'Flannigan trying to reform the punk that's about to gut-shoot him. For no more reason than to watch him die.

But actually, if you take it upon yourself to destroy my credit, you might do be a favor. I've been looking for something to put the brakes on my burgeoning materialism.

I spent a day wondering whether I was dealing with another Kevin Mitnik before the other shoe dropped:

**Barlow:** ... With crackers like acid and optik, the issue is less intelligence than alienation. Trade their modems for skateboards and only a slight conceptual shift would occur.

**Optik:** You have some pair of balls comparing my talent with that of a skateboarder. Hmmm... This was indeed boring, but nonetheless:

At which point he downloaded my credit history.

Optik had hacked the core of TRW, an institution which has made my business (and yours) their business, extracting from it an abbreviated (and incorrect) version of my personal financial life. With this came the implication that he and Acid could and would revise it to my disadvantage if I didn't back off.

I have since learned that while getting someone's TRW file is fairly trivial, changing it is not. But at that time, my assessment of the crackers' black skills was one of superstitious awe. They were digital

brujos about to zombify my economic soul.

To a middle-class American, one's credit rating has become nearly identical to his freedom. It now appeared that I was dealing with someone who had both the means and desire to hoodoo mine, leaving me trapped in a life of wrinkled bills and money order queues. Never again would I call the Sharper Image on a whim.

I've been in redneck bars wearing shoulder-length curls, police custody while on acid, and Harlem after midnight, but no one has ever put the spook in me quite as Phiber Optik did at that moment. I realized that we had problems which exceeded the human conductivity of the WELL's bandwidth. If someone were about to paralyze me with a spell, I wanted a more visceral sense of him than could fit through a modem.

I e-mailed him asking him to give me a phone call. I told him I wouldn't insult his skills by giving him my phone number and, with the assurance conveyed by that challenge, I settled back and waited for the phone to ring. Which, directly, it did.

In this conversation and the others that followed I encountered an intelligent, civilized, and surprisingly principled kid of 18 who sounded, and continues to sound, as though there's little harm in him to man or data. His cracking impulses seemed purely exploratory, and I've begun to wonder if we wouldn't also regard spelunkers as desperate criminals if AT&T owned all the caves.

The terrifying poses which Optik and Acid had been striking on screen were a media-amplified example of a human adaptation I'd seen before: One becomes as he is beheld. They were simply living up to what they thought we, and, more particularly, the editors of Harper's, expected of them. Like the televised tears of disaster victims, their snarls adapted easily to mass distribution.

Months later, Harper's took Optik, Acid and me to dinner at a Manhattan restaurant which, though very fancy, was appropriately Chinese. Acid and Optik, as material beings, were well-scrubbed and fashionably-clad. They looked to be dangerous as ducks. But, as Harper's and the rest of the media have discovered to their delight, the boys had developed distinctly showier personae for their rambles through the howling wilderness of Cyberspace.

Glittering with spikes of binary chrome, they strode past the kleig lights and into the digital distance. There they would be outlaws. It was only a matter of time before they started to believe themselves as bad as they sounded. And no time at all before everyone else did.

In this, they were like another kid named Billy, many of whose feral deeds in the pre-civilized West were encouraged by the same dime novelist who chronicled them. And like Tom Horn, they seemed to have some doubt as to which side of the law they were on. Acid even expressed an ambition to work for the government someday, nabbing "terrorists and code abusers."

There is also a frontier ambiguity to the "crimes" the crackers commit. They are not exactly stealing VCR's. Copying a text file from TRW doesn't deprive its owner of anything except informational exclusivity. (Though it may be said that information has monetary value only in proportion to its containment.)

There was no question that they were making unauthorized use of data channels. The night I met them, they left our restaurant table and disappeared into the phone booth for a long time. I didn't see them marshalling quarters before they went.

And, as I became less their adversary and more their scoutmaster, I began to get "conference calls" in which six or eight of them would crack pay phones all over New York and simultaneously land on my line in Wyoming. These deft maneuvers made me think of sky-diving stunts where large groups convene geometrically in free fall. In this case, the risk was largely legal.

Their other favorite risky business is the time-honored adolescent sport of trespassing. They insist on going where they don't belong. But then teen-age boys have been proceeding uninvited since the dawn of human puberty. It seems hard-wired. The only innovation is in the new form of the forbidden zone the means of getting in it.

In fact, like Kevin Mitnik, I broke into NORAD when I was 17. A friend and I left a nearby "woodsie" (as rustic adolescent drunks were called in Colorado) and tried to get inside the Cheyenne Mountain. The chrome-helmeted Air Force MP's held us for about 2 hours before letting us go. They weren't much older than us and knew exactly our level of national security threat. Had we come cloaked in electronic



mystery, their alert status certainly would have been higher.

Whence rises much of the anxiety. Everything is so ill-defined. How can you guess what lies in their hearts when you can't see their eyes? How can one be sure that, like Mitnik, they won't cross the line from trespassing into another adolescent pastime, vandalism? And how can you be sure they pose no threat when you don't know what a threat might be?

And for the crackers some thrill is derived from the metamorphic vagueness of the laws themselves. On the Net, their effects are unpredictable. One never knows when they'll bite.

This is because most of the statutes invoked against the crackers were designed in a very different world from the one they explore. For example, can unauthorized electronic access can be regarded as the ethical equivalent of old-fashioned trespass? Like open range, the property boundaries of Cyberspace are hard to stake and harder still to defend.

Is transmission through an otherwise unused data channel really theft? Is the track-less passage of a mind through TRW's mainframe the same as the passage of a pickup through my Back 40? What is a place if Cyberspace is everywhere? What are data and what is free speech? How does one treat property which has no physical form and can be infinitely reproduced? Is a computer the same as a printing press? Can the history of my business affairs properly belong to someone else? Can anyone morally claim to own knowledge itself?

If such questions were hard to answer precisely, there are those who are ready to try. Based on their experience in the Virtual World, they were about as qualified to enforce its mores as I am to write the Law of the Sea. But if they lacked technical sophistication, they brought to this task their usual conviction. And, of course, badges and guns.

## Operation Sun Devil

"Recently, we have witnessed an alarming number of young people who, for a variety of sociological and psychological reasons, have become attached to their computers and are exploiting their potential in a criminal manner. Often, a progression of criminal activity occurs which involves telecommunications fraud (free long distance phone calls), unauthorized access to other computers (whether for profit,

fascination, ego, or the intellectual challenge), credit card fraud (cash advances and unauthorized purchases of goods), and then move on to other destructive activities like computer viruses." "Our experience shows that many computer hacker suspects are no longer misguided teenagers mischievously playing games with their computers in their bedrooms. Some are now high tech computer operators using computers to engage in unlawful conduct."

—Excerpts from a statement by  
Garry M. Jenkins  
Asst. Director, U. S. Secret Service

"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue but upon probable cause, support by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

—Amendment VI  
United States Constitution

On January 24, 1990, a platoon of Secret Service agents entered the apartment which Acid Phreak shares with his mother and 12 year-old sister. The latter was the only person home when they burst through the door with guns drawn. They managed to hold her at bay for about half an hour until their quarry happened home.

By then, they were nearly done packing up Acid's worldly goods, including his computer, his notes (both paper and magnetic), books, and such dubiously dangerous tools as a telephone answering machine, a ghetto blaster and his complete collection of audio tapes. One agent asked him to define the real purpose of the answering machine and was frankly skeptical when told that it answered the phone. The audio tapes seemed to contain nothing but music, but who knew what dark data Acid might have encoded between the notes...

When Acid's mother returned from work, she found her apartment a scene of apprehended criminality. She asked what, exactly, her son had done to deserve all this attention and was told that, among other things, he had caused the AT&T system crash several days earlier. (Previously AT&T had taken full responsibility.) Thus, the agent explained, her darling boy was thought to have caused over a billion dollars

in damage to the economy of the United States.

This accusation was never turned into a formal charge. Indeed, no charge of any sort of was filed against Mr. Phreak then and, although the Secret Service maintained resolute possession of his hardware, software, and data, no charge had been charged 4 months later.

Across town, similar scenes were being played out at the homes of Phiber Optik and another colleague code-named Scorpion. Again, equipment, notes, disks both hard and soft, and personal effects were confiscated. Again no charges were filed.

Thus began the visible phase of Operation Sun Devil, a two-year Secret Service investigation which involved 150 federal agents, numerous local and state law enforcement agencies. and the combined security resources of PacBell, AT&T, Bellcore, Bell South MCI, U.S. Sprint, Mid-American, Southwestern Bell, NYNEX, U.S. West and American Express.

The focus of this impressive institutional array was the Legion of Doom, a group which never had any formal membership list but was thought by the members with whom I spoke to number less than 20, nearly all of them in their teens or early twenties.

I asked Acid why they'd chosen such a threatening name. "You wouldn't want a fairy kind of thing like Legion of Flower Pickers or something. But the media ate it up too. Probing the Legion of Doom like it was a gang or something, when really it was just a bunch of geeks behind terminals."

Sometime in December 1988, a 21 year-old Atlanta-area Legion of Doomster named The Prophet cracked a Bell South computer and downloaded a three- page text file which outlined, in bureaucrat-ese of surpassing opacity, the administrative procedures and responsibilities for marketing, servicing, upgrading, and billing for Bell South's 911 system.

A dense thicket of acronyms, the document was filled with passages like:

"In accordance with the basic SSC/MAC strategy for provisioning, the SSC/MAC will be Overall Control Office (OCO) for all Notes to PSAP circuits (official services) and any other services for this customer. Training must be scheduled for all SSC/MAC involved personnel during the pre-service stage of the project."

And other such.

At some risk, I too have a copy of this document. To read the whole thing straight through without entering coma requires either a machine or a human who has too much practice thinking like one. Anyone who can understand it fully and fluidly has altered his consciousness beyond the ability to ever again read Blake, Whitman, or Tolstoy. It is, quite simply, the worst writing I have ever tried to read.

Since the document contains little of interest to anyone who is not a student of advanced organizational sclerosis...that is, no access codes, trade secrets, or proprietary information...I assume The Prophet only copied this file as a kind of hunting trophy. He had been to the heart of the forest and had returned with this coonskin to nail to the barn door.

Furthermore, he was proud of his accomplishment, and since such trophies are infinitely replicable, he wasn't content to nail it to his door alone. Among the places he copied it was a UNIX bulletin board (rather like the WELL) in Lockport, Illinois called Jolnet.

It was downloaded from there by a 20 year-old hacker and pre-law student (whom I had met in the Harper's Forum) who called himself Knight Lightning. Though not a member of the Legion of Doom, Knight Lightning and a friend, Taran King, also published from St. Louis and his fraternity house at the University of Missouri a worldwide hacker's magazine called Phrack. (From phone phreak and hack.)

Phrack was an unusual publication in that it was entirely virtual. The only time its articles hit paper was when one of its subscribers decided to print out a hard copy. Otherwise, its editions existed in Cyberspace and took no physical form.

When Knight Lightning got hold of the Bell South document, he thought it would amuse his readers and reproduced it in the next issue of Phrack. He had little reason to think that he was doing something illegal. There is nothing in it to indicate that it contains proprietary or even sensitive information. Indeed, it closely resembles telco reference documents which have long been publicly available.

However, Rich Andrews, the systems operator who oversaw the operation of Jolnet, thought there might be something funny about the document when he first

ran across it in his system. To be on the safe side, he forwarded a copy of it to AT&T officials. He was subsequently contacted by the authorities, and he cooperated with them fully. He would regret that later.

On the basis of the forgoing, a Grand Jury in Lockport was persuaded by the Secret Service in early February to hand down a seven count indictment against The Prophet and Knight Lightning, charging them, among other things, with interstate transfer of stolen property worth more than \$5,000. When The Prophet and two of his Georgia colleagues were arrested on February 7, 1990, the Atlanta papers reported they faced 40 years in prison and a \$2 million fine. Knight Lightning was arrested on February 15.

The property in question was the afore-mentioned blot on the history of prose whose full title was A Bell South Standard Practice (BSP) 660-225-104SV Control Office Administration of Enhanced 911 Services for Special Services and Major Account Centers, March, 1988.

And not only was this item worth more than \$5,000.00, it was worth, according to the indictment and Bell South, precisely \$79,449.00. And not a penny less. We will probably never know how this figure was reached or by whom, though I like to imagine an appraisal team consisting of Franz Kafka, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon...

In addition to charging Knight Lightning with crimes for which he could go to jail 30 years and be fined \$122,000.00, they seized his publication, Phrack, along with all related equipment, software and data, including his list of subscribers, many of whom would soon lose their computers and data for the crime of appearing on it.

I talked to Emmanuel Goldstein, the editor of 2600, another hacker publication which has been known to publish purloined documents. If they could shut down Phrack, couldn't they as easily shut down 2600?

He said, "I've got one advantage. I come out on paper and the Constitution knows how to deal with paper."

In fact, nearly all publications are now electronic at some point in their creation. In a modern newspaper, stories written at the scene are typed to screens and then sent by modem to a central computer. This computer composes the layout in electronic type and the entire product transmitted electronically to the presses. There, finally, the bytes become ink.

Phrack merely omitted the last step in a long line of virtual events. However, that omission, and its insignificant circulation, left it vulnerable to seizure based on content. If the 911 document had been the Pentagon Papers (another proprietary document) and Phrack the New York Times, a completion of the analogy would have seen the government stopping publication of the Times and seizing its every material possession, from notepads to presses.

Not that anyone in the newspaper business seemed particularly worried about such implications. They, and the rest of the media who bothered to report Knight Lightning's arrest were too obsessed by what they portrayed as actual disruptions of emergency service and with marvelling at the sociopathy of it. One report expressed relief that no one appeared to have died as a result of the "intrusions."

Meanwhile, in Baltimore, the 911 dragnet snared Leonard Rose, aka Terminus. A professional computer consultant who specialized in UNIX, Rose got a visit from the government early in February. The G-men forcibly detained his wife and children for six hours while they interrogated Rose about the 911 document and ransacked his system.

Rose had no knowledge of the 911 matter. Indeed, his only connection had been occasional contact with Knight Lightning over several years...and admitted membership in the Legion of Doom. However, when searching his hard disk for 911 evidence, they found something else. Like many UNIX consultants, Rose did have some UNIX source code in his possession. Furthermore, there was evidence that he had transmitted some of it to Jolnet and left it there for another consultant.

UNIX is a ubiquitous operating system, and though its main virtue is its openness to amendment at the source level, it is nevertheless the property of AT&T. What had been widely distributed within businesses and universities for years was suddenly, in Rose's hands, a felonious possession.

Finally, the Secret Service rewarded the good citizenship of Rich Andrews by confiscating the computer where Jolnet had dwelt, along with all the e-mail, read and un-read, which his subscribers had left there. Like the many others whose equipment and data were taken by the Secret Service subsequently, he wasn't charged with anything. Nor is he likely to be. They have already inflicted on him the worst

punishment a nerd can suffer: data death.

Andrews was baffled. "I'm the one that found it, I'm the one that turned it in...And I'm the one that's suffering," he said.

One wonders what will happen when they find such documents on the hard disks of CompuServe. Maybe I'll just upload my copy of Bell South Standard Practice (BSP) 660-225-104SV and see...

In any case, association with stolen data is all the guilt you need. It's quite as if the government could seize your house simply because a guest left a stolen VCR in an upstairs bedroom closet. Or confiscate all the mail in a post office upon finding a stolen package there. The first concept of modern jurisprudence to have arrived in Cyberspace seems to have been Zero Tolerance.

Rich Andrews was not the last to learn about the Secret Service's debonair new attitude toward the 4th Amendment's protection against unreasonable seizure.

Early on March 1, 1990, the offices of a roll-playing game publisher in Austin, Texas called Steve Jackson Games were visited by agents of the United States Secret Service. They ransacked the premises, broke into several locked filing cabinets (damaging them irreparably in the process) and eventually left carrying 3 computers, 2 laser printers, several hard disks, and many boxes of paper and floppy disks.

Later in the day, callers to the Illuminati BBS (which Steve Jackson Games operated to keep in touch with roll-players around the country) encountered the following message:

"So far we have not received a clear explanation of what the Secret Service was looking for, what they expected to find, or much of anything else. We are fairly certain that Steve Jackson Games is not the target of whatever investigation is being conducted; in any case, we have done nothing illegal and have nothing whatsoever to hide. However, the equipment that was seized is apparently considered to be evidence in whatever they're investigating, so we aren't likely to get it back any time soon. It could be a month, it could be never." It's been three months as I write this and, not only has nothing been returned to them, but, according to Steve Jackson, the Secret Service will no longer take his calls. He figures that, in the months since the raid, his little company has

lost an estimated \$125,000. With such a fiscal hemorrhage, he can't afford a lawyer to take after the Secret Service. Both the state and national offices of the ACLU told him to "run along" when he solicited their help.

He tried to go to the press. As in most other cases, there were unwilling to raise the alarm. Jackson theorized, "The conservative press is taking the attitude that the suppression of evil hackers is a good thing and that anyone who happens to be put out of business in the meantime...well, that's just their tough luck."

In fact, Newsweek did run a story about the event, portraying it from Jackson's perspective, but they were almost alone in dealing with it.

What had he done to deserve this nightmare? Role-playing games, of which Dungeons and Dragons is the most famous, have been accused of creating obsessive involvement in their nerdy young players, but no one before had found it necessary to prevent their publication. It seems that Steve Jackson had hired the wrong writer. The managing editor of Steve Jackson Games is a former cracker, known by his fellows in the Legion of Doom as The Mentor. At the time of the raid, he and the rest of Jackson staff had been working for over a year on a game called GURPS Cyberpunk, High-Tech Low-Life Role-Playing.

At the time of the Secret Service raids, the game resided entirely on the hard disks they confiscated. Indeed, it was their target. They told Jackson that, based on its author's background, they had reason to believe it was a "handbook on computer crime." It was therefore inappropriate for publication, 1st Amendment or no 1st Amendment.

I got a copy of the game from the trunk of The Mentor's car in an Austin parking lot. Like the Bell South document, it seemed pretty innocuous to me, if a little inscrutable. Borrowing its flavor from the works of William Gibson and Austin sci-fi author Bruce Sterling, it is filled with silicon brain implants, holodecks, and gauss guns.

It is, as the cover copy puts it, "a fusion of the dystopian visions of George Orwell and Timothy Leary." Actually, without the gizmos, it describes a future kind of like the present its publisher is experiencing at the hands of the Secret Service.

An unbelievably Byzantine world resides within its

120 large pages of small print. (These roll-players must be some kind of idiots savants...) Indeed, it's a thing of such complexity that I can't swear there's no criminal information in there, but then I can't swear that Grateful Dead records don't have satanic messages if played backwards. Anything's possible, especially inside something as remarkable as Cyberpunk.

The most remarkable thing about Cyberpunk is the fact that it was printed at all. After much negotiation, Jackson was able to get the Secret Service to let him have some of his data back. However, they told him that he would be limited to an hour and a half with only one of his three computers. Also, according to Jackson, "They insisted that all the copies be made by a Secret Service agent who was a two-finger typist. So we didn't get much."

In the end, Jackson and his staff had to reconstruct most of the game from neural rather than magnetic memory. They did have a few very old backups, and they retrieved a some scraps which had been passed around to game testers. They also had the determination of the enraged.

Despite government efforts to impose censorship by prior restraint, Cyberpunk is now on the market. Presumably, advertising it as "The book that was seized by the U.S. Secret Service" will invigorate sales. But Steve Jackson Games, the heretofore prosperous publisher of more than a hundred role-playing games, has been forced to lay off more than half of its employees and may well be mortally wounded.

Any employer who has heard this tale will think hard before he hires a computer cracker. Which may be, of course, among the effects the Secret Service desires.

On May 8, 1990, Operation Sun Devil, heretofore an apparently random and nameless trickle of Secret Service actions, swept down on the Legion of Doom and its ilk like a bureaucratic tsunami. On that day, the Secret Service served 27 search warrants in 14 cities from Plano, Texas to New York, New York.

The law had come to Cyberspace. When the day was over, transit through the wide open spaces of the Virtual World would be a lot trickier.

In a press release following the sweep, the Secret Service boasted having shut down numerous computer bulletin boards, confiscated 40 computers, and seized 23,000 disks. They noted in their statement that "the

conceivable criminal violations of this operation have serious implications for the health and welfare of all individuals, corporations, and United States Government agencies relying on computers and telephones to communicate."

It was unclear from their statement whether "this operation" meant the Legion of Doom or Operation Sun Devil. There was room to interpret it either way.

Because the deliciously ironic truth is that, aside from the 3 page Bell South document, the hackers had neither removed nor damaged anyone's data. Operation Sun Devil, on the other hand, had "serious implications" for a number of folks who relied on "computers and telephones to communicate." They lost the equivalent of about 5.4 million pages of information. Not to mention a few computers and telephones.

And the welfare of the individuals behind those figures was surely in jeopardy. Like the story of the single mother and computer consultant in Baltimore whose sole means of supporting herself and her 18 year old son was stripped away early one morning. Secret Service agents broke down her door with sledge hammers, entered with guns drawn, and seized all her computer equipment. Apparently her son had also been using it...

Or the father in New York who opened the door at 6:00 AM and found a shotgun at his nose. A dozen agents entered. While one of the kept the man's wife in a choke-hold, the rest made ready to shoot and entered the bedroom of their sleeping 14 year old. Before leaving, the confiscated every piece of electronic equipment in the house, including all the telephones.

It was enough to suggest that the insurance companies should start writing policies against capricious governmental seizure of circuitry.

In fairness, one can imagine the government's problem. This is all pretty magical stuff to them. If I were trying to terminate the operations of a witch coven, I'd probably seize everything in sight. How would I tell the ordinary household brooms from the getaway vehicles?

But as I heard more and more about the vile injustices being heaped on my young pals in the Legion of Doom, not to mention the unfortunate folks nearby, the less I was inclined toward such temperate thoughts as these. I drifted back into a 60's-style sense of the government, thinking it a thing of mono-

lithic and evil efficiency and adopting an up-against-the-wall willingness to spit words like "pig" or "fascist" into my descriptions.

In doing so, I endowed the Secret Service with a clarity of intent which no agency of government will ever possess. Despite almost every experience I've ever had with federal authority, I keep imagining its competence.

For some reason, it was easier to invest the Keystone Kapers of Operation Sun Devil with malign purpose rather than confront their absurdity straight-on. There is, after all, a twisted kind of comfort in political paranoia. It provides one such a sense of orderliness to think that the government is neither crazy nor stupid and that its plots, though wicked, are succinct.

I was about to have an experience which would restore both my natural sense of unreality and my unwillingness to demean the motives of others. I was about to see first hand the disorientation of the law in the featureless vastness of Cyberspace.

## In Search of NuPrometheus

"I pity the poor immigrant..."

—Bob Dylan

Sometime last June, an angry hacker got hold of a chunk of the highly secret source code which drives the Apple Macintosh. He then distributed it to a variety of addresses, claiming responsibility for this act of information terrorism in the name of the Nu Prometheus League.

Apple freaked. NuPrometheus had stolen, if not the Apple crown jewels, at least a stone from them. Worse, NuPrometheus had then given this prize away. Repeatedly.

All Apple really has to offer the world is the software which lies encoded in silicon on the ROM chip of every Macintosh. This set of instructions is the cyber-DNA which makes a Macintosh a Macintosh.

Worse, much of the magic in this code was put there by people who not only did not work for Apple any longer, might only do so again if encouraged with cattle prods. Apple's attitude toward its ROM code is a little like that of a rich kid toward his inheritance. Not actually knowing how to create wealth himself,

he guards what he has with hysterical fervor.

Time passed, and I forgot about the incident. But one recent May morning, I learned that others had not. The tireless search for the spectral heart of NuPrometheus finally reached Pinedale, Wyoming, where I was the object of a two hour interview by Special Agent Richard Baxter, Jr. of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Poor Agent Baxter didn't know a ROM chip from a Vise-grip when he arrived, so much of that time was spent trying to educate him on the nature of the thing which had been stolen. Or whether "stolen" was the right term for what had happened to it.

You know things have rather jumped the groove when potential suspects must explain to law enforcers the nature of their alleged perpetrations.

I wouldn't swear Agent Baxter ever got it quite right. After I showed him some actual source code, gave a demonstration of e-mail in action, and downloaded a file from the WELL, he took to rubbing his face with both hands, peering up over his finger tips and saying, "It sure is something, isn't it" Or, "Whooo-ee."

Or "my eight year old knows more about these things than I do." He didn't say this with a father's pride so much as an immigrant's fear of a strange new land into which he will be forcibly moved and in which his own child is a native. He looked across my keyboard into Cyberspace and didn't like what he saw.

We could have made it harder for one another, but I think we each sensed that the other occupied a world which was as bizarre and nonsensical as it could be. We did our mutual best to suppress immune response at the border.

You'd have thought his world might have been a little more recognizable to me. Not so, it turns out. Because in his world, I found several unfamiliar features, including these:

1. The Hacker's Conference is an underground organization of computer outlaws with likely connections to, and almost certainly sympathy with, the NuPrometheus League. (Or as Agent Baxter repeatedly put it, the "New Prosthesis League.")
2. John Draper, the afore-mentioned Cap'n Crunch, in addition to being a known member of the Hacker's Conference, is also CEO and president of Autodesk, Inc. This is of particular con-



cern to the FBI because Autodesk has many top-secret contracts with the government to supply Star Wars graphics imaging and "hyperspace" technology. Worse, Draper is thought to have Soviet contacts.

He wasn't making this up. He had lengthy documents from the San Francisco office to prove it. And in which Autodesk's address was certainly correct.

On the other hand, I know John Draper. While, as I say, he may have once distinguished himself as a cracker during the Pleistocene, he is not now, never has been, and never will be CEO of Autodesk. He did work there for awhile last year, but he was let go long before he got in a position to take over.

Nor is Autodesk, in my experience with it, the Star Wars skunk works which Agent Baxter's documents indicated. One could hang out there a long time without ever seeing any gold braid.

Their primary product is something called AutoCAD, by far the most popular computer-aided design software but generally lacking in lethal potential. They do have a small development program in Cyberspace, which is what they call Virtual Reality. (This, I assume is the "hyperspace" to which Agent Baxter's documents referred.)

However, Autodesk had reduced its Cyberspace program to a couple of programmers. I imagined Randy Walser and Carl Tollander toiling away in the dark and lonely service of their country. Didn't work. Then I tried to describe Virtual Reality to Agent Baxter, but that didn't work either. In fact, he tilted. I took several runs at it, but I could tell I was violating our border agreements. These seemed to include a requirement that neither of us try to drag the other across into his conceptual zone.

I fared a little better on the Hacker's Conference. Hardly a conspiracy, the Hacker's Conference is an annual convention originated in 1984 by the Point Foundation and the editors of Whole Earth Review. Each year it invites about a hundred of the most gifted and accomplished of digital creators. Indeed, they are the very people who have conducted the personal computer revolution. Agent Baxter looked at my list of Hacker's Conference attendees and read their bios. "These are the people who actually design this stuff, aren't they?" He was incredulous. Their corporate addresses didn't fit his model of outlaws at all well.

Why had he come all the way to Pinedale to investigate a crime he didn't understand which had taken place (sort of) in 5 different places, none of which was within 500 miles?

Well, it seems Apple has told the FBI that they can expect little cooperation from Hackers in and around the Silicon Valley, owing to virulent anti-Apple sentiment there. They claim this is due to the Hacker belief that software should be free combined with festering resentment of Apple's commercial success. They advised the FBI to question only those Hackers who were as far as possible from the twisted heart of the subculture.

They did have their eye on some local people though. These included a couple of former Apple employees, Grady Ward and Water Horat, Chuck Farnham (who has made a living out of harassing Apple), Glenn Tenney (the purported leader of the Hackers), and, of course, the purported CEO of Autodesk.

Other folks Agent Baxter asked me about included Mitch Kapur, who wrote Lotus 1-2-3 and was known to have received some this mysterious source code. Or whatever. But I had also met Mitch Kapur, both on the WELL and in person. A less likely computer terrorist would be hard to come by.

Actually, the question of the source code was another area where worlds but shadow-boxed. Although Agent Baxter didn't know source code from Tuesday, he did know that Apple Computer had told his agency that what had been stolen and disseminated was the complete recipe for a Macintosh computer. The distribution of this secret formula might result in the creation of millions of Macintoshes not made by Apple. And, of course, the ruination of Apple Computer.

In my world, NuPrometheus (whoever they, or more likely, he might be) had distributed a small portion of the code which related specifically to Color QuickDraw. QuickDraw is Apple's name for the software which controls the Mac's on-screen graphics. But this was another detail which Agent Baxter could not capture. For all he knew, you could grow Macintoshes from floppy disks.

I explained to him that Apple was alleging something like the ability to assemble an entire human being from the recipe for a foot, but even he knew the analogy was inexact. And trying to get him to accept the

idea that a corporation could go mad with suspicion was quite futile. He had a far different perception of the emotional reliability of institutions.

When he finally left, we were both dazzled and disturbed. I spent some time thinking about Lewis Carroll and tried to return to writing about the legal persecution of the Legion of Doom. But my heart wasn't in it. I found myself suddenly too much in sympathy with Agent Baxter and his struggling colleagues from Operation Sun Devil to get back into a proper sort of pig-bashing mode.

Given what had happened to other innocent bystanders like Steve Jackson, I gave some thought to getting scared. But this was Kafka in a clown suit. It wasn't precisely frightening. I also took some comfort in a phrase once applied to the administration of Frederick the Great: "Despotism tempered by incompetence."

Of course, incompetence is a double-edged banana. While we may know this new territory better than the authorities, they have us literally out-gunned. One should pause before making well-armed paranoids feel foolish, no matter how foolish they seem.

## The Fear of White Noise

"Neurosis is the inability to tolerate ambiguity."

—Sigmund Freud,  
appearing to me in a dream

I'm a member of that half of the human race which is inclined to divide the human race into two kinds of people. My dividing line runs between the people who crave certainty and the people who trust chance.

You can draw this one a number of ways, of course, like Control *vs.* Serendipity, Order *vs.* Chaos, Hard answers *vs.* Silly questions, or Newton, Descartes & Aquinas *vs.* Heisenberg, Mandelbrot & the Dalai Lama. Etc.

Large organizations and their drones huddle on one end of my scale, busily trying to impose predictable homogeneity on messy circumstance. On the other end, free-lancers and ne'er-do-wells cavort about, getting by on luck if they get by at all.

However you cast these poles, it comes down to the difference between those who see life as a struggle

against cosmic peril and human infamy and those who believe, without any hard evidence, that the universe is actually on our side. Fear *vs.* Faith.

I am of the latter group. Along with Gandhi and Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, I believe that other human beings will quite consistently merit my trust if I'm not doing something which scares them or makes them feel bad about themselves. In other words, the best defense is a good way to get hurt.

In spite of the fact that this system works very reliably for me and my kind, I find we are increasingly in the minority. More and more of our neighbors live in armed compounds. Alarms blare continuously. Potentially happy people give their lives over to the corporate state as though the world were so dangerous outside its veil of collective immunity that they have no choice.

I have a number of theories as to why this is happening. One has to do with the opening of Cyberspace. As a result of this development, humanity is now undergoing the most profound transformation of its history. Coming into the Virtual World, we inhabit Information. Indeed, we become Information. Thought is embodied and the Flesh is made Word. It's weird as hell.

Beginning with the invention of the telegraph and extending through television into Virtual Reality, we have been, for a over a century, experiencing a terrifying erosion in our sense of both body and place. As we begin to realize the enormity of what is happening to us, all but the most courageous have gotten scared.

And everyone, regardless of his psychic resilience, feels this overwhelming sense of strangeness. The world, once so certain and tangible and legally precise, has become an infinite layering of opinions, perceptions, litigation, camera-angles, data, white noise, and, most of all, ambiguities. Those of us who are of the fearful persuasion do not like ambiguities.

Indeed, if one were a little jumpy to start with, he may now be fairly humming with nameless dread. Since no one likes his dread to be nameless, the first order of business is to find it some names.

For a long time here in the United States, Communism provided a kind of catch-all bogeyman. Marx, Stalin and Mao summoned forth such a spectre that, to many Americans, annihilation of all life was prefer-

able to the human portion's becoming Communist. But as Big Red wizened and lost his teeth, we began to cast about for a replacement.

Finding none of sufficient individual horror, we have draped a number of objects with the old black bunting which once shrouded the Kremlin. Our current spooks are terrorists, child abductors, AIDS, and the underclass. I would say drugs, but anyone who thinks that the War on Drugs is not actually the War on the Underclass hasn't been paying close enough attention.

There are a couple of problems with these Four Horsemen. For one thing, they aren't actually very dangerous. For example, only 7 Americans died in worldwide terrorist attacks in 1987. Fewer than 10 (out of about 70 million) children are abducted by strangers in the U.S. each year. Your chances of getting AIDS if you are neither gay nor a hemophiliac nor a junkie are considerably less than your chances of getting killed by lightning while golfing. The underclass is dangerous, of course, but only, with very few exceptions, if you are a member of it.

The other problem with these perils is that they are all physical. If we are entering into a world in which no one has a body, physical threats begin to lose their sting.

And now I come to the point of this screed: The perfect bogeyman for Modern Times is the Cyberpunk! He is so smart he makes you feel even more stupid than you usually do. He knows this complex country in which you're perpetually lost. He understands the value of things you can't conceptualize long enough to cash in on. He is the one-eyed man in the Country of the Blind.

In a world where you and your wealth consist of nothing but beeps and boops of micro-voltage, he can steal all your assets in nanoseconds and then make you disappear.

He can even reach back out of his haunted mists and kill you physically. Among the justifications for Operation Sun Devil was this chilling tidbit:

"Hackers had the ability to access and review the files of hospital patients. Furthermore, they could have added, deleted, or altered vital patient information, possibly causing life-threatening situations." [Emphasis added.]

Perhaps the most frightening thing about the Cyberpunk is the danger he presents to The Institution, whether corporate or governmental. If you are frightened you have almost certainly taken shelter by now in one of these collective organisms, so the very last thing you want is something which can endanger your heretofore unassailable hive.

And make no mistake, crackers will become to bureaucratic bodies what viruses presently are to human bodies. Thus, Operation Sun Devil can be seen as the first of many waves of organizational immune response to this new antigen. Agent Baxter was a T-cell. Fortunately, he didn't know that himself and I was very careful not to show him my own antigenic tendencies.

I think that herein lies the way out of what might otherwise become an Armageddon between the control freaks and the neo-hip. Those who are comfortable with these disorienting changes must do everything in our power to convey that comfort to others. In other words, we must share our sense of hope and opportunity with those who feel that in Cyberspace they will be obsolete eunuchs for sure.

It's a tall order. But, my silicon brothers, our self-interest is strong. If we come on as witches, they will burn us. If we volunteer to guide them gently into its new lands, the Virtual World might be a more amiable place for all of us than this one has been.

Of course, we may also have to fight.

\* \* \*

Defining the conceptual and legal map of Cyberspace before the ambiguophobes do it for us (with punitive over-precision) is going to require some effort. We can't expect the Constitution to take care of itself. Indeed, the precedent for mitigating the Constitutional protection of a new medium has already been established. Consider what happened to radio in the early part of this century.

Under the pretext of allocating limited bandwidth, the government established an early right of censorship over broadcast content which still seems directly unconstitutional to me. Except that it stuck. And now, owing to a large body of case law, looks to go on sticking.

New media, like any chaotic system, are highly sensitive to initial conditions. Today's heuristical answers

of the moment become tomorrow's permanent institutions of both law and expectation. Thus, they bear examination with that destiny in mind.

Earlier in this article, I asked a number of tough questions relating to the nature of property, privacy, and speech in the digital domain. Questions like: "What are data and what is free speech?" or "How does one treat property which has no physical form and can be infinitely reproduced?" or "Is a computer the same as a printing press." The events of Operation Sun Devil were nothing less than an effort to provide answers to these questions. Answers which would greatly enhance governmental ability to silence the future's opinionated nerds.

In over-reaching as extravagantly as they did, the Secret Service may actually have done a service for those of us who love liberty. They have provided us with a devil. And devils, among their other galvanizing virtues, are just great for clarifying the issues and putting iron in your spine. In the presence of a devil, it's always easier to figure out where you stand.

While I previously had felt no stake in the obscure conundra of free telecommunication, I was, thanks to Operation Sun Devil, suddenly able to plot a trajectory from the current plight of the Legion of Doom to an eventual constraint on opinions much dearer to me. I remembered Martin Neimoeller, who said:

"In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. They came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up."

I decided it was time for me to speak up.

The evening of my visit from Agent Baxter, I wrote an account of it which I placed on the WELL. Several days later, Mitch Kapor literally dropped by for a chat.

Also a WELL denizen, he had read about Agent Baxter and had begun to meditate on the inappropriateness of leaving our civil liberties to be defined by the technologically benighted. A man who places great emphasis on face-to-face contact, he wanted to discuss this issue with me in person. He had been

flying his Canadair bizjet to a meeting in California when he realized his route took him directly over Pinedale.

We talked for a couple of hours in my office while a spring snowstorm swirled outside. When I recounted for him what I had learned about Operation Sun Devil, he decided it was time for him to speak up too.

He called a few days later with the phone number of a civil libertarian named Harvey Silverglate, who, as evidence of his conviction that everyone deserves due process, is currently defending Leona Helmsley. Mitch asked me to tell Harvey what I knew, with the inference that he would help support the costs which are liable to arise whenever you tell a lawyer anything.

I found Harvey in New York at the offices of that city's most distinguished constitutional law firm, Rabinowitz, Boudin, Standard, Krinsky, and Lieberman. These are the folks who made it possible for the New York Times to print the Pentagon Papers. (Not to dwell on the unwilling notoriety which partner Leonard Boudin achieved back in 1970 when his Weathergirl daughter blew up the family home...)

In the conference call which followed, I could almost hear the skeletal click as their jaws dropped. The next day, Eric Lieberman and Terry Gross of Rabinowitz, Boudin met with Acid Phreak, Phiber Optik, and Scorpion.

The maddening trouble with writing this account is that Whole Earth Review, unlike, say, Phrack, doesn't publish instantaneously. Events are boiling up at such a frothy pace that anything I say about current occurrences surely will not obtain by the time you read this. The road from here is certain to fork many times. The printed version of this will seem downright quaint before it's dry.

But as of today (in early June of 1990), Mitch and I are legally constituting the Computer Liberty Foundation, a two (or possibly three) man organization which will raise and disburse funds for education, lobbying, and litigation in the areas relating to digital speech and the extension of the Constitution into Cyberspace.

Already, on the strength of preliminary stories about our efforts in the Washington Post and the New York Times, Mitch has received an offer from Steve Woz-

niak to match whatever funds he dedicates to this effort. (As well as a fair amount of abuse from the more institutionalized precincts of the computer industry.)

The Computer Liberty Foundation will fund, conduct, and support legal efforts to demonstrate that the Secret Service has exercised prior restraint on publications, limited free speech, conducted improper seizure of equipment and data, used undue force, and generally conducted itself in a fashion which is arbitrary, oppressive, and unconstitutional.

In addition, we will work with the Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility and other organizations to convey to both the public and the policy-makers metaphors which will illuminate the more general stake in liberating Cyberspace.

Not everyone will agree. Crackers are, after all, generally beyond public sympathy. Actions on their behalf are not going to be popular no matter who else might benefit from them in the long run.

Nevertheless, in the litigations and political debates which are certain to follow, we will endeavor to assure that their electronic speech is protected as certainly as any opinions which are printed or, for that matter, screamed. We will make an effort to clarify issues surrounding the distribution of intellectual property. And we will help to create for America a future which is as blessed by the Bill of Rights as its past has been.

John Perry Barlow  
barlow@well.sf.ca.us  
Friday, June 8, 1990

# Navero V-X

©1990 Daniel Parsons  
Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA

*Navero (Of the Correct and Unalterable Way) appeared on rec.games.frp during the 89-90 school year, endearing himself to readers worldwide. Chapters five through ten of the famed saga are reproduced here with the author's permission.*

## Navero V

... And our heroes went riding off into the marshes, looking for the Orc band. It isn't easy to hide an entire band of Orcs, and this proved no exception to that. Their tracks were quite visible on the paths and runs, and we followed them back to a large cavern in a limestone rock formation. We did not enter immediately; instead, we sat, and watched, and argued some more. This we did happily for some time, until we were spotted by a patrol, who were naturally not happy to see us. There were only 2 Orcs, and we spotted them almost as soon as they saw us.

Orc 1: "Hu gudier nouds?" (What's with you?)

Orc 2: "Sliimsuka! Jackoffss wit." (Elves over there! Humans too.)

Navero: "Oh, ick! What are those things over there?"

Dania: "Orcs! Get 'em!!"

The Cavalier: "GLORY AND DEATH! GLORY AND DEATH!"

Hack-Maim-Shred-Destroy-Slice-Chop-Crush-Smash-Murder-Irk-Annoy-Vex-Irritate-Inconvenience

Game Master: You succeed in wounding an Orc. The other runs away.

Dania: "Stop him! He'll tell all the others!"

The Cavalier: "I ride off after the Orc and outdistance him. I do not spear him in the back, as that is unworthy of me. I challenge him to stand and fight like slime."

Game Master: How? Your horse is dead, remember.

The Cavalier: "I...."

Rizudo: "I shoot him in the back with my cross-bow."

Game Master: Did you have it ready? I don't remember you saying so.

Rizudo: "Of course it's ready! I'm not stupid!"  
\*Big, pleading grin\*

Game Master: Ok. Roll to hit.

Rizudo: Ah, I roll a 3. Shit.

Dania: "You're all incompetent. I 'magic missile' it."

Game Master: Ok. (rolls dice) It stumbles, but does not fall, and is rapidly losing itself in the trees.

Rizudo: "Don't you have a 'Hold Person' spell, priest?"

Navero: "But I don't speak Orcish..."

The Assassin: "It's out of range for dart throwing, isn't it?"

Game Master: Uh, yes. Anything else? Oh, (rolls dice) you notice the wounded Orc is trying to crawl off into the bushes.

Navero: "I jump on it and stop it!"

Game Master: It tries to hit you. (rolls dice) It does. Take 5 hit points.

Navero: "Ouch!"

Rizudo: "I kill it. I guess it's up to me to clean up after yon Knight's incompetence."

The Cavalier: "I shall ignore that. Consider yourself fortunate."



**Dania:** "Did the other one get away? Shit! Pretty soon, they'll be all over the place. We better get out of here."

**The Cavalier:** "We cannot run from a bunch of Orcs! You can, but I refuse."

**Navero:** "And what about all the damage they would do if we don't stop them?"

**Dania:** "Navero, come on. We can't take all of them..."

**The Cavalier:** "The devil you say! I move we take them by surprise, right now, while they are still trying to organize themselves."

**Rizudo:** "Now listen, kids. Our position here isn't exactly ideal. Why don't we go tell the guys in the keep that we saw the Orcs coming? Then we'll get a bunch of men-at-arms to go with us to meet them."

**The Cavalier:** "I refuse to rely on an unruly bunch of peasants swinging farm implements."

**Navero:** "Why stir up many men, when only one voice is equal to the task?"

**The Assassin:** "It's getting dark. They will soon be about. We'd better go."

**Dania:** "Yes. C'mon, guys."

**The Cavalier:** "You are taking all the horses? Ah, I suppose a retreat to consider strategy would be in order. But we are not running."

**Dania:** "Right."

With our horses, we were easily able to outdistance the Orcs, and reach the keep. We saw them behind us in the marsh, and counted over 20 of them. They did not travel all the way to Swamp Keep, but threw javelins and insults at us as we fled back to relative safety. None hit. Once we reached the keep, we were accosted by the gate guards, who had heard the shouting, and taken in to see some high official whose title I have forgotten.

**Official:** "YOU WHAT!? You rode out to spy on the Orcs, and stirred them up?"

**Rizudo:** "Yep, and they're coming this way. And they stink, too. We need the militia, a few of your guards, so we can tidy them up a bit."

**Dania:** "Yeah."

**Official:** \*bugeyed stare\* "You... They haven't been here raiding for nearly a month... which means they won't be here for another month... and you... people... went out and deliberately antagonized them!?"

**The Cavalier:** "You should never bear evil so lightly."

**Official:** "WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!?"

**Navero:** "Um... have we interfered with some other plans of yours?"

**Official:** (sudden, indignant look) "Do you have any idea what this means?"

**The Cavalier:** "Freedom and Glory."

**Dania:** "Oh, shut up."

**The Cavalier:** "I will not for the likes of you."

**Official:** "Be quiet, all of you! (to a servant) Boy, go fetch that warrior. Now, perhaps we can salvage something out of this. How would you like to go back there and clean out those caverns right now? We have a man here, the survivor of the last group who tried it. He has been inside their cave, and may know enough to help you. He is supposedly a capable fighter and bowman. I believe he comes from the northern regions."

With this, a very large figure stomped into the room. You might say that he did not believe in personal hygiene. You might also say that he needed no announcement. He was well over 6 feet and had a huge sword over his shoulder, and a long bow on his back.

**Official:** "Kortul, you had expressed a desire to have another try at the Orcs once your wounds healed. Well, I would like to ask you to serve as a guide to this group, which has the same purpose in mind. Will you do it."

**Kortul:** (Looks group over. Sneers.) \*Grunt.\*

**Official:** "Very good. Well, I wish you luck. And if you fail, don't come back. After this, if they don't kill you, some here may wish to do so themselves."

And with that cheery thought, we spent the night and rose early to go out and finish the job. Although at some point, the Assassin disappeared during the night. Apparently, she had had quite enough of us all, and went elsewhere to seek greener pastures. (Actually, the player dropped out of the group, as he had too much work to do. But that's not as much fun.)

"I read about the 'great unwashed' but I never expected to see one." —*Dan Parsons*

## Navero VI

NOTE: I finally went out and found out what the name of that damn Cavalier was. Even the player had some trouble remembering: Rourk Ravensbane, a seemingly un-elfen sort of name, but he's Drow, which sort of explains it.

The Party Currently:

- Navero, 1st level human cleric
- Dania, 1st level 1/2-wood elf MU
- Rourk Ravensbane, 1st level Drow Cavalier
- Rizudo, 1st level human fighter
- Kortul, 1st level human fighter

We went riding into the marshes, early in the morning; we expected to reach the Orcs cavern by that afternoon. Our trek through the marshes was largely uneventful, except for a bunch of 6-armed squirrel-like monkeys who would stare at us from the trees, and throw things. Rizudo once tried to hit one, but they were impossibly fast. When we neared the cave, we left our horses tethered about 100 yards up the path, and snuck up on foot; within, a number of eyes seemed to peer out, but did not see us.

Rizudo: "Well, kids, what do we do with 'em?"

Rourk: "We can take them now. Pardon me while I prepare myself."

Dania: "What did the caves look like, Kortul?"

Kortul: "Dark, damp. Didn't get far; hit deadfall near entrance, killed 3, Orcs finished rest."

Rourk: "And you ran."

Kortul: \*Fumes\* "Quiet, munchkin."

Navero: "Maybe if we can get them out of the cave into daylight..."

Rizudo: "Yeah! Good idea! We smoke them out, then kill them as they come running from the cave."

Navero: "Uh..."

Rourk: "A poor strategy. The cave is probably ventilated."

Dania: "Right. They must have another entrance anyway."

Navero: "Uh..."

Rizudo: "Look, these are Orcs, remember? Shit-for-brains? How much of a problem do you think they'll be to fake out?"

Kortul: "Stupid." \*Disgusted look at Rizudo\*

Navero: "Uh..."

Rizudo: "Are you saying it won't work, o your mightiness?"

Kortul: "Might. Probably not."

Rizudo: "Well then, lets go get a bunch of wood!"

Dania: "Only dead wood, now." (Remember, she is half-wood elf, and feels somewhat protective of trees.)

Rourk: "Dead wood will not make enough smoke. It must be big, green logs."

Dania: "I'd rather you not chop down trees, dear. Besides, you wouldn't want to dishonor your blades with mere wood."

Rourk: "Kortul, I perceive, has a hand axe. And we can use his blade if necessary. One so large and unwieldy is of little use otherwise."

Kortul: Snarls.

And so, we began uprooting saplings and chopping down small trees. Dania ran about for a little bit, pleading or threatening or smacking us with her staff, but the 3 warriors ignored her and soon assembled a pile of green wood. Navero, having no great feelings about trees, tried to comfort Dania with the argument that it seemed necessary, but she ignored him. By now, it was late afternoon. We gathered the wood into a large pile on a hill before the cave mouth; we could feel eyes on us, but we were out of range of any but powerful longbows, which we were sure the Orcs did not possess. We doused it with lantern oil, lit it, and let it get to burning nice and smoky. Then we sent it all rolling downhill into the cave.

We got lucky; most of it went in, but not so far in that we couldn't see it. We sat on the hill; any Orc who appeared to put the fire out was shot. They eventually tried throwing water on from further back in the cave, but this didn't seem to do much good. The wood smoked merrily, but as evening approached, no Orcs came fleeing out. It wasn't working.

Dania: (Much grumbling and swearing) "Murderers."

Rizudo: "Oh, be quiet. You're getting on our nerves. Why don't you go play with yourself or something? Put that staff to good use."

Dania: "Go fuck yourself, asshole. Whatcha gonna do now? Throw in some squirrel-monkeys?"

Rourk: "Perhaps if we offer them a magic-user."

Navero: "No! You can't do that!"

Everyone: Stare at Navero

Navero: "I mean..."

Dania: "The sun is setting, guys. Got any bright ideas what to do?"

No one did. Instead, we sat on the hilltop and argued until our conversation was rudely interrupted by the sound of wings flapping. BIG wings. Big, leathery wings that seemed right overhead. Suddenly, from over the hill that the cave was in, a great shape appeared. It looked like the Wyvern, but it had four legs and was larger, and colored a great oily black. The party scattered. Everyone but Rourk ran to hide in the trees and bushes; he whistled for his dead horse, which did not appear, and then took his stand in the middle of the clearing. The Dragon (for that's what it was this time, boys and girls) did not attack, but merely soared over the clearing, horrible and proud, watching us from above. Rourk was about to call it a coward, when a javelin whizzed past his helmet, and he saw nearly 20 Orcs were charging towards him.

Rourk: "Ah, they are finally coming out. I shall go get my horse." (Runs)

Dania: "That's \*my\* horse!" (Runs after him)

Navero: "Kortul, do you know the Orcish word for 'Stop'?"

Kortul: "Hudsdg. Let's get horses."

Dania easily outdistanced the heavily armored Cavalier; she reached her horse and rode off. Navero was the second to reach the horses, and went riding off after Dania, not wishing to see her get hurt. The Cavalier took Kortul's horse; Kortul remained on foot, and Rizudo hid in a tree.

At this point, things became somewhat chaotic, with four separate units of party running around, and so I will try to take things on an individual basis.

Rizudo: Hid in the tree for most of the battle. Only the fact that all the other party members were making so much noise kept him from being found. After it was over he claimed to have killed 6 Orcs.

Kortul: Picked off a few with his bow from the bushes, then crept about in the darkness, using his two-handed sword to kill more. I use the term 'crept' lightly; sneaking in banded mail is no mean feat, especially around creatures with infravision. He was on foot and alone, and so presented the ideal target for the Orcs; nonetheless, he was able to move fast enough not to be overborn, and dispatched 8 Orcs while taking no damage himself. Eventually, they ran away and left him alone. (I was playing both Kortul and Navero. I was rolling extremely well for Kortul, which may surprise you when you see how Navero did.)

Rourk: Got onto Kortul's big horse with some difficulty, and charged down the paths of the swamp, using his lance to great effect, until he found an individual whom he considered to be the Chief. This worthy he dismounted and challenged to personal combat. That worthy looked at him like he was some sort of joke, and whistled at the sky. Nothing happened for a moment, and so Rourk charged to do battle. "GLORY AND DEATH! GLORY AND DEATH!" Then, he heard wings again. Realizing at once that here was a foe far more worthy of him, he turned to face the beast, realizing that only his valor could defeat it. The Dragons attack was not fussy or frilly; it simply landed on him, grinding him into the mud. The Orc chief patted its nose and told it it was a good boy, which Rourk found quite surprising.

Rourk: "The Orc Chief said WHAT? And it didn't kill him?! Must be a very young, stupid Dragon. Are both my arms pinned?"

Game Master: No, one is free.

Rourk: "I stab the Dragon and tell it to get off of me."

Would you believe he got a critical hit? And that his next stab was also a critical? He didn't kill it, though. Bleeding, it flew away into the swamp, blubbering and calling for its mother. The Orc Chief took one look at this and ran off, leaving our hero flushed with pride, beaming to himself. Damn, I'm good.

Dania and Navero: Dania went riding into the woods, looking for a place where she could be of some use. Navero went riding off after her, to protect her. They crossed over a run with 3 Orcs in it; Dania rode down one, but the others stayed up and took swings at Navero. Navero did 'comand - stop' on one, using the new word he had just learned, and the other fortunately missed. They rode into the trees, when suddenly another group of 3 Orcs jumped up in front of them, frightening the horses and bringing them to a halt. Navero realized he would have to fight. They were charging up with swords in their hands and blood in their eyes, and he had to protect his friend.

Navero swung his mace at an Orc trying to grab his reins. Critical Fumble - he brained his horse. "oops" he thought as he landed face-first in the mud. Dania smacked one with her staff, but another stabbed her for 1 hit point. Yelling, Navero charged through to her defense, determined to carry the day despite adversity. Critical Fumble - he brained her horse. The Orcs started laughing. Dania ran away, with Navero right behind her. The Orcs started to chase them, so Dania turned and magic missed one in the face. Navero hit a tree. The remaining two somehow missed. After quite a few rounds of this, both orcs somehow lay dead. I believe that Navero actually hit his target once during the encounter, and did something like one hit point of damage. After it was done, they both stood for a moment to collect themselves, Navero staring at the ground, and Dania staring at Navero. Then, she began to speak.

**Dania:** "YOU FUCKING IDIOT!!! What the fuck do (censored) you think you were doing?!?! You (censored) asshole, I ought break your (censored) stupid head off! GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY GODAMN LIFE!!! I hate your ancestors, your teachers, everything, you (censored) (censored) sorry excuse (censored) little (censored) moronic... LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE, I don't ever want to see you again in my entire goddammed life, you (censored) (censored) (really censored)! Just keep the fuck away from me! go somewhere else! leave, you (censored) moron!! TRY to (censored) describe your (censored), complete, and utter STUPIDITY!! You incompetent! You idiot! You clumsy... IDIOT! Arghhh....! I hate you!! I hate the sight of you! STAY THE (censored) FUCK AWAY FROM ME AND NEVER COME NEAR ME AGAIN!! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!?!?!"

Navero stood in numb silence. Mud crept up around

his shoes. His mace hung loosely from one hand. Tears streaked down his face.

**Navero:** "But.... but you're the only friend I have."

She stared at him. Her whole body was clenched like a fist, knuckles white on her staff. What could she say? She stared and stared and stared. She wanted to kill him. He honestly deserved it. He was... He did...

**Dania:** "Oh, shit. Come on Nav, lets go get the Orcs, OK?"

She walked off into the forest, confused and angry and depressed all at the same time, pointedly ignoring the dead horses. Navero, utterly confused but somehow kind of happy, followed after.

And so, our heros routed the band of Orcs. Those who survived, including the chief, fled into the marshes, and were not seen again. All that was left now was the cave.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

"It's ok. Forget it. I know you didn't. It's ok." —*Dan Parsons*

## Navero VII

And so...

The party got itself reorganized, and wounds were bandaged, the Cavalier healed, and the dead horses not mentioned. Everyone proceeded on foot into the big, spooky cave, looking for the Orcs treasure...

The first thing we encountered was the need for a light. Navero had fortunately brought a lantern. (Navero would soon develop the habit of carrying everything he might conceivably need on a trip.) We walked past the still-smoking wood, to discover a large vent within the entrance hall itself; our smoke was all going right out. Further back in the cave was a rusty iron gate; behind this gate we saw at least one Orc, watching us. We decided to throw a Molotov cocktail, to take it and any others that might be there. The DM rolled a save for the clay pot the oil was in; it didn't break. The Orc picked it up and threw it back at us. It didn't break again. We ripped out the burning rag and watched the Orc run away.

Kortul the Mighty Barbarian Type (who has 18/98 strength) wrenched open a gap in the bars, and shortly thereafter we discovered that it could have been raised up quite easily. Sigh. We decided to proceed immediately, but some dispute came up over the marching order.

Rourk: "I shall go in first, naturally."

Kortul: "Better I go. Know caves better."

Rourk: "I recall that YOU didn't get much beyond the entrance."

Kortul: "You guard the rear, keep the priest and mage safe."

Rourk: "I think not."

Kortul: "Back there, munchkin. Let men go first."

Rourk: "You try my patience, barbarian. If you wish to repulse them through sheer malodorousness, I must admit that you have an advantage over me. But in the arts of combat I am the acknowledged superior, so remove your clumsy bulk from my path!"

Dania: "Look, will someone just go in?"

Rourk: "Shut up. You may guard the rear. Perhaps you can make up for your previous failure some other time, when it is less vital to the survival of others..."

Rizudo: "Oh, hell." (Walks through gate.)

Kortul went after Rizudo, who was now standing in some sort of great hall. It was mostly empty, apart from piles of straw and rags, sacks, and a great deal of smoked meat near the south wall. There were 3 other exits; one to the North (we came from the west), one South, and a big one to the East. The one to the east was peculiar; the Orcs had built a huge fence or barrier, with big spikes smeared with some gummy resin all through it. It was angled so as to keep something from beyond from getting in. Something big. We decided to leave it alone, and went to check out the south. Again, the argument over who goes first, solved by Navero wandering down the tunnel.

Navero: "Hello?"

Orcs: "GURTTIO!! KILLGT FUIORS DT UN-GOWAA GITCHE GUMEE!!"

Navero: "Eeep!" (Runs)

He came wandering back quite quickly, with about 20 Orcs on his heels. Fortunately, these were all women and child orcs, and so we were victorious against them. Kortul was hit in the face with a soup ladle, and the Cavalier suffered badly gnawed-on ankles.

Game Master: You slay all the women and children. Truly, a heroic effort.

Down south, there was nothing of interest. No money, nothin'. We went up north. After much searching, we hit a trap. It was a big pit that opened up beneath the lead party member (Rizudo again) dropping him 15' onto a smooth floor. He was injured, but noticed that there was something down there: a level on one wall. He decided to go over and pull the lever down. A large section of the ceiling fell into the pit, neatly fitting into the hole, providing a smooth surface that the rest of the party could walk over, except that at one end it was an inch or two higher. So long, Rizudo. We mourned for the required seconds, and Navero gave him the last rites, or tried to, and then went about our business. In the northern caves, we found a few trinkets, and about 500 gp in loose change. Also a dwarven prisoner, who was unconscious and remained so all the way back.

Must run. I fear that this is somewhat rushed. Does anyone like this so far? I haven't heard anything about it. Is everyone ignoring me?

"He was a... good man. Sometimes. Maybe." —*Dan Parsons*

## Navero VIII

Last time, we explored the Orc caverns, Rizudo died in an idiot trap, (such traps turned out to be very effective against our party), and we found a dwarven prisoner and about 500gp in assorted loose change. There were also various weapons, armors, all in fair condition, but nothing we didn't already have enough of. Somewhat disappointed, we went back to the great hall, and stared over the east barrier; beyond, we could see a little bit of a large cavern, which seemed utterly devoid of life. However, we were not about to go over and start exploring; first, we would have to go back to Swamp Keep, report that the Orcs were gone, and claim the rewards that we so richly deserved.

Guard 1: "Aw, shit, its them again."

Dania: "Will you PLEASE just open the god-damned gate for once? You know who we are."

Guard 2: "Look, yu. Yu go' a might big fa' hed there, I'll lady. Now, be nice, an' maybe I'll le' ya in."

Rourk: "We are not amused at your attempts at humor. And our patience is wearing quite thin. This ill-treatment of those who should be your honoured guests speaks volumes of this pitiful place. I demand that you open the gates at once!"

Guard 2: "Say please."

Kortul: Punches Guard 2. Guard 2 drops unconscious.

Guard 1: "Oh, good. He's been especially crass this morning. Roger! Could you open the gate for these lovely people, and put Mungo to bed?"

Roger: (From above) "Is he out cold?"

Guard 1: (Checks guard 2) "Yes, he is. Lovely, isn't it?"

Roger: "Quite."

And so we entered the keep. Naturally, the first thing did was get ourselves healed to full strength (We use a spell-point based magic system, and Navero had just enough spell points for everyone.) We then went to go see the official we had spoken to the previous day, to report on our success and see to our reward (A reward had been promised; I forgot to mention it.)

Official: "You succeeded? Wonderful! I really can't tell you how happy we all are to hear that. They came about every couple of months; they used to stay away from the keep completely, but since all the caravans started traveling on the North road, they have given us their attentions. The lord of the Keep will naturally wish to see you."

Rourk: "Think nothing of it. It was child's play."

Official: "Ah. Well: did you bring the Chief's head with you?"

Rourk: "The coward fled into the swamp, and so I was unable to obtain it for you. Rest assured that if we meet again, the oversight shall be corrected."

Official: "Did you bring any heads back? Or hands, or ears...?"

Navero: "That's... kind of barbaric, I mean, mutilation of the bodies?"

Official: "...So you have no actual proof that you ever went near the Orcs?"

Dead silence.

Kortul: "Stupid."

Rourk: "You doubt my word? Those who do learn not to."

Kortul: "Real stupid."

Official: "I, of course, believe every word you say. However, the Lord of the Keep is a hard man to please. He will want to be certain. I must say, that under these circumstances, seeing his Lordship would be out of the question. And, of course, the status of your reward money is placed somewhat in jeopardy..."

Navero: "Well, there's the money we found in the \*ow!\*" (Dania drives her staff into Navero's foot.)

Official: "What's this?"

Dania: "My young friend here was just saying how short on cash we were. Would it please you if we were to go back and get battle tokens?"

Rourk: "We may find a few more, if you absolutely insist upon this matter."

Navero: "oww..."

Official: "Yes, I think that would be the best thing for you to do. A word, children; 'foresight makes all matters go to your advantage.' Now please go finish your task."

We did spot one other Orc out in the marshes; it was not the Chief. Kortul killed it with arrow shots. We collected all the right ears we could still find, even the females and children. It was a very unpleasant task, and accomplished hurriedly. The total came to 32; not bad. We arrived back at the Keep that night.

Guard 1: "Oi, this lot. Fuck it, le' 'em in."

As even officials need to sleep, we decided to be nice and not bother the government people until morning. Instead, Kortul, Rourk, and Dania went to the only tavern, where they saw a few familiar faces. The first was that of the rescued Dwarf, whom they had dropped off at the inn; he had recovered enough to go down to the common room, and wished to thank his rescuers. His name was Arlor. The second was a mercenary-looking type who rather resembled the late and largely unlamented Rizudo; this worthy turned out to be his twin brother Razuli, who wished to hear of his brother's death.

Rourk: "So, Dwarf, you were captured by the Orcs while trying to steal from them. Being naturally incompetent, you were unable to fight them off or escape."

Arlor: "I, um, was jus' trying to earn a liven', yup."

Dania: "God, that guy looks familiar. Unpleasantly so."

Razuli: "Hi there, kids! Say, you look like those idiots who were hanging around with my brother!"

Rourk: "Oh, no... Please leave us at once."

Razuli: "Not 'till you tell me what happened. Say, are you the little..."

Dania: "Shove it, asshole."

Razuli: "I see you are. Well, kids; wanna have some fun?"

The remainder of their evening is best left to the imagination. Navero did not go to the tavern. While he did not approve of the others going to that place, he didn't know what to say without offending, and he desperately didn't want to offend anyone. Especially so soon after his failure in trying to protect his friend Dania. She had been so very angry, and rightly so; he had done so very much harm. They all must think so badly of him. It was very late at night. Most everyone else was indoors, asleep or otherwise, like good people should be. Navero wandered through the streets for a little while, but found nothing that required his aid, nothing for him to help. Once a patrol of night watchmen passed by, and eyed him with obvious suspicion. He went to the only temple in the town, which was consecrated to some Defender goddess he did not recognize. He apologized to the goddess, as she was not of The Order and he had no right to be in her place, found a prayer alcove, and curled up and went to sleep.

"Forgive me, Lords, for I have tried and failed. Again." —*Dan Parsons*

## Navero IX

A short pause whilst I pontificate:

Thank you to everyone who sent mail. Thank you to everyone who sent comments. I must admit, the story has become rather less humorous than it used to be, but that is completely intentional, I assure you. In reality, the humor did settle down once the Orc chase started in earnest — somehow, when we had something to actually do, the jokes died down a bit and things took a more serious tone. The funniest segments seemed to come between adventures.

One suggestion was a *Dramatis Personae* at the beginning of each posting, as many people have trouble

keeping the characters straight. This might be a good idea, especially as the party gets to be larger than five people. I believe the most we ever had in the party at one time is eight; I would need a list to keep them all straight at that point.

Also, some of you have told me how sad you were that Rizudo died in the idiot trap. He was not mourned long — Razuli came in; he was run by the same player, had the same stats, and the same personality. Basically, he decided to start Rizudo over, rather than come up with a new character. He is gone, yet he is with us. :-)

And finally, to the individual who commented on Dania's "lecture" to Navero at the end of Navero VI: A "lecture"? That was a full-bore rant if I ever heard one. The player was actually yelling at me for almost a minute (how's that for role-playing) using most of her very impressive vocabulary. If you consider that a "lecture" I would hate to hear a "reprimand."

## AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT...

The following morning, we all assembled in the official's office. There was a great deal of yelling and screaming, but the end result was that we didn't get to go see his Lordship, we didn't get public fame, and we got only half the reward, as we had left the Chief and the Dragon alive. Much grumbling followed.

The DM then said that Navero, Danai, Rourk, and Kortul had gained enough experience to go to second level, but we would have to go get the requisite training. The warriors had it easy - training facilities were readily available for them. The DM kindly ruled that, in this case, Navero could go up by praying and talking with the local priests for about a month, even though they were not of The Order. Our DM generally doesn't like to sweat these things, and neither do I.

However, dear Dania would have to find someone to supervise her studies in the arcane arts, and in a Keep this small, the chances of finding a mage who would apprentice her, and put up with her adventuring, seemed to be pretty dismal. Her efforts did come to fruit, in time.

Dania: (To Joe Townsperson) "Excuse me, but is there a mage or wizard living around here, with whom I might speak?"

Joe: "Well, there's the Wizards on High street..."

**Dania:** "There are \*several\* of them? In a town this size?"

**Joe:** "Yep, they hang around together. Don't know why you'd wanna talk to them, though."

**Dania:** "I've got my reasons. Thank you and good day, Sir."

(Walks to High street. There, she sees that the houses are all very tall, and seem to lean back, away from the street. They are painted bright colors, and have gardens with lots of colorful flowers. Violets and purples seem to be a general favorite here. She went up to a random house and knocked. A tall figure with a long white beard opened the door; surprisingly, he was not at all annoyed at the intrusion (as wizards often are), but seemed to positively beam good tidings from his beetling little brows. He was also, by the way, dressed in a very loud purple robe, with lots of polka-dots.)

**Dania:** "Um... Hello, master Wizard? I am Dania Couliari; I have come seeking an apprenticeship."

**Wizard:** "You have? Splendid!! I love apprentices! Especially small cute ones with pointy ears! (Poof. Flowers appear in his hand.) Have some flowers! Have some more! (Poof) Have whole bunches of them! (Poof)(Poof)(Poof)(Poof)(Poof)(Poof) Aren't flowers nice? I like this kind best. Do you like flowers, young lady?"

**Dania:** "Actually, I have hay fever. Good day, sorry to have troubled you."

**Wizard:** "No, no! I can't have you going away like that! You aren't happy!"

**Dania:** "Excuse me?"

**Wizard:** "We cannot have unhappy people in our midst... For we are THE PURPLE POLKA-DOT WIZARDS!!! We ALL want to make the whole world HAPPY!!!"

(All of a sudden, doors and windows all up and down the street burst open, and about 20 mages in loud, purple, polka-dotted clothing lean out.)

**PPW's:** "YES!! HAPPY, HAPPY, HAPPY!!"  
(They all jump out and begin dancing.)

**Dania:** stares

**PPW 1:** "We want everyone in the world to be just as happy as we are!"

**All PPW's:** "YES!!" (Some are doing cartwheels)

**Dania:** STARES

**PPW 2:** "We want the world to be a joyful place! With bright colors and flowers and singing and effervescence and glee!"

**All PPW's:** "YES! ALL THAT!" (they make a giant pyramid, which falls, but they don't mind.)

**Dania:** \*STARES\*

**PPW 1:** "I love apprentices; don't you love apprentices?"

**PPW 2:** "How dare you grab this one up so fast! How dare you, sir! Why, I'd horsewhip you if I had a horse!"

**Dania:** \*STARES\* (Jaw drops, hits ground with audible thud.)

**PPW 3:** "Actually, I'd much rather she did that to me!"

**PPW 2:** "Oh? Whips and chains, dear Xinjanthropus?"

**PPW 3:** "Chains, you say? Your remark leaves me fit to be TIED!"

**PPW 2:** "I am BOUND to strike you for that remark!"

**PPW 1:** "Lets have no disCORD!"

**PPW 5:** "Yes! All this over a deLINKuent!"

**PPW 3:** "But she looks like a FAST 'UN!"

**PPW 1:** "You have a filthy mind! At least, not a TIE-dy one!"

**PPW 4:** "This LINE leaves me at the end of my rope!"

**Dania:** "Uh, do you do this all the time, uh, great wizards?"

(All PPW's gaze upon her, with glee in their beady little eyes.)

**PPW 5:** "A STRAIGHT WOMAN!! SHE'S MINE!!"

**PPW 2:** "Restraint! Julius saw her first!"

**PPW 1:** "I'll fight you for her! Do your worst!"

**PPW 5:** "RIGHT! Lets have at it then, Julie baby!!"



(They do "rock, scissors, paper" in a furious huff. Both get rock, then both scissors, then both paper.)

PPW 1: "Alright then, two out of three!"

PPW 3: "Wait a minute, she's leaving. Come back!"

PPW 1: "Don't leave! Can't you see I'm trying to tell you I love you? Because you remind me of you! Your eyes, your lips your hair... everything about you reminds me of you! Except you. How do you account for that?"

Dania: "Sorry,gottago,kidsonthestove,bye!" (Flees)

PPW 4: "Rats."

PPW 5: "Do you think we sent her away unhappy?"

PPW 1: "No, not at all. Look! She seems much happier already."

A few notes on the Purple Polka-dot Wizards: (This is 1st edition AD&D, of course) They cast Tasha's Uncontrollable Hideous Laughter as a 1st level spell, and Otto's Irresistible Dance as a 4th level spell. They are of Chaotic Good alignment. When summoning familiars, if they get a special familiar, it is not a Pseudo-dragon; they get a Faerie Dragon.

Dania went to find Joe Townsperson again.

Joe: "Oh, hello."

Dania: "You bastard. You sick little (censored) bastard. Why didn't you tell me they were all a bunch of lunatics?!"

Joe: "Well... you didn't ask."

Dania: "Well, now I AM ASKING: are there any mages in this whole goddamned place who AREN'T insane?"

Joe: "Well, one..."

Dania: "Where? And is there anything I should know about him?"

Joe: "Nobody much goes near his place, ma'am. He only gets visitors late at night. It's the big dark house on Kings road, can't miss it. He isn't a very good neighbor, ma'am, but I can say he aint any loopier than any other wizard, and less than some."

Dania: "Good. Good-day."

Dania trekked up to Kings road. The house was indeed unmistakable, in it's glowering eldritch hugeness, suspended seemingly as an abomination within a polite white-housed neighborhood. Other dwellings shyed away from it's improbable obesity, while it stood in solitude, lofty and arrogant, shrouded it it's sheer weight of gloom and despair. There were no visible doors, although windows which seemed to gaze into your cringing soul were scattered about in awful patterns that the mind refused to acknowledge. A neat house, but I wouldn't want to live there.

Dania went looking for a door, but a disembodied voice stopped her.

Voice: "I am aware of your presence. And your desires..."

(A door suddenly existed, where she was sure one had not been.)

Voice: "Enter freely, and of your own will."

Dania entered. Beyond, there was a hallway, thin but impossibly high, whose walls were a uniform shade of grey, a disturbing grey; they seemed to shift slightly, just at the edges of your vision, but never were seen to move. The hall was longer than it looked; it took a long time to reach the end, although when she looked back, she saw it was indeed a long way back, and no door was visible. She reached the end of the hall, and stepped into a small black room. An unknown force moved her to another place, seemingly beyond the very limits of space itself. There, she saw what was presumably the master of the house. Nearly 7 feet tall, dressed in a loose robe like a sundered piece of space, and with huge hands which seemed to flow into more fingers than was acceptable. His features were a study in fascinating ugliness, riveting and commanding in their grotesquery.

Master: "An apprenticeship. How amusing. How presumptuous. I haven't dealt with an apprentice since.... Ah. So your former master was Galvolin."

Dania: "Uh, yes. He kicked me out when my parents did."

Master: "For sleeping with a Drow? Very close-minded people. You are well rid of them. I see some potential in you, though. Interesting flares and prominences. Very well, apprentice."

Dania: "Sure, thanks. Glad to be here."

Master: "Of course you are. Your first task..."

(A wild gesture. Space and time scream. They appear in a room.)

**Master:** "Clean all this glassware. And I want to be able to see my face in it! After that, set the dining room table. I am expecting an important guest. Put 7 forks and 12 knives at his place."

**Dania:** "There's enough glassware here to fill my old bedroom..."

**Master:** "It seems that would be rather uncomfortable to sleep on. But some might find it very interesting... To work. Now!"

**Dania:** "Yes! Very good, o my master! Chop, chop! Oh, uh..."

**Master:** "Of course. I am perfectly aware of your other career. Your next assignment will involve it."

**Dania:** "Ok. No problems."

**Master:** "For your studies, you may peruse the library on the first floor. NONE of the others. And, after you finish here."

Dania managed to complete the requisite studies, and was able to rejoin us periodically for a drink. In fact, although that one library was a mages dream, she took every possible opportunity to get out of the house. If she seemed any more morbid than usual, no one noticed. The training period passed uneventfully, leaving us rested and ready to continue in our explorations of the Orc caverns.

"Your hands look scaly. Is that from lots of washing?"

"Lord, I hope so." —*Dan Parsons*

## Navero X

The continuing sto-o-o-ry...

- Navero, male human cleric ("oops...")
- Dania, female 1/2-wood elf MU ("You (racial slur) idiot!")
- Rourk Ravensbane, male drow cavalier ("You insult me, knave.")
- Kortul, male human fighter (various grumbles)
- Razuli, male human fighter ("Well, kids, whatcha gonna do now?")

- Arlor, male dwarf thief ("Uh... yep. Yep. I do. Really.")

Training went relatively well. Dania didn't turn into anything more hideous than usual, and the rest of the month passed rapidly. Rested and fit, we decided to trek back to the cavern and see what it was beyond that big barrier that made the slovenly Orcs put it up. Razuli accompanied the group, despite the assurances of the others that his presence was not necessary, and Arlor also came along. Arlor was not treated very well, I am sad to admit; the humans regarded him with indifference at best, and both elves very obviously disliked him. (The player was very quiet, and unused to our playing style, which involves lots of squabbling, as you may have noticed.)

**Rourk:** "And another thing: you are to address me as 'Sir' at all times, unless conditions demand the more appropriate title."

**Arlor:** "You mean, uh, 'madam'?"

**Rourk:** (Draws sword.) "If you insult me again, I shall feed you your liver."

**Arlor:** "Sorry, sorry. Um."

**Navero:** "I kind of don't think that was very nice, uh, Rourk."

**Rourk:** "YOU try being NICE to this hairy little... But you are correct. I am loosing my temper over a nothing. I do apologize for disturbing your composure, priest."

**Arlor:** "Thanks. Thanks lots."

**Dania:** "Just be quiet, will you?"

**Razuli:** "What are you two getting so upset about, anyway? It's OK, Arlor, they really don't mean it."

**Arlor:** "I think they do, yup."

**Razuli:** "No! They just feel that way about anyone shorter than they are. You see, Dania thinks you're gonna look up her robe, and Sir Snot over there was once bested by a rabid chihuahua, and it left him traumatized. We all love you. Really."

**Rourk:** "Mercenary, my temper is short enough as it is..."

**Razuli:** "And that's not the only thing."

**Rourk:** "You are unworthy of notice. Begone from my sight."

**Naverro:** "I wish you didn't not like him so much. It's kind of sad."

**Razuli:** "Kid, I've spent enough time here to know that those two are both idiots. They are pretty sad. Ignore 'em, and do what you need to."

**Kortul:** "Dragon to the left."

There was indeed a Dragon there, in the misty distance. We couldn't tell if it was the same one, and frankly didn't want to find out. At least, most of us didn't; Rourk had to be told that by the time he reached it, it would have flown away again.

**Naverro:** "I wish they wouldn't be so unkind. Especially Dania; she is a very nice person, I don't know why she's behaving like this."

**Razuli:** "Dania? NICE? Kid, you're deluding yourself. She is better built than most elves... but that isn't what you mean, now, is it?"

**Naverro:** "Huh?"

**Razuli:** "Never mind. (sigh) Where the hell did someone like you come from, anyway?"

**Naverro:** "From the Chapel of St. Glajmir of the Glow, under Master Luminant. And it's not good to use that name. It might attract diabolical attentions, the likes of which thy soul would quake to behold."

**Razuli:** "Right. (chuckles)"

**Naverro:** "And you shouldn't say such degrading things about others as you do. 'Others will treat you as you see them.' And you shouldn't drink of liquorous spirits. Or fraternize with the evil or the undisciplined..."

**Razuli:** "Nav?"

**Naverro:** "And... uh, yes?"

**Razuli:** "Shut up. And do your job. Ok?"

**Naverro:** "But I must follow my faith."

**Razuli:** "Fine. Do that. But you've been pretty fucking useless so far, you know, and shouldn't be giving no sermons."

**Naverro:** "But... I'm sorry. But..."

**Razuli:** "Fine. Now shut up."

We reached the cavern in due course, and went inside to the great hall. As far as we could tell, the food-stuffs had been taken, but nothing else disturbed. The barrier was intact, although the gummy resin on the stakes seemed to have degraded, and flaked off in places. The barrier was made of large logs and branches, sharpened in places, and bound together mostly with rope. Something the size of a human could scramble over it without much danger, but something much larger probably wouldn't make it. The cavern beyond was quite large; there were a few interesting rock formations, most of them broken off at the base, but the cave seemed empty and dead.

**Rourk:** "Priest! I request of you a blessing before going in to battle the creature."

**Kortul:** "Find creature first. Don't waste time sitting around now."

**Dania:** "Yes, as long as we're in here, we should keep moving."

**Rourk:** "You may explore ahead if you must. I shall be prepared."

**Naverro:** "Uh, kneel, and take off your helmet."

**Rourk:** "I have vowed not to face others until I have proven myself worthy of it."

**Naverro:** "Oh. Well, uh... O Lords of the Correct and Unalterable Way... The true shining path of servitude and right... Please do look down on this, thy... humble servant, and give me the right and the power to instigate thy will. (Takes Rourk's head between his hands) Look down upon me, thy chosen instrument, and let your will flow through me into this, our... protector, that he may have the courage... and skill... to do thy holy works."

**Rourk:** "Very good." (Tries to rise, but Naverro continues.)

**Naverro:** "Yea, though thy flesh-and-blood servants be weak, O Lords, I do ask that you forgive us all, each and every one... for our failures, be they of mercy... or of will. Please, O Lords, let our petty differences be settled between us, and may we unite to vanquish those who would move against your will."

**Rourk:** "Amen!" (Again tries to rise, but Naverro continues.)

**Navero:** "If one of us do drag the whole down, O Lords, inspire that one with thine own strength, that he may better serve the needs of all! Let that one smite down that which divides us! Let petty hatreds and pointless greed be ended!" (Shakes Rourk's helmet. Rourk's head rattles around inside.)

**Rourk:** "Uh, priest..."

**Navero:** "Please, O Lords! Forgive us all! We are weak and stupid and humble before your eyes! Let us also cast aside old hates, which our own STUPIDITY drives on! Yea verily, the scars of a thousand years can be healed with an act of kindness, if kindness can possibly enter the tiny minds of those who hold the hate!"

(Everyone is staring at Navero. Rourk starts to feel uncomfortable.)

**Navero:** "Let the fear of the FIRES and PAIN of your punishments sit with us ALL! Yea, illuminate us, and show us our follies! Though we be but as mortals, BLIND and STUPID, let it be within your infinite kindness to give us your wisdom, THAT WE MAY SEE OURSELVES!! And let this discord CEASE!"

**Dania:** "Navero?"

**Navero:** "And look DOWN and... Yes?"

**Razuli:** "Is your robe too tight or something?"

**Rourk:** "Perhaps it is." (Quickly jerks away and stands up.) "A good blessing. Truly, a great blessing. I thank you, priest."

**Navero:** "Uh... yes. Uh..." (Everyone continues to stare.)

**Arlor:** "Um..."

**Navero:** "uh..."

**Kortul:** "Hope yelling didn't attract monster."

**Razuli:** "Oh, brother. That's all we need. A loud-speaker for a priest."

**Kortul:** "Thought all priests loud-speakers. How they became priests."

**Rourk:** "Indeed. This one can certainly make a helmet echo."

**Razuli:** "Of course! It's easy with such a big hollow space."

**Rourk:** (Fume...) "You are beneath contempt."

**Dania:** "Come on, Rourk, you walked into that one. Lets go now."

**Rourk:** "I did not. I insist upon that fact."

**Arlor:** (giggles)

**Rourk:** "WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT!?"

**Arlor:** "Nothin'."

Our brave heroes climbed over the barrier, and down to the cavern below. There they were met by... absolutely nothing. No hungry Dragons, maniacally screaming slime monsters from the planet Sh'rue'y\*ed, not even so much as a rabid Kobold. It was a huge, irregular cavern, about 60 feet across, with entrances in the north and the east sides. Our footsteps echoed, but there was no other sound.

"Nice place. Wouldn't want to build a house here, though." —*Dan Parsons*

## Harrison 3 & 4

©1990 Jim Vassilakos  
jimv@ucrmath.ucr.edu

*Jim began the Harrison Chapters during the mid 80's, intending the work to serve as 'filler' for the setting of his Traveller campaign. The third and fourth of the series are reproduced here with his permission.*

### Three

"Are you family?" The nurse's eyebrows wrinkled in rehearsed concern as he scratched down Mike's name and Tizarian I.D. number.

"No, but will this do?" Mike showed the nurse his Galactican press clearance. The shiny blue and silver card was nearly identical to his Tizarian personal identification or his Imperial consumer profile. The three were hard to tell apart at a glance.

The young man nodded in acknowledgement and hurriedly escorted Mike through the long white corridors of the medical center. The usually polished floor tiles showed dirty tread markings where a pair of wet, oversized starlaw boots had recently stomped. Mike grinned and snapped a picture though he doubted that analysis of the photo could tell much more than the boot size and service division of its wearer.

The air felt slightly colder as the nurse pushed aside a set of green double doors. The word "Freezers" was painted in icy blue across their surface. Mike followed closely.

"So what d'ya want with a 'corpsicle' anyway?" The nurse smiled at his own joke. He was being too smooth. Mike guessed that they were giving him loads of preferential treatment because they were scared silly of the bad press he could inflict.

"It's a long story." Mike bent over the computer and with a few quick keystrokes he scanned the registry of the dead. Niki had taught him how the system worked last month and the lesson came back to him as quickly as were it taught yesterday. Such were the benefits of being lectured by a Siri, Mike thought as the nurse approached the terminal.

"Hey, wait a second buddy." The nurse was visibly surprised, but he scanned the screen seeing Mike had found his way through the system.

"He's gone." Mike closed his eyes in the anticipated frustration. It was too much too expect that

the Imperial police would leave his subject's body on cite. That would make verification of the time of death too simple a matter.

"I thought you guys held a patient's body for autopsy."

"We do. I least we're supposed to." The nurse hit a few more keys and scanned the screen for more data.

"Here. The verdict was heart attack due to the stress medication. It happens occasionally. The body's been taken to Greenflower mortuary."

The news startled Mike momentarily, and he wondered what the Imp's motives could be. He pushed himself away from the console and straightened out, slowly perceiving the implications. The nurse gazed up from the computer and tried to read Mike's expression.

Mike finally smiled, "At least Fork's going out in style. Say, you got a spare hour?"

\* \* \*

Surrounded by lush costal woodlands and set around a wild flower garden, Greenflower easily rated as the prettiest community in Silver-Tri county. It was small, quiet, nearly perfect in every way. Mike would have lived there, but it lacked in one crucial respect: no beach.

Mike watched the passing trees and sighed as the nurse suddenly turned delivery boy drove the white grav-car along the highway. The med-center was being too kind but totally predictable, loaning him a nurse and a car, all to straighten out its reputation with one reporter from a very powerful news syndicate.

"I hope you're enjoying this." The nurse sounded slightly irritated.

"Sure am. Watch out for the cat."

Small rain droplets marched steadily up the windshield and swerved sideways with every curve in the road as the sun poked between the clouds with sporadic recess, its rays shattering into a kaleidoscope of colorful, dancing patterns.

Cruising at a hundred kilometers per hour, the grav-car sped over the highway at an approximate

altitude of one meter. Mike thought that it felt like they were floating on a current of air though he knew that wasn't the case. They were floating on the force of gravity which was really the curvature of space. Mike's mind began to swim with equations learned in a series of undergraduate science courses he had been dragged into by a friend. Something about down-vectors and Higgs boson emissions. He couldn't quite remember who to hate for it. Mike had always liked science, but never enough to actually understand it.

The nurse pulled up to the mortuary and gently touched earth. Outside the deep grey building a small service seemed to be taking place. The dark gloomy afternoon made the mourners look like an assembly of Draconian diplomats dressed in sleek black suits huddling together exchanging whispers. Their somber mood was catching.

Mike climbed from the car and headed warily for the mortuary. A pit of ashes was exposed to the rain about a hundred feet from the building's entrance, green clover petals curving in along its red brick walls. The nurse, genuinely fascinated, stopped to look down. It was archaic. Almost barbarian.

Mike entered the building's lobby while the nurse ran to catch up.

"What'd you see?"

"Nothing. It was too dark," the young man puffed catching his breath.

"May I help you gentlemen?" A middle aged woman with a pale complexion suddenly appeared as if from thin air. She was dressed in a long black gown and wore a black pearl necklace.

Mike took out his press clearance, "I hope so. I'm looking for a man, I mean a body of a man which was brought here this morning."

The women seemed strangely amused. "Does this body of a man have a name." Her words sang out like music.

"He was listed as a jay-dee eighteen from Silver-Tri costal med-center."

"I see," She seemed absolutely enthralled.

Mike smiled, "Great," then consciously dropped his smile. "Where is he?"

She slipped between Mike and the nurse and crept to the lobby entrance, opening the large oaken doors and pointing her long slender arm toward the ash pit. Mike watched the rain fall in disappointment.

\* \* \*

The setting sun's amber beams tanned the evening coast, streaming thoughtlessly past the white water's edge, scattering sullenly across Michael Harrison's tired features. He watched two gulls, wings outstretched, gliding peacefully over the shifting blue

and crimson waves, hanging precariously onto the thin salty air. As if beckoning him forth, the sea approached within inches of his face and then receded into the distance while thoughts twisted about in his mind like delicate angels on their way to a darktime's meal.

But something was missing; something was overlooked. And for the life of him, he didn't know what it was. What to do when you're deadended? Go back and re-examine the facts. But there were no facts. Everything was hidden behind lies.

Unable to sleep in his only true home, he picked himself up and walked back toward the house. The huge wooden doors seemed even more menacing when sober, but he managed them open and headed to the kitchen for a brew.

His soft bed and cold beer summed up the perfect way to spend an evening, but as he sat on the edge of the covers the camera drew away his attention. Near the wall, it sat on the rug where he had dropped it less than an hour ago as if pleading like a child for a trip to the zoo, "take me a picturing, I want to have fun."

Mike smiled and stretched out on the floor beside his toy. He opened the workset and began to review the pictures in memory. He zipped past a Telmarian mountain range where strange animals carried supplies across a snow ridge to the local guerrilla faction, then floated along Tizarian waters as a shuttle from nearby Aquapolis darted from under the seascape in a beautifully chaotic conglomeration of white water spray and a rainbow of sunshine, then noticed a Calannan temple where the alter priests sacrificed a political dissident with knives and a chainsaw, but only one picture grabbed his attention- that of two starlaw guards scowling outside a medical center entrance in the wee hours of morning.

Mike pivoted the picture into different corners of the screen and tried to decide where it would look best hanging from the wall. He reversed the colors, intensified the light, rotated the picture around, zoomed out for a wideangle, and suddenly noticed what was missing.

The small distorted numbers mocked him from the far corner of the screen. He manually zoomed in on them and refocused. How could he be so stupid? The medical center had no permanent cargo shuttle. The vessel must have belonged to the Imperials.

He looked toward the controller wall, "Cindy, load file from Silver-Tri. Find Imperial shuttle 8372919041."

She responded within the second, "That shuttle is found."

"Where is it now?"

"Docked onto the independent fast-merchant, Nissithiu, which has jumped out of system fifteen point two centims ago."

The idea itched like a hunch sent by the devil, "What was the cargo?"

"It was dropping off pharmaceuticals."

"Departure cargo?"

"None."

Mike leaned back on the bed, "That's pretty strange, leaving a world as wealthy as Tizar."

Cindy gave no reply.

"Where is the ship headed?"

"Flight orders don't state."

"They should."

"They don't."

"Then read topside nav-data and figure it out." Mike hated lazy computers.

Cindy came back to him after a few seconds, "This will take me twenty-four point seven centims to compute."

"Why so long?"

"I'm not a navigation computer."

He shrugged, "Fine, Take your time."

"Now computing," she responded as if more than a little annoyed.

Mike grinned. She'd be working until well past midnight. At least he now knew how to keep her busy.

As he stepped back outside, beer in paw, he shot the dying sun a victory smile and sat down on the damp sands under a chilly wind. Then, curling up next to the surf, Mike closed his eyes and tried not to dream. Songs of water and birds soothed him with a serenity beyond mere music as he drifted away to other seas.

\* \* \*

Slowly, his soul floated about in black and empty space. Silently, a touch from above pulled him away from sleep's cherished womb. Sounds of music, songs from the sea, clustered around him like the players of an opera theater, sinking in and out of the void with a strange, perhaps arranged harmony.

She bore no expression as he opened his eyes. He felt himself gripped with a strange combination of confusion and fear as the black sky above cast a bold contrast around her disarranged golden blonde hair and deep blue eyes.

She smiled sweetly whispering, "Good morning."

For a moment, he felt as if he was dreaming, but the rush of questions was uncharacteristic of sleep-think. In dreams he could accept that life was death and good was evil, but on the surface of thought there

was only the here and the now and many, many questions.

"Why are you here?"

"We found your psyche."

The cold tide washed the tips of Mike's toes as a cool, salty breeze lifted a few strands of Robin's hair.

"Drop the story, or you'll never see her again."

Robin walked slowly up the beach as Mike sat still in the sand watching the ocean horizon curve away into the distance.

\* \* \*

Dawn was particularly brilliant along the coast, a primary reason for his choosing to live there. Mike watched the sunrise with a rueful stare as the dull, throbbing pain stuck like a stiff arrow in the base of his skull. Bitterly, he picked his sand encrusted self off the beach and headed wearily toward the house. Grains of earth fell off him with each dismal step.

The large livingroom reeked of a dreary gloom. Mike glanced toward the couch and the pillow where her head had rested two nights before. He walked sullenly into the bedroom. The far curtains remained closed, dimming the room. The chain locket she'd given him rested on his bed with the camera.

"Hello."

It beeped compulsively as a point of light danced around the controller screen.

"Yes?"

"The Nissithiu went to the Calanna star system."

"Oh."

Mike tumbled the junk off the bed, all except for the locket. It was in the shape of a heart with words inscribed along the front: "Go For It!"

"Place audio connection call to Linden."

The light danced around the screen.

"Done."

Mike gathered up his breath.

"Hi, What's up Mike?" It was Linden's voice.

"Morning editor."

"Yes, and a very nice one it is too. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Mike consciously tried collecting his spirit.

"Why did you tell Clay?"

"What?"

"You heard me."

"I don't understand, Mike. What happened?"

"They've got Niki."

"...You think I told Clay about her?"

"I know you did, Chuck. I just wanna know why."

"Now don't start hurling accusations, buddy. I didn't say a thing to Clay or anybody else. Now,

tell me exactly what happened. Did she screw up or something?"

"No."

"Well, how do you know?"

"She's not a screw-up! Okay?!"

"Well, I didn't say anything. Editor's honor, Mike."

"Bullshit."

"The honest truth."

"No, it had to be you."

"Nope."

"Chuck, if I find out later..."

"I'm clean."

"Chuck... stupid question coming up..."

Mike scratched his head with the locket searching for the right words.

"You ready?"

"I love dumb questions. Shoot."

"When's the last time you had your office checked for bugs?"

Silence.

"Chuck?!?"

The line was dead.

## Four

Mike leaned over the mottled piece of metal which had fused itself beyond recognition. The analysis specialist scanned his expression.

"There's no way we can trace manufacture; it's just too far gone," she explained.

"Have you found anymore?"

"Nearly a dozen," Charles Linden broke in, somewhat heatedly. Mike could almost see his boss's anger steaming off the heavy overcoat he wore to protect himself from the lab's sub-zero temperature.

"I don't understand it at all," he continued. "Why would Clay go to all the trouble? And what's so important about this dead John Doe?"

Mike glanced at the specialist who seemed to be examining the editor with an unconcerned stare. He hoped she wasn't the type to blab.

"Look Chuck, there are warmer places to discuss this."

Linden was keen on the idea of getting out of the lab, not so much because of the third party with ears and a mouth as due to the chill. He and Mike took the lift down to the subways leaving the company security personnel to the unhappy clean-up their own incompetence had prompted.

The subway train to Greenflower was nearly empty, and the trip uneventful. Linden was, for once, totally unconcerned about what was happening on

the floor. The scores of staff writers would just be sending him more meaningless trash which he would later strip to the bare facts and send back due to lack of content. It was always the same old story at the middle of the week.

Mike promised something far more interesting for the readers, and for the editor as well. Linden had suddenly taken a personal interest in the story, a big no-no in his business. But it was worth bending a few rules, and it felt right. It was even worth a trip to the pit of ashes.

The late morning air warmed Linden as sunshine broke through the white fluffy clouds and streamed down in long silver threads from the heavens. He hiked alongside Mike etching a trail through the dew-sodden expanse of grass. Birds were darting about in the brisk morning air. Their songs were like a child's laughter, almost mocking yet innocent.

The pit suddenly lay before them, its sides sinking into the earth without warning. A variety of religious symbols decorated the inner surfaces informing wayward souls to beware the footsteps of the dead as the familiar sweet scent of ash and apple resin hung heavy in the air. Linden sat down on the red brick lifting his chin and squinting at Mike through the bright beams of sunlight.

"Not what you expected," Mike cautiously broke the silence.

"No," Linden admitted. "It's too..." He couldn't pull off the words.

"Antique?"

"Old fashioned. It's too dated."

"I thought you were into that Chuck," Mike prodded smiling.

"I am, but there's a limit. This is so undignified. It's a mass burial."

"Just another screwed up religion." Mike stretched out his arm pointing down the pit approvingly, "But you have to admit, they did a great job."

"What? I don't follow."

"The Imps. They kill Fork, and get rid of his body so perfectly that there's no way I can get a confirmation on the time of death."

"Sure, but why the mass burial? Why not just cremate him and leave it at that?"

Mike kicked a stone into the pit, "Because he isn't dead."

"You just said they killed him," Linden countered.

Mike shrugged, "I lied. If they just wanted him dead and gone, they'd have done what you said."

Linden stood up. He glared at Mike in spontaneous disbelief but knew the reporter well enough to



realize that doubting was useless and quite possibly counter-productive.

"Explain," Linden finally insisted.

"The Imps want to stage a fake death. They snatch Fork and put some poor fool in his place, kill the guy and send the body to the incinerators. But that still isn't good enough. They now have to get rid of the remains in a legal manner, but in such a way that these remains cannot be later analyzed to prove the guy who got burned wasn't Fork. Even ashes can be analyzed. Admittedly, it isn't something we often do, but it can be done. People don't often share identical body chemistry. A mere difference of as little as a gram in solid weight would be enough to..."

"Enough," Linden interrupted, "I've got the idea. The only legal way to dispose of the ashes in a manner in which they cannot be later analyzed is to mix them with other ashes. Thus, the ash pit."

"Exactly."

Linden laughed, "It's a really neat theory Mike. Now prove it."

Mike looked at the wet grass in front of his feet, "If I try, I lose Niki."

"What makes you so sure you haven't already?"

Mike considered the editor's question with antipathy.

"I know what you're thinking Harrison."

"Do you?"

"I've already sent for company personnel, off planet. They should be here in a few days."

"Chuck, if we had a few days we wouldn't be talking."

"Regardless of all other considerations, I won't use our current security staff to deal with this... situation."

Mike shot his boss a rueful grin, "You don't trust them."

"After what happened... would you?"

"We can always go to Tizar police. Even though she's unregistered, they've been supportive in such matters before."

Linden shook his head in flat refusal, "You know as well as I that the paper cannot risk this getting out."

"She a friend, Chuck."

"She's also a psyche. And Clay is a damn board-member. There's no win here; we have no choice but to wait and let company people handle it."

"If we wait, it may be to late."

"She's already lost, buddy. If you think you'll ever see her again..." Linden cut himself off mid-sentence. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay. You're probably right."

"So what are you going to do?" The editor carefully enunciated each syllable with the utmost patience.

"What d'you think I should do?"

"If they're hiding, we must chase. I'll get one of the paper's private starships to take you to Calanna. I know you didn't have much fun last time you were there, but like they say, duty calls."

"Fine, but don't stick me in some ice box."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Linden pledged. He knew well Mike's distaste for low passage.

"And what about Niki? If there's any chance..."

Linden gazed back into the pit for some inspiration, but the same anger kept welling within him. Mike studied his boss as the sunlight shined off Linden's black boots and whisked the corners of his eyes.

"Whatever you do between now and the time you leave is your own business," he insisted. "You understand?"

\* \* \*

Mike and Chuck took the escalator down to the floor from p872. As they entered the ten acre room all they could hear was the clicking of fingers on keyboards and the dull chatter of hundreds of gatherers. Linden's press office lay at dead center, and a small group of grouchy staff writers wandered about outside the entrance.

"Why the committee," Mike wondered allowed.

Linden explained, "There's been talk of a strike. Haven't you been reading the paper?"

"Must have missed it. Serious?"

"They just like making waves." It was one of Chuck's pet phrases. Staff writers and clericals were both labeled as replaceable by management. If they decided to strike, there would be no problem finding new recruits. For this reason, their union demands were generally ignored. But even so, they still liked to stomp around and threaten the editor every other year or so. Mike was glad he wasn't following it.

"I guess you read the news once and you've read it a thousand times," Mike quoted.

"Watch that kiddo."

They went their separate ways, and Mike felt the better of it. He didn't envy Linden's job in the least.

"Hey Harrison. Haven't seen you here in a while."

"Hi Mike."

"Hey buddy, where've you been?"

"Walker. Kim. Chris, I've been sick."

"I see the boss is catching it too. I hope you guys've been having safe sex."

"Chris, you're an asshole."

"Happy birthday to you too buddy."

Come to think of it, Mike didn't envy his own job either. Not that he didn't like gathering. He just didn't like many gatherers.

There also came those moments which he genuinely regretted. These he called mistakes. Being seen walking in late with the editor was but one example. He hoped he didn't just call too much attention to himself. Having a trail of story-starved gatherers tagging along could seriously jeopardize his chances of sneaking up on Clay.

Mike sat down at his desk and switched on his terminal scanning the latest breaking headlines.

"Staffwriters Prepare For Strike"

"Youth Locked In Freezer Eats Own Foot"

"Upcoming Press Banquet..."

"So what's up?" It was Bill Walker. He was another crack investigative gatherer. Not very successful, but crack all the same. His youth was his greatest advantage and his biggest stumbling block. Mike could remember what it was like.

"Not much. How 'bout you?"

"Nothin'. Did you see the one about the banquet? You're gonna be speaking." Bill knew how much Mike hated to read the paper and thus usually never got word about these things until it was too late to make reservations for an interstellar cruise.

"The one before it looked more interesting. You write it?" Mike accused in his most inquiring tone.

"Wish I did." It was something Bill would write. He had a flare for the gory.

"Where'd you get cut?" Mike just noticed Bill had a nasty slash under his left ear taking the whole length of cheek down to his dark sunburnt chin.

"Mama did it," he laid out. There was a glint of amusement in his grey-blue eyes. Otherwise he seemed deadly serious.

"Walker, you've got a sweet mama."

"She is."

"But you're a sick bastard."

"Do you really mean it?"

Mike turned back to his headlines pretending he had serious work to do.

"I really got into a fight with my neighbor's cat."

"That's really fascinating." Mike mimicked Walker's distinctive "really" without effort. It was a common part of their interaction on the rare occasion that both were on the floor.

Mike didn't mind the wasted time. He knew it would pay for itself eventually. Walker was young and often useful when he wanted to be. He and Mike worked together occasionally on the difficult parts of each others assignments. Mike sometimes thought of

himself as a kind of mentor teaching a newcomer the tricks of the trade.

But as much as he liked working with Bill Walker, he knew the young man was also dangerous to be around. He took too many unwarranted risks as far as Mike was concerned. He got himself into scrapes that he'd have to fight himself out of. But as the boss would often testify, it was all part of the job.

\* \* \*

"So what's really going on?" Bill asked an hour later as he finished picking the seeds out of his xisimo core. His elbows rested on the clear surface of the table as he tossed slivers of the fruit cut by his laser knife high into the air and caught them smoking between his teeth. This was one reason the cafeteria staff insisted they sit in the corner, Mike thought.

"You're about to catch your tongue on fire."

"Only if I miss. C'mon Mike. I need a story. The well is dry buddy. I'm dying of thirst."

"So you want to steal mine?"

"I've shared with you," Bill acted hurt.

"Yeah, shared crap."

"C'mon Mike. Admit it. You need me."

"Like I need my penis to fall off," Mike agreed thoughtfully.

Bill ignored the comment, "Remember that time on Telmar? Who saved who? Huh?" He pointed the blade of his weapon at Mike, "You owe me one."

Mike gulped down the last of his beer and hoped nobody was listening.

"Hell, you owe me two. Remember..."

"I wasn't aware we were counting. But now that we are, how many do you think you owe me?"

Bill estimated a number in his head. Then finally gave in with a sheepish look, "Okay, I'll drop it."

\* \* \*

Mike spent most of the afternoon on the computer running searches on Clay and beginning a journal for the story complete with facts, photos, and tapes of conversations. Everyone else was minding their own business which was nice for a change, though they didn't seem to have very much to do. Private reports kept coming in, forwarded from Linden, on new melted pieces of metal being found in Chuck's private residence and on his clothes. There was even one under the seat he sat in during lunch. Such is the life of an editor, Mike smiled.

He kept smiling until his searches started coming up negative. Clay seemed to have disappeared over the past two days except for one use of his corporate

credit card at a shop in aquapolis just that morning. He bought an expensive tie.

Otherwise, zip. He hadn't signed any business or legal documents. He wasn't at his office. He wasn't at his flat in Silver Tri. He hadn't been using the subway. He hadn't so much as peed in an executive toilet. Deadend, pure and simple. The only good thing Mike could tell was that he certainly hadn't left the planet. That would have made things a little too complicated.

"I can tell you where Clay is." Mike turned with alarming speed, almost giving himself the second near whiplash of the week.

"You've got to break that habit, Mike. Seriously." It was Bill again.

"What the hell do you want, Walker?"

"I can tell you where Clay is." This time it registered. Mike opened his eyes wide, then looked around to be sure nobody was listening.

"Where?"

"Snow Country. He's staying in a friend's cabin. Some sort of ski vacation."

"What friend?" Mike nearly growled it.

"Some sort of business associate with the paper. I don't remember the name, but I can find out."

"How do you know this?"

Bill shrugged, "If I told you... maybe it would rain for me." A smug grin crossed his lips, but his eyes remained laser sharp, like the knife he carried for "occupational emergencies".

"You want in on this one?" Mike hated to offer, but he had little choice.

"You don't have to let me in if you don't want to."

"In or out? I'm not saying please."

Bill considered it for all of two seconds, "Okay, I'm in."

\* \* \*

The infrared goggles penetrated the icy pitch darkness, making the chimney top of the well insulated Solomon mansion seem like a beacon of light on an otherwise frozen landscape. Mike bit his upper lip as he lay prone in the snow, considering the fair possibility that Billy's grapevine might be wrong.

"Thank mama there's no wind," Bill whispered. Mike smiled as the phrase. Clay would have thanked the lord; Mike might have thanked the night, but Bill would thank his mama.

"Thank mama they've got a fire going," Mike countered. Bill quietly agreed. The house might have been doubly invisible without it.

"So get goin'," Bill prodded.

Mike dropped the goggles and crawled over the hard slippery ice away from his flycycle. He hoped the vehicle would carry three on the off chance they'd find Niki inside.

As Mike quickly reviewed the plan in his head, he began to wonder if the computer's information was up to date. It showed three entrances to the house; a front, a garage, and a servant's entrance. In fact, it gave him the entire floor plans including electrical access, water, and sewage piping which he and Bill studied most of the evening. Being a reporter on Tizar accorded some amazing privileges.

Mike reached the garage. The door had an hard polymer bolt fashioned to undermine the courage of any would be thieves. He couldn't see it, but he knew a fancy security alarm would be hidden behind. All the locks would be like this one if the computer told the truth. All would be difficult to saw. At least here he wouldn't be heard.

The borrowed laser knife switched on silently. The little bit of light that it shed was enough for Mike to see what he was doing, though he didn't need the luxury. He knew exactly where to make the initial incision killing the alarm as it were. The rest was grunt work as laser grinded against polymer. Now it was only a question of time.

\* \* \*

Mr. John Clay relaxed in a cushioned rocking chair as he warmed his feet by the fireplace. It was quaint but effective, he mused as he slowly rocked back and forth, like fire itself. He glanced at the wooden chessboard where he had defeated his host, Mr. Soloman; the two kings now stood alone face to face at center board. Not very happy was he, Clay almost giggled. The corporation did not encourage good losers. In that, he was somewhat of an outcast.

He knew he had failed, but at least he was finished. Now he would soon leave Tizar and return to the home of his childhood. He smiled faintly at the thought.

Suddenly a noise thrust him to full consciousness. Someone was yelling and slamming his fist against the front door.

"Who could it possibly be at such an ungodly hour?" Clay got to his feet, hoping the sound hadn't awakened his host.

"I'll get it, sir." Marley, the night guard took only few seconds to appear from the kitchen area. He seemed stiff and angry.

"Open up! Please hurry! Someone... Oh thank goodness. You've got to help. There's been a terrible accident. Do you have a vidiophone?!"

"Who are you?" The guard's face was stern as he looked over the young man. His long stringy black hair was wet from the snowfall, and he held a heavy steel flashlight in his right hand which he kept shining in the guard's eyes.

"Oh please! Let me in. It's a matter of life and death! I've got to use your videophone. There's been a terrible accident..." The young man was panting from exhaustion.

"Where?!"

"Out there," the young man, exasperated, waved his arm back into the darkness.

\* \* \*

Mike quickly cut through the lock at the back of the garage leading into the storage hall. Hearing the commotion up front, he slipped into the hall and ran to the kitchen area. The polymer bolt had taken more time than he anticipated. He had to hurry. He reached the security office just a minute behind schedule.

The office was full of little television screens, and there was a desk with a control station. An eight-pack of fun-punch was set on the floor next to the largest screen where the highlights of a tourist hunting safari were being broadcast in via satellite from the far side of the planet by channel #117 sports. Mike scanned the other monitors and saw the recording light on one. He grinned when he saw Bill's face, desperate, nearly frantic. Bill was always good at diversions.

Mike took out the current disk being recorded and slipped it into his pocket. He grabbed a blank from the desk and melted it down with the knife in one swift stroke. Then, by flipping a few red switches, he disconnected the batteries and shut off power to the entire mansion.

The guard turned around in surprise when the stairwell suddenly darkened. He didn't have time to feel the blow to the back of his skull. He was already unconscious.

Mike raced into the room. The fire and the knife blade were the only sources of light in the entire house. Clay stood motionless, hoping he wouldn't be noticed.

"Morning Mr. Clay."

"Good morning, Michael. You wanted to see me?"

"Well, yes sir. I was hoping to talk to you about how irresponsible the press has been acting lately. It's a damn disgrace."

Bill walked in, now competing for stage presence. "To think a few reporters could spoil a whole code of ethics through some gross dereliction of duty." He was shaking his head sadly and he homed in on Clay.

Mike continued, "Overzealous is perhaps more the word. Derelict implies neglect. What do you think Mr. Boardmember?" Mike held the blade to Clay's throat, igniting the bare traces of aftershave near his chin.

"What do you want?"

"Niki. You. Robin. Not necessarily in that order."

"Your research assistant is upstairs in the south guest room. You can go get her." Clay's breath was heavy with fear.

"Lend me the flashlight Billy."

"It broke."

Mike pivoted his glance, "You hit with the back."

"I know. I forgot."

Clay strained a smile, "If you two professionals don't mind being interrupted, I happened to notice that the guard was carrying..."

"Sit down and shut-up."

"Merely trying to be helpful." He sat back down in the rocking chair.

Mike stripped the flashlight off the guard's belt and picked up an automatic pistol and a pair of handcuffs to boot. He gave the knife to Bill and wrapped Clay's arms around the back of the chair, securing them with the handcuffs before he headed upstairs. Slowly, carefully, he measured each step as he neared the top of the plush stairwell searching for the barest reason to shoot someone. The south guest room was just down the hall. He found the door unlocked. Niki was inside, on the bed, heavily sedated. Mike picked her up gently, very much relieved to find her unharmed. Content with his prize, he climbed back down the stairs.

"Okay sport, where's Robin." Mike set Niki's limp body on the floor by the guard.

"Asleep, upstairs."

Bill rocked the chair roughly at the answer. "I wasn't aware androids slept."

"She likes to pretend."

"So she's heard everything."

Clay offered a smile, "No, she shuts her senses down, expect for touch."

Suddenly the stairwell light came back on. Mike whirled around to face the kitchen. He lifted the gun half expecting to see Robin running in to save her master. Clay had, of course, lied. Mike inwardly debated blowing the old man away right there. He could almost see the image of blood cascading through the air as the chair would rock backward plunging its occupant into the fireplace. Mike nearly smiled at the thought.

"Mike..."

"I know. Get Niki and get out of here." He tossed Bill the flashlight.

"What about you?!"

"I'll think of something. Go!"

Bill didn't argue. He dragged Niki out the front door as fast as his feet would carry him, leaving Mike with Clay to wonder how many bullets it would take shatter the circuits of a pissed off android.

"She's very cunning Mr. Harrison. You'd best be careful." Clay seemed amused. He's trying to distract me, Mike thought.

Ignoring Clay, Mike slinked quietly toward the kitchen entrance, wondering with each ill-fated step how good the android's hearing was. Exceptional, he supposed. The designers could make her as well as they wanted. He tried to make his breathing silent, but he only succeeded in noticing every small sound he made whether it was a footstep, a breath, or even a heartbeat.

Suddenly the door swung open. Miraculously, he squeezed off a shot in time. Her head snapped back from the impact, but it didn't stop her. She struck him with phenomenal force, and Mike felt as if his entire chest were caving in. In another moment her hand darted up. That was all he remembered.

\* \* \*

It was a little like watching the stars fall. The cold coastal breeze gripping and then letting go, the tan sands which seemed rather darker than tan, and that distant disoriented feeling would combine on rare occasion when the stars fell from the sky.

Mike saw the stars falling clearly enough. He could feel the chill. But it was the disorientation that stole the show. He made numerous attempts at standing, but he never quite managed it. The ground seemed to rock like a see-saw back and forth as he lay down, and whenever he tried to get on his feet he'd upset the balance and the entire room would turn upside-down and send him crashing to the ceiling and after a moment back to the floor again.

He heard voices far away almost shouting. They seemed to be very angry voices, but he couldn't understand the words. Suddenly he knew the language was foreign. Then he heard a girl giggling, but he couldn't place the laugh. It was a sweet innocent laughter which reminded him of the birds singing at Greenflower. But it was very near. Mike thought he could touch it if he reached out his arm just far enough, but suddenly it ceased. He knew she was close. His hand searched for her, but she wouldn't be found. He crawled toward her for a few feet, and then slumped down in despair.

He was too tired and she was too far away. Instead, he listened carefully for her laughter. But she was gone.

# An Interview with Michael Harrison

©1990 Jim Vassilakos

*This is a supplement/prelude to the Harrison Chapters for the more religious reader. Many thanx to Wally Neilsen-Steinhardt, Kathy Reinig, Ed Barach & alan@shodha.enet.dec.com for supplying the personality profile format.*

**Memory:** Okay, Mr. Harrison...

**Harrison:** Is that thing on?

**Memory:** Yes. As you are no doubt aware, *Memory* is an Outworld Publication dedicated to the gathering of biographical information regarding popular figures of our time for the purpose of constructing...

**Harrison:** Is this you're standard speel?

**Memory:** Yes. ...for the purpose of constructing more accurate historical pictures for generations to come. As such...

**Harrison:** ...nothing I say will be released for at least ten standard years after my official demise...

**Memory:** You're stealing me lines?

**Harrison:** You wanna do this interview or not?

**Memory:** Fair enough. Let's start off with the basics. Self description. What is your name?

**Harrison:** You tell me.

**Memory:** Please Mister Harrison...

**Harrison:** Call me Mike. For the record, I was christened Michael James Harrison. Imperial bureaucracy recognizes only the first and last name, however.

**Memory:** Christened?

**Harrison:** Y'know, baptized? It had to do with some religion my parents subscribed to.

**Memory:** Do you?

**Harrison:** No...

**Memory:** You're height?

**Harrison:** Average.

**Memory:** Could you please be more precise.

**Harrison:** Probably.

**Memory:** Well?

**Harrison:** I'm 5'11"

**Memory:** Weight?

**Harrison:** 165 lbs.

**Memory:** Hair color?

**Harrison:** Brown, tending toward auburn or so I've been told.

**Memory:** Eye color?

**Harrison:** Y'know, I can just give you a picture if it would help.

**Memory:** Eye color?

**Harrison:** Brown.

**Memory:** How old are you?

**Harrison:** Thirty-seven standards.

**Memory:** Your birthdate begin 218-619?

**Harrison:** I believe that's right.

**Memory:** And your place of birth being Eden, Poseidon subsector, Ares sector, Hercules centrant, the Empire.

**Harrison:** Yes.

**Memory:** Tell me about it.

**Harrison:** I don't really know what there's to tell. Most people already know about what happened.

**Memory:** From *Shattered Eden*. We'd like to hear the short of it again.

**Harrison:** Okay, well... Eden is just a little satellite surrounding Nod, the system's main gas giant. The core is so dense, however, that its gravitational influence is strong enough to attract a descent atmosphere which supports a terranorm ecosystem. The planet's anarchist state was founded by a rebellion within the Imperial military during the 2nd civil war. It seems that in the thick of the struggle, Constantine wanted to test a top secret war device capable of imploding gas giants. That's the rumor anyway. The population rebelled, taking control of the naval facility orbiting the gas giant. After the war, the archduke tried reconsolidation, effectively killing off 99 with a biological agent popularly known as the *Death Bug*. However, he was forced to shift his attention with the Siri rebellion and didn't get back to us until there was already a big stink in the TNS.

The sparse population that remains doesn't have much more of a government than you'd expect for a small town. Further, they're all spread out far enough all over the world that nobody is really capable of dictating rules to anybody else. There are certain standards over what's proper and what's not, but that's about all.

**Memory:** Will you ever go back there?

**Harrison:** I'm a little scared of the place to be honest, not that I don't want to go back, mind you. My parents got me off planet before they died of an emerging strain of the bug. We were of the very few who were uninfected. Most of the folks left still carry various strains. Our medical technology is good enough to effectively quarantine and occasionally to stop its progression, but not so good as a cure. In 628 my parents found out they had the bug. Luckily it wasn't contagious enough to overcome my immunizations. They knew I'd get it sooner or later if I stuck around, so they got rid of me ASAP.

**Memory:** Where were you educated?

**Harrison:** I was shipped off to Tyber, a yucky-foo place I never got used to. I studied foreign languages, some history, and journalism. The university offered vacation packages to Tizar since it was so close, so that's how I got here.

**Memory:** What have you learned since then?

**Harrison:** I've learned quite a bit about various cultures and religions since I've taken this job, not

much about them very appealing. Some interstellar law in there. I've learned to ride a flycycle. You can't do that very well on Tyber. Air's too dirty and acidic. I learned more about operating computers than I expected to. I've had to shoot a gun from time to time, not that I'd call myself a marksman or anything. I've picked up more bits and pieces of various languages. It's funny how they begin to fit together, astrographically. You see how dialects tend to evolve, how environment dictates vocabulary; it's really more interesting than it sounds.

**Memory:** I'm sure...

**Harrison:** Fine... be that way.

**Memory:** What were you doing a year ago?

I was on Telmar last year. There was a civil war in the brewing. Long story. I got paid very well. Bill went with me. We almost got shot a couple times. I also visited Tyber and Calanna before that. Routine jobs to make ends meet. I was having trouble financing the house. Pissed me off, because here I was with this big house and I couldn't even live in it.

**Memory:** What were you doing a month ago?

**Harrison:** Recuperating from a hangover probably. The festivities after Telmar never seemed to cease. Me and Bill had a lot to celebrate besides the money. I never did find out what he did with his half.

**Memory:** Do you work?

**Harrison:** I thought it was my so-called work that led to this interview.

**Memory:** We're just sucking the air out. In your honest opinion, do you *work*?

**Harrison:** Well, I like to pretend I do; on occasion at least. My job allows me to take the role of the independently wealthy eccentric from time to time, only I'm not old enough to play the part very well. I tend to just sit around and sniff for something interesting mostly. Niki helps with that.

**Memory:** Doing what?

**Harrison:** The job title is independent gatherer. In the news business, that means I'm a cross between a hired gun and a snoopy house guest. Instead of being put on such and such a story, I go out and find stories. If that means breaking

the law, I can always plead freedom of the press. You get good at it after awhile.

**Memory:** How do you like to spend your spare time?

**Harrison:** How do I like to spend my spare time or how do I usually end up spending my spare time. That's the difference between taking nice long walks on the beach and curling up half-drunk hoping the waves don't drown you before morning. I'm lazy. I like to relax. Occasionally I get into a social mood, but that usually passes like most other modern insanities.

**Memory:** What do you like most?

**Harrison:** Well, I'm not sure it's printable... okay, everything's printable... but barring anything entirely uncivilized, I like being with friends such as they are; I like to watch the sun set on the ocean's horizon; I like picnics and riding my fly-cycle over the flat sands on the coast. I like my job. That surprises most folks. Something about busting the big people always makes my day, particularly if they're Imperials. I guess it doesn't take much imagination to figure out why.

**Memory:** What do you like least?

**Harrison:** Nightmares are never fun. Drunken nightmares are worse. Having to do grunt work isn't much fun either. My first job as a gatherer, I was watching people walk out of a subway exit, counting heads for some statistician because he didn't trust the transit board figures. That was before "Shattered Eden" came out. Being an unknown was generally a drag. Being well known has its own problems, but they're completely opposite and can often be turned to an advantage, so I don't have too much to complain about. I think the thing I like least about my job is that it takes me and my friends into situations that are downright lethal at times. Clandestine drops are the worst. That whole episode on Telmar was extremely stupid. That fact that our team took only one fatality, albeit the team leader, is something we like to pretend we're proud over. The truth is that luck plays a larger part than people will usually admit.

**Memory:** What makes you angry?

**Harrison:** Losing a good friend. When I lost Kitara, that really blew my day. Maybe because of my parents, those things don't affect me like they'd get to most people. Maybe. For day to day things I like to maintain an even keel. Knowing

someone is lying to me gets me mad, but as a professional gatherer you learn to channel those sort of emotions into some constructive... usually that is.

**Memory:** What makes you happy?

**Harrison:** Being with friends. I guess I'm easy to please.

**Memory:** What makes you laugh?

**Harrison:** Niki makes me laugh. Some of the local headlines in the Galactican are designed for humor's sake. When you're into news as a business, entertainment tends to take precedence over information content.

**Memory:** What experience has made the strongest mark on you?

**Harrison:** Probably losing my parents. No surprises there. Losing Kitara also. They had a lot in common. They all knew it was coming. When I go, I hope its quick. I'd rather not deal with the anticipation.

**Memory:** What person has made the strongest mark on you?

**Harrison:** My parents shaped me into who I am. After they died, I'd have to give the trophy to Tara. It wasn't just her execution on Calanna, although that had a lot to do with it. She was just special.

**Memory:** In what way?

**Harrison:** In many ways. I'd rather not get into it.

**Memory:** What have you done that you are most proud of?

**Harrison:** My first book, *Shattered Eden*. Only after getting it out, published, talked about, was I ever really able to come to terms with what the Imps did there. The Galactican ran lengthy excerpts. It wasn't the money or even the fact that it put me on the map. Believe it or not, I didn't make all that much from it. First time writers rarely do. Tyberian Publications reaped billions off me, or so I've been told, but being new in the business, I had to swallow a lot of their shit. They stuck me out on a ten year contract. Everything I wrote. Since I already had ties to the Galactican, they basically rented me out. It wasn't until the renegotiation that I could even buy this house.



**Memory:** What have you done that you are most ashamed of?

**Harrison:** Leaving my parents when they were sick. I went willingly. It was the only way it would have worked. Since I was a minor, I couldn't even be prosecuted. I basically let them take all the risks. A better son would've stayed.

There are other things. Taking pics of salamen on Aiwek wasn't the best thing I ever did. I didn't have much of a choice, of course; I was still being rented out by Tyberian Pub. And it wasn't like I was pulling the trigger. But...

And then there's Tara. That never sleeps. I keep thinking of other things I could have tried to do. There's Davin. There wasn't too much I could've done about that, but then again you never know. The guilt is spread pretty thick in this business.

**Memory:** Do you have a philosophy of life?

**Harrison:** I keep thinking I've heard every one there is or could possibly be until another comes sprinting along. No, I don't keep any favorites.

**Memory:** Do you have a religion?

**Harrison:** If I pray, it'll probably be to the moon dogs of space or Bill's mama. I've never been taken in by that stuff. About all I can say, believe-wise, is that I think there's more out there than what we realize. What it is, I dunno.

**Memory:** Could you be more specific?

**Harrison:** I once had a philosophy prof who said God is the identity function on the universe, whatever that's supposed to mean. Umm, can you strike that last statement?

**Memory:** Many people see the life of an IG as... well, adventuresome. And is has been for you by nearly all accounts. How would you characterize it.

**Harrison:** I dunno. It's a living.

**Memory:** Okay.... How about the money.

**Harrison:** I like to spend it. Strike that, I like... being able to live comfortably, the way you wanna live... it's nice. I'm not saying I grew up impoverished or anything. Eden was a fairly rich world, and people adapted to the disaster. Labor was replaced by robots, there was practically no service sector except what you could do long distance. But living on Tizar, on the beach,

with a nice house, and not having to worry about money... I have to say me and money have generally gotten along rather well.

**Memory:** How about the knowledge access that comes with the job?

**Harrison:** For a gatherer, knowledge and money are interchangeable commodities. Knowledge for knowledge's sake I'll leave to scholars.

**Memory:** How about the power it can afford?

**Harrison:** It comes in handy to know that you can rip waves through other peoples lives and to know that they know it too. Being an well known gatherer affords that privilege, and I do use it from time to time. Again, its all a matter of leverage and what you're trying to achieve by using it. Having power simply to have power has never made much sense to me. That sort of thing doesn't give me a charge.

**Memory:** Sometimes you work takes you into physical conflict. Any words to share with us on that topic?

**Harrison:** To be honest, I'd rather run. Sometimes you feel you have to fight, or that you have some advantage and can afford to be cocky. If you wanna interview a fighter, interview Bill. He enjoys that sorta thing.

**Memory:** How does killing make you feel?

**Harrison:** Lousy. I'm not a psycho. I'll do it. I have done it. I'm not a total pacifist, but if it has to be done then there's no choice.... I don't feel as bad as I should probably, but there you have it.

**Memory:** I take it, it's a facet of your work you don't like to think about too much.

**Harrison:** To put words in my mouth... yes.

**Memory:** Okay. Name something naughty you did when you were about twelve years old that you got away with?

**Harrison:** Twelve? When I was nine I became contraband. You know that story already, and it's not something I feel was particularly naughty anyway since they never sent me back. How could they? I was on Tyber when I was twelve. Probably attending middle school. I remember me and some friends inverted the images on the school monitors while the principal was addressing the student body. We messed with the colors

too. Never got caught. That's pretty lame stuff through. I think I do more naughty things now that I'm an adult.

**Memory:** Such as?

**Harrison:** Ummm... can we move to something lighter?

**Memory:** What is your favorite color?

**Harrison:** Umm... blue. Sea blue.

**Memory:** What are your hobbies?

**Harrison:** Hobbies? Swimming. Kiyaking. Boating. Occasional fishing. Taking pictures of my friends why they aren't expecting it. That last one's the most fun. I guess I'm a gatherer at heart.

**Memory:** What sort of scars or handicaps do you retain, either physical, mental or emotional?

**Harrison:** That's light? Nothing physical...

**Memory:** Tell me about your work experience?

**Harrison:** How much do you want to hear?

**Memory:** As much as you feel free to tell. Just... what you've done work-wise over the course of your life?

**Harrison:** Well, this is gonna take some time.... I wrote *Shattered Eden* during college. It started out as a hobby and grew into a job I couldn't have quit if you put a gun to my head. I did layout and photo designs for various school periodicals and transferred the experience to a part time job with the Galactican during break periods. Eventually somebody saw the book still in progress and figured out I could write. I got moved out of photo & layouts and up to the floor. I worked with this training group. We had three advisors and I worked under this guy, Kalla was his name. He's the one who made me count heads, and I went on a few photo shoots after that. Mostly grunt stuff.

By the time I graduated, the book was finished. I waltzed into the Tyberian Pub, meeting this big wig Kalla set me up with. She got me to sign on for ten years. Turned out to be a big mistake. The first thing they did was get me out of the region. *Eden* was selling like flimsies, and the TNS was closing in for a personal interview... to help promote the book, or so it was argued.

Tizar Pub had me by the balls and said if I interviewed it would be a breach of contract. They started using public relations people to handle it, using their own in-house "statements from the author" to keep people interested and clinging to the story. They kept drawing it out, trying to capitalize on the media value. I finally got frustrated and went to TNS. It made Tizar Pub look very bad, and I got sued, of course.

**Memory:** Tell me more about that.

**Harrison:** Well, it was strange working for the people who were suing me. I was already on the inside where I could make lots of waves. They realized their mistake rather quickly and compromised by shipping me outside Imperial borders in exchange for dropping the suit which was costing them public sentiment anyway. I worked in the Yahhen district and Pansentient Alliance, finally coming back by way of the Siri worlds. Most of it was photo work. There were several political essays regarding events in the region. I was invited to attend a conference on Draconia but never managed to make it. Because all this stuff was outside Imperial Space, Tizar Pub could never collect on me. The sad part was that I couldn't convert my liquid assets into credits upon re-entering Imperial space. In the end, I managed to do some speculation with the remainder and made it back to Tyber in reasonable comfort.

They stuck me back on Tizar, but by that time renegotiations were in order. I got to speak my own terms, and although my fame had largely dwindled during the long absence, I managed to get a job doing independent work. That sort of position is usually handed only to those who brown nose or are born lucky. I'd earned it, so there was an immediate respect not usually accorded with the job title.

However, the disadvantage was that my stories had to be better than everyone else's because I was getting paid more. By this time the Galactican was already splitting with Tizar Pub, and there was a certain amount of animosity on both sides, so I went to Tizar and played monkey with their bureaucracy. With Tara's help, we managed to make a good many people look rather bad. It was dirty laundry, but it did sell, and I needed the money.

The series was said to be, and I quote, "the most successful of its kind," this being said by the Tizar's public affairs department. It must

have been, because it touched off a whole tidal-wave of similar stories, not a few being directed at myself. It convinced me to get out of town for awhile. As an interesting sidenote, the readership for both sides steadily improved for several standard months before finally slopping off at a new equilibrium.

By this time I was taking a long cruise with Royal Fleet, ending up somewhere in the Hepaestus sector, trailing end. I was running out of money, so me and Tara started taking the seedier freighters, and we ended up getting grounded on Mithras. It's an Imperial prison world, also doubled as a medical research lab. interdicted and the whole bit, but then our jump drive didn't know that. They sent a prisoner detail to help up get back on our feet, and Tara started picking up all sorts of interesting things. Turned into a real adventure. The short of it was that the Imps were using prisoners in genetic research. War research. It cut me to the core, because I'd seen what that sort of thing could do first hand when I was a kid. TNS offered to carry it, but I figured it would get me back in the good with my so-called colleges if I took it to the Galactic and let them run the first copies. That's eventually what happened. TNS and the Platform both picked it up on commission and had a field day, and I was making more money, so all in all, most everyone was happy.

It was about this time I began taking a break from gathering. I wrote some more essays on biotechnology and its horrific applications as a weapon of war. There were a few others concerning worlds which had successfully broken ties with the Imperium and they why and how of it. The various means they used. Chuck was my editor this time, and he kept me constrained to the subsector wanting to keep the commentaries locally based. Thus, the two candidates which fell into place were Calanna and Telmar.

I visited Calanna legally, but ran into a sort of trouble I'd rather not get into. Well, it concerned contraband. Not slaves or anything like that, but technology. It was rather messy and I had to keep myself confined to the embassy for quite some time. Luckily for me, I wasn't there during the bombing. Strangely, there was no statement from any terrorist groups regarding the why of it. I got paranoid and went under cover. Tara came over once she heard about it, and we decided to do a little investigating on our own. To make a long story short, it never

panned out. There didn't seem to be any terrorist or state involvement that we could find, and Tara was executed for assisting me in a rather poorly conducted break-in of government offices. I got away... lucky me, but she was caught. She warned me of an upcoming assassination plot before she died. Other than being inconsequential, it did earn me a friend in the government and got me off planet. Calanna's like that. Politics by the bullet.

Davin heard about my interest in Telmar about a month later, and being rather cocky by this point or not much caring whether I'd live another day... never did figure out which... I decided to accept the offer. We dropped in, Davin got killed, and me and Bill got to run around in the snow for several days, dodging bullets and hand grenades. We were captured by the rebels, of course, but as soon as they realized what we were doing, they helped up put our story together, took us on a few of their operations, and got us off planet. I was completely insane, but then front page material usually is.

That whole experience took my mind off Tara long enough to contemplate getting myself another research assistant. Sure enough, I was back in the Siri institute in no time flat. Niki was better at the parties then she was on the job, but then I wasn't doing very much either. By the time she found Fork, I was thinking of Tara every time I looked at her. We got closer because of it.

**Memory:** During all that time, who would you say your best friend was?

**Harrison:** Tara. What can I say? I guess we were closer than I had ever wanted to admit. Niki helped fill in the gap after she died.

**Memory:** Other friends?

Bill's a friend. Davin was. Chuck rates pretty high up there. Niki's a very good friend. Then there's the party crowd. Y'know how it is.

**Memory:** I do?

**Harrison:** 'Course you do.

**Memory:** How about the opposite? Enemies.

**Harrison:** Enemies? I pissed a lot of people off on Tyber. There was that shitty contract and then the muckraking. I've been told that the whole episode triggered the Tyber Corporation's divestment out of Galactic Press, killing a virtual

monopoly in the making. The way I see it, the split was bound to happen sooner or later, but I'm sure there's some truth that I helped it along.

The Blanco regime on Telmar would probably like to do me damage. My article made it politically infeasible for the Grand Duke to turn the rebellion into a police action.

Then there's the Imperium at large. I busted that research lab on Mithras and made the navy look very bad for what they did to Eden.

All in all, I've got more than any man's share of enemies. Of course, its not like they're just gonna come out and murder me. Well, I hope not anyway.

**Memory:** Tell me about your family.

**Harrison:** That was a long time ago.

**Memory:** Indulge me.

**Harrison:** My dad's name was James Harrison. My mom's name was Lissa Ninque. They both worked at Eden's primary clinic, my mom doing viral-genetic research and containment and my dad operating a shuttle. Nothing too fancy for people trying to survive.

**Memory:** No siblings?

**Harrison:** None that matter.

**Memory:** You don't want to talk about it.

**Harrison:** I try to forget most of the past.

**Memory:** Okay. What would you say your main problem is in the present.

**Harrison:** I'm interested in finding out what happened to Fork. After that whole episode on Mithras, I know what technology can do in Imperial hands. Maybe he's another victim. Maybe it'll tie in. Who knows?

**Memory:** Do you think you'll have much luck?

**Harrison:** All sorts of things could go wrong. He could fall into a coma because of some errant drug dispenser. I don't know.

**Memory:** What do you think your strongest and weakest traits are?

**Harrison:** Mine? I'm persistent. I also know when to turn tail. I'm not sure how to answer this.

**Memory:** Well, how do you see yourself?

**Harrison:** I'm a gatherer.

**Memory:** Not much good. How do you think others see you?

**Harrison:** Probably a crusader. Or a trouble-maker. Is there ever a difference?

**Memory:** Let me get more specific. Do you have a sense of humor?

**Harrison:** I like to think I have one.

**Memory:** What kind?

**Harrison:** I laugh where I hear something funny. Look, I'm not as twisted as people say I am. Almost, but not quite....

**Memory:** I guess I'm finishing for something.

**Harrison:** Fishing? I'm lazy until I hook on to something. Then I'm obsessed.

**Memory:** Still you general. What are your ambitions?

**Harrison:** To smack a few more Imperial faces before I die. I shouldn't say that, because I've had all the revenge I'm probably entitled. Certainly more than most people reap. But then again, I'm not burned out yet. It's not like I need the money that badly. One more front pagers and I'll be set for retirement. Well, maybe two more.

**Memory:** What sort of art... music... reading material do you like?

**Harrison:** Classics, historical novels. The music varies depending on my mood. Bi-dimensional imaging is my forte when it comes to art, even though its not the in-thing.

**Memory:** How do you characterize the way you dress?

**Harrison:** Simple equals better.

**Memory:** How would you characterize your home? It's atmosphere?

**Harrison:** Quiet. Peaceful. My house is white, has lots of rooms, and is on the beachfront. You know that, of course, because you're in it.

**Memory:** Expand on that.

**Harrison:** Ummm..... It's not packed in like those others on the cliffs. And its walking distance from a subway terminal. We're talking prime location. It's a nice place. I don't mean to brag... well, I guess I do, but most people don't realize just what real estate is worth on Tizar. We're talking about a world that has dedicated itself to tourism and the natural environment. Sure, you've got a local planetside population of twenty some-odd billion, but they're all crunched up into these acrologies... contained living environments with everything you could ever need except privacy and freedom. Over 95% of the people occupy less than hundredth of one percent of the surface area. If you make sure you're not in that 95%, you know you're doing okay.

**Memory:** That's pretty good. What else beside that and your background differentiates you from other, successful gatherers such as Bryce, Nabours...

**Harrison:** My methods, probably. To put it in economic terms, I fill a production niche.

**Memory:** What's that supposed to mean?

**Harrison:** I hire telepaths as personnel assistants. Somewhat of a no-no. Unlike Bryce, I don't use controllers. Unlike Nabours, I don't use runners. It's all a question of style. The way you look for a story usually dictates more or less what you find, so we each have our niche.

**Memory:** Ever consider branching out?

**Harrison:** What? Invade their territory?

**Memory:** It's been done before.

**Harrison:** And often without success. It takes a certain, I dunno, a certain kind of person to control any method effectively. Running is illegal on Tizar and rather dangerous besides. And a controller can literally ruin your whole day if they're not careful. I don't like having to rely on another person like that.

**Memory:** Then you'd consider yourself a solo?

**Harrison:** Not necessarily. It all depends on the situation, but I like to have the flexibility to go solo. Once you get into cyberspace or use a controller, the tendency is toward addiction. You can say the same thing about telepathy, but not to the same extent. The telepath makes the hook, sure, but unless you know how to reel in the line on your own, someday you'll be shit outta luck.□

# One Smelly Gerbil

Frank Lemire

frankl@xrtl.uucp

*This story may not have much to do with gaming, but then, we suppose, that all depends on the sort of games you play. Not meant for cloistered eyes, be-warned...*

It was a dark, moist night. The kind of night where you just pull your raincoat in real tight as some kind of futile gesture against the elements. Spokes shuddered to himself as he raced down the slick steps.

"Goddamn weather. Why the fuck do I live in Los Angeles anyway?"

His head down, his non-descript rain coat pulled in close, as if he might rust, Spokes hurried down the street. A casual onlooker might have seen a frumpy, aging bachelor fretting about the weather, but to those who inhabit the higher echelons, they would know. He was a professional. He was a man whose services could be called upon in the direst of emergencies. He charged high and worked hard. He was discreet and untouchable. When John Gotti had hemorrhoids, he called Spokes Legerdemain. Yassir Arafat needed liposuction... he called Spokes.

Tonight, the call was from Richard Gere.

Spokes was sitting in front on the box, trying to come down from a hard day on the streets and in the buildings, when the phone rang. The red phone.

"Shit," he muttered.

"Spokes."

"Need ya."

"Who the hell is this?"

"Look Spokes, get down to Labrea General."

"I'm not moving til I find out what the job is..."

There was a pause on the line.

"Okay. It's for Richard Gere."

"Again!?" Spokes shouted.

"Yeah, it's a gerbil this time... looks like a big one. We really need you.... Spokes? Spokes? are you there, man?"

But he was speaking into a dead line. Spokes Legerdemain was on his way.

The hospital was busy, but this was L.A. Spokes jogged past the crowds of bleeding heavy metal musicians, over to the door marked *M.D. conference*. He

whipped out his access card, and the door slid silently open. He stepped in.

Gere was on the table. Naked. He was facing down, with his hairy buttocks exposed. A plaintive squeaking sound could be heard, muffled in pain and agony. As well, the sound of a gerbil could be heard from Gere's anus.

Spokes Legerdemain shook his head in disgust. "Goddamn kids," he thought.

Seizing the nearest forceps, he probed into Gere's colon until he had a firm grip on the terrified, shaven, rodent. He pulled mightily, cheerfully ignoring the yelps from Gere himself.

With a sickening *plop* the rodent and Gere's anus parted ways. Spokes grabbed a cello-wrap, placed the still-wriggling rodent into it, and handed it to Richard Gere.

"There you go, son. Try to be more careful from now on. And remember, don't put anything up your bum that doesn't want to go."

"Thank you, sir... and I didn't even get your name!"

"That's all right son," Spokes replied, "you'll be hearing from my collection agents. If you don't pay up, this will be all over USENET, and pimply nerds will be asking for more information. But if you pay, it'll just be our little secret."

And with his smile still hanging in the air, Spokes Legerdemain left, leaving behind a relieved actor and one smelly gerbil.

# On Humanity

©1990 Steve Mays

*This story is about something most of us don't like to contemplate much less confront. Yet, in gaming, it is a thing with which we learn to tarry on a fairly constant basis. Steve brings the topic home with a flash of cybertech for glitter and morality for garters.*

Looking out the window of the hovercraft, Harvey saw none of the scenes of his childhood, only a mesmerizing blur of color and shape. Harvey Bartok, a youngish man, almost invisible in his nondescript appearance, was going home. For him, this was a new experience since he could barely remember his home. At the age of three, he was given up by his parents to be used in scientific experiments at the National Disease Research Laboratory at low Earth orbit level one. He could never understand why his parents gave him up, but he was told it was because he had some terrible disease that could infect and kill many; now he had his doubts.

The neighborhood was the typical American neighborhood, almost perfect. Harvey hated that, perfection. Too much of his life was spent in "perfect" conditions, he ate the most pure foods, breathed the most perfect air, and was kept in a temperature controlled room. Now he was *out*, he wanted to enjoy the sensation of *imperfection*. He slowed down to wind his way through the residential neighborhood. On the left side, a blue and white house was displayed on his video screen.

"Ah, there... that's the one... left, yep, blue, yah, that's the one," came the voice from inside Harvey's command helmet.

Its turbfans down to one tenth power, the hovercraft made a swift, almost acrobatic forty five degree turn, to rest neatly on the driveway of a house on Maple Ave, in Billingsly, Vermont.

"Shutting down all systems, and I'm outta here," Harvey said to nobody in particular as he took off his helmet and turned a large amount of switches to their off position.

Pushing the big red button marked *door release*, a solitary figure emerged from the hovercraft. Looking around, Harvey saw that his hovercraft was unique in this neighborhood, alone in a sea of gasoline-burning ecology killers.

A snort of disdain escaped his tight lipped mouth

as Harvey said, "You'd think that people would learn; ozone disaster of 2050 didn't teach these apes very much, did it!"

With a spring in his step, albeit a nervous one, the black jumpsuit clad Harvey Bartok approached the ornate wooden door. A face came up on the monitor beside the door.

"Hello, and welcome to the Bartok residence. One of the Bartoks will shortly answer the door. If you will please make yourself comfortable on the bench behind you...", a plush couch, more than a bench, arose behind Harvey as the face spoke these words, "...I will inform them of your presence."

"Damn electronic door! Can't anyone do anything for themselves any more? Just once, I would like to see..." His thought was cut short as a man with greying black hair opened the door. "Yes, may I help you?" asked the man in the doorway.

"Ye... yes," Harvey stammered as he looked into the eyes of the man who might or not be his father, Justin Bartok, "My name is Harvey."

"Nice to meet you Harvey, may I ask the purpose of your visit?"

"I am from the... that is... oh, what the hell, my name is Harvey *Bartok*."

"Are you a relative of mine from out west?"

"No sir; I am your son. That is, if you are Justin Bartok."

"I flopped badly on this one," thought Harvey to himself, "I could even have the wrong Bartoks. Either that or this man to whom I've just confessed my kinship is the Bartoks' butler!"

"I am Justin Bartok, but I have no son."

"Sir, I was told that I was your son from the National Disease Laboratory Director Michael..."

"Hunt," came the voice of the man who had just taken a step back from the door, eyebrows knotted in shock. "Yes, I know his name very well. Come in, won't you?"

"If you do not mind, sir, um... Mr. Bartok... um..." Harvey's bravado was beginning to slip, and noticeably.

"Denise, we have a visitor."

"Who is it?" came the answering voice.

"It is, um... *Harvey*."

"Mr. Bartok, if this is any inconvenience..." Harvey managed to spit out the words from his quivering lips.

"Nonsense, I want to find out for sure if you are who you say you are."

From somewhere in the house, Harvey heard a TeleTalk activate; its high pitch whining seemed noticeable only to Harvey. The voice on the other end of the phone seemed very familiar. Funny, didn't the voice coming from the phone sound like Michael Hunt?

"You must have traveled a long way, let me make you comfortable. Would you like a small snack, or a drink? Mrs. Bartok will be here in just a few minutes and we can clear this whole matter up."

"Yes I would like something to drink," intoned Harvey, knowing that something was wrong here. The man was definitely stalling for some reason. Also, there was that voice, Michael's, almost positively.

The house was well furnished, a new modern kitchen led off through the opening to the left of the entryway, and a black lacquer paradise lurked ahead. The living room was an example of a modern nightmare. Pictures of natural landscapes stood in stark comparison to the unnatural sculptures of twisted metal on the coffee table that were dubbed incorrectly as *modern art*. Modern refuse recycling seemed a better description. The closest couch was a black lacquered wicker framework with what looked, surprisingly, very enticing.

"I have come a long way, and must be more exhausted than I thought," said Harvey.

"Here... yes here, dammit. What do we do?" came the voice that was now absolutely talking about him to Michael.

Looking around casually as if nothing was happening, Harvey made small talk with Mr. Bartok while he tried to think of a way out of this situation. Sliding glass door to the left, bay window in front, hallway to right, possibility of hostage situation with Mr. Bartok, these were some of the thoughts running through Harvey's mind, though the last was a very distasteful one.

"Mr. Bartok, may I use your restroom?" asked Harvey in a very disarming tone.

"Why sure, um, Harvey, it's down the hall to the right."

"Thanks, I'll be back in a second."

He could not believe that the man who said he was Justin Bartok did not know that Harvey could hear everything that Denise Bartok was saying about him to Michael Hunt. At least he made no appearance of knowing, if he did.

The bathroom hid behind a small closet and a heating compartment. Having the bathroom visible today was considered tacky by polite company; at least that's what Harvey had read in *Vogue*: 2060.

Closing the door, the lights automatically switching on because of his entry, Harvey saw that his escape (*yet another one!*) wasn't going to be as easy as he thought.

"*Shit!* Why can't these fuck heads at *least* have a window in their bathroom," growled Harvey to himself as he noticed the acute lack of a window in the bare wall facing him.

Still, the voices continued on the phone, outlining a plan for the recapture of the *Harvey Bartok experiment*. "Experiment! What the hell were they talking about? I have been cured of the Wayfarer's disease for 10 years," Harvey thought.

All of a sudden the phone connection broke and the *experiment* new it was time to act. He came out of the bathroom, and approached Mr. Bartok.

"Mr. Bartok," said Harvey in an apologetic tone, "I am sorry, but I am unable to stay. Mr. Hunt has requested me immediate return on my miniphone."

"You *must* stay and meet Mrs. Bartok so that we may determine whether or not you are our son!"

Something was wrong with the way Mr. Bartok said, "You *must*."

Faster than humanly possible, Harvey's hand reached out and grasped the unsuspecting man's gun hand and its enclosed stunner in a vice-like grip. Leaning closer to emphasize his point, Harvey hurled his hushed words at the surprised and obviously hurting Bartok.

"If I were you Mr. Bartok, or whoever you are, I would be *dead* quiet or I may do something that both you and I, mostly you of course, will regret."

"Aggggk," gasped Bartok as Harvey's hand on his became tighter and tighter.

"*Oh Shit!*" yelled Harvey.

As the still befuddled Mr. Bartok looked to the right where his wife should be coming with her own stunner, Harvey's hand shot into his solar plexus making it impossible for him to breathe, much less warn his accomplice of Harvey's actions.

"Dumb fuck! Never take your eyes from your enemy," whispered Harvey.

Like a bolt of lightning, the man who was one second ago holding the now incapacitated man's hand, was down the hallway ambushing the second occupant of the house. As she came out of the bedroom, stunner at the ready because of the commotion in the living room, the woman who pretended to be Denise Bartok met an oncoming fist that stopped about a millimeter from her face. Gasping from fear,



the woman was not prepared for the hand in front of face to reach down and snatch the stunner from her limp hand.

"Now then, tell me who you are, since obviously you weren't sent here for my health?" questioned the now angry Harvey.

"We.. aaa.. are... your parents Harvey!" lied the woman.

"How do you know my name? I have met only the man in the living room, who right now, by the way, is gasping for breath."

"I.. uh... i... i... know your face, you are my son." Again another lie, and a bad one too!

"If you do not tell me who you are, and right *fucking now*, I will quite probably rip your shitty little head off!"

"Okay, Okay! We went sent by..." With a sudden burst of energy, the woman tried to surge past Harvey, only to be met by a fist in the back of the head.

As the woman slumped to the ground, Harvey heard the man getting back up and through the bedroom window. He saw three ground cars careen into the back yard. Running as hard as he could, Harvey bolted for the front door. Mr. Bartok stood in front of him to bar his path and was met by a grim end as the speeding Harvey sent him flying through the kitchen window. Once outside, the blur that was Harvey Bartok jumped into his hovercraft.

"Main turbo... on. Gyros... on. Turbosfans and lifters... on. C'mon, c'mon!! God Damn it!! Start!!!"

His last words were met by a resounding boom that marked the start up. At full power, the fans were capable of blowing over the house in front of him. His right hand shot to the thruster control and pulled it all the way back, and at the same time, his other pulled the control wheel all the way back. The effect was spectacular, a still grey sleek machine became a ball of fire shooting backwards into the air.

"Steady, steady." His left hand pulled the thruster back to 50% while his right leveled out the wheel.

"Let's see them catch that!" cried Harvey triumphantly.

Three blips showed up on his aerial doppler as if to refute his statement.

"Oh goody! Just like the tube races!! Only with a whole sky to work with!" laughed Harvey.

Over the radio came, "This is the United Terran Federation patrol. Please land your vehicle immediately."

Wasting no time, his left hand pushed the thruster control towards its maximum, but this time, his right hand did not echo its partner. It pushed

the wheel down. In among the houses, the flashing needle that was Harvey's hovercraft quickly lost the pursuing blips.

Back on Lagrange one or, Low Earth Orbit, as the scientists called it, Harvey was the champion of the most popular sport, *Tube Racing*. Tube Racing consisted of ten speeders inside vacuum-sealed, magnetically-charged duralineum (a clear plastic polymer stronger than titanium). Each speeder was inversely charged to the tube (if the tube was positive, the cars were negative), but could vary the charge in their own field to take corners tighter. This was a very dangerous sport as the tubes criss-crossed, making it very easy for the amateur to get hit by a speeder moving at about mach one or roughly 600 *mph*. Thinking back on his experience, Harvey was surprised at his speed, and also at what had happened to the man he had now come to think of as his enemy.

"I hit him, sent him flying about 20 feet and through a window, but I didn't even feel it," mumbled Harvey to himself.

Seeing his ship up ahead, he knew that if he wasn't even safe on Earth, the only place to find out what *Harvey Bartok experiment* meant was back in Michael Hunt's office.

"Dammit, I don't wanna go back there! I just got away, yet I'm going back! What kinda dumb shit am I? Simple, the kind who would go back to a place that he escaped from; that's what kind!"

The N-wave signal he sent to the lander told it to open the entry portal.

"Open the pod bay doors Hal," came to mind as Harvey chuckled to himself and landed in his ship, or at least the one that became his. "Possession is 9/10 of the law, is it not?"

In a few seconds, yet another fireball shot into the sky, this time a much bigger one, and much faster.

"Once in Lagrange," thought Harvey, "I'm gonna have a bitch of a time gettin back into the Lab!"

The National Disease Research Laboratory looked much larger and much more imposing when going towards it, wondering how to get in, rather than flying away from it.

"Security outpost one-zulu-foxtrot, unidentified vessel, please send vehicle identification code, and clearance number," came the harsh voice on the receiver.

Looking around for the paper he had found in an old shoe, Harvey hoped madly that the code would not be deactivated, reported to the authorities as possessed by a pirate!

"Aha! This better work, or I'm dead meat,"

whispered a now worried Harvey.

"One-zulu-foxtrot, this is federal shuttle Omega, clearance six-niner-alpha-seven, on route to National Disease Research Laboratory on Lagrange one."

"Omega, clearance," there was a pause which put Harvey on the edge of his seat, hoping against all hope that the next words would say that he was cleared. "Okay, continue on indicated route."

Breathing a sigh of relief, Harvey joked to himself, "Gotta remember to clean out these underwear when I get home!!"

As he approached the Lab, he saw another ship entering the landing bay.

"Tower control to vessel Omega, transponder signal okay. Proceed to bay six, slot thirty-eight," rasped a voice from the receiver.

"Holy Shit! I made it! I'm in!"

The bay doors closed behind Harvey and the receiver spoke again, this time it was a much different voice, and one that Harvey did *not* expect.

"Mr. Bartok, please land your vehicle and come out unarmed. A defense garrison is awaiting your arrival at slot thirty-eight. Please do not keep them waiting." Michael's voice had not changed, except for the noticeable glee in it.

"All this way, just get captured, *bullshit!*" roared Harvey.

"*Eat me Hunt!*" was the reply Michael Hunt got from Harvey. "Kill his engines, right now!" was Michael's response to what was quite a rude statement in his opinion.

"Mr. Bartok, your engines are now dead," said Michael, and he was right. At that instant, all his engine power dropped to zero, and like its engine power, so did the ship, zero feet.

With a crash that shook the whole landing bay, fifty tons of steel and plastic hit the deck. When he woke up, Harvey was staring at Michael Hunt.

"Mr. Bartok, that was a rash act of yours. I mean, Piracy! Surely we did not program you to do such things!"

"What do you mean, programmed?" growled Harvey.

"Exactly what you do to a machine, you program it to do what you want; only this time, something odd happened. The machine programmed itself!"

"I am no machine. I am a man, the same as you, and *nobody* programmed me."

"Harvey, think about it. Did you ever notice how fast you are? How strong? How, well... everything?"

"Yes, I am fast and strong, but I work out fiercely for the races and eat well."

"You do not eat. You merely take in food, process it, and release it. It is to simulate normal human

digestion."

"*Bullshit!* What do you think you are accomplishing by this weird shit? Why would you lie about my humanity?"

"You are correct. Why would I lie about your humanity, or lack thereof?"

"I am done talking to you Michael. I ain't finding nothin' new from you anyway... so I'll be leavin' now."

"That is not possible. I will not allow it."

"I don't give a rat's ass about what you think, dickhead!"

"Really, you have been watching too much tri-D. Your language has become abdominal!"

"Later, dude. I'm outta here."

Just then he felt very weak, almost as if drained of energy. As he looked up, Harvey saw Michael standing above him with a device.

"You see? You are a machine. I can neutralize your reactor, thus draining you of your power."

"No, no *NO!!!*" came Harvey's insane reply.

With amazing strength, Harvey leapt to his feet and ripped through the steel straps binding him to the chair.

"This cannot be!" gasped Michael upon seeing Harvey's returned strength. "I have neutralized your reactor!! You shouldn't have any power!!"

"If I was a machine, I am more now, I am *human!!!*"

"No you are a machine, not capable of sentient thought. We programmed you...."

"I am now human. And now, let me show you one of my *human* emotions... *hate!!*"

Both Michael Hunt and the machine that came to be known as Harvey Bartok were erased from reality as a Photon cannon atomized them both from a before unnoticed hatch.

"Damn, neither one of them worked," said the real Harvey Bartok.

"I wonder what went wrong?" said the real Michael Hunt.

"Humanity. That's what went wrong."

"Will we ever get this God thing right?"

"I don't know, but I'm hungry. How about lunch?"

"Harvey?"

"Yes Michael?"

"What if we are the same thing as them? Are we gonna be eradicated? Is that what death is?"

No response came from the real Harvey Bartok as both men left the control room.

# Kingdom of the Mind

©1990 Daniel Lee Rouk  
gt6940a@prism.gatech.edu

Georgia Institute of Technology

*These are the first two chapters of a story Dan began writing back in March. Lucky for us other writers out there, he doesn't yet know how good he is...*

## One

The old chancellor looked up from his desk and planted me with his gaze. "What do you mean, you wish to speak to His Grace?"

"I need to see him at once, Lord Torsa, as I have a message from the captain Stormright, sir." I answered. I hate this runaround I get each time I come here. Someday Lord Chancellor is going to get it. Old Drago should have this mans head on a stake for all his trouble. To think that anyone should question Loric, son of Stormright.

"Well, why don't you just give this message to me and I'll go ahead and pass it on the king."

Go to hell, I thought. "I'm sorry, my Lord, but I was told to specifically give it to His Grace, King Drago Vlan Shipwain. I will give this message to no one else, not even the trusted Lord Chancellor." He'll let me in eventually, but I'm in a hurry so I think I'll just have a little fun with him now.

Slowly, now, lest he suspect. Ha, the old fool forgot even his basic protections, so trusting in his power. Now...

As the mind of the chancellor was suddenly seized, a look of pain passed over his face and then slowly changed to one of joy. "I'm sorry for the trouble, oh masterful lord of the South Coast, the King will see you now I'm sure. Here let me kiss your feet and give praise for your allowing me to see you." A look of pain again comes to the chancellors face, but eventually it passes and he leads the way through the Hall of Swords. Guards wave us past, recognizing us both. Only Lordamar, the King's personal bodyguard, remains to be passed.

"Hail Lordamar, how are you?" I say as I approach him.

"Release Lord Chancellor Torsa, Loric, before I take action."

I hesitate a bit, wanting to embarrass the chancellor some more, but Lordamar is not one to play with. Pain rushes though my mind like a firestorm, then quickly fades. Yes, he reminds me that he can not be trifled with. I relinquish my control.

"Lordamar, do something to this delinquent!" Torsa shouts as he regains possession of his body. He shakes his head as if to clear it. A person who is being dominated loses control of his body, but remembers and feels everything that happens. Were Torsa not such an arrogant lout I might just feel guilty about what I'd done.

"I don't think you need worry about him, my Lord Chancellor. The King has some plans for him which will be quite punishment enough, I do believe."

I can't tell what he means, as his mind is closed and his face expressionless, but a feeling of dread slowly creeps upon me. The King Drago Vlan Shipwain is not one to take lightly. In addition to being King of HighReach, he is the rightful Lord of the Anacists, the people of the mind, and strongest of any of that class since Quillion the Bright. Only Lordamar could challenge the king mentally, for he is the King's Apprentice and Protector, learning secrets that no others of the Anacim alive now know.

The three of us entered the main hall, Lordamar on my right and the chancellor to my left. We waited at the base of the throne for some minutes, bowing low so as to not see the king's entrance. "You may rise" said an old voice, but still a strong one. I looked up and beheld my King once again. He looked to be about 50, with half his hair turned grey and worry lines about his face. His robes gave him a deservedly regal look. His hands were clasped together and he was leaning slightly forward to see us better. He was not a weak king by any means. The absence of guards in his throne room was not due to a shortage of gold to pay them, but rather to a feeling that nothing could harm this man, so powerful was he. Any who might even try to harm him would either feel the bite of the runed sword sitting at his side, or would not leave this place with their minds intact..

"My King, I bring a message from my father,

Lord Stormright of the South Coast. He says that the Magi of Arcanium are abroad again and to be warned, the seas are no longer a safe road to travel. They have raided Townharbour and taken the supplies of grain held there against the upcoming winter. Also no ships have been seen from the south in two weeks. The warships we sent out have not returned, despite calm seas and experienced captains. My father Stormright wishes to muster again the Anacim and to finish these Magi for once and for all."

A pained look passed quickly on the king's face. It was well known that Princess Thelina, heir and daughter of the king, was overseas in her mother's homeland. She was beloved by all, and a gem too precious for any to own. Normally the passage across the White Sea would be an easy one, but now danger has come.

"Loric, this is grievous news you bear, but not terribly unexpected. A number of messengers are long past due from both the South Coast and also, fearfully, the Norloc Woods themselves." He pauses to let that information sink in, then begins, "In the older days of my great grandfather they killed bearers of bad tidings, believing them to carry bad luck. I'll spare you this pain, however, but give you a new one. I charge you to seek out the land of Queen Helena, and to bear my daughter, the Princess Thelina, back to me. Make all due haste and do not tarry. I will not allow even death to keep you from this task. Lord Chancellor Torsa, send those who are able to light the beacons. We will begin the gathering of those remaining Anacists who can answer the call."

The dread I had been feeling, suddenly came to full growth. Queen Helena is the aunt of the princess and will never let the Princess go. After the death of Drago's wife, Queen Helena's younger sister, last year, the two countries have not had even a single messenger pass between them. It is said that Helena blames King Drago for her death. "And the rumors might not be all that far off," I thought. Much more important however was the news that the Norloc Woods had been cut off. The greatest strength of the Anacim remain there. To come at the beacon's call they might have to break through some unknown force of the Arcanium. For the Magi to have divided us so soon is a terrible blow, and possible our doom.

"Lordamar will accompany you on this quest, but again, make all speed. Soon war will sweep the land again and I want my heir near me should I fail and fall."

We left the high room and went back to the lower chambers. I felt as if a weight had been placed on my shoulders. In addition I was exhausted from my long ride here. But rest is not a pleasure I now can permit.

I gathered my belongings and turning to Lordamar said, "Well, cousin, let's be off; there's work to be done."

## Two

"Well, cousin, let's be off; there's work to be done," I said to Lordamar as we left the High Room.

"Yes, Loric, we have need of great haste. How are the road conditions between here and the South Coast?" Lordamar answered. He appeared deep in thought, as if planing something.

"The road is dry, a miracle after the last weeks of rain. It is very busy, however. I passed two caravans of wagons as I came here. Many people told stories of strange riders and odd lights in the night. My guess is that half the stories are merely lies designed to make a story teller look good." I recalled my ride a second, then resumed, "There was a look of fear in their eyes, as though something scared them. The people did not trust me until I told them who I was."

"Hmm, it appears, should some of the stories be true, that groups of the Magi of Arcanium are also in the Southron Woods. It would be folly for an Anacim to take the road to South Coast now." Lordamar paused, as if thinking and then resumed, "Here, go down to the stables and ready our mounts. I am going to take care of some unfinished duties and will join you in the Crystal Room within the hour. We will depart then." He walked beside me till we came to the passage I needed to take. "Within the hour now." I heard as I turned off.

I went to the stables and looked in on our horses. Mine was a black stallion with a white mane. He looked magnificent and stood tall and proud. Nighthoof was his name. He was bred from the very seed of Tolmar's Daymare, a noble blood to say the least. After placing the saddle and other pieces of gear on him, I looked over to Lordamar's stallion. His was a great white steed born out of legend. Greatsword was the horse's name. He was taller than any horse I've seen before. None could ride him but by his leave. Greatsword was unequaled by any horse alive. None knew his history but Lordamar, who quested long years to find him. Many peasants say that Greatsword isn't a horse at all, but a demon in disguise. Whatever the answer, he was a horse to put awe in a king. I saddled him and, taking my leave, headed toward the Crystal Room.

Arriving early, I looked about. The Crystal Room was the place of meditation for Anacim masters. I had been to Castle HighReach often in my youth, even studying there for a number of years under old Master Torsul, but never had I been allowed

to enter this room. In the center of this large chamber stood a huge crystal. This I knew to be the MindGlass. It was found during the time when King Shipwain's grandfather ruled. Even standing by the door I could already feel its effects. The crystal calms the nerves and opens the mind of anybody who would come close to it. Few secrets could be kept here if one wished to pry. I gazed up at the MindGlass and felt my muscles relaxing. I could feel my guard slipping and resting. One could not, lest he be mentally blind, commit violence here. The crystal removes violence before it can take root.

*"Loric, speak to me."*

I jumped some, not realizing someone else was there. "Who's there and what do you wish?"

*"Please, use your mind if you have one child. Speech resonates badly here. I am Master Guldson and was sent by King Drago Shipwain to test how your studies have been going down in South Coast."*

Proudly, I responded using the mind speech of the Anacim, *"My studies are proceeding excellently, Master. I even bested Chancellor Torsa today."*

*"Fool! I'll be the judge of your studies, boy. The very act you speak of belies your confidence. Torsa has been blind now for a month. He lost his Talent fighting the late Lord Baruso in a duel of honor! Now quit bragging and open to me, so I can see how well your Masters in South Coast have taught you."*

I felt the fool he called me. Of course! How could I not have seen? I had thought Torsa overconfident in his power since he didn't have defenses raised. Blind he was, and a fool I was for not having seen the absence of mental ability. Lucky that Torsa did not report me, for it is criminal to assault a Blind. I should have known better. How could I have known from looking, though? Chancellor Torsa was numbered among the most powerful of the Anacim. What a tragedy for something like this to have happened to one like him!

I lowered the last of my defenses that had not succumbed to the MindGlass's effect. The touch of Master Guldson's soul was at first sharp and painful. For a second I tried to bring back my defenses, but Guldson held them back and rushed into my mind. I felt naked before him. Before I knew it, however, he was gone.

*"You are progressing well, son, but need some work still."* Guldson rested a moment and continued, *"Your strength is surprising for one so young. I am tired from reading you. In another few years you might make Adept. Now don't jump to conclusions. You still have a lot of work to come yet. I will give the King a favorable report. You have tremendous raw talent. Your training at South Coast is slower*

*than what you might have had here, but I believe you adequate for your mission. Good luck."* He rose up from where he was sitting by the crystal and started to leave. *"Oh yes, your trainer in South Coast claims to have taught you all he can and states that you need a new teacher. The King has decided that Lordamar is to be the one responsible. Obey him, as you are now his apprentice."*

Master Guldson left and soon Lordamar entered. *"I hear you are to be my new trainer, Lordamar,"* I said, using the mindspeech still, *"Should I call you Master Lordamar now?"* Sarcasm seeping from my voice.

*"Don't get smart with me Loric."* His voice shattering the peace of the Crystal Room, *"I dread this duty also, but the King's law shall not be challenged, especially by the King's Protector. I hope the horses are prepared as I asked?"* I nodded so. *"Good. We ride now east toward the Norloc Woods, and there we will lay a trap for an unlucky Mage."*

# Xodiza

Jeffrey M. Horne

jhorne@ucrmath.ucr.edu

*This is a world setting inspired by both astrology and various elements of post-holocaust cyberpunk.*

## Intro

This short introduction is just for anyone out there in gaming land who might be a little confused by the following passages. I have gamed for several years now and one thing that has bothered me a little is the repetition of world settings and gaming styles. In answer to that I present the following work in progress which is my own vision of a slightly different world and gaming system. Many of the same rules apply but I believe it is the setting that is the most unique. It is submitted for your approval in hopes that some of its elements will inspire original ideas and worlds of your own. Much of what is presented here is loosely (very loosely) based upon astrology, among other things, and is what inspired the world of Xodiza.

## Philosophy

My belief is that all energy in the universe mental or physical comes from a person's life force or Ka (pronounced Kahh). The proper definition for Ka being; the life force each of us is born with and which leaves us when we die, the source of all strength and power in the universe. I am told and believe is true that I like balance in everything, including this world I am describing. Pursuant to that, my world has two paths that can be chosen by a follower of any God a physical path and a mental or magical path. Followers who chose the Physical major are most akin to Warriors and followers who chose the Mental major are most akin to Wizards. There are of course advantages and disadvantages to each. Of course cross breeding of tribes is possible but with various unpredictable effects and with in certain restrictions. A follower chooses or has chosen for him a major path at the age of seven and a minor path at the age of twelve. The major may be in Mental or Physical but must follow the dictates of his God and his tribe. A follower may

take only one path if he chooses gaining the commensurate advantages and disadvantages. Regardless of the path chosen, the strength and power one receives is linked to the follower's Ka. When a follower expends Ka in the name of his God(s) he must rest and pray in order to regain his Ka and thus perform the feats unique to his tribe(s). Those following the magical path must pray more than rest and those following the physical path must rest more than pray. The source of Ka, whether internal or divine, is unsure, but both prayer and rest are necessary, for one with out the other does not replenish one's Ka.

## History

The world of Xodiza is a world far apart from our own, but this was not always so. Xodiza is now quite a regressive society. A world once dominated by machines and technology, it is now a strange mix of magic, religion and the bizzare effects of nuclear, chemical and biological warfare. Even before the devastation of the legendary religious wars there were signs of the tension and cultural differences that would one day lead to the twelve tribes we now know. Xodiza had always been a polytheistic society with little trouble between the followers of the various gods in the pantheon. In the second cycle of the third milenia or somewhere thereabouts, a charismatic leader of the Geminese, known as Saador, called for conversion of all Xodizians to the worship of the God Gemini. The Libra sect, which had deep philosophical, moral and yes even religious differences with the Geminese called for a united front against the powerful Geminese and their Scorpion allies. By this time the regions of Xodiza were ruled for all intensive purposes by ironhanded theocracies who controlled weak ineffective governments. The religious missionaries/soldiers of the Libran and Geminese alliances soon came to blows which quickly resulted in the use of chemical, biological and even a few tactical nuclear weapons. The initial exchange which did 90% of the damage was actually quite short only 4 or 5 days. The scars of that battle still show on the landscape and

faces of the people of Xodiza. Throughout the centuries as attempts were made to restore Xodiza's former level of civilization more and more of the former technology was destroyed as rival religious sects raped and pillaged rising cities out of jealousy and fear of eventual domination by said cities. All that is left now of the former world are the empty shells of pillaged cities and towns, various scraps of metal, a lingering fear of anything mechanized or technological in nature, and fervent devotion to one's god.

## Geography

In order to paint a more complete picture of the world of Xodiza a short explanation of the geography and topography of the world is now presented.

**Gwanaray:** The largest of the habitable regions has two major livable areas The Northern Coast and the Living Desert.

**The Northern Coast:** This area is made up of the remnants of the cities of ancient Xodiza. The inhabitants of this region include the Pieceans, the Cancerians, and the Ariens. The Pieceans control areas to the east. The Cancerians control the west. The Ariens control a large central area known as Ramsville and are otherwise scattered throughout the other two tribes settlements. The major town of the Cancerians is Hermiton. The Pieceans main town is Fisher's Port. The only thing that makes these towns any more important than the other's is that they contain the religious temples for the tribe.

**The Living Desert:** A semi arid region to the south that contains giant mutated lizards, huge mesas and giant cacti some of which eat small animals and even small Xodizians. The Librans live in ancient cave dwellings on the edge of the desert. The Geminese make their homes atop the mesas using man made stone steps to reach the summit. The Capriconians are nomadic traveling the desert hunting giant kangaroo rats and the smaller of the giant lizards for food.

**The Astoria Archipelago:** A group of islands a few hundred miles of coast of Gwanaray

**Ixtapa:** The tribal home of the Scorpions which is now little more than a toxic waste dump, but they call it home and they love it. The

air on Ixtapa is lethal to other tribes if they stay on the island long enough. There are no plants and no animals of any kind. The ground is made of a black lifeless substance that is damp but cannot properly be called either soil or mud. The Scorpions make their homes in what appear to be underground military bunkers.

**Obselia:** The volcanic island home of the Virgoans. It is a lush island with abundant tropical plants and various mutated versions of tropical animals. Mount Aphesia rises out of the center of the island with the Virgoan settlements spreading out at its base in a circular fashion. The Volcano has been dormant for centuries.

**Akira:** The tribal home of the Aquarians is characterized by the rampant growth and quick life cycles of the plants there. No animals only giant insects inhabit the island. It is said drinking from the fresh water lagoons of the island can extend life and is said to be the source of the Aquarians healing powers.

**Pangaea:** A land mass connected to Gwanaray by the Isthmus of Tanier.

**The Savannah:** The home of the Leonions where they live in grass huts in extended family groups. The grass in the region reaching a height of six feet or more gives excellent cover for hunting herd animals which make up the diet of the Leonions.

**The Woodlands:** To east of the Savannah is a heavily forested area where the Sagittarians make their home. The forest is traveled often by traders moving between the Leonion settlements and the Tauran villages in the Uluzian Mountains. These parties are frequently raided by Sagittarian bands.

**The Uluzian Mountains:** A huge range of lofty mountains whose summits average 10,000 feet in height. The Taurans live in countless villages from the foothills to near the summits all up and down the range. Beyond the Mountains is what is simply known as the Wasteland.

**Other Regions:** Other land masses and islands exist but like the Wasteland east of the Uluzian Mountains they are assumed unlivable and for the most part unseen.

## The Races

Xodiza currently has three races, if they can be called that. They are classified here by their closeness to the original humanoid gene pool of Xodiza and various political and religious alliances. The reason for the races, beyond the alliances, is that viable offspring can only be produced within a given race. On rare occasions Brutals have produced offspring with both Elwin and Mutants. But It Is Rare! And Elwin and Mutants are completely unable to crossbreed.

**The Elwin:** The Elwin are the most like the original Xodizians genetically and ironically are the least prevalent as far as population. The tribes that make up the Elwin are the Virgoans, the Librans, the Taurans and the Aquarians. Although each tribe has its own particular culture Elwin are generally, peaceful, reclusive and helpful when given the opportunity.

**The Brutals:** The Brutals are a slightly mutated race of Xodizians with certain mild physical mutations which set them apart from the Elwin. The Brutals are the most abundant of the races on Xodiza with about 50% more population than the Mutants. They are considered the most barbaric of the races and thus received the name Brutals. Brutals are generally aggressive, chaotic, and prone to fits of lustful raping and pillaging. The brutal tribes are the Ariens, the Pieceans, the Leonians and the Capriconians.

**The Mutants:** They are by far the most malformed of the races when compared to the original inhabitant of Xodiza. Their overt physical mutations tend to disgust the Elwin but are for the most part tolerated by the Brutals. The Mutants hunger for power and wish to enslave the rest of Xodiza. The Mutants are generally deceitful, cautious in battle and extremely vengeful. The Mutant tribes are the Scorpions, the Geminese, the Cancerians and the Sagittarians.

## The Tribes

The Emergence of the twelve tribes can be linked to Eugenics experiments being performed by the scientists of the various religious sects at the at the out

break of the religious wars. These experiments which dealt with Psychic abilities of certain Xodizian families, when combined with natural selection, a combative environment, and the bizarre effects of modern warfare, produced the strange assortment of peoples which are now known as the Twelve Tribes of Xodiza.

**Geminese:** A most powerful tribe, who worship the two headed god Gemini. A mutant tribe with two faces on the opposite sides of a single head. They almost always wear a cloak with a hood in order to hide one of their faces when they are around other tribes. Along the magical path they are able to polymorph objects, create duplicate objects given an original and the more powerful of the tribe can polymorph people. Each face of a Geminese has a distinct personality. Geminese personality traits come in opposite pairs (eg. shy vs outgoing or cruel vs kind). The degree of opposition is a function of how well that particular Geminese works out his/her dual nature. One personality and face in a Geminese is ALWAYS dominate thus controlling the change between personalities and faces. Geminese have the ability to swivel their head so as to have the appropriate face and personality oriented to the front of their torso. When following the physical path, Geminese take full advantage of their unique mutation. In Battle Geminese get two attacks front and back left and right handed, but only if opponents are attacking front and rear. Often times Geminese use this ability to surprise a would be assassin or backstabber in the heat of battle.

**Ariens:** A Brutal tribe known for their impish nature. They are relentless pranksters and practical jokers with a curious nasal laugh that is particular to their tribe alone. Those who follow the magical path have the power of telekinesis, which aids them greatly in their antics at the expense of others. An unexplained trip or a tap on the shoulder when no one is there can be an indication that an Arien is somewhere in the vicinity. Those honing their physical attributes have extremely acute senses. A well trained Arien can hear people talking three miles away and see through thirty feet of led on a moonless night. Ariens make excellent trackers and often work as bounty hunters finding the utmost joy taunting their prey before he is captured. Their bloodhound's nose allows them to follow even the slightest trail. The telekinetic powers of Ariens progress and stabilize in a fairly predictable pattern. The physical powers of Ariens appear to



be less predictable. Some Ariens seem to revert to almost normal levels in one sense while the remaining senses increase markedly in their acuteness. The only reason for this seems to be over use of one particular sense. To compensate for this side effect most Ariens tend to exercise all of their senses equally. Arien facial features are what make them so distinctive. They have very round heads with small ears placed unusually high on the skull. Their eyes are also quite large and set about twice as far apart as would be considered normal.

**Leonions:** A Brutal tribe sometimes called the Lion Men. The most distinctive feature of this tribe is the customary long curly hair of both the men and women. The men will almost always sport beards after the onset of puberty. The men and women often have lengthy and quite sharp nails which they use effectively in hand to hand combat. Leonians possess both the strength and sensitivity of a lion. Along the physical path there are none stronger. A single Leonion can clear a road of a fallen Redwood. On the magical path Leonions are empaths of exceptional power and are naturally telepathic within their tribe. They have been known to develop telepathic links with close friends of other tribes given time. As empaths Leonians can pick up on and eventually project all sorts of emotions and physical sensations including but not limited to love, hate, thirst, cold, fear, exhaustion, pain, joy, and despair. Leonions are devoted to their family and often live in extended family groups of three or four generations. Leonions are renowned for their bravery and loyalty and are the most respected of the Brutal tribes by all four of the Elwin tribes.

**Scorpions:** A Mutant tribe who love to use chemicals, potions and toxic concoctions of all types. In appearance Scorpions are perhaps the least grotesque of the Mutant tribes. They are short, never more than five in height. The irises of their eyes are a fluorescent green with even the whites showing a tinge of minty color. Scorpions are immune to all types of poisons and toxins. This being result of the fact that their ancestors were the survivors of massive chemical/biological attack the remains of which generations of Scorpions have lived in and adapted to. The one goal of all Scorpions seems to be to spread disease, contamination and death everywhere they go. Such exploits tend to be limited to enemies, assassination targets, and people who piss them off: however, a cornered or desperate Scorpion

may just toss off a gas grenade filled with neuro toxin in the middle of a crowded market place, his only concern being if used enough to ensure genetic damage to the offspring of any survivors. The magical and physical path manifest themselves in the Scorpions in the types of elixirs they use. Physically oriented potions tend to explode, burn, freeze, dissolve or just kill. Magical potions tend to induce truth, lust, invisibility, alteration, or petrification. Despite the unusual nature of the scorpions talents they still make use of their Ka like all the tribes. For a scorpions potion to be effective he must pray for the specified, be alert these are delicate compounds, (in other words rested) and most of all every Scorpion requires a prescribed amount of the makers blood. The amount is usually not much but exotic potions can call for a pint or two. As a result of this requirement, scorpions always have numerous scars and scabs along their hands and wrists. Fortunately they are quick healers.

**Librans:** An Elwin race known for their poise and grace in all situations. Like all the Elwin races, they are quite normal looking humanoid types save for the fact that many of them about forty percent have two different colored eyes. This trait does not appear to affect vision in any way but is a curious mutation. Along the magical path Librans are sometimes called mental thieves. They have the curious ability to rob a person of both memories and emotions. By robbing, it is meant to remove these things from a person so as they will not know they ever existed. As a result of this talent Librans make both excellent spies and peacemakers. They can calm the emotion of heated parties over a negotiating table, while at the same time lifting forever crucial pieces of information from the two combatants minds. Libran mentalist are also said to have near photographic memories. Though all Librans possess an elegance of both speech and movement, those following the physical path have evolved movement into an art form. Physical Librans are acrobats of extraordinary skill. They are ambidextrous, double jointed, and extremely flexible. Librans are excellent climbers of any surface and quite skilled in hand to hand combat of any kind using their special abilities and superior agility to great advantage.

**Virgoans:** An extremely beautiful Elwin race who have a particularly powerful effect on the opposite sex. Along the magical path they are able to seduce nearly any person or creature of the oppo-

site gender. Their beauty has the effect of making the opposite sex believe almost any thing the Virgoan says and obey all reasonable requests. A Virgoan making an obvious pass can seldom be refused. A Virgoan kiss has many different effects including, orgasm, memory loss, confusion, sleep, deafness, blindness, and even death. Along the physical path Virgoans are defenders and protectors experts in the use of shields and spiked bucklers. On the aggressive side Virgoans are well trained in the use of whips and chains. (Having had so much practice with their sexual partners) It is important to note that Virgoans are a predominately female race. Males make up only about thirty percent of the tribe. Males are used for reproduction and a few menial tasks. Most of the males are docile and physically smaller than the females. Virgoan females average about 6ft 2in while Virgoan males average only about 5ft 8in. A sizable minority of the males about ten percent reach between 6ft and 6ft 4in. These males are far more aggressive, and possess more brute strength than the average female Virgoan and as a result are driven out of Virgoan society by the age of eighteen. (After a suitable amount their genetic material has been forcibly obtain for eugenics purposes) Virgoans are very reclusive and seldom go outside their own communities.

**Cancerians:** A Mutant race with armour like skin which gives them excellent protection in combat. Cancerians do not have hands or fingers but instead claws or pincers which they use with great skill when in combat. Cancerians brown shell like skin is able to deflect all but the largest missile weapons. Cancerians are susceptible to most heavy swords and all types of blunt weapons. Along the magical path Cancerians are able to enter the astral world and to commune with the spirits of the both places and people. Astral travel allows the follower to hear and see all that is occurring in a particular place and all that has occurred recently in that place assuming the psychic vibrations have not yet faded. Cancerians are also able to project their spirit into other people for short periods of time, thus causing great mental, emotional and physical damage. The amount of time spent tormenting a soul and damage done is a function of that Cancerians individual power level. Cancerians are very hermitish throughout their life time. The young are raised by the same sex parent and leave home by the age of ten. Mating pairs

generally have three offspring and separate after the children are grown. If all three children are of the same sex the opposite sex parent will leave after the birth of the third child. His/Her duty is now complete, since there are no same sex children to rear and the Cancerian will continue his/her wandering ways. Cancerians are very duty bound when it comes to their tribal obligations to family, tribal defense and tribal secrecy.

**Taurans:** A strange race of totally blind prophets who vary greatly in the accuracy of their predictions depending on how far into the future they are called upon to see. In the very short term Taurans, when able to concentrate, have the ability to navigate what obstacles to avoid, duck under, and and step over in a cluttered room. They virtually see the obstacles in the room as they move through it. Concentration is required for this type of movement though, and if broken takes time to renew. Despite their handicap it is very difficult to surprise a Tauran as they can predict an ambush a mile away. Taurans rarely if ever carry canes but they are known to have guide dogs which double as attack dogs. These dogs are large, viscous loyal, beasts with three inch fangs and very sharp claws. The dogs are bred specifically for this purpose and are found only in around Tauran communities. In the physical discipline, Taurans are masters of the martial arts. Their only limitation being that their opponent attack first. (So as to give away his position) Taurans also have the ability to regenerate and heal from wounds much faster than the average tribe and subsequently have the longest average lifespan of any tribe about 150 years.

**Capriconians:** A rather tall Brutal tribe with abnormally large heads, thick skulls and low intelligence. Though of low intelligence Capriconians have a likable nature and characteristically will not attack anyone who does not attack them first. Capriconians, like the Leonions, generally have good relations with the Elwin tribes. When following the magical path Capriconians have the power of mental domination. When invoked, spoken requests are difficult to refuse. This power will work on both sexes and can include (with powerful followers) unreasonable and even self injurious acts even to the point of suicide. This makes their ability in this regard much more formidable than the similar power of the Virgoan's, seduction; however, unlike the

Virgoans seduction, if a victim realizes he is being influenced he has a better chance of resisting. After all if a person knew he was being seduced by a very attractive member of the opposite, would he really try to resist? Due to their kind nature Capriconians tend only to use this power against those they consider enemies, potential enemies, or enemies of their allies. On the battle field Capriconians are fierce fighters, their favorite and best weapon being a spiked club which they wield with great accuracy. As a result of their large thick skulls Capriconians can deliver a potentially stunning head butt to an opponent and are highly resistant to psychic attacks.

**Aquarians:** An Elwin tribe with short lifespans, a physically powerful grip and the ability to heal, sometimes even to the point of resurrection. Along the magical path Aquarians are known as the doctors of Xodiza. Depending on the power of the follower, Aquarians can cure light wounds to amputated limbs with a touch of their over sized hands. Conversely they can cause wounds and powerful followers can even cause death with a touch. Aquarians have very large powerful hands and with physical training possess a Crushing Grip that can shatter bones and crack windpipes in a matter of seconds. An Aquarian's grip is strong enough to squash a ball of solid lead like it was clay. Culturally the Aquarians are very peaceful, even cowardly. Their favorite sport is none other than thumb wrestling and is practiced nightly by amateurs in Aquarian pubs throughout Xodiza.

**Sagittarians:** A Mutant tribe sometimes called the watchers in the wood. They are a hairy bipedal tribe with goats legs. Males sprout short horns on their heads, above the hair line, after puberty. On the physical path they are skilled archers and quite adept at any sort of missile weapon. It is told in legend that Saador, the Geminese fanatic who started the religious wars, was slain by a Sagittarian arrow. Along the magical path they are able to command the woodlands and all its creatures. They are often mistaken for woodland creatures themselves. It is not uncommon for a pack of wolves or a weeping willow to come to the aid of a Sagittarian in distress. Powerful Sagittarians can call upon the weather to aid them summoning gales, lightning and hail. Swarms of insects, acid fog, and acid rain are also not unheard of. Culturally Sagittarians revere all that has to do with nature and are the most distrust-

ful of all the tribes of anything mechanical or technical. They will destroy any machine they find no matter what the size or nature of it and will attack any travelers, who are making obvious use of a machine. In past times Sagittarians had been responsible for much of the destruction of the former technology of Xodiza. There are stories of Sagittarian bands taking a week or more to destroy cars, buses, tanks, even ships not to mention the whole sale trashing of computer centers that have become epic in their oral histories. The other tribes engaged in machine bashing, literally, but to the degree and with the finesse of the Sagittarians.

**Pieceans:** A Brutal tribe known for muscular legs, small feet and webbed hands. They are excellent swimmers almost from birth and often become fishermen. Along the physical path they are extraordinary runners and jumpers as these skills improve with practice. Much of their fighting consists of kicks and leg sweeps. They often stomp opponents into submission or death. What fights they don't want to get into they can usually run away from with ease. The average Piecean can move a little faster than a gazelle at top speed and jump thirty feet straight up or fifty feet forward. In the practice of the magical discipline, Pieceans are illusionists who revel in messing with people's minds. Most illusions start out simple but can become quite lethal the more powerful the follower becomes. Some examples of illusions of various power levels would be: light, darkness, invisibility, phantom shadow, dancing daggers, dream monster, shadow wall, phantasmal killer and dream world. Pieceans love the water and can seldom be found far from a large body of water. For their own physical health they must immerse their body at least once a week in water or suffer dry peeling skin and a persistent rash that can become incapacitating if water is not available to treat it. Soaking in a bath or pool of water relieves the rash in a few days.

# The Smuggler & the Smith

©1990 Mike Sellers

msellers@pdx.mentor.com

*Here's an FRP adventure for all you module runners out there.*

## Some Notes

The adventure takes place in a large city-state, and can involve some role-playing, intrigue, combat, a little magic, and a brief peek at the high-stakes power plays going on in the city. I think this will work best with characters who are not high power, though I suppose you could scale it up if necessary.

The patron, Sir Eric, is a well-known noble associated with one of the more powerful trading houses in the city. A deep background check might reveal a hint of some connections that might raise a few eyebrows, but the characters have no reason to suspect duplicity on his part.

Jules, the smuggler, is a tall thin man with lank brown hair (why? I don't know, but that's how I imagined him). He is well-paid, though his forte is smuggling, not fighting. He died quite conveniently when I ran this before as he was covering the PCs retreat. He did it more out of shock that a plan of his could have gone so far wrong than out of altruism for the smith or the PCs (though I *did* have some vague thoughts about Carl being Jules' hated older brother whom he regretted at the last minute having sold to the Sisters, but thankfully that little subplot never had to see the light of day).

The city has many large temples to various gods. Most of these are set on a hill near the center of the city, and are well appointed and attended. There are undercurrents of conflict or rivalry between some of the temples, though this rarely touches the worshiper-on-the-street. The temple in which most of this adventure takes place is devoted to the goddess Reltira, also known as "she who walks in the night" (as some people know, an equally viable translation of her name could be rendered "she who stalks in darkness"). Reltira is the patron of thieves, astronomers, lycanthropes, shape changers, prostitutes, and others who practice mainly beneath the moon. This temple is at odds with the temple of Greenslade (god of life and illusion [if you've ever seen Roger Dean's artwork,

you may recognize where the concept for Greenslade came from -MJS]), and is rumored by some to have secret dealings with some of the priests in the temple to Thet, the sea god.

## Adventure in brief

Sir Eric, a noble of wealth and manners, has contracted with the characters to rescue a certain smith (named Carl) from the clutches of the Temple of She Who Walks in the Night, where he is currently illegally being held prisoner. If pressed, Eric will admit that the smith is a master, and has a reputation for making magical devices that the Sisters of the Night are attempting to forcibly cash in on. Certain people do not want the Sisters to gain the sort of power they could from this smith, and so have determined that it would be best if he left their employ (though this is not, strictly speaking, the PCs concern). All of the PCs have been selected more or less at random (from the pool of nascent adventurers) so as not to arouse the Temple's suspicions. To help them find the smith and bring him to safety is a smuggler named Jules. Jules says he knows where the smith is being kept and has been hired to help get him out. In fact, Jules knows about this because he was the one who smuggled the smith into the Temple in the first place, and now bigger pay has helped him change sides. Jules will admit this if it comes up, but will not volunteer this information [note: this was played for much hilarity on my part when I ran this; all the player's mouths dropped open when Jules casually admitted that he knew which way to turn because "this was the way I carried him in here in the first place"]. Eric also gives the PCs each a small ebony panther amulet and gives one of them (optionally the confederate, see below) two keys that will help them get into the Temple (one fits the outside garden gate where the gardeners throw out their clippings, and the other a grate leading into a series of steam tunnels). The amulets will be needed to circumvent the temple's passive guardians when the PCs are on the way out.

## What's going on

The Temple wants Carl to make a magical cloak that will aid in shapeshifting, something Carl is not excited about doing. He is in fact a consummate master, but his mainstream ethics prevent him from willingly giving in to the Sisters.

Carl wants to escape, but is being held both in chains and by the fact that the Temple has something on him (maybe a family member held hostage?). [Note: I conveniently let this latter aspect of things drop when everything started to get hairy and the PCs were running like crazy.]

Eric ostensibly wants the smith rescued because it will deal a blow to the Temple. In reality he is deeply involved with the Temple himself, and this is part of a power play on his part to gain more control over it. While he cannot directly supplant the High Priestess, he *can* replace her with someone more tractable. If the current high priestess were shown to be incompetent (say, by losing an important commodity like the smith), her opposition would have the leverage it needs to overthrow her with the popular (though vapid) Clarise at their head.

Jules is just in this for the money. (Or is he? Decide depending on how many twists and turns you want in this thing.)

One of the PCs might be a confidant of Eric's. He (or she, which works even better, since most of the people in the temple are women) would know about Eric's plan and be along to make sure things go okay. Maybe this character knows a couple of passwords or something that is all too convenient... in any event, if things go well, the confederate will probably expect some credit from Eric, though if things go badly he or she might just fade out with the rest of the PCs.

## What They Have To Do

Get into the Temple, via the garden gate. (Possibility of being seen by a random person/priestess walking in the garden, or of being seen while stealing across the garden towards the locked grate that leads toward the basement where Carl is. Jules can unlock the gate and grate, or the confederate can, or another party member can.)

Get from there into the steam/ventilation tunnels (unused at this time of year). The grate leads down into some steam tunnels. These are about 8' on a side, with a square cross-section, and are lined with a marble-like stone or ceramic that is fairly slick with condensation. Jules knows his way perfectly, though it might be interesting to have him fall or something so that the characters are left to their own devices. At

any rate, Carl is in the lowest basement. The tunnels open out into the ceiling of this room about 20' off the floor. I also decided at the last minute that the floor of the tunnel sloped precipitously above the grate in the ceiling above Carl's room, which made opening the grate and lowering a rope quite hazardous with the slippery footing.

Along the way, steal some robes from a ward-room for later use. Jules can go get these, or a couple of the characters can for a small side adventure. They'll need these on the way out (but see below). Also, if there is a confederate along, at some point he or she should drop the small panther amulet they were given, or trip a tripwire "by accident" or something similar. Basically, one of the confederate's jobs is to raise the alarm before Carl is taken out of the temple so that the Sisters can see who it is who is taking him. Once they see that he is being taken out by physical rather than magical means, they won't suspect that this is really (in a twisted sort of way) an inside job, and all their fury will be directed at these unsuspecting adventurers.

From there get into the special forge that has been set up in the lowest basement underneath the temple. Carl is a large fairly handsome smith standing in the center of the room, hammering with large stone hammers in both hands over a glowing anvil. He is hammering at what looks like very thin shiny black metal/cloth, and sparks fly from it each time he hits it (this cloth is *\*very\** valuable, but needs more work by a non-smith before it can be made into a cloak of shape changing). Carl is chained at the waist to long chains, each terminating in an opposite end of the room. He cannot move far from his anvil, and cannot get a good angle to break the chains.

Once down into the room, the PCs have to free Carl. Jules will watch the door, and bar it from the inside. Only Carl's hammer (wielded by someone else until he is free on one side) will be able to break the chains; there is enough slack to get a piece of it on the stone floor, and it will break after being hit a few times (this will also make rubble of the stone underneath it). A dwarf or smith will be able to see that the links in the chain are iron that has some sort of crystalline treatment on it to make them magically strong.

Carl is very grateful about being set free, but will not leave without his hammer, the metal/cloth he was working on, a beautiful dagger, and a few miscellaneous items. He will look longingly at the anvil (in my system, such an anvil assists expert smiths in making magic items; to a master smith, it is what a +4 flametongue would be to a fighter), but there is no way to move it (unless your characters have one

of my patented collapsible pack mules).

Once Carl is free on one side, the PCs will here a lot of running and shouting coming toward them in the hall outside the room. Either the alarm the confederate tripped or something else (breaking the chain?) has raised the alarm, and troops are coming down on them quickly. While they are still trying to free Carl on the other side, a big booming step can be heard in the hall outside. Troops are now right outside the door, and they are trying to open it. A huge booming starts up, like a big fist or a small battering ram hitting the door. The party is trapped (since they can't go back up through the tunnels, given the slope)!

## Or Are They?

Carl shows them an ancient trap door he found under some boxes and rags in one corner. If the PCs Dally, the door bursts open, revealing several temple guards preceded by a large, angry troll on a leash with a spiked collar. This is where Jules bought it before, and I think it worked well. As the PCs struggle to get the trap door opened, Jules fires a small crossbow (where did he get *\*that\**?) at the troll. The troll, now really angry, rips Jules' arms off. It pauses to bite the top of his head off while the PCs, now truly motivated, open the trap door and descend the steep stone stairs.

They should all get through the door just before the temple guards reach it. Rather than pursuing them, though, the guards quickly shut the door; sounds of it being spiked shut or something heavy being moved on top of it can be heard, along with muffled laughter. Clearly, the guards are not worried about the PCs or the smith escaping this way.

They are now in small circular room with five passages leading off in various directions. The passages appear to be storm sewers; there is a small amount of stagnant water in the bottom of each and a smell of stale air and refuse around them.

If any of the PCs have any religious training, they might have heard tales of the passages underneath the temples, but these are never given much credence. In all the tales, however, the passages are supposed to be the homes of deranged lunatics, old insane shape-changing priestesses, prisoners converted to animal form, lycanthropes, sluks, ghouls, and other miscellaneous uglies.

In fact, all of the above do live in various parts of these passages. I drew up a very random map on unlined paper showing how the passages proceed, intersect, dead-end, and (in a few cases) actually empty out into an empty field, the basement of a slum house,

or into the pit outside the city walls. The PCs have to roam around for a while, and the number of hideous things they encounter is basically up to you. To be fair, I quickly noted on my map where the old insane priestess lives, where most of the lycanthropes converge, where the party of goblins trying to break in to the city is located, etc.. The party skirted the area (and heard bone-chilling hysterical cackling in the distance) where the priestess lives, hit some werabats and weretoads, and eventually got out – it had been a long evening).

Along the way, the party discovered a large room with a stone ceiling that resembled the underside of a huge bowl. A little ways beyond this, they found a stair way leading up on one side of the passage. At the top was a long dis-used door, with a brass fish for a handle. They guessed (rightly) that this door led into the sea-god's temple, though they didn't even want to *think* about what those people might be keeping in a large bowl or pool deep in the basement of their temple... This little tidbit will come in handy in later adventures :-)

The party eventually finds its way out of the sewers and into a field or some such (they almost ended up coming out of a secret door (whose presence is unknown to the proprietors) in a sleazy beer-hall in the slums). Carl wants to take refuge in the Temple of Greenslade if he has any choice, and suggests that the PCs come along. If they agree and they make there without being sighted by the other temple's guards, he will give them the dagger (beautifully wrought, with some really nice magic on it). For their part, the priests of Greenslade will be so glad to see Carl (he was originally coming to see them when his trip was interrupted) that they will agree to give the party safe passage out of the city [this is where the PCs actually set up their next adventure when I ran this, as the priests had a task that needed doing, and since these folks really did need to leave town anyway...].

# Advanced Character Generation for 2300AD

©1990 Shawn Dudley

*The following is a set of guidelines intended to give helpful hints and assistance to anyone creating a character for Game Designers' Workshop's role-playing game 2300AD.*

The character generation rules in 2300AD and in its previous format, *Traveller:2300* tend to be somewhat vague, and often do not mention important facts about generating characters. Also, players often are looking to add color to their character's background. This article should help players (and game masters) on both accounts. To fully use this guide, one must have the *Adventurer's Guide* from 2300AD (or the *Player's Guide* from *Traveller:2300*), as well as a sheet of paper or a character record sheet. It will also be helpful to have both the *Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook*, and the *Colonial Atlas*. Further articles will be forthcoming about subjects like equipment for 2300AD, as well as details on the *Cybertech* supplement for 2300AD.

## Creating a Character *the basics*

The first order of business in creating a character in 2300AD is determining his homeworld. In the rules, a player first needs to make a die roll to determine if he is from the core or frontier. If he rolls frontier, he then rolls for the gravity of the frontier world/outpost.

In practice, the above is not generally recommended. Choosing one's home need not be so random, and the charts given in the rules tend to be very biased towards characters born in the colonies on worlds with abnormally high or low gravity levels. While this is great if you're playing adventures on the frontier, it tends to be a big minus for characters involved in *Cybertech* adventures on Earth, as the given die charts give them a big disadvantage when it comes to abilities and background skills.

For characters who are intended to be played in *Earthbound cybertech* adventures, the following is recommended: reverse the core/frontier die chart so that a roll of 1 through 3 is a Frontier result, and a 4 through 10 is a core result. Once this is done, then

skip the gravity roll and directly choose your homeworld from the Colonies given in the *Adventurer's Guide* and the *Colonial Atlas*. Characters in the core, of course, can choose either Earth or Tirane (the colony at Alpha Centauri).

Once you've chosen your homeworld, you need to determine your body type. This can be done in two ways: one, roll under the appropriate gravity column on the bodytype chart to find a body type, or two, just choose the body type you like. The second method is preferred by many, as it gives a player a little more control over his character than the existing charts would allow. The full descriptions of the body types are given in the *Adventurer's Guide*, but an easy way to think of body types is like this: Mesomorphs play football, Ectomorphs play basketball, Endomorphs play hockey, and Normals play baseball.

Now that you've got your body type taken care of, now roll for your physical and psychological attributes, as per the original rules. One thing to note, however. The game rules are very vague on Attribute Task Modifiers (basically, some fool at the typesetters left it out!). Each one of your eight attributes needs to be divided by four, fractions rounded down, to provide die modifiers for various rolls. This means a roll between 1 and 3 would yield no modifier, a roll of 4 to 7 would yield a modifier of 1, a roll of 8 to 11 would yield a modifier of 2, a roll of 12 to 15 would yield a modifier of 3, a roll of 16 to 19 would yield a modifier of 4, and a roll of 20 would yield a modifier of 5. Always keep this in mind when you are making your rolls (and your rerolls), so that you can achieve the maximum level of modifiers.

Also, don't forget you can reroll two attributes: one physical and one psychological, and that the reroll is only optional: you don't have to take it the second time around. For the physical modifiers, what you reroll depends on what you want to emphasize: it could be wise to concentrate on beefing up one particular ability, as opposed to just picking up lower rolls. At the same time, it's easier to pick up a low roll than it is to make a high roll even higher by rerolling up. The choice is yours. As far as your psychological attributes go, the Determination ability is the single most used asset your character has. You should always try for a reroll of any Determination roll under

8, and it is strongly encouraged also for a determination under 12. The second-most used attribute in play is (get this, folks!) eloquence. If the character desires to interact well with NPCs, this ability should have a minimum of 8, and 12 or higher is desired.

## Background Skills

How a character divvies up his skill points depends on what type of character he desires, of course, but a general rule of thumb is to have a character with one skill at level 4, about two or three at level 3 (including at least one combat skill), and the rest at level 2. Any skill at level 1 or 0 tends to be not as useful.

What background skills a player gets depends on if he's from the core or the frontier. The core is quite sanitary, computerized, controlled, and, well, boring. A core character will receive little in the way of combat skills, but lots of computer and intellectual skills. Frontier characters do not get much in the way of computer or intellectual, but do have most of the combat and survival-oriented skills available, due to a more rugged lifestyle.

For players who are looking for real detail in their characters, a helpful hint: Characters growing up on Tirane, and any colony over 75 years of age (determinable by the colonies chart in the play aids) have access to both core and frontier background skills. This reflects the modernization occurring on the oldest of Earth's colonies, as they cease to become mere frontier installations, and transform into fullfledged, thriving worlds.

Before I get into carrers, a note on skills: the amount of skill points needed to achieve a certain skill level depends on the type of skill, determined in the carrer section. To make it easier, follow the chart below.

Type of skill	Skill level desired					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Primary, Background	1	1	1	2	2	3
Related	1	1	2	3	4	5
Unrelated	1	2	3	5	6	8

Cross-index the type of skill with the skill level desired: the given number is the number of skill points it takes to reach that skill level. A few notes to remember: skill points left over in choosing background skills, initial training, or carrer skills NEVER carry over. Use them, or loose them. Keep in mind that you can't jump skill levels: a character must move from each skill level to the next, paying all of the necessary costs. Also, an unrelated skill is any skill that is not a primary or related skill, as given by the

carrer chart.

## Choosing Carrers & Skills

Probably one of the two most challenging things a player has to do when generating a character is pick a carrer (for some reason, picking a nationality is the other one). Players need to have at least one carrer, and having two is highly recommended. As for what kind of carrer is best for one's character, I suggest that you should read both what skill points the carrer offers you in initial training, and what the primary skills are, then choose a carrer that best suits you. For combat oriented characters, a military carrer is a must for a first carrer. If you want a character to have some combat abilities, but be more well rounded, Troubleshooter, Field Agent, Law Enforcement and both of the extralegal carrers are good. For real technical-oriented characters, the two exploratory carrers, academic, colonist, and core world are recommended. And, for those that want characters that roleplay well, Field Agent, both Extralegal carrers, Journalist, Independent Trader, and Administrator come in handy.

The reason why I recommend taking on a second carrer is due to the free skill points available in initial training. Normally, a character with a single carrer will get a whole mess of skill points once, in initial training, then a small trickle of skill points based on how many years a character spends in a carrer until he fails a turning point. With a second carrer, the player will get another flood of skill points, as he goes through initial training for that carrer as well. On the average, this will leave your character with more skill points, and therefore higher skill levels, than if he had just selected one carrer. Remember, though, you can only change carrers after passing a turning point, and you only get to do it once.

For players interested in more detail in their carrers, consult the various sidebars and notes on organizations in the basic game, as well as in other 2300AD source materials. Characters may want to assign their characters to a particular corporation, foundation, or national military, law enforcement, or intelligence organization. A wide selection is given in the adventurer's guide alone. If none of the groups mentioned in the above sources really appeal to your character, make something up, or, attach him to a future equivalent of a modern day organization. For example, in 2300AD, just as in present day, the United States will probably still have the US Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Marine Corps, plus probably a Space Force of some kind, as well as the FBI, the Secret Service, the CIA, the National Security Agency,



the DEA, and the US Marshall's Office, or at least the twenty-fourth century equivalents of them.

**A note on college:** In 2300AD, nearly 80% of the population of the core worlds has five years of college education or more, as well as close to 40% of the frontier population. If you wish to simulate this, let either your first or second careers be academic. Optionally, you can allow for two career changes, as long as one of your careers is academic. But don't feel pressured to go academic: it's a good way to build up intellectual and computer skills, but it's not necessary to have one in 2300AD. *On the other hand, a good cyberjockey would be incomplete without a college education and the cheap computer and info gathering skill points it provides.*

**A note on skills:** The academic skills provided in the adventurer's guide are only a smattering of the type of skills one could obtain. Characters that desire to have fields of study outside of this list should feel free to add another skill or two, maybe skills like Law, Economics, Botany, Astronomy, or whatever else he feels like (with the GM's approval, of course). The General Skills list could be added to in the same manner, with skills such as Heavy Equipment, Animal Handling, Agriculture, Acting, Dance, Music, etc. (within reason, of course). However, adding skills beyond these two areas is not generally recommended.

## Finalization

Upon failing your last turning point, your character is now given the polishing touches that make him/her complete. Finalization is explained pretty straightforward in the Adventurer's guide, but there are a few extra points of interest.

**Mass:** you might notice that, after computing this characteristic, your character seems a little overweight, particularly if he's a mesomorph or an endomorph. I'm somewhat suspicious of the tabulation method myself, but I usually don't worry about it much. Mass is probably one of the most useless stats this game has.

**Throw range:** A character with a strength of 10 can throw an 1 kg (about 2 lb. object) 80 meters, in the game. Like mass, it's a little questionable, but just how many situations occur in which you need to throw something the length of a football field, anyway?

**Nationality:** For some reason, this seems to be the other really difficult choice a character has to make. If you really want to get into what the political shape of 2300AD is, buy **Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook** from your local game shop, or borrow it from somebody. It will answer most of your questions about who's who these days. However, for those who would like a quick and dirty approach to picking a nationality, just use the nations that are here today. The basic geography has not changed all that much, and the important changes are listed below.

**United States:** Now commonly called America. No longer the world's #1 nation (not necessarily a weakling, either!), significantly more isolationist. Southern California, and most of Arizona and New Mexico are now part of Mexico. Texas is an independent nation. Puerto Rico is now a state.

**Mexico:** Gained Southern California, Central America, Cuba, and most of the Caribbean.

**Texas:** Now independent of the U.S.

**Australia:** Tasmania is independent, as is Queensland (now known as Papua).

**Japan:** Gained the Philippines, Guam, most of the small Pacific island chains, but not Hawaii, or Korea.

**France:** Now the #1 nation; the French Empire is composed of France, Belgium, Guyana, a good chunk of North, West and Central Africa, as well as various other parts of the world. Characters who are French are generally not well liked by anyone but Frogs themselves.

**Britain:** Northern Ireland now part of unified Ireland. Still has a King, still a major power, but does not have Gibraltar, or the Falklands.

**Germany:** Unified, but only recently (see game history).

**Russia:** USSR no longer around, most of the captured republics have gone independent, such as the Ukraine, Latvia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Far East Republic.

**Scandinavia:** Now unified.

**China:** Split in three parts. Manchuria in the north, Canton in the south, and China in the middle. Tibet is still not independent.

**India:** Split nine different ways.

**Arabia:** Saudi Arabia absorbed all the gulf states.

**Iran:** Still has an Ayahtollah.

**Palestine:** Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and the PLO all unify (the **only** future event I personally don't think would really happen. GDW can dream on, but if you want to be a Zionist in my campaigns, please, feel free).

**Africa:** Egypt expands into the UAR, the French take over half the continent, and South Africa comes under black rule, and changes its name to Azania.

A character does not have to be particularly loyal to his chosen nationality, but he should come from somewhere.

Major powers in 2300AD are France, Germany, Britain, America, Japan, and Manchuria. Other major political players are: Azania, Ukraine, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Texas, Canton and Australia.

There! Now, you're finished with an enhanced character, but still within the basic rules and game universe. A note to the wary: please don't let the above rules and recommendations, or the standard game rules restrict you too much on what you want to do with a character. As long as you and the game master both agree to it, there's really nothing you shouldn't be able to do, or as GDW prez and 2300AD creator Frank Chadwick told me once: "Once you buy it, it's not our game anymore; it's yours, to do what you want to do with it." Enjoy!

# Doubly Blind

## Limited Intelligence for GDW's Starcruiser

©1990 Brian Yip

*Whether roleplaying or wargaming, the general consensus seems to be that no system of rules is perfect, and that every rule is open, not merely to reinterpretation, but also to revision. Understanding this, Brian presents his revisions to GDW's Starcruiser.*

Starcruiser presents a very nice system for starship combat that depends as much on detecting the enemy (if not more in some instances) as the firepower one can bring to bear. "Bogeys" all appear as black globes, indistinguishable from one another except by action until detected by active or passive sensors.

During the Active Sensor Illumination phase, players may illuminate their ships' active sensors and use their active sensor rating to detect other objects. During the detection phase, players may ask, for example, "Does this bogey have a radiated signature of 6 or more?" If the opposing player responds "yes," the object is detected.

A couple of things happen in Star Cruiser that I do not find to be quite right. When players ask about their target's signature, their target then knows the players sensor rating. Secondly, the target player answers "yes" or "no" when asked about his signature, meaning the target always knows whether he's been detected or not. It seems to me that players should only know whether they've detected their target (and thus the target's signature), not whether they themselves have been detected or their opponents sensor ratings, especially not passive ones. Here is how I propose this could be simulated.

For each object (starship, missile, drone, etc.), two index cards are required. One card is divided into four sections with each section numbered as in figure A.

The other index card should be cut into strips that will cover each of the four sections.

Under "Radiated Signature" circle your object's radiated signature number (masked). Similarly, circle the object's radial and lateral reflected signature. Under "Identity", write in the identity of the unit. By "Object" at the top, write a letter or number or otherwise special mark that will identify which black globe counter this card represents.

To play, lay the cards face up by the map where

your opponents will easily reach them. Play the strips (information blinds) on top of each column but allow the top part (where the object number and column names are) to be visible. Now everything is ready.

Play proceeds as normal except that during the detection phase, players consult the cards instead of asking each other about their signatures. Instead of asking "Does this bogey have a signature of x?" go to the card with that bogey's number or letter and secretly slide down the strip under that column until you see the number "x". If you see one of the numbers circled, then the ship has been detected and you may look under the "Identity" column to see what it is. You do not need to tell your opponent that he has been detected. Move the strips back into place so that no one will know your sensor rating.

Note that if you illuminate using active sensors, you still indicate so since detection of your ship is then automatic. Also, if your ship has suffered a hull breach, its radiated signature goes up. When this happens, immediately take the ship's card back and circle the higher signature number. Return the card to the table and continue play.

Object			
Radiated Signature	Reflected Signature		Identity
	Radial	Lateral	
15	15	15	
14	14	14	
13	13	13	
12	12	12	
11	11	11	
10	10	10	
9	9	9	
8	8	8	
7	7	7	
6	6	6	
5	5	5	
4	4	4	
3	3	3	
2	2	2	
1	1	1	
0	0	0	

figure A

# Combat Vehicles for Striker

©1990 Brian Yip

*For all of you who've taken a loooong... look at Striker vehicle design rules and have after long hours of study and consternation figured out that you don't really want to mess with 'em, we've found a crazy person who does. Enjoy!*

## Light GEV (Tech Level 10)

The light GEV has a crew of 2 (driver, gunner). It mounts one 5 cm CPR gun in a chassis front mount, with both direct and indirect fire control. Height: 1.75m; Width: 2m; length: 3m. Total volume is  $10.5m^3$ . Weight is 14.00941 tons (+2), Price: 451,534.18 (+ ammo) Cr. This vehicle is non-amphibious.  $0.005m^3$  cargo.

Movement: 335 kph / 279 cm

Movement effect on fire: none.

Armor (crystalline): front (1.5cm, radical slope) 28; sides (1.5cm, moderate slope) 24; rear (1.5cm) 20; deck (2cm) 23; belly (1cm) 15.

Target Size DMs: +1 low, no high.

Equipment: 100-power radio, 100-power radio jammer, map box, light amplifer goggles, activer IR scope.

Power: 4 MW fusion powerplant consumes 3.0 liters of fuel per hour; fuel capacity is 48 liters, enough for 32 hours constant running.

Weapon: 5 cm bore CPR gun. Medium velocity, Mounted chassis front. There is an autoloader and space and weight is allocated for 140 rounds. Performance varies with ammo: Direct.

ROUND	ROF	EFFECTIVE	LONG	EXTREME	COST
HE	7	150(9)(1)1	250(9)(1)1	400(9)(1)1	1680
HEAP	7	150(21)	250(21)	400(21)	2520
KEAP	7	150(20)	250(18)	400(16)	1680
KEAPER	7	150(18)	250(16)	400(14)	1848
flechette	danger space 10, DM+4				8400
CBM					5040

Performance varies with ammo: Indirect. Range is 7 km; Accuracy: +3 at 3.5 km, +1 at 7 km.

## Jo'nas (Tech level 5)

The Jo'nas has a crew of 3 (commander, driver, gunner). It mounts one 2 cm charchwl' autocannon in a turret with direct fire control only. Height: 2m (1.5m chassis); Width: 4m; Length: 5m. Total volume is  $34.375m^3$  ( $30m^3 + m^3$ ). Weight is 30.254 tons. Price: 48,614.28 Cr. This vehicle is amphibious. 2 passengers.

Movement: 55 kph/45.8 cm road speed  
27.5 kph/ 22.9 cm cross country speed

Movement effects on fire: -4 FFP, no EFP if  $\frac{1}{2}$  speed

Armor (soft steel): front: 19; rear: 15; sides: 19; deck: 8; belly: 1; Turret - front: 19; rear: 11; sides: 19

Target size: +2 DM low/ +1 DM high

Equipment: 10-power radio, 10-power jammer

Power: 0.6 MW internal combustion engine consumes 540 liters per hour; fuel capacity is 1080 liters, enough for 2 hours constant running

Weapon: 2 cm bore gas-operated action autocannon with single barrel. High velocity. Mounted in the turret. The weapon engages 16 targets and its ROF is 640 rounds per turn. There are 6400 shots (20 bursts worth)

Ammo: KEAP Effective:60(9)+6 Long:100(8)+5 Extreme:320(7)+2 (320 shots expended per phase)

# Rangers in AD&D

©1990 Wayne S. Wallace

## Ranger Extraordinaire

*This article was written as a response to the way certain folks (who shall remain unnamed :- ) tend to play rangers. Follow-ups are, of course, welcome.*

The Ranger is a woodsman by nature, a stealthy scout by training, and a warrior by circumstance. All rangers are in touch with nature, with plants and with animals. Yet, they are protectors of *good*.

The problems some people have in playing a Paladin are usually irrelevant when applied to a Ranger; after all, Rangers don't have some big, limiting code of honor like Paladins, right? *Wrong!!* A Ranger is, yes, a survivalist. He knows how to live off the land and find shelter in bad weather and other things which make one's trip through a forest less harrowing. He is not, however, a survivalist in the sense of putting his own life before others. As a *good* person, he goes by that basic code of honor that all *good* characters go by: to help others, to sacrifice, though not foolishly, most anything to save an innocent or good life, and to attempt to one's best ability to fix past mistakes.

Mortals are not perfect, however, and do make mistakes. However, for those mortals who have lived and/or adventured a long time (in gamespeak, quite a few levels gained and foes dealt with), these mistakes should be fewer, if not near-nonexistent.

**Scenario one:** The party, with an average level of ten, foolishly draws attention to itself in a dormant volcano with a fresh-water lake and tower (w/ drawbridge). They knew that they were in dangerous territory where something lurked that had killed a powerful group of the king's elite warriors. Not giving a care to the cave they hadn't entered yet, they proceeded to make much noise and ruckus. Little did they know that the Red Dragon who had killed the elite warriors had heard the party and while they were still looking around and had flown out of its lair to strafe them. Breathing fire once, it alerted them to its presence and returned to its lair. Most of the party yet lived, and all decided to go through the cave and slay the dragon. They healed themselves somewhat and proceeded to beard the beast. All, that is, except the Ranger. After ten levels of fighting the

good fight, he chose to take off, taking his valuable fighting ability away from the party's potential.

**Scenario two:** The party, with an average level of one, is currently enjoying the hospitality of a halfling farmer. (*NOTE: no class limitations were in place in this campaign*) The druid/monk, a rather attractive female figure, awakens the party in the barn with the words: "Let's go kill that stupid farmer. I want his money." (*Unbeknownst to the party, she was pissed off that he didn't fall for her human charms and also had undergone enough stress to bring her evil Illusionist/Assassin personality to the fore.*) The party blinked as one and the Ranger stood before her, sword drawn, but not in a threatening manner, and asked of her if she truly understood what she was saying. He also told her that murder is wrong. She proceeded to *Color Spray* (blind) him. He had lost his most important sight. He could not track or battle very effectively while blind. He used his magic ring to see through the eyes of his falcon circling above and proceeded to attack her. He hit, and she was down and bleeding. The elf came over to bandage her wounds and stabilize her so that, to his mind, she could be taken to a city and checked for possession by evil spirits, insanity, etc. The ranger, his sight now regained, was furious, and as the elf sat over her, making sure she would live, the Ranger came over, sword brandished, and tried to attack her with intent to kill. Had the weaker elf not gained leverage over the Ranger's far greater strength, surely he would have committed murder. Eventually seeing the futility of trying to remove this *obvious* source of *evil* while the rest of the party was against him, the Ranger sheathed his sword and sat down for a while and became calm again.

Now, in which of those two situations did the Ranger's alignment (*Good*) breach cause him to later lose the status of Ranger? Exactly what is forgivable? In the first scenario, the Ranger deserted his near life-long friends with whom he had adventured for many years, and left without even a thought of remorse or caring for them. He had abandoned the ideals of *good* to save his own skin, instead of helping them. If they had survived with the Ranger, much *good* would have

been accomplished. If they had all died, *all of them: including the Ranger*, each would be assured a place in their respective heavens because of past deeds.

In the second scenario, the Ranger was new and inexperienced, so his lapse in judgement is understandable. Mortals make mistakes when angered and the Ranger learned from his mistake and went on to help the party win the rest of their battles.

Clearly, the dividing line between an honest mistake (while angered) and willful evil (leaving your friends possibly to a gruesome death when perhaps you could have helped them) is quite fine indeed. Here are some tips on correctly playing the ranger as he is: a *good* woodsman, not a *cowardly* survivalist. A *true* Ranger helps the helpless, is charitable to those who have not, is loyal to his friends, never deserting them in their hour of need no matter how bleak the outcome looks. A *false* Ranger ignores those who are in need, never helps someone unless it benefits him, and values his own life above all others, especially in a might-as-well-be no-win situation, trading them away to make good his escape.

# Two For the Show

## Ed's Guide to Dragon Skinning

*These are a few guidelines Ed uses when his players get lucky. Real lucky...*

The following is my adaption of the AD&D 2nd Edition rules concerning the skinning of dragonhide.

The second edition AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide has some great ideas on this topic. Skinning a dragon is difficult to do. It might take a series of proficiency checks (or some such method) in order to remove the hide without ruining it. I would give a base chance of 50% to remove enough hide to make each suit of armor. This could be modified by +5% by such things as leather- working or hunting proficiency. Magical weapons add +10% per plus of the weapon. Half the age category of the wyrm equates to the amount of usable hide for armor construction. Thus an age stage 8 dragon has enough undamaged hide (you don't want sword gashes in your armor) to make 4 size M (man-sized) suits, or 8 size Small.

The curing of the hide would be very expensive and must be done with care. Some GM's might require the armor to be enchanted with the 'enchant an item' spell. The Armor Class the finished product bestows is 4 worse than the AC of the original dragon. Thus the AC of Great Wyrms Gold Dragon Hide would be = *wyrm AC*: -12 minus 4 = -8.

Normally Dragon hide does not give any bonus to saves or similar things (i.e. red dragon hide does not give immunity to fire or even a +1 save as it is assumed that the low AC bestowed is benefit enough).

If you want to give this kind of bonus that I would suggest that you should give all dragon hides a base AC of 5 (or whatever is the equivalent of scale mail). In all cases, the base AC of any hide should not be worse than this regardless of dragon age stage.

One of the best things about dragon hide is that while it gives scale-mail like protection (or better), it is as supple as studded leather. Thus thieves can wear it with the usual penalties for studded leather. The same is true for rangers. Because it is a "natural" hide, druids can also don this armor. Among high-level druids, usually those going into battle, dragon hide is a sign of status. Note that druids do not kill dragons for their hide, but like the American Indians, they will put all remains of a dragon to good use.

— Edward Zeamba

## Colin's Guide to Killer Characters

*Here's Colin's advice on powergaming.*

Greetings mutants and other sentient beings. How goes it? My name is Colin (Fandora) Kameoka and I have a few funny facts (or dumb and totally useless pieces of trivia to all those power gamers out there) about people and their characters.

### THE PROBLEM?

I can say it in one word... POWER! Almost every gamer in the back of his or her mind must make every character the most powerful in existence. It does not matter what game you play; it is the same old thing. I have long since given up hope that people might change; only people who have seen the light can really change. For example, the infamous roll dice for characteristics game. Nearly everyone will cheat their rolls; an "18" means nothing. I personally do not like characters like this because low characteristics build character. High characteristics from what I have seen mean nothing these days. How can one roleplay all "18" characters??? There are no *real* traits to make fun of. On the other hand, I can also see why players want *powerful* characters. It is called the infamous killer GM. In my days of playing RPGs nothing bugs me more than jerks who run nothing but blood baths, (pc that is) and kill as many as they can with the most powerful junk that they can come up with. Well, let us face the facts; human nature makes us very destructive.

### THE ANSWER?

I can not tell other people how to run their game; that is their business. I however, use lots of little squishy baddies for PCs to deal with. I don't use too many, just enough that I only have to worry about bad die rolling nights for PCs. Reason: it gives players a good feeling about their characters without hurting their egos. The big bad guy should be rare and not much more powerful than a single player character. These are only steps in the right direction. I can say no more. If abusing a game system is your cup of tea and you think it is fun to powergame, then continue to do so. Only make sure to buy your new game when your last one is no longer fun to play.

— Colin (Fandora) Kameoka

# Magical Items for AD&D

Aaron Sher & Jim Vassilakos

*If the magic in your AD&D campaign is getting a little boring, the following items should help spice it up just a bit. Feel free to modify and use as you see fit.*

## Aaron's Items

**Force Gem:** Appears as a brilliant blue gem about 4" across, faceted, and with a yellow glow in the center. If someone holds it and invokes it ("I invoke you", "Invoke!", or something similar), it will sink into their palm, becoming just a pattern (like a tattoo), of blue with glowing lines of yellow running up the fingers. At any subsequent time, if the user so wills it, a bolt of force (which looks sort of like colorless fire, if you can picture that) will shoot from his palm to a range of 150', doing damage based on the percentage of HP the user has left:

100% - 75%:	3d6
75% - 50%:	2d6
50% - 25%:	1d6
0% - 25%:	1d3

A successful save *vs* Wands on the part of the target will reduce this damage by half. Item saves apply only if 1) the target failed his save, and 2) the item is exposed to the blast, which is very directional and about half a foot in diameter.

**Ring of XXXXXX:** Note about the name: This ring should be called either a ring of lightning/electricity/whatever, or after its creator. Its two incarnations in my campaigns have been called the Ring of Irabunol and the Ring of Is-taris (yes, the same one as in the module). This ring appears as a normal silver ring, with a good-sized emerald set into it. Its powers are as follows:

- Immunity to Electricity
- Lightning Dart (2/day, 1 turn)
- Lightning Ball (1/day)
- Shocking Grasp (4/day, 3 rounds)

Where applicable, the value before the comma is how many times the power may be used, and the number after is the minimum interval between usages. For instance, Lightning Dart may be used twice in a given day, but the second usage must be at least 1 turn after the first.

- The wearer is completely immune to any and all electrical effects, including any type (magical or natural) of lightning. However, his equipment is not; if he's hit by a lightning bolt, item saves still apply.
- A spell of my own creation, Lightning Dart is as follows:

### Lightning Dart

2nd level Invocation/Evocation

V,S,M

Casting Time: 2

Duration: special

Area of Effect: special

When this spell is cast, the mage is empowered to fire small "darts" of electricity, like miniature lightning bolts. These darts can vary in strength; their power is measured in "units", each of which represents 1d4 damage (i.e. a 3 unit dart does 3d4). The available power equals 1 unit per level of the mage, and these can be held for a time equal to one-half of the mage's level, rounded up. After this time, any unused units are lost. Units may not be split. For example, if Isid the 7th level mage were to cast Lightning Dart, he would receive 7 units. If he then cast a 4 unit dart (doing 4d4 damage), he would have 3 left. He could then cast a 1, 2, or 3 unit dart. If he does not use all 7 units within 4 turns of the casting time, any remaining units are lost.

- Lightning Ball is as a ring of shooting stars, but at one-half damage.
- Shocking Grasp is as the spell.



All powers are used at the 8th level of magic use, where applicable.

**Lightning Whip:** This appears as a metal whip, 18' long. It is shaped like a three-pointed star, with the edges very sharp. It thus inflicts slashing damage as a longsword, rather than normal whip damage. At the wielder's will, the whip will begin to crackle and emit faint blue sparks. Anyone struck by it when its power is active will take an additional d4 of electrical damage. Its power can be active for one turn per day, but this can be split however the wielder chooses.

**Mesh Armor:** This is not exactly a magic item, it's a new type of armor I've come up with. It's made of heavy wire mesh, in layers. It's thicker (more layers) over vulnerable points, and thinner over the joints to allow increased flexibility. Treat it as elven chain for combat purposes, but it is almost silent as there's nothing to click, clank, or clatter.

**Wand of Acid Blobs:** This wand is capable of firing small blobs of acid, one per round. If a successful to-hit roll is made, the acid inflicts 2d4 points of damage on the target. Ranges are 2/4/6, in tens of yards. It has charges, of course, and cannot be recharged.

**Necklace of Guarding:** This necklace protects the wearer from normal missile attacks. It puts out needles of force, hopefully diverting the missiles from their course. In game terms, this translates to a -4 for any normal missiles of spear size or smaller (no boulders) to strike the wearer. It has charges, which are used up at a rate of one per missile, whether or not the missile is successfully repelled.

## Jim's Items

**Gem of Imprisonment:** This dark gem has the property of serving as an efficient prison for spirits and demons. Any being captured within it cannot normally be released other than by breaking the gem of through magical means. Nor is any communication possible with the held party, though some distinctive feature (usually eyes) may be recognized. Note that by placing the gem against a crystal ball, communication with the imprisoned spirit may occur via the crystal ball.

**Ring of the Leprechauns:** This ring, wearable only by a dwarven sized creature or smaller,

causes its wearer to become as a two-foot tall leprechaun with the powers of invisibility at will (from normal sight and infravision but not from ultravision or vision of undead), ventriloquism also at will, and create minor illusion once per day (with the following restrictions).

The illusion must be something small and simple and can only be worked on one person. All illusions are cast instantaneously and last a maximum of one minute (10 melee rounds) or until dispelled. Options on illusion forms are as follows:

- A small object may seem to appear, such as a shiny coin or bright gem or dagger in the hand of the ring wearer.
- The illusion may take the form of a blur spell for the ring wearer (-4 on initial attack, -2 on successive attacks, +1 save *vs* directed magical attacks).
- The illusion may finally take the form of a hypnotism (if the victim is lured to attention in a non-combat situation and fails a saving throw *vs* spell at +5). The victim may then be urged to do something (as suggestion) for the duration of the minute or until attacked or damaged.

**DragonDeath:** DragonDeath is a magical (+3), two-handed sword. It is +4 versus reptiles, +5 versus dragons, and +6 versus wyrms (true-dragons in my campaign). It has a tendency to glow when in the presence of these creatures which it detests within an unholy wrath, and in the presence of Wyrms, the weapon attains dancing capabilities, striking as its wielder for d12 rounds before returning. Note: regardless of circumstances, the weapon may dance only once per day.

**Amulets of Inner-Voice:** These amulets are dull copper and unremarkable except for their magical auras which confer upon their respective wearers the ability to speak with each other, regardless of distance or method of separation, as though by an inner voice which need not be openly vocalized.

**Belt of the Serpent:** Snapping this belt causes it to transform into an eight foot Amphibaena (two-headed) poison-spitting serpent. The creature has 64 hitpoints and attacks with a 12 thaco causing 3-18 points of damage biting (twice), 2-12 points for constriction, and 1-6 for poison spit (twice). The serpent's Armor Class is 3. If

victims make saves *vs* poison, normal damage applies, however if they fail their save then death quickly ensues.

**Hat of Three Spirits:** This cloth hat is tall, light grey, and pointed, with an ever-dusty rim. It contains within it three spirits who serve separate functions. One Spirit erases magical trails left during teleportation, another serves as a pair of 2nd eyes for the wearer of the hat (in any level of lighting up to sixty feet). Still another spirit controls the movements of the hat, so that it can act on its own with minimal control by the wearer, sprouting legs or wings as called for by the wearer. This spirit may also be enticed to leave the hat for a short duration, but is very shy of doing so. In this capacity, it may act as a light, an unseen servant, or a liaison with unfriendly spirits.

**Saddles of Walking:** This is a pair of seemingly ordinary leather saddles without shin straps. By use of this footwear, the wearer may walk on water (80%), on air (50%), as teleportation (20%), or as interplanar travel (10%). Note, that there is an improvement of 1% for every successful use up to a maximum of 95%. On a roll of "00" something bizarre may occur such as interplanar travel, teleportation, timetravel, or a "spirit-high" involving an out-of-body experience (DM's discretion). Luckily of foolish wearers, the saddles will nearly always attempt to find their point of origin after such mishaps.

**Staff of the Elementals:** This is a tall wooden staff, twisted as if warped by water, and black as if charred by fire. At the end, it is looped, with the head of a snake, the forked tongue wrapping around the shaft to close the circlet.

An Elementalist may spit through the loop, blow air or fire through it, or toss a speck of dust through it to create any of the four basic elementals. Other sorts of elementals can also be created with some imagination. All elementals start with AC2, however, hit dice, thaco, and D/A follow directly from the wielder's level of experience.

Hit Dice =  $d8 \times \text{level}$   
Thaco = as per monster thaco at level  
D/A =  $\text{max of } 2.5 \times \text{level}$

A save *vs* INT or Spell must be made to successfully control the elemental, both checks mean absolute control and neither meaning total loss of

control where the elemental attacks the wielder of the staff.

The elemental may grow to greater proportions once released from the staff, but with such growth the elemental may make a save *vs* spell breaking the wielders control when the elemental reaches the necessary hit dice corresponding to its save.

After several minutes on a prime world, the elemental will naturally seek its own plane again, thus gating itself through any like element, seeming to dissolve within its own kind.

**Sulegurth (Spirit Death):** This folding mace is a devourer of spirits, and in particular, of magic items. It does  $d10+4$  damage and is at +4 to hit. When thrown it will attack its target and return to the wielder in the same round. It can also defend the wielder in combat without actually being held, striking attacking weapons and foes. Persons killed by Sulegurth are forever dead unless the spirit makes a save to flee the corpse before being devoured, and normal weapons failing saves are likewise destroyed.

Sulegurth has the personality and temperament of a small, ill-disciplined child. It will insist of its wielder that it be fed at regular intervals, often refusing to go to bed without *supper*.

**Bands of Dholethalion:** Both wrought of enchanted gold, inlaid with mithril, and each holding a soulstone, the bracelet and anklet are intertwined in a powerful magic.

Each bands confers an 18 constitution upon the wearer, and if one of the band wearers approaches death (unconscious), then hitpoints are instantly transferred ( $d8/\text{melee}$ ) to keep each at or above 0hp. Once put on, the bands cannot be removed except by the most exceptional counter-magic. Further, both bands cannot be placed upon the same person.

The soulstone betrays the inner feelings/states of the wearer through the ever changing color of the gem.

Red	Anger	Yellow	Revelation
Blue	Sorrow	Green	Life/Nature
White	Purity	Orange	Forgiveness
Black	Evil	Purple	Hurt

There is a limited dream telepathy between the wearers, an emotional cross-over, and often wearers will experience parallel lifepaths, each doing

similar things, meeting similar people, catching the same cold, ect...

Further, the bracelet may only be worn by a male while the anklet is specifically female. Each of the items has a powerful spirit, but little outward intelligence.

**Necklace of Lust:** Inscribed on one red pearl of this necklace is a PowerRune which allures members of the opposite sex when the pearl is rubbed. Eleven charges are present.

**Ramagurth (winged death):** This weapon is like a boomerang, except that it has one extra blade. When thrown, the weapon seeks out its target, even if out of range or behind cover. It attacks at +4 twice per round, slicing and stabbing for d6 & d8. Its straight blade is venomous, doing an extra 3d12 on failed saves *vs* poison. Once in, the poison works to the heart, doing an additional d4 per melee until the victim is at zero hit points. Then the victim becomes numb and dies slowly and painfully. The weapon may dance for three rounds, and it may defend its wielder during sleep if stuck into the side of a living creature or plant. [As a sidenote: in my campaign, the PC who acquired the weapon (not knowing its true-name) named it "Ragamuffin" which eventually stuck, becoming representative of the personality the venom blade soon developed. Feel free to carry such "development" out as you see fit.]

### **Rings of Mischief:**

**The ring of truth:** the wearer cannot tell lies, and must save *vs* magic when attempting to deceive. Likewise, all lies which are heard or read are detected, and attempts to deceive must make a save *vs* magic in order to remain undiscovered.

**The ring of gullibility:** The wearer will believe anything told to him, but likewise, others will believe everything he says. Save *vs* magic applicable for truly unlikely lies. Counters the ring of truth, canceling both magics.

**The ring of lies:** The wearer cannot tell a truth in the most awkward situations. Further, when he hears a true statement, the ring may tell him it is a lie. When he hears a falsehood, the ring may force him to believe it. DM's discretion advised.

All three rings appear as simple circlets of gold. Each adjust in size to the finger of the wearer, and they are impossible to tell apart. They all have the ability to fall off fingers during the night, roll to where they want to go, and hop on new fingers as desired; thus traveling with a party, continually interchanging partners, and causing confusion and mayhem along the way.

**Make-up Kit:** The magical make-up, properly applied, grants a 24 comeliness. Duration is eight hours and there are ten doses. There is also a special nail paint (5 doses) which turns a woman's fingernail into a sharp poisoned dagger (d4 & save). The perfume (9 doses) acts as an aphrodisiac on males. And the black lippaint (3 doses) may be used to administer the kiss of death (save *vs* deathmagic). The make-up kit is locked with a wizard lock and trapped with a sigil 2d20pts.

**Shorty:** This long, thin-bladed dagger possesses its wielder with a desire to steal and kill, turning the wielder toward a shade of selfish evil. In the hands of a thief, the blade allows a plus 50% on opening locks (up to a maximum of 99%). Moreover, it can cut through most magical seals (8 charges). The blade does a base d6 damage, is +4 in term of magic, and attacks twice per round whether thrown or held in melee. It may dance for 3 rounds and may excrete a magical poison once per day (save *vs* poison: lethal *vs* lawful creatures, others take 6d6). The dagger has a playful mentality but a limited intelligence.

# Riddles

©1990 Dan Judd

*These are some riddles picked off the eklektic server at Pittsburgh. Enjoy...*

1. For our ambrosia we were blessed,  
by Jupiter, with a sting of death.  
Though our might, to some is jest,  
we have quelled the dragon's breath.  
Who are we?
2. Colored as a maiden tweaked,  
time was naught when I began;  
through the garden I was sneaked,  
I alone am the fall of man.  
What am I?
3. Early ages the iron boot tread,  
with Europe at her command.  
Through time power slipped and fled,  
'til the creation of new holy land.  
Who am I?
4. One thin, one bold,  
one sick, one cold.  
The earth we span,  
to prey upon man.  
Who are we?
5. One where none should be,  
or maybe where two should be,  
seeking out purity,  
in the kings trees.  
What am I?
6. He who makes it does not keep it.  
He who takes it does not know it.  
He who knows it does not want it.  
He who gathers it must destroy it.  
What is it?
7. One tooth to bite,  
he's the forests foe.  
One tooth to fight,  
as all Norse know.  
What is it?
8. This creature, part man and part tree,  
hates the termite as much as the flea.
- His tracks do not match,  
and his limbs may detach,  
but he's not a strange creature to see.  
What is it?
9. The part of the bird  
that is not in the sky,  
which can swim in the ocean  
and always stay dry.  
What is it?
10. Dead and bound,  
what once was free.  
What made no sound,  
now sings with glee.  
What is it?
11. The root tops the trunk  
on this backward thing,  
that grows in the winter  
and dies in the spring.  
What is it?
12. Touching one, yet holding two,  
it is a one link chain  
binding those who keep words true,  
'til death rent it in twain.  
What is it?

1. Bees
2. An Apple
3. Italy (*Rome*)
4. The Four Horsemen of Apocalypse
5. A Unicorn
6. Counterfeit Money
7. An Axe
8. A Man With A Wooden Leg
9. A Shadow
10. A Wooden, Stringed Instrument
11. An Icicle
12. A Wedding Ring

# Species of the Gamester

Compiled by Charles K. Hughes

*with addendum by Ed Zeamba*

*Whether of humor good or bad, Gamesters have taken great pleasure in classifying their fellow Gamesters into various species, some benign and others rather malignant. Sparing the grand history of the our adventure into the taxonomy of gaming, we hereby present for your enlightenment, edification, and general jollies the umpteen million Species of the Gamester.*

## The Players

*Bill Bynum:*

1. **The Real Man:** "Hot Diggity!! Gnoll outpost at twelve o'clock!! *Chaaaaaaarge!!!!*"
2. **The Real Role-Player:** "Don't start yet!! I need my two minutes to get properly into character."
3. **The Loonie:** "I sheathe my longsword and kiss the ogre on the lips."
4. **The Munchkin:** "Five arch-devils and two demigods? That's *all*!! I guess I'll only need to use six of my rings for this encounter."
5. **The Coward:** "Yikes! Three kobolds!! Retreat! Retreat!"
6. **The Troublemaker:** "Just before the Mayor gives his speech to the town, I cast 'command: vomit' on him."
7. **The Novice:** "I just rolled a 2 on my 'to hit' roll. Did I want high or low?"
8. **The Tactician:** "The archer will move silently into position behind the podium, carefully aiming at the sergeant. The mage shall remain behind the door in preparation of a 'sleep' spell which will be centered at the table around which are the bulk of the guards. Meanwhile, the fighter and I shall..."
9. **The Quiet Type:** "I dunno... I lob off another arrow at the monster this round, I guess."
10. **The Punster:** "You know how many clerics it takes to fix a light bulb? One to cast 'cure light.'"
11. **The PC Infighter:** "Since Ruth's been such a twit, I hit her in the face with my flail while she's casting her 'find familiar' spell."
12. **Joe I-Got-the-Rules-Down-Pat:** "No, if you look in the DMG, page eighty-one paragraph five, you'll find this spell won't affect griffons."
13. **The Whiner:** "Three points?! I take *three points of damage*?! Frank, what the hell kind of grudge do you have against me?"
14. **The Bully:** "Are you sure I don't make my saving throw? Are you **ABSOLUTELY** sure? Do you want to keep your nose the way it is, Lou?"
15. **Mr. Greedy:** "So it's not evil? And it's not attacking? So what! I **WANT THAT XP!!!!**"
16. **The Cheater:** "I roll an... *18!* It hits!" (*Quickly grabs dice*)
17. **The Chastiser:** "And you *didn't see that trap coming*? Hahahahahaha!! Just how long did you say you've been playing this game?"
18. **The Kamikaze Guy:** "I jump off our perch, taking careful aim to land dead center on the hobgoblin patrol. Just before I hit the ground, though, I set off the 'fire trap' on all my nine flasks of oil."
19. **The Good Roller:** "Oh, looky here. An *03* on percentile dice. If that door was trapped, I just found something."
20. **The Bad Roller:** "Oh, damn it all!! \*Another\* critical fumble!!"
21. **The Braggart:** "The thought of you attacking me isn't even interesting. I could get off a 'sleep' spell and slit your unconscious throat before you even get your longsword out of its sheath."

22. **The Reminiscer:** "Say, y'know, this is kind of like the time our party thief spent twenty minutes trying to lock-pick an unlocked door."
23. **Goody Two-Shoes:** "Wait a minute. Even if they are orcs, we just can't kill them when they're asleep and can't defend themselves."
24. **The Overoptimistic Daydreamer:** "After we get through this campaign, and have gained about nine, ten levels, I'm going to buy me the finest battle axe that money can buy."
25. **Short-Attention-Span Man:** "Hmmm? What? Oh, are we attacking now?"

*James Heath*

26. **Thermonuclear Man** (*sub-species of Munchkin*): "Awright, I swing at the Orc with my Bastard Sword. (roll) That's a 2, +2 for strength, +3 for specialization, +2 for (blah blah blah). So that's a 27. (Sarcastic grin) Does it hit?"

*Kathryn L. Smith*

27. **The GM-hater** (*subclass of troublemaker*): The person who comes into the game and does his best to think of ways to react to a situation that the GM hasn't. Having a PC who is slightly schizophrenic is a good excuse for this. Note: mixes really badly with the "storytelling" style of GM.

*Charles K. Hughes*

28. **The mindless player:**

GM: "The gaping chasm stretches out before you. It is too far to jump across."

Player: "I jump the chasm."

*Paul J. Zanca*

29. **The Crybaby:** "You mean the big rock crushed me? My character's dead?!? Really, really dead?!? Nooooooooooooo!!!!!"
30. **The Cowboy:** "I walk proudly up to the King and challenge him to a duel to the death. Oh yeah, I make sure to call him a wimp."
31. **The Psycho Killer:**

DM: "Okay, you open the door and you see —"

PK: "Kill kill kill!! Blood blood blood!! Rraaaaagggghh!!!"

32. **The Worry Wort:** "Okay, my mage is invisible, levitating thirty meters above the party, has a Phantom Armor and a Stoneskin on him, a Ring of Fire Resistance worn, a Minor Globe of Invulnerability up (*et cetera, et cetera*) Damn! I have a bad feeling about this..."

*Robert "Nickelpede" DeLoura replies:*

DM: Suddenly, a spellcaster appears in the hallway before you. Quickly gesturing in the direction of the invisible mage, he casts a spell. (*Dispel Magic*) Oh, my! Mr. Worry Wort has just plummeted thirty meters to the ground, to his death!

33. **The Cavern Shyster** (*more commonly known as Bill Mulhausen*): "Oh, so the Illusionary Medusa I cast at the Archdemon Orcus doesn't turn him to stone, does it? Well, if you look at the spell description, it says right here that he gets no save, has no chance to disbelieve, and I made my magic resistance roll! What do you say to that?"

*Robert "Nickelpede" DeLoura replies:*

DM: Orcus is a Demon Lord. He eats Medusae for breakfast. Amidst a hearty chuckle of laughter at your feeble attempt at illusion, he throws a thirty-die lightning bolt at you. What do you say to that?

34. **The Pig-eyed Glutton:** "Now how do we go about carting off this 800 copper pieces? We're already loaded down with the four suits of leather armor and electrum-inlaid toilet seats we found earlier..."

*Charles Hughes*

35. **The masochist:** "I stop running, turn around, slap the minotaur, and tell him to stop breathing down my neck." (*closely related to #3, the Loonie*)

*Edward C. Zeamba*

36. **Dishonorable Thieves** (*The Backstab Brothers — Quiz & Sly*): "I'll watch your back." or "Of course you're free to go... I give you my word of honor." or "I like to think of myself as an income redistributor... I steal from the rich and keep it myself."

37. **Thief Attractor** (*dwarf "Retten" — Larry Crammer*): "What do you mean that drink will be one copper piece. All I have is big bag of gold." or

(yelled loudly in tavern) "Anyone want to buy some gems!"

38. **Questionable Ranger** ("Quince" — Jim Gajewski): He pushes an unaware low-level guard into a campfire just so he can retrieve his stolen quiver of Ehlonna which is behind the guard fifteen feet away. or "I know she is an innocent maiden, but I need one x.p. to become next level."
39. **Unfaithful Cleric** ("Morden" — Kyle Whatshisname): After nine levels and thirty years of neutral-good life, He switches from neutral-good Celestian to Boccob (*who doesn't care if anyone worships him*) just so he can get combat spells. "I'm sure Celestian won't mind."
40. **Selfish Wizard** ("Zzyzzk" — Jim Gajewski): A fellow party member is in close melee with a Githyanki and the mage toasts them both with a fireball while yelling "Don't hit the monster. If I kill him I gain a level! (*deck of many things*)"

## The Game Masters

Scott Butler

1. **The Munchkin**: "Having slain the hordes of Azoth single-handedly, without even unsheathing the Sword of Universal Destruction, your half grey-elven/half gold-dragon 50th level paladin/MU/Cleric/Monk/Bard gazes down upon the pitiful Cthulhu who grovels at his feet..."
2. **Monty Haul** (*variation on the Munchkin, but characters tend to be lower level*):
- GM: "You are each granted one wish."
- Player #1: "I wish to have the hand and eye of Vecna."
- Player #2: "I wish to have the flask of Teurny the Merciless."
- Player #3: "I wish to have..."
- GM: "Poof, they appear in front of you. Now what do you do?"
3. **Killer**: "As you pull aside the tapestry, a green slime jumps upon you from behind it, killing you... nope, no 'to hit' or saving throw allowed, it says so right here."
4. **The Troublemaker**: singles out one player and continually hands him/her notes which read "Don't let anyone know there is nothing on this note."
5. **The Cheater**: "I don't care if you hit on an 18 last time, *this* time you missed, and I don't want to hear another thing about it."
6. **Mr. Don't-question-me**: "A blue bolt from heaven strikes Harold the Whiner, reducing him to one hit point. Anybody else got a problem with this campaign?"
7. **The Novice**: "You rolled a 2 on your 'to hit' roll. Did you want high or low?"
8. **Verbose**: "The door is solid oak, bound with four iron bands of roughly equal width, spaced equidistant along its width, and the wood is polished smooth, stained a dark brown, except for a small patch near the bottom which is blacker, and hinges are not visible from this side, but you notice the exquisite design of the lock, the faceplate of which is a starburst design, edged in gold or maybe polished copper or brass, its kind of hard to tell with the torchlight, but the knocker is definitely cast iron and you see..." (*sounds of snoring from party members*)
9. **Those With a poker face**: "The slave you rescued courteously accepts your offer to accompany you and thanks you for your trust in her..."
10. **Those Without a poker face**: "The slave you rescued, hee hee, courteously accepts your offer, snort, to accompany you and thanks you for your trust in her, hah hah... boy are you gonna get it now... giggle."
11. **Timid**: "The orc hits your for four points of damage, if that's okay with you, Steve. Really, you've got seventeen hit points left and he has only two, so you'll be okay, okay?"
12. **DePalma school of blood and gore**: "Your magic drill cleaves the demon's skull in twain and it literally explodes, spattering everyone with blood and brains. An unsightly green ichor drips from your face as you watch the smoldering corpse churn before you like a baby in a blender and finally settle into a puddle of vomit and excrement..."
13. **Gibson school of writing graduate**: "The view in the crystal ball was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel."
14. **Vengeful**: "You won't go out with me Saturday? Okay, all of the were-rats attack Christine."

15. **AD&D'er:** "The 100 peasants beat at your fighter ineffectually with their sticks and pitchforks until you have slain them all. A heroic effort on your part." (*That was a really cheap shot!*)
  16. **anti-AD&D'er:** "The 100 peasants overbear your fighter with their great numbers and, unable to move under the weight of their hordes, you squirm helplessly as they pry open your field plate and skewer you like a lobster. You die an ignoble death."
  17. **the Stickler for detail:** "Taking into account atmospheric conditions, the acceleration due to gravity, the low drag coefficient of your greased plate mail, your high dexterity, the gold in your backpack, your associated credit rating, the eggs you had for breakfast, ...and the average number of chickens who would remain inside the coop on a warm day, you have to roll 13 or better to survive the fall..."
  18. **No originality:** "It's a quest, see, you're trying to take this ring to Mordor, to drop it into a volcano to destroy it. No, no, honest I thought of this campaign myself..."
  19. **Leading and Overbearing:**

**DM:** "You pump the bartender for information and he tells you about a red dragon's lair to the west."

**Player:** "Too risky, we go to hear rumours somewhere else."

**DM:** "A man offers to hire you to clean out a red dragon's lair for him."

**Player:** "We say no thank you and leave for the next village."

**DM:** "On the way to the village you stumble onto a red dragon's lair..."
- Mark Isaak*
20. **the Dungeon Builder:** "The first door in the hallway opens onto a 20'x20' room containing a griffon. The next room contains a party of orcs. The next contains a gelatinous cube. The next contains a couple giants..."
- J.D. Frazer*
21. **The Schmuck:** "Oh. Can someone really do that? Okay, I'll let you have a 50% chance. Oh. Okay, 75% then."
22. **The Executioner:** "A hidden blade slides down the doorway, mincing the two fighters and the cleric. The thief gets nine crossbow bolts in his back, and the magic user is hit by an intense beam of light, burning a hole through his head."
  23. **The Ghoul:** "That's the 17th character you rolled tonight? Mouahahahahahahahahah!"
  24. **The Absolute Monarch:** "The huge Red dragon *can* fit through the little hole, 'cause *I said so!*"
  25. **The Generous Munchkin:** "Okay, now that you've killed that Kobold, you open the treasure chests and find 100,000 gold pieces, 50,000 platinum pieces, and two hundred gems worth a zillion gold each. Oh, and a +20 Vorpal Sword. And before I forget, a Rod of Seven Parts too."
  26. **The Killer Munchkin:** "You guys are dead."
  27. **The Whining Munchkin:** "But, but, you guys *can't* do that! It's my only dungeon! Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaail!"
  28. **The Die Modifier:** "Yeah, yeah, so you rolled a 20. You missed. Secret modifiers you know."
  29. **The Unimaginative Type:** "You walk into the bar and see thirty mercenaries all wearing scalemail and carrying longswords. They all sit at separate tables."
  30. **The Design Zealot:** "I just need another fifteen minutes. I only have three more levels to populate."
- Kathryn L. Smith*
31. **The storyteller/scripter:** He has the plot for the adventure all figured out, and you're going to follow it come hell or high water.
  32. **The planner:** He has everything for the adventure carefully planned and written out ahead of time. All the NPCs stats and background details, who will tell you what, and so forth.
  33. **The "Make it up as we go" type:** He comes in with a vague idea of what the PCs will run into today, and fills in the details as he goes along.
- Charles K. Hughes*
34. **The literal type:** **Player:** "I wish Joe had more lives."  
**GM:** "Joe, you are now a schizophrenic."



# &

**Player:** "What is the air speed of a swallow?"

**GM:** "African or European?"

*Paul J. Zanca*

- 35. Sadistic:** "Just then, eighty ancient huge red dragons descend on your party... they all breathe on you at once! What do you do *now*?"

*Charles Hughes*

- 35a. Sadist with Masochist players:** "Realizing that you are adventurers the red dragon egg hurls itself into a pan to prevent you from getting the experience for them." (2nd edition AD&D)

- 35b. Sadist with Masochist players:**  
"Realizing that you are adventurers the eighty ancient huge red dragons kill themselves to prevent you from getting the experience for them." (pre-2nd edition)

Yes, I know, 35a and 35b were cheap shots, but I'm an AD&D DM so I can make them. :)

*Paul J. Zanca*

- 36. Graduate of the Bob Newhart School of Dry Humour:** "Okay, the sun goes nova and you are caught in the explosion. Everybody takes (*roll roll roll...*) nine thousand seven hundred and forty-eight points of fire damage from the plasma... save for half. What'd you roll? Oh, too bad."

*Robert "Nickelpede" DeLoura replies:*

**Cavern Shyster (a member of the party):**  
"Well, I had my Ring of Fire Resistance on, so I only take two points of damage per round from the flames. How long did they last?"

- 37. Nice Guy:** "Well Bill, I don't know how to tell you this, but your character's dead. Just like that. I'm really sorry, but you know, these things happen. 'Man hath but a short time to live, and that full of sorrow.' Look man, I know you're hurting. If you want to talk about it, we can take a break..."

- 38. Monty Python-esque:** "Oh no! The Mutated Potato Monster sprays the party with a stream of *Red Hot Wolf Nipple Chips<sup>TM</sup>*! Everybody takes zero damage, Save Versus Heebie-Jeebies or Become Very Frightened And Explode!"

- 39. Forgetful:** "Okay, you walk into the room. The orcs look up from their card game, much surprised to see anybody at this hour, and grab their—Huh? You've already been through here and killed the orcs? Shit. Okay, let's try that again. You notice seven slaughtered orcs..."

- 40. Flowery:** "Oho! Methinks that the Purple Mage has waxed sorely pissed at thy attempt to engulf him in thy vomitous Stinking Cloud dweomer! By my trow, he has, in his wroth, flung a Power Word, Kill at thee, with a shout of 'Have at thee, vile knave!' What dost thou doest now, brave adventurer?"

*Dave Cooke*

- 41. The Chaos King:** "Ok, the gnome got off his Confusion spell, everyone roll their actions as the four leprechauns chase three rust monsters into the camp. BTW: the two hobbits who you found tied to a tree earlier take this moment to change into doppelgangers and attack the princess you're supposed to be guarding. You see all this clearly because the wagons in the caravan are burning from the arrows the orcs have fired at them. Who's wearing armor, as you were all asleep?"

*Ed C. Zeamba*

- 42. The Bullshit Timewarp DM:** "You are all riding on the back of a good blue dragon — flying at mach 5" or "Flying toward you is a red dragon (*with 150 h.p. and a dragon rider who can make a lance and two sword attacks against one character in one round*) he breaths on the party — Oh, did I mention the two F-4 Phantoms coming straight for you?!!"

- 43. The Too-Nice DM:** "Oh, I didn't know that rule but I'll let you get away with that this time... and next time... and next time." or "Okay, you want to jump down a twenty foot wall wearing field plate. Um... make a *dex* check."

- 44. The Rules-Lawer DM:** no comment —

# The Infinite Ways in Which **IT** is Done

Compiled by Charles K. Hughes

ordania-dm@cup.portal.com

*Lots of very strange people decided to contribute to my list of ways in which IT is done, so rather than list them by author I am simply listing how. IT is done, and at the end is a list of credits (why anyone would want to be ON this list is beyond me.*

*Since my compiled list of "The Umpteen Million Types of Players and GMs" did not prevent the foolishness of creating yet another 'list' having to do with frp, I now inflict upon you:*

## The Infinite Ways in Which IT is done.

- Dm's have better encounters.
- Monks do it out of habit.
- Dwarves do it with short strokes.
- Medusas do it stoned.
- Werewolves do it doggie-style.
- Shriekers do it louder.
- Djinn just wish they could do it.
- When minotaurs do it, they're a-mazing.
- Psionic creatures don't do it, it's the thought that counts.
- Demons do it wherever they \*&@# \$ well please!
- Thieves do it from behind.
- Earth Elementals do it dirty.
- Fire Elementals do it with spark.
- Air Elementals blow a lot.
- Water Elementals know they're ready when they're wet...

### *Frp'ers do it:*

- all night

- all weekend
- in a dungeon
- in a group

### *DM's do it:*

- with dice,
- any way they feel like it,
- whether you like it or not,
- to YOU real good,
- anywhere they damn well please!
- with worlds (or alternately, with entire populations)
- with land masses, universes... you get the idea... and contrary to the laws of nature (or physics, or any other laws, for that matter!)
- Druids do it with animals.
- Rangers do it in the woods.
- Thieves do it with tools.
- Assassins do it from behind.
- Clerics do it with their gods.
- Swashbucklers do it with three feet of steel.
- Paladins do it good or not at all.
- Druids leave no trace.
- Illusionists fake it.
- Magic Users have crystal balls.
- Cavaliers do it mounted.
- Monks do it by hand.
- Ninjas do it under cover of darkness.

- Drow do it with the lights out.
- Centaurs do it on all fours.
- Clerics do it in church.
- Kings do it in the throne room.
- Court jesters do it in front of a crowd (for laughs).
- Merchants do it all over the country.
- Slaves do it with whips and chains.
- Flumphs do it upside down.
- Druids do it in the bushes.
- Thieves do it in leather.
- Gnomes are too short to do it.
- Illusionists only LOOK like they're doing it.
- Magic-users do it with their hands.
- D.M.s do it behind a screen.
- Hobbits do it only if it isn't dangerous. (Well, MOST hobbits, anyway.)
- Elves do it in fairy rings.
- Spellcasters do it with their rods/staves/wands.
- Thieves do it when you're not looking.
- Mages do it with their familiars.
- Barbarians do it with anything. (As do orcs.)
- Paladins don't do it.
- Mermaids CAN'T do it.
- Neutrals do it both ways!
- Silversmith does it on a VAX.

*How the Gods do it...*

- Jupiter does it with mortals.
- Hermes does it quickly.
- Atlas doesn't do it (back problems you know..)
- Hera doesn't do it, and is jealous of anyone who does.
- Poseidon does it underwater.

- Nike says Just Do It!

*The way games do it:*

- AD&D does it badly.
- Champions can do it, but there are always Disadvantages.
- GURPS does it generically.
- Rolemaster does it with skill!

*...and unix don't do it at all! :-)*

*List of Contributors:*

- Defender (*who started it*)
- Silversmith (*who seems to know too many ways to do it* :)
- Kev @ UNC
- Paul Fritschle
- Mike Shepherd
- Cybersaur (*mitzel@uiucvmd.bitnet*)
- Michael J. "Landshark" Wheeler
- The Raven (*who thinks (s)he's punderful* :)
- Philip Brown (*pbrown@ocf.berkeley.edu*)
- Peter C. Lind (*lind@maccs.ca*)
- Luna (*aka: Helen Todd*  
*htodd@gmuvax2.gmu.edu*)
- Peter Crowther  
(*Internet: pcrowther@r1.cs.man.ac.uk*)
- Yngvi Diamondeye Hammerfoot  
(*yngvi@ariel.unm.edu*)
- Ordania-DM (*Ordania-DM@cup.portal.com*,  
*who is listing it all. My excuse is that it came from a button bought at Mass Confusion, what's yours? Naysayers ignored* :)

*No flames please...*

*If you can't take a joke, don't read my lists!*  
Additions & other silliness can be sent to me at:  
Ordania-DM@cup.portal.com

or

Charles\_K.Hughes@cup.portal.com  
*This list brought to you as a public service so that those people who persist in doing IT can be brought to justice, and stop telling us right thinking people what right thinks we should be thinking!*

## Bits & Pieces

*In the course of reading numerous articles over rec.games.frp it becomes apparent that the strength of Internet communication is not so much in the quick and reliable distribution of massive essays as in the cooperative sharing of bits and pieces thereof. Such miscellaneous threads can be the work of no single person, yet when brought together in a single forum, they form a chaotic tapestry of alternate perspectives and ideas betraying both the character and company of the assemblage they represent. Herein follows the bits & pieces.*

"Beware the beast man, for he is the devil's pawn. Alone among God's primates, he kills for sport... or lust... or greed. Yea, he will murder his brother to possess his brother's land. Let him not breed in great numbers, for he will make a desert of his home... and yours. Shun him... for he is the harbinger of death."

— Beneath the Planet of the Apes  
©1970

### *Two bits on the topics of orcs & evil:*

In our game, orcs are EVIL, and short of a helm of opposite alignment, there is no way to make them good. Therefore releasing orcish prisoners makes the releaser morally responsible for any and all actions of the former prisoners. "The only good orc is a dead orc!" If an orc surrenders, he should be questioned (not tortured), and then executed as quickly, and painlessly, as possible.

— Eric Hunter  
hunter@oswego.oswego.edu

The UW gaming club [WATSFIC] ran a nifty tourney that depended on that very mind-set. The party is hired to clean out a temple infested by Orcs. It's only *\*after\** the PCs slaughter the Orc warriors and put the women and children to the sword that the cleric who *\*runs\** the temple shows up and is greatly upset at the brutal murder of his converted Lawful

Good Orcs. The cleric who hired the party is a tad conservative in his social views, you see, and didn't believe that Orcs *\*could\** be converted. Funny how few PCs will turn down the opportunity to commit genocide.

— jdnicoll@watyew.uwaterloo.ca  
University of Waterloo

### *More about orcs and evil:*

**Psychotherapist:** So, vaht ist de problem?

**Orc:** It's those darn humans. They call me evil, and I can't handle it....

— orion@desire.wright.edu

"If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow, and which will not, then speak to me, who neither beg nor fear your favors nor your hate."

— Macbeth, Banquo to the  
Witches, I, iii, 58-61.

### *On the topic of Good & Evil:*

If you are playing in a campaign where there is absolute evil or good (D&D being the classic example), and assuming that the terms "evil" and "good" are used the way heroic fiction usually defines them, then killing helpless prisoners is always an evil idea, period. Mercy is a good trait; it is given to any and all, regardless of the situation, regardless of their identity or potential as a future threat, and regardless of whether or not it is convenient.

Remember, good characters should treat deadly enemies with courtesy and respect, should give any unknown person the benefit of a reasonable doubt, and should never put what is convenient ahead of what is right.

— Richard L. Bulter  
rlb@apple-gunkies.ai.mit.edu

"You see me now a veteran,  
Of a thousand psychic wars,  
I've been living on the edge so long,  
Where the winds of Limbo roar,  
And I'm young enough to look at,  
And far too old to see,  
All the scars are on the inside,  
I don't know if there's anything left of me."  
— BOC

"More than any time in history mankind  
faces a crossroads. One path leads to de-  
spair and utter hopelessness, the other to  
total extinction. Let us pray that we have  
the wisdom to choose correctly."

— Woody Allen

*About the risky business:*

A risk without risk is not a risk. Ahem! :-)

That is, a player should not take the atti-  
tude of, "Well, I'm about to do something  
really cool, so the GM better not kill me  
off." What makes the situation "cool" is the  
element of danger, which requires planning,  
a certain amount of toughness on the part  
of the characters (read hit points), and, of  
course \*LUCK\* (read die rolls) to overcome.  
What makes the deed "cool" for the charac-  
ters is their ability to pull it off with their  
collective hides intact. If the GM does not  
challenge (read attempt to kill :-) the char-  
acters then the intactness of their hides is  
virtually guaranteed, and the situation be-  
comes "uncool."

— Michael Cornelius  
231d3107@fergvax.unl.edu

*On the topics of game-richness & roll-  
fudging:*

What is really important in creating a cam-  
paign or adventure is the richness of the  
environment the players wander around in,

and this is not only not synonymous with  
detail; detail can kill the richness of a cam-  
paign. I can get more out of making the  
King of Slobovia blind than I can out of  
working out his ancestors to the nth gen-  
eration. The first detail makes the gaming  
world rich and interesting, the second bogs  
it down with trivial and unnecessary detail.  
Will the characters even make any use out  
of the fact that the king's fifth cousin's great  
grandfather's aunt's ninth cousin was Bill?  
I doubt it, so why waste my time working  
something like that out. Might they use the  
fact that he is blind? Probably.

I have had to play under GM's who had  
extensive game worlds which were exten-  
sively detailed, and yet they had not the  
magic to create a story in that world — to  
weave events and histories and love and hate  
around the cold details of their world, to  
make them subtly rich with hidden mean-  
ing. It is more like a geography lesson (or  
prison sentence) to play in such a world.

I have gotten more passion out of a player  
with a single roll of a saving die than I  
could have hoped for out of five hours of  
narrative. One monk was hit by a poi-  
son arrow down in a water dungeon, and  
failed the saving throw. The narrative ele-  
ment of the game had made the player care  
more about what happened to that monk  
than any hack'n'slash power-grubbing game  
ever could (the player told me later that  
the monk was his favorite character, even  
though it was only sixth level and he had  
played characters up higher in other games),  
but the saving throw really brought all the  
thrill, danger and risk that is vital to gam-  
ing to bear at one single instant. I didn't  
fudge the roll (and I'd bet \$1000 that the  
player wanted me too — in fact if I remem-  
ber right he offered me \$10 to restore the  
character). But the death of the monk gave  
a sense of tragedy, senseless and futility to  
the narrative that I could never have made  
up on my own (it required the participa-  
tion of the players and the mechanism of the  
game be there) — this is what GM's who try  
to control the game too tightly miss out on,  
the sense of awe at something that occurs  
that is beyond them. So in a sense there are

times when a fudge could save the game but the GM should be loathe beyond words (a narrative GM, that is) to let this spoil the magic and wonder he has created with his story.

And yet, when the house would not be built but would come crashing down by not adjusting a die roll, it should be made. Even something as vulgar sounding as fudging may be elevated to an art of style that can make or destroy the GM's game. When it really comes down to it, no hard and fast rule can decide for you what to do — the GM is in the driver's seat and accepts total responsibility for the progress and style of the game.

— D. Brad Shapcott  
dbshapcott@dahlia.uwaterloo.ca  
University of Waterloo

"God not only plays dice, He also sometimes throws the dice where they cannot be seen."

— S. Hawking

"Like any good GM."

— D. Heffernan

#### *Fudging with Falling:*

A fall from a balcony, even at 100 stories, is not always fatal. Perhaps you could fudge these rolls.

— Brian T. Schellenberger  
bts@unx.sas.com

Sure! How about...

- You land on a passing flat-bed truck piled high with mattresses. How fortunate!
- A passing blimp cushions your fall.
- Your high-tech sneakers save you from destruction.

- You crash to the sidewalk with terrific velocity, smashing the concrete and breaking an underground water main. You climb out of the crater and dust yourself off. One of your ankles is sprained.

— Robert Plamondon  
robert@weitek.com  
Weitek, Sunnyvale CA

#### *Hamlet on roll-fudging:*

To fudge or not to fudge,

That is the question.

Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or by taking arms against a sea of troubles, end them...

Let he who has not fudged cast the first die...

Fudging is as much a reality for GM's as cheating on taxes is for accountants. Sure, we all know its not right, but when we can get that teeny-tiny little advantage just by adjusting the numbers slightly . . .

— D Brad Shapcott  
dbshapcott@dahlia.uwaterloo.ca  
University of Waterloo

"Let's just say that if complete and utter chaos were lightning, then he'd be the sort to stand on a hilltop in a thunderstorm wearing wet copper armour and shouting 'All gods are bastards.' "

— Terry Pratchett

I knew a GM who had an extremely powerful natural magician in his party. Thing was, the fellow didn't believe in magic. He believed that everything had a logical, technical explanation. The force of his magic was so strong that whatever he believed was true. Then one day his party met up with a dragon...

He snuck around back, opened the hatch and evicted the two dwarves who were operating the machine. His fellow party members never succeeded in making him believe that it really had been a dragon.

— Gwen Johnson  
sgj@slc1.brl.mil

“Hmm. Enterprise. So that’s its name. I always assumed it was the U.S.S. ‘Whoosh!’ or something.”

— Paramount Legal Department Ogre

“There’s a whole new breed of scientist out there today: They drink, smoke, fool around with women, but they won’t answer one simple question: How do you destroy Washington, D.C. ?”

— villian, Matt Helm flick

#### *Fun times in the city:*

Yes, towns and cities can be lots of fun, for both player and DM. And let’s not forget one of the inevitable consequences of a large, well-run city with an active City Council and Merchants’ Guild — bureaucracy! Let’s illustrate from one of my recent adventures:

The party has arrived in town, laden with assorted loot to sell. They’ve found an inn which won’t rob them blind overnight (through sheer good luck), and have got directions to the Street of the Armors...

**Player:** “I’d like to sell a suit of plate mail. It’s magic.”

**Armorer:** “Magic, eh? No problem, magic plate’s always in demand. Let’s see the pink slip for it then.”

**Player:** “Pink slip???”

**Armorer:** “Yeah, the pink slip. From the wizard who certified it.”

**Player:** “Certified it???”

**Armorer:** “Look, don’t keep on repeating what I just said. Do you have a pink slip or don’t you? Can’t take any magic stuff without the pink slip, everyone knows that!”

And so begins a lovely chase up and down the Street of the Wizards (whose fees are \*much\* too dear for our lowly party), ending up at Benjamin the Hedge-Wizard’s for an under-the-table pink slip, leading to an introduction to the Captain of the Guard (“So you expect me to believe you didn’t know this pink slip wasn’t issued by an \*accredited\* wizard when you gave it to the armorer who sold the mail to His Lordship?”), and the beginning of their next adventure...

— Chris Robertson  
chris@griffon.mcc.pyrsyd.oz  
Griffon Consulting

**Cyoeraith (Sigh-or-athe):** *n.* a blood drinking nasty.

#### *The secret to successful horror:*

I once played in a call of Cthulhu game that scared the wits out of us. We were supposed to find out what happened to some person who had been committed to an insane asylum some years ago; the asylum was closed and the patients transferred. By the time we got done being briefed by the client, it was dark, but he told us not to worry, he’d made arrangements to have the power turned back on at the asylum, so we could go up tonight. And we’d get a bonus for early success. So we went.

We encountered various weird details along the way, like no bird or animal or insect noises. And a gate that was shiny and new fastened with a lock that was old and rusted. And things grabbed our hair (turned out to be branches, but little things mean a lot). Once at the asylum the lights flickered off and on, and occasionally went out, so we scared each other by running into each other (we’d split up to search the place). And we found details, like a doctor’s hidden notes, on fresh paper, in handwriting identical to notes in a thirty year old medical record, and the doctor was supposed to be dead... and other little things, like a severed hand in a drawer... which moved when we weren’t looking. And cold nasty green slime oozing from under a door, but when the door

was opened nothing was there. And desperate graffiti left behind on the walls by lunatics, claiming they were being experimented upon. And an operating theater without anesthetic equipment. And a noose hanging in a stair well. The noose was brand new, but there were no marks of any kind in the heavy dust to show how somebody might have put it there. And one time when the lights were out, we heard a scream and went charging up this stairwell, only to smack into a very old, dead body hanging in the noose. The body turned out to belong to our client's handyman, whom he'd sent over first to find the papers. But what happened to him that he became such a cadaver in only a few days? And how did his body get into the noose?

And on and on and on. We were freaking all right, one of the best adventures I've ever played in. And I don't really like Call of Cthulhu. (We never did meet any Cthulhuoid nasties. But the thought that we might certainly flavored the adventure. Especially when the green slime started oozing under the door.)

The secret to successful horror is details. A door locking behind you, for example, trapping you in the mental ward. So what if nobody's there? They might be.

— S. Gwen Johnson  
sgj@slc1.brl.mil

"I've seen the ocean break on the shore, comes together, no harm done."

— Loren Miller  
millerl@desci.wharton.upenn.edu

**Justyn Tyme:** "I'm here to save you!! I'm Justyn Tyme!!!"

**Peasants:** "Great. Who are you?"

*Funny Fumbles:*

1. Player fumbles sword, but with a great feat of agility manages to catch it... the wrong way...

2. Character swings and lets go of weapon, which sails way up into the clouds. Several days later (in another encounter) the players should hear a high pitched whistling sound: the weapon comes down at mach 1, doing a whole lot of damage to anybody it hits (otherwise digging a big crater)
3. (variation on #2) Weapon just happens to land in such a manner as to kill a local monarch. The local constabulary seeks out the owner of the weapon.
4. Player accidentally cuts a rift in the fabric of the universe. Stepping through (or being pushed through) has no ill effect, and players can climb back out again. Fabric of the universe can be mended with normal needle and thread.
5. Gets stuck in mid-air. No amount of pushing, pulling, etc. will dislodge it from its position. It has become lodged in the aether.
6. The weapon suddenly becomes a bowl of petunias.
7. Weapon hits the ground... and strikes oil! The fumbling player is blinded for a number of rounds, wiping off all of the oil, and everyone in the general vicinity must save vs. DEX every round to stay on their feet.
8. The player makes a massively bad swing... Suddenly 10 imps appear, they confer for a short while and then hold up scorecards: 9 of them give the player a score < 0.1, but one gives him/her a 0.5. All the rest of the imps shout at this imp, throwing their score cards at it. The entire assemblage then disappears.
9. Player is about to swing... but suddenly is struck by the thought that he/she might not have turned the oven off before they left on this adventure. They must spend the next several turns trying to remember if they did indeed turn the oven off, or even if they have an oven to turn off.

— Gary P. Gray  
ggray@wpi.wpi.edu  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute,  
Worcester, MA





M.F. "It's kinda got a foul scent to it don't it?"

Myke: "Yeah, and it smells too. Hey, maybe it's taffy or something. I mean, giant's gotta eat a lot right?"

M.F. "I dunno, why don't you try it? It sure looks familiar though."

Then it hits Myke.

Myke: "OH NO! Don't eat it!"

M.F. (Burp!) Yum, this tastes familiar..."

Myke: (RRRRaaallpppphh) (Other puking noises deleted) Ohhhh, you idiot!"

Pook! Myke pokes him in the face.

M.F. "What's the matter?"

Myke: (Gag) You just ate part of that Giants booger vault!"

Sorry it's kinda sick. Here's a pun to cheer you up.

An assassin went into an ancient part of the wilderness to scout out the plans of an invading army. He knew the enemy's armies sorcerers would know he was in their land and that the General would be searching for him right away. Well, he made it through their borders and ventured forth through the heart of their capitol city. He was great at stealth tactics and clandestine operations. Eventually the spy made it into the HQ, which was situated inside the enemy's greatest ancient structure, an old ziggurat (a wedding cake shaped temple structure). Once there he knew he was running out of time, and that the general and his armies would find him if he took too long. He searched the whole building and could not find the plans he was looking for. Angry, he lit fire to the place, and the whole structure lit up like a bonfire. Being that it was broad daylight, the smoke could be seen for many miles. The general saw the smoke and circled the whole area and captured the spy.

Wanna know the moral of this story?

The Searching General has determined that smoking ziggaraunts is dangerous to your stealth.

Had enough? Awright, awright, let me get out a here before the tomatos fly.

— Joel Lovell  
jlovell@xcalibur.intel.com  
Santa Clara Microprocessor Division,  
Intel Corp., Santa Clara, CA

"You're a notch, and I'm a legend."

— Alice Cooper

"Ride like the wind. Fight proud, my son. You're the Defender God has sent."

— Manowar

*The "high-intensity" approach to characterization:*

When I was involved in theatre, in high school, I always dreamed about the play. Every night. This was true whether I was acting, running the lights, or whatever.

As opening night approached, I would think and talk of little else.

I would also talk about the character I was playing in the first person, and refer to other people by their characters' names, though it's not as if I didn't know the difference.

At the time, all this was considered normal: the dreams, the obsession, the random references to actors and their characters. It was part of theatre.

I suppose if we talked about it on the net, though, people would start to worry that we had been "too wrapped up," and that something should have been done to "bring us back to reality." Perhaps we should have been "removed" from the play "w/o hope for

returning.”

Fortunately for us, they didn’t, and we weren’t denied the experience of participating in high-intensity theatre.

The parallel to role-playing games is exact. Some role-playing campaigns, like some theatre, is deeply involving, and is not the sort of thing you can shrug off in an instant. Others are beer-and-pretzel affairs that are good for a few thrills and a lot of yucks. Members of each camp look at the others with disdain and suspicion. No doubt people in the middle are confused.

But it’s no kindness to take an actor/gamer who gets deeply involved in a role aside and say, “Hey, dude, it’s only a game! Have some more beer and pretzels!” You aren’t dealing with a failure of the actor/gamer’s sanity; you’re dealing with a difference in approach to characterization.

— Robert Plamondon  
robert@weitek.com  
Weitek, Sunnyvale CA

*On the topic of Role Playing:*

In a game I played about a year and a half ago, we were a motley collection of seven characters flying out of Russia. Our plane downed in a remote spot somewhere in the eastern bloc (can’t remember where, sorry), and we were involved in a very peculiar chain of events. My character was a retired army chaplain, a six foot tall negro and a very christian man. He had been designed by the GM and assigned to me by him. I wasn’t very happy about this, but I was determined to play the character to the best of my ability. As the game progressed, I managed to get more and more into character until I reached a point where I truly felt that I had merged, and for a while there I *was* Dr. Elias. It was

an awesome experience, I am told it was quite scary for the others watching me. I lived that man. I was reduced to tears at one stage when God failed me when I called upon Him in my hour of need. I developed a major sense of responsibility for the rest of the party, and lost my cool (going into a kind of half shock state) for about half an hour when two of my party got killed. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life, exhilarating, emotional and terribly tiring. I got further into that character than I have ever been in any game, and I *loved* every minute of it. It was a glorious experience and I wouldn’t have missed it for the world. *HOWEVER*, at all times I was aware that what I was doing was simply a piece of incredibly intense acting. I was Dr. Elias because I *allowed* myself to be. *I* was in control, and I could have (and did at one stage — to eat pizza) snapped out of him at any time. At the close of the scenario, I was drained and happy. I knew when things were over, took off my mask and went home.

— The Welsh Hobbit  
pears@shiva.trl.oz  
Telecom Research Labs,  
Melbourne, Australia

“I can handle reality in small doses, but as a lifestyle, it’s much too confining.”

— Lilly Tomlin

## Advertisements

*Hush up now boys & girls. Town Cryer has to wait some.*

### Discounts on Games

#### Alpha Omega Games Unlimited

Bruce Perez (*Owner*)  
10454 "C" Artesia Blvd.  
Bellflower, CA 90706  
(213) 867-5082

Mon	Closed
Tues - Thurs	Noon - 9pm
Fri - Sat	Noon - 10pm
Sun	9am - 5pm

25% discount for all card-holding members of the UCR Gamers' Guild on all in-stock supplies.

Comics +  
3858 Tyler St.  
Riverside, CA 92503  
(714) 785-4818

Mon - Sat	9am - 10pm
Sun	10am - 8pm

20% discount for all card-holding members of the UCR Gamers' Guild.

Daylight Hobbies  
10220 Hole Ave.  
Riverside, CA 92505  
(714) 688-6013

Sat - Sun	10am - 6pm
Mon - Fri	10am - 8pm

10% discount for all card-holding members of the UCR Gamers' Guild.

**Note:** Daylight has requested that groups use their gaming table during store hours for either rpg's or war games in order to drum up business. Groups should schedule a week in advance for such events.

### Zines 4 U

Necronomicon  
c/o Anthony Kapolka  
2931 Spring St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15210

A magazine for gamers. \$5 for four issues of \$2 for a single issue.

The Game Oracle  
c/o David M. Fitzgerald  
1851 N. Ivar #208  
Hollywood, CA 90028

A fantasy/role-playing magazine for adult gamers. \$3 per issue on postage paid subscription. \$1 per back-issue, availability permitting.

### Call for Wargamers!!

Now, while I enjoy role-playing as much as the next person, not all games in this world include character sheets, gold pieces, and dungeons. Occasionally, ...well, not occasionally, quite often as a matter of fact, I get a real urge to lay down maps and counters and declare war on whatever opponent I choose, whether it be columns of Soviet armor, Iraqi MiG-29s, North Korean patrol submarines, Viet Cong guerillas, or even Kafer battlecruisers. Whether it be for an afternoon, or a long weekend, I find wargaming to be a very challenging, fun and rewarding experience.

While doing my internship in Washington, D.C. last spring, I spent several weeks in Virginia in the company of several other obsessive wargamers, many of which were designers as well as players of games (including, among others, Larry Bond of Harpoon and Red Storm Rising fame). We would spend our Saturday afternoons gaming out various historical and hypothetical situations, as well as shooting around gossip as to what was happening in the gaming and military worlds. I found the experience quite rewarding, and I found myself not wanting to leave when the time came to go back to California.

When I got back to California, I realized what a vacuum this place was for wargaming. California's

a pretty laid-back place, and Californians are not the type to go off to foreign lands and make holes in other people's teeth. Even during the Civil War, while states on the Union side were sending thousands of troops to fight, California only set a handful.

However, I have met in the past few months others that also enjoy wargaming in all of its various forms in the Riverside area, and in gaming with them discovered a need for a central group where gamers could get together, game and discuss gaming. One night a week, perhaps, at a central location. What type of game would depend on what the interests of the group were. I, for instance, prefer contemporary or post-WWII historical games, particularly strategy ones. I also enjoy naval combat quite a bit. Others I know have other preferences, anything from Star Fleet Battles, to Squad Leader, Axis & Allies, Risk & even miniatures.

If you're an active or compulsive wargamer, or perhaps just interested in wargaming and things military in general, this might be the gaming group for you. I'm trying to arrange games for Saturday afternoon (and/or evening, depending on what demand is), plus additional gaming sessions during the upcoming cons. If you're interested, please give me a call.

—Shawn Dudley 369-1518  
*if no answer, please leave a message.*

## Other Assorted Ads

### Cypress Games

Cypress Games is a start-up publisher of role-playing scenarios and games, with an emphasis on historical and alternative history games intended for mature audiences. We have three titles scheduled of publication during calendar 1990. We are currently seeking:

- Freelance artists for current and future projects;
- Freelance authors for system-independent scenario packages to be published in late 1990/early 1991.

We offer compensation on an advance plus royalty basis for major contributors, and a flat fee in advance of publication for minor contributors.

Please write for a copy of our authors' and artists' guidelines:

Cypress Games  
19855 Stevens Creek Blvd. #165  
Cupertino, CA 95014

P.S. We are also building our product mailing list, if you'd like to drop us your name and address.

—Christopher Pettus  
*cep.apple.com*  
*circa: February 1990*

### Alarums & Excursions (A&E)

c/o Lee Gold  
3965 Alla Rd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90066

The cost of A&E is postage PLUS \$1.50. Postage runs about \$2.40 for U.S. first class, \$2.30 or so UPS, \$.90 book rate. For Canada postage is \$2.72 for first class delivery, \$1.34 book rate (the same cost applies for book rate to other foreign countries as well. Air is \$4.88 to Europe/Britain, \$6.46 to Oz).

Essentially, just send Lee a check for \$10.00 or \$15.00, tell her how you want the 'zine delivered, and she'll send you copies until the money runs out.

Unlike many APAs, A&E has no minimum contribution requirements — if you contribute your own 'zine, you get that issue for free, and the following issue for only the postage cost. There is no waiting list.

As a once (*and future?*) contributor to A&E I recommend it highly. Quite a bit like a monthly dose of *rec.games.frp* actually. A bit less "off-the-cuff" though.

—Scott Bauer  
*sbauer@cup.portal.com*  
*...!sun!portal!sbauer*  
*circa: May 1990*

### Anthropomorphs

Status of some of the things going on in the Anthropomorphic World. Steve Gallacci says he will be getting back to doing more stuff with Erma Felna, which is good. Albedo Anthropomorphics might just become a production of MUPress.

Huzzah! the Albedo fanzine, might be expanding to cover other stuff. The first new Erma Felna stuff will appear in Huzzah!. Subscriptions cost \$1.50 per regular issue. Or you can pay \$4.00 per issue which covers the expensive cost of a full color centerfold piece. The last one, was by Dan Flahive, of a scene in upcoming Spacewolf installments. It was really good. The address for subscriptions are

**Huzzah!**  
c/o Dwight Dutton  
6700 Warner Avenue #5G  
Huntington Beach, CA 92647-5130

Please include in your letter that you heard about it here from me and make checks payable to Dwight Dutton. Foreign subscribers, add approximately \$1.50 for overseas mail. If you are a foreign subscriber I suggest you order one issue, to see what the mailing cost will be.

A new anthropomorphic magazine is being produced. It is called **Yarf!** and is coming out about eight times a year. Currently it is forty-five pages long, bound in either square bound or spiral (your choice!, I suggest square), and contains art and fiction related to anthropomorphics. It will also contain reviews, editorials, and news related to the anthropomorphic field of fiction (comics, books, rpgs, etc). The production is very good, and I recommend this for anyone who likes anthropomorphics. They have high production values and intend to publish mainstream material (neither "kiddie" or pornographic). Subscriptions are for eight issues and cost \$24. You can get a single issue by sending \$3, and remember to ask for square or spiral bound. A "Preview" issue exists, which is six pages long, and is free. You can purchase single issues at the cost of \$3 per. Postage within the United States is included, overseas subscribers must add the extra amount (once again I suggest overseas people order one issue, and add extra money [approx. \$3.00] to determine the mailing rate). When you order specify whether you want issue #1, #2, or in two weeks #3 as the first issue of your subscription. They will gratefully accept submissions. The address is:

**Yarf!**  
PO Box 1200  
Cupertino, CA 95014-1200

Make checks payable to **Yarf!** The next issue will be #3 and is coming out very, very soon, so you will want to get your order in quickly. Also, please mention in your letter that you heard about it here from me.

Finally, we are still working on a mailing list, so please, if you are interested send me an email letter. Also, the BBS that covers Albedo is called the Rowrbrazzle BBS (you will have to connect to it to find out why). I am still making the numbers available to anyone who is interested. You must email me to get the number. Some of the subboards on it are titled: Albedo, Usagi Yojimbo, SpaceWolf, Storyboards, Albedo RPG, Anthropomorphics, and much more. The board has two phone lines, and to give an example of the amount of traffic, in the last six weeks

there have been approximately 1100 posts (and this is not from any FidoNet feeds)!

Well, have fun.

—Steven B. Fellows  
*sfellows@cs.m9a.colorado.edu*  
*Colorado School of Mines*  
*circa: March 1990*

**Disclaimer:** I am not receiving any benefit by telling everybody about the **Huzzah!** fanzine and **Yarf!** magazine, other than hopefully seeing two good pieces of work succeed. I was introduced to them via the Rowrbrazzle BBS. I have no connection to them other than intending to be an occasional contributor and that I have been steadily communicating with members of their staff via the Rowrbrazzle BBS. I am putting my money where my mouth is, for I have subscriptions to both of them.

## One Step Beyond

A roleplaying game system, five years in the making. For current ordering information contact:

Aggressor Games  
c/o James H. Grassi  
P.O. Box 1610  
Cotuit, MA 02635