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TM

# JOURNEYS

JOURNAL OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL ROLEPLAYING

Premiere Issue  
Special  
Collectors Edition

With a few words from some  
of the best game designers in  
the industry including: Steve  
Jackson, Michael Pondsmitth, Eric  
Wujcik, George MacDonald, Bill  
Slavicsek, Frank Mentzer,  
Dave Newton, and Lester  
Smith (he's the Editor)...

...Oh, and of course Gary Gygax!



GDW

GARY GYGAX'S

5000

# DANGEROUS JOURNEYS™

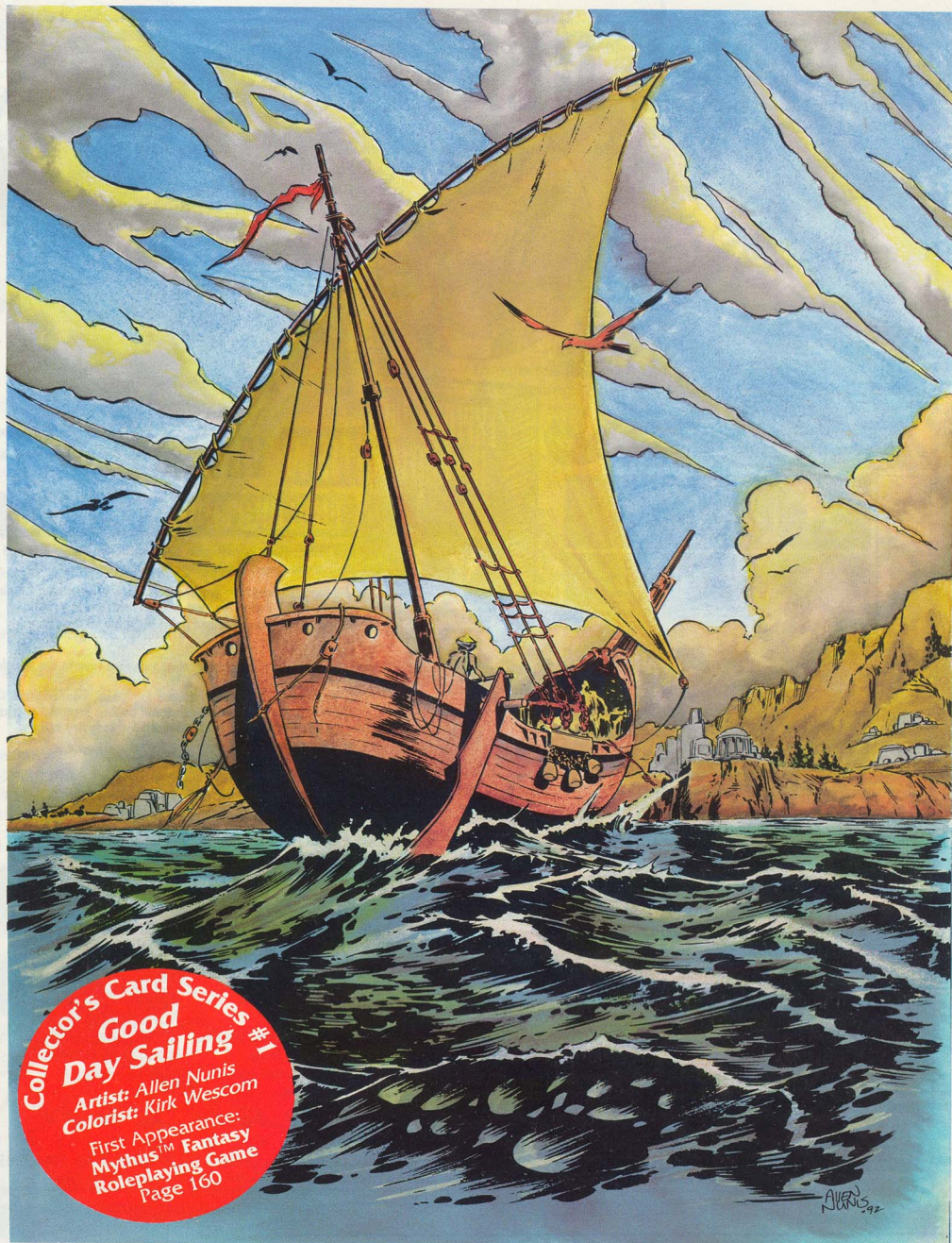
Multigenre Fantasy Roleplaying Game System



# MYTHUS™

Fantasy Roleplaying Game  
with DAVE NEWTON





Collector's Card Series  
**Good Day Sailing** #1

Artist: Allen Nunis

Colorist: Kirk Wescom

First Appearance:  
Mythus™ Fantasy  
Roleplaying Game  
Page 160

Allen Nunis



# EXCLAMATIONS

## A BIT OF THANKSGIVING

This isn't the November issue yet, but I do feel like indulging in a bit of "thanksgiving," because the past year has been very good to me.

First, as I am writing this, it has been just one year ago that GDW released the **Dark Conspiracy** horror RPG, a project I am grateful to have had the chance to write. Since that time, there have been numerous other titles in the line, and I've had the pleasure to develop or create many of them, including the **Minion Hunter** board game. It isn't often that

by Lester Smith

the opportunity arises to create a new RPG for a major publisher; I'm indebted to GDW's management for having given me the chance, and to numerous writers, artists and text development people for making the **Dark Conspiracy** line such a healthy one.

Second, as you are reading this, it will have been just one year ago that Frank Chadwick first told me of the possibility that GDW would be publishing a new, multigenre line of roleplaying games authored by Gary Gygax—the **Dangerous Journeys** line, beginning with the **Mythus** fantasy roleplaying game. I remember clearly my great excitement that evening, just back from GenCon, as I contemplated the strength of such a cooperation. Again, it isn't often that Gary Gygax creates a new fantasy roleplaying game, and I was fortunate enough to be chosen as editor for the project! Like most roleplayers, I started with Gary's first fantasy RPG (you know, that other one), and the chance to work with him in publishing a brand new one has been thrilling. But that's not all! The **Mythus** game, as far reaching as it is, is only one part of an entire collection of RPGs, together making up the **Dangerous Journeys** system. I'm happy to say that by next year at this time, you'll see Gary's second game in the system, the **Unhallowed** supernatural horror RPG (for which I will also have the pleasure to be editor). Of course, in the meantime, and thereafter, you will also see a lot of support material for the **Mythus** game: adventures, novels, sourcebooks, miniatures and even electronic adventures for *Nintendo* and personal computers, to name a few.

Which brings me to my third point of thanksgiving. It isn't often that the opportunity arises to be Editor-in-Chief for a brand new magazine. But here I am, at the helm of the **Journeys** journal of multidimensional roleplaying. GDW has experienced a great deal of success with its other periodical, **Challenge**, the magazine of science-fiction gaming. In its pages, we include adventures and rules variants for all sorts

of futuristic and horror games: our own **MegaTraveller**, **Twilight: 2000** and **Dark Conspiracy**, for instance, as well as *Shadowrun*, *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, several *GURPS* titles, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Battletech*, *Renegade Legion* and numerous other games. But obviously, **Challenge's** focus is such as to preclude fantasy and superhero RPGs, for example. And naturally, upon beginning publishing of the **Dangerous Journeys** game line, it became obvious to us that we would want regular magazine coverage for multigenre roleplaying. Rather than change **Challenge's** focus, however, we decided to launch a brand new magazine, and to launch it in a big way.

## WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

The result is **Journeys**. From the start, this journal will be a monthly production, dedicated to bringing you the finest support for multigenre roleplaying games of all types. Not only will we have monthly coverage of the **Dangerous Journeys** system, but as a glance at this first—collector's—issue will reveal, we will also have regular coverage of such multigenre games as the *GURPS* line, *Torg*, the *Hero System*, *Amber Diceless Roleplaying*, *Dream Park* and pretty much whatever else you tell us you're interested in. In this first issue, we've taken pains to gain material from actual creators of these lines! In future issues, we'll make a point to include more such material from such game creators, but also from other writers, maybe even you!

Note the comic strip, "The Infinity Mirror," in this issue; the unfolding saga it begins will be a regular feature in issues to come. We'll also be including a section devoted to computer gaming very soon, courtesy of Electronic Arts. And we'll even have a pair of Hollywood professionals writing a movie review feature (under pseudonyms)!

## A DJ ADVENTURE IN EVERY ISSUE!

One point I'd like to make absolutely clear is that **Journeys** will be bringing you a **Dangerous Journeys** adventure in every issue! Of course we'll have other things such as game news, rules and designer insights, and we'll regularly include adventures for other systems. But you can count on a monthly adventure for **Dangerous Journeys**.

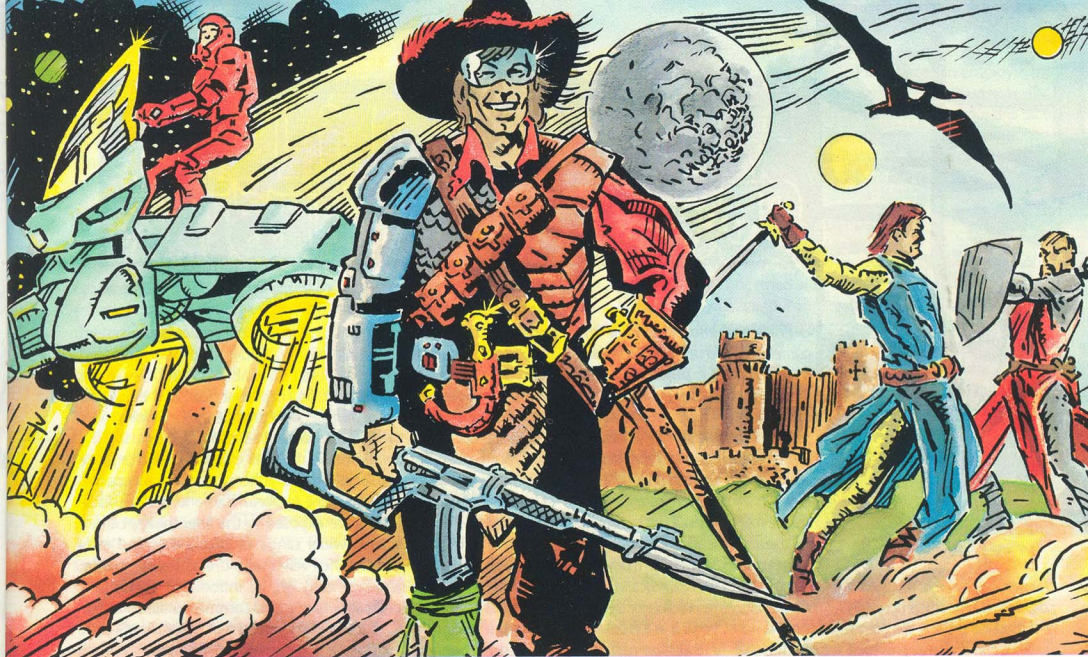
## CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY

Obviously, with all that material to cover, we won't be able to remain for long at 32 pages! To fit in everything we'll be covering, we're going need more room! Starting with the very next issue, then, the **Journeys** journal will be expanding to 48 pages, and we expect we'll have to expand further soon after that.

## HELP! M'AIDEZ! ¡AYÚDAME! ASSISTANCE!

It is reader interest that will determine the exact content of this magazine. To put it another way, if you like a particular game system, write a letter to tell us so. Better yet, write an article for that system and submit it to us for publication! We actively solicit reader submissions. To find out more concerning how to submit materials, please write and ask for a copy of our writers' guidelines.





## AND NOW FOR THE ART

by Amy Doubet

I guess by now most of you have noticed that *Journeys* journal is going to be a lot different from the magazines that are currently in the industry. First of all, there is color. Not just a little color, but a whole lot of color. Now to some people that is not a big selling point. Some prefer the content over the look of the magazine. Lester is going to take care of that. I'm here to take care of the part that people don't really think about. To me, the look of a magazine determines whether I am going to have enough interest to actually buy it. But then again, I am an artist. Can you blame me? If you like the look of the magazine, let me know. If you hate the look, let me know. I want to hear from you. Your opinion counts double when it comes to making this new magazine work. We are going to work really hard over the next few months to tweak this magazine so that we have a polished, finished-looking product.

Among some of the more interesting things that will be happening along these lines is the comic strip written and illustrated by Allen Nunis, the collector's card on page one of every issue that will showcase some of the best color art from the pages of our *Dangerous Journeys* books and of course the FREE pull-out poster of the cover in the center of every issue. Wow, what a great magazine! Another goal that we have is to use some of the best artists in the industry, including Janet Aulisio (cover of Issue #2), Jeff Laubenstein and Jim Nelson from FASA Corporation (they're signed on for covers, too), Allen Nunis, Rick Harris and so many more that I can't list them all. I hope that what I have done so far makes you pick this up and buy it—I hope it makes you subscribe!

## Letters

Dear Readers,

We on the *Journeys* staff really like to hear from you. If you happen to see any of us at a convention, game store, or some such place, please stop by, say "Hi!" and tell us what you think of the magazine.

But because the chances are that you won't run into one of us every month, please take the time to write and tell us what you think.

Seriously, we value your feedback, and we like to print your letters, especially if you have a question of some sort, or a comment requesting a response. Chances are that a number of other readers have the same comment or question, and they'll benefit from seeing a reply in these pages.

So flood our mailbox with your praises, criticisms, and random thoughts. We'll love you for it.

Sincerely,

The *Journeys* staff

## General Notice

*Journeys* journal will not provide coverage for any products produced by or licensed to Palladium Books, at the request of Palladium Books.



by Gary Gygas

## THE MYTHUS SEC BENEFITS QUESTION

The first of a series of *Dangerous Journeys* system articles for GMs.

*Privileged information for the gamemaster! What's this? Something more disallowed to players? Not at all. This is by no means confidential, let alone secret. If I have the attention of players not otherwise prone to read this sort of article, however, I consider it a valuable step. Do read on, and if you find the information such that you believe your GMs would benefit from it, tell them so. The goal of this writing is to improve and enliven the many new*

*Dangerous Journeys* multigenre roleplaying game (MGRPG) system campaigns, and to do so it is necessary to reach the persons responsible for creating and conducting them, the gamemasters of the world. What is in this column, however, is in one sense privileged. It is assumed that the readers are all special, more knowledgeable, in some measure because they are readers. Therefore, what is contained herein will certainly benefit gamemasters, players and the latter's Heroic Personas in no small measure!

Greetings to all of the participants in what I believe is the roleplaying game of the future! Welcome to the system which opens every conceivable vista to players and provides all the tools gamemasters will need to make those vistas vividly real. Before you dismiss those words as hype, remember that I have the whole of the system in mind and much of it on paper, and can foresee the end result. There is no exaggeration in what I tell you, but only time will enable us to bring the whole to you. It is complex, monumental in scope and enthralling in its application. What you have seen so far is but the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Perhaps later on I'll be able to deliver more in the way of information and facts, but for now there is something far more critical to discuss—material aimed primarily at the farsighted souls who have ventured into this multiverse as GMs.

This initial article will deal strictly with the *Mythus* fantasy roleplaying game, of course, for obvious reasons. However, GMs will be well advised to extend what is said herein to all genres, as applicable, for there are general considerations which are as valid in other times and places. Now here's what I'm talking about....

Class distinctions. The Socio-Economic Class (SEC) rule system is highly important to the whole of the *Dangerous Journeys* MGRPG system, and particularly so to the *Mythus* fantasy RPG module. I did not stress this as completely as I might have in the published work. There are two reasons for this omission: First, it would have further accentuated an admittedly touchy subject and promoted argument about how much or how little benefit the socio-economic class background might actually bestow upon the HP (and in that read the player's SEC too!). Second, to reflect my own opinions requires the granting of additional Knowledge/Skill (K/S) Areas and STEEP points;

and once that door is opened up to the casual reader/game system participant, there would be virtually no end to allowing more and more of this sort of thing, and tremendous abuse would arise as the proverbial camel entered the tent. So I kept that head out, as it were. But for those able to control things, I now provide the basis for a more accurate reflection of the SEC in relation to the Heroic Persona (HP).

A moment's consideration will make it evident that the more advantaged members of a society, those higher on the socio-economic ladder, will by and large have more opportunities and better education. That is, from birth they are exposed to the finer things, culture outside the immediate area, wider range of experiences and early education (upbringing). Later they will have more and better education, learn a foreign language early on, be introduced to relatively important people and enter society at a level commensurate with their background. Contrarily, those near the bottom of the scale will have less of these benefits, but there is one game-related bright spot. They will probably have certain connections (as "Good Ol' Boys" or "Homies"), likely know a second language (because it is spoken at home) and might have "quirks" which aid them in their environment. Thus, it is possible to award something to assist the lower SEC range even as we take away from these ranks and add to those higher up.

### SEC ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Now it is time to stop dealing in generalities and get down to game specifics. Working from the highest SEC downward, here is what can be done by the gamemaster to reflect the realities of virtually any society. The SEC Advantages/Disadvantages Table encapsulates the advantages and disadvantages.

#### SEC Advantages/Disadvantages

| SEC Level | Add'l. Foreign Language | Other K/S @5 STEEP per | Add'l. Special Connections | Add'l. STEEP @1 per K/S | Add'l. Quirk |
|-----------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 9         | 1                       | 4                      | 3                          | +9                      | —            |
| 8         | 1                       | 3                      | 2                          | +8                      | —            |
| 7         | —                       | 2                      | 1                          | +7                      | —            |
| 6         | —                       | 1                      | —                          | +6                      | —            |
| 5         | —                       | —                      | —                          | —                       | —            |
| 4         | —                       | —                      | 1                          | -2                      | 1            |
| 3         | —                       | —                      | 2                          | -4                      | 2            |
| 2         | —                       | -1                     | 3                          | -6                      | 3            |
| 1         | 1                       | -2                     | 4                          | -8                      | 4            |

If the group elects to institute this optional SEC adjustment, then here is how it works. As each player develops his or her Heroic Persona, the SEC Level of the HP will effect the portions of that persona noted on the table above. That is, adjustments will be made in one or more of the statistics as hereafter explained.



## Add'l. Foreign Language

The exact language gained should be determined by the GM, as appropriate to the player's HP Profile, the game genre and the campaign milieu. For the upper SECs, the STEEP will be that of the Class Level—i.e., 9 STEEP at SEC Level 9, 8 STEEP at 8, etc. For the lowest two, the STEEP will be 2D10+5 minus SEC Level.

## Other Knowledge/Skill Areas at 5 STEEP Points per Area

Again, the GM will determine which Knowledge/Skill Areas the persona can pick up due to SEC Level, based on the Profile, genre and campaign. HPs are thus benefited by having a smattering of knowledge in more K/S Areas, a reflection of the advantages of their level.

## Add'l. Special Connections

This is simply a matter of using the table or allowing the player to decide later when the Heroic Persona will make a Special Connection. Naturally, the gamemaster might find it reasonable to take a hand in the matter by personally determining such connections, creating special lists of them for this addition and so forth.

## Add'l. STEEP Points at 1 per Knowledge/Skill Area

The added points of STEEP must be broadly distributed in that only 1 point may be awarded to any single K/S Area. This prevents too great a disparity amongst beginning Heroic Personas, but adequately and reasonably reflects SEC effects. Although the header of the column doesn't reflect it, there is also a penalty in STEEP for the lower ranks, albeit not a very great one. Again, only 1 point may be taken from a single K/S Area.

## Add'l. Quirks

This means exactly what it says. Those Heroic Personas not blessed by high SEC have the benefit of extra Quirks. If the gamemaster keeps these added Quirks on the relatively moderate side and makes sure they aren't too powerful, then no Counter-Quirks are necessary. To this end I have included some new Quirks and a system for their operation so as to obviate the need of the Counter-Quirks being placed into the makeup of the Heroic Persona.

## SPECIAL QUIRKS

The basic operation of any of these Special Quirks is a K/S-type roll. The percentage chance for successful operation is determined at the outset. There are two different methods of finding the chance of successful operation, depending on the Special Quirk. In some, the chance is found by taking the appropriate TRAIT score, dividing it in half, then adding the results of the roll of 1D10 minus SEC Level, negatives counting (that is, a score of 1, minus SEC Level 3, means the player must deduct 2 from the HP's percentage chance). In the second case, the GM supervises the concerned player, the latter making an initial d% roll. If this roll is under 30, the result is modified upward by adding points equal to 40 minus (10xSEC Level)—i.e., -30 at SEC 1, -20 at SEC 2 or -10 at SEC 3. If the result is over 70, the result is modified downward by the same method. In effect, we thus modify the curve to get a higher cluster near the medial point of 50% likelihood of success.

Once the percentage chance of success of any Special Quirk is known, it doesn't normally change. No Difficulty Rating is usually placed on their operation, but gamemasters might wish to adjust things from time to time for special circumstances. Gamemasters might also wish to take into account related K/S Areas, if any, when

determining the use and number needed to succeed in employment of a Special Quirk. Whenever the Special Quirk is put into play by the player on behalf of the HP, it is simply a matter of rolling the d% dice (with such adjustments as the GM deems appropriate, as mentioned previously) to see if the attempt succeeds or fails. Results of success are given in the descriptions of the Special Quirks hereafter.

## Blarney (Rap)

Use the first method for chance of success; this is based on the Spiritual TRAIT. Any one may be used at intervals of one game hour, as long as individuals concerned are generally different from those last faced. In this case we have four separate Special Quirks:

**Funny Stories & Entertaining:** A crowd of people (or like beings) able to hear and understand such HPs will be kept amused and generally friendly if this Special Quirk functions successfully. After an Action Turn or so, such HPs can cease, and the listeners will be generally disposed to let the persona go without molestation.

**Men:** An audience of men (or like-gender similar beings) able to hear and understand the HP will be interested in what the HP has to say and so remain generally friendly if this Special Quirk functions successfully. After an Action Turn or so, such HPs can cease, and the listeners will be generally disposed to let the personas go without molestation. A single individual might be won to special friendliness by successful use of this ability.

**Petty Officials:** One to three such individuals (guards, police, clerks, etc.) can be convinced of something generally reasonable and not too unlikely by the HP, if this Special Quirk functions successfully. The persona should then move away quickly, for the effect won't last too long, in all probability!

**Women:** An audience of women (or like-gender similar beings) able to hear and understand the HP will be interested in what the HP has to say, and so remain generally friendly if this Special Quirk functions successfully. After an Action Turn or so, such HPs can cease, and the listeners will be generally disposed to let the personas go without molestation. A single individual might be won to special friendliness by successful use of this ability.

## Connecting

This is based on Spiritual TRAIT. Its function can be attempted once per game day. Success enables the individual to establish a short-term, one-time Special Connection with an appropriate selected individual. Those more than one place above SEC Level will not be affected by this Special Quirk, but there is no downward limit.

## Language Ability

Didn't Sir Richard Burton speak no fewer than 23 different languages fluently? Use the Mental TRAIT for finding operational percentage chance. Its function can be tried once on any new accent, dialect or language heard for an extensive period (one or more hours/days/weeks). Failure means that there is no chance of ever getting/speaking the accent/dialect/language in question. The limit of possible accents/dialects/languages gained is the average of Mental reasoning and Mnemonic Capacity. In this case, we have three separate Special Quirks:

**Accents:** Such HPs are able to perfectly accent their speech to suit the desired accent if the Special Quirk functions successfully. Note that this is not actually speaking a previously unknown dialect or language, but the mimicking of unusual, regional or local speech sounds and patterns of a known language.



**Dialects:** The HP is able to employ a dialect of a known language, even though it is actually almost a different one than that of the known language, if the Special Quirk functions successfully. However, the individual must know the root language of the dialect to enable the learning of one of its dialects. Ability conferred in gaining the dialect is equal to that of the root language.

**Languages:** The HP is able to learn to speak the language in question if the Special Quirk functions successfully. The STEEP conferred will be equal to the HP's Mental Mnemonic Power (MMPow). If full capacity (reading and writing) are to be added, the HP must purchase these abilities at the cost of 1 AP/G per speaking STEEP ability (MMPow), and all must be purchased at once. A week is required after purchase to command reading and writing facilities.

### Gimmicks

The second method, adjusting an initial D% roll, is used to find the chance of successful operation of this Special Quirk. This Special Quirk can be used only once per game week. If it operates successfully, such HPs can cobble together some little thing that will serve to rig up something or get them out of a scrape or difficulty. Examples are: (1) A gadget to cheat or foil cheating at some mechanical gambling device; (2) a mechanical device or alteration to a machine or apparatus, so as to temporarily bypass checks or improve operation or performance; or (3) something useful to such individuals to get past, into or through something, viz. a Gimmick to convince an attendant that the HP (and associates) are really inspectors.

### Lucky

This is based on Spiritual TRAIT. Its function can be attempted once per game week. The operation is limited to small sorts of things, and anything truly important will not be affected by this Special Quirk. There are three Special Quirks considered under this heading:

**Chances & Drawings:** Such personas are able to enter their name or take a chance in drawings for small things or relatively petty prizes, and win if they roll successfully. As a rule of thumb, the GM might reduce success chance by one for every 10 people involved beyond 100 (this will, of course, mitigate against winning larger prizes and sums of cash).

**Finding:** Such personas are able to find—as a lost, discarded or unwanted item—some small thing or sum they need at the time, if the roll for this Special Quirk succeeds. Thus, a persona might gain a key, a sum of cash equal to a couple of day's average earnings for an average person, a tool or an instrument needed, and so forth.

**Tight Situations:** In a threatening situation of minor sort, such an HP will be able to find a means of escape. If it operates successfully, the Special Quirk will provide a distraction, open door or other means not dissimilar to the Finding Special Quirk above, to enable the persona to slip out of trouble.

### Nondescript

This is based on Spiritual TRAIT. Its function can be attempted once per game day. By employing this Special Quirk, individual personas will seem normal and unremarkable to all those in a general area who might otherwise observe and remember them. As a rule of thumb, this will operate for about a half-hour, affect 100 individuals or continue for one mile's travelling distance.

### Perfect Pitch

This is based on Physical TRAIT. The obvious use is to know the

quality of sound (music) and be able to match it with voice, whistling or instrument. It can, however, also be used once per day to imitate sounds of a natural sort of those emanating from a device, within the range of sound possible for a normal human. Thus, beeps, twitters, etc. can be imitated. This might enable one to activate some mechanism, for instance, which would otherwise not function for the persona. Operation requires a successful roll, of course.

### Physical Burst

This is based on Physical TRAIT. It increases potential by 50% (round down) and can be used once per week. After successful employment of this Special Quirk, the Heroic Persona must rest for one hour or else suffer Physical Damage equal to the number of additional points of Speed or Strength (see below) gained by its use. There are two cases of this Special Quirk:

**Speed:** This applies to Physical Muscular and Neural Speed. If it functions successfully, such individuals will have the greater ability for as many Combat Turns as they have points of Physical Muscular and Neural Capacity ATTRIBUTES, divided by 2. Thus, they could run faster, move faster and so on.

**Strength:** This applies to Physical Muscular and Neural Strength. If it functions successfully, such personas will have the greater ability for as many Combat Turns as they have points of Physical Muscular and Neural Capacity ATTRIBUTES, divided by 2. Thus, they could hit harder, lift more, etc.

### Rapid Reading

This is based on Mental TRAIT. It enables the persona to scan a surface equal to a normal page in one Combat Turn so as to see all that is thereon, including words, pictures, drawings, maps, charts, etc., if the K/S check roll for the ability succeeds. Note, however, that *recall* of the material is based on MMPow; the GM will assign a DR to the material in question, and a second K/S roll will then have to be made for success in remembering what was gained through this Special Quirk. Thus, recalling a page of simple material might be Easy, several pages Hard, and many pages Hard or even Difficult. A sketch map might be Moderate, and a highly detailed, small-scale map Extreme, to accurately reflect all material thereon. However, it can be employed as frequently as the player desires. Remember, the GM will make the DR more difficult as volume or complexity or unfamiliarity of material increases.

### Rhyming

This is based on Spiritual TRAIT. This Special Quirk can be used as frequently as desired, with a "rest" of one or more Action Turns between attempts. If it operates successfully, the HP can make up rhymes, doggerel, song lyrics and the like on the spur of the moment. A roll of 2D10 will indicate the number of couplets, quatrains or stanzas of about eight lines (GM's option) the persona will be able to make before the Special Quirk ceases functioning. "Rapping" is an example of the sort of rhyming generally enabled by this ability.

This brings us the end of this first sally through the many portals of the *Dangerous Journeys* system. Next issue we'll try another door and see what is to be learned by the exploration. Interested in Magic? Be here!



# 3 Ways To Skin A Cat



Varieties of Multigenre  
Game System

By Steve Jackson



As the designer of a multigenre game system, I've spent a lot of time over the past few years thinking about the theory behind such games. Not just "What can I add to *GURPS*?" or even "If we did a fourth edition, what would be different?"—but "If I were starting over *entirely*, what might I do differently?" (an important question for me—but we'll get back to that).

Now, I admit to bias. But even if *GURPS* is the True Way, I know there are other True Ways out there, too. There are clearly several radically different ways to start the design of a multigenre system. If they look alike when they're done—well, a shark looks like a dolphin, and they both look like a submarine, but the insides are different.

I see three basic ways to design a multigenre game system—that is, three basic philosophies for writing basic rules and supplements. Each one calls for a different presentation and marketing of the system, as well.

### COMMON ELEMENTS

Any multigenre game system should, by definition, be able to cover a wide variety of backgrounds. Not necessarily *any* background—though that's a worthy goal. The basic idea is to let players (and sometimes more importantly, gamemasters) learn a single set of rules which they can then apply to any campaign they want to play.

From the players and GM's point of view, this means they can spend more time gaming and less time *learning* to game. They can also get more for their money; they don't have to buy the basic rules over and over! From the writer and publisher's point of view, a multigenre system means they can spend more time writing *neat stuff* and less time re-inventing the wheel by creating new rule systems to do the same thing.

### UNIVERSAL MULTIGENRE

The first type of system is the basic multigenre one. My own *GURPS* is an example here. The rules are designed to cover all contingencies, from rocks to laser guns and magic.

No particular allowance is made for crossing genres—if the system works properly, genre-crossing is supported automatically. To the extent that the system is not completely integrated, rough edges will be found when a character switches genres. In *GURPS*, most of these rough edges are seen in problems with point value for special skills and abilities. Some of this is unavoidable and can be rationalized with mechanisms like the Unusual Background cost in *Supers*. Other problems can arise from insufficient playtesting when new rules are added—especially insufficient *cross-genre* playtesting. When problems are discovered, the designers must decide whether to revise the system seriously, paper over the problem, or just ignore it and accept an inconsistency—and that decision would make a whole separate article.

The advantage of a universal system is that once the players know the basic rules, they can do anything. The game mechanics, if they're well written, recede into the background. A related advantage is that any number of supplements and sourcebooks can be presented—between

history and fiction, you'll never run out of genres. We've published about 50 *GURPS* worldbooks to date—I've lost count!—and we're still rolling. Better yet, with a good universal system, players can do anything they want *without* a sourcebook.

The *disadvantage* of a universal system is that it has to cover all contingencies. Otherwise, it's not universal! This means that there will either be a lot of rules (as in *GURPS*), or the rules will be incredibly simplified (as in *TWERPS*, *The World's Easiest Roleplaying System*, which does it all in a very few pages and one character stat).

### CROSS-GENRE

A cross-genre system, by contrast, is designed specifically to support transfer of characters between different backgrounds, or combinations of different backgrounds, to create unique game worlds. Possibly the best-known example is *Torg*, in which characters spend their time travelling between the different "cosms."

For a cross-genre system to work, the overall story behind it has to be interesting. Ideally, the story should enable a variety of roleplaying, rather than limit it. I see this as a weakness in *Torg*. The background story is interesting, but players who don't want to become Storm Knights and battle invaders have few other options. Nevertheless, the *Torg* background is interesting and contains a lot of detail, so players who like the basic idea will be able to keep busy hopping from cosm to cosm.

The cross-genre system has some of the same advantages that the basic multigenre system does. Players can learn one rules set and stick with it. If the background is well chosen, there will be plenty of room for supplements—and players *like* supplements. Likewise, with the right background, GMs can fit their own scenarios into it. Although *Torg* doesn't have an official "French Revolution" cosm, one could exist somewhere, and a GM could easily write it up for a swashbuckling adventure!

### MODULAR MULTIGENRE

This is the term I use to designate games like *Champions* and *Dangerous Journeys*. Such a game starts with a core rules system. Each supported genre adds other rules specialized to fit that genre. This may be a deliberate design decision, as it was for *DJ*. It may also arise when a very successful single-genre system is expanded past its original limits; this is what happened with *Champions*.

These genre-specific rules are not necessarily mutually compatible, though they all build from the same base. Thus, a character created for one genre would not necessarily be transportable to a campaign set in another genre—at least, not without some changes. And players would have to learn some new rules for each new background. Now, any system will have to add new rules whenever it adds new backgrounds. But in a universal system, the rules are all—theoretically—compatible. In a modular system, they may not be.

Some players will dislike this; others won't. After all, a new background is supposed to present new situations and



challenges. Fully compatible rules are easier to learn—but in the process of making rules fully compatible, some flavor is often lost. This is the strength of single-genre systems, and modular systems can borrow some of that strength. What would *Toon* be without *Falling Down*, or *Call of Cthulhu* without Sanity Checks? What would *Paranoia* be without treason points?

But none of those systems would make any sense in—for instance—a generic fantasy game. And building them into a universal multigenre system would be excess baggage. Therefore, the advantage of a modular system is that it can introduce customized rules to capture the flavor of each specific background. This helps on writing and marketing, as well; a system can be released *without* checking every possible rules interaction, which can save literally years of playtesting!

The disadvantage is not just that *players must learn a few new rules*—which is no great hardship—but that *they must forget some of the old rules*. Additionally, characters may not be freely transportable between campaigns.

### SO WHAT'S BEST?

There is no “best.” It depends on the campaign and the play style of the GM. With a good GM, the players hardly need to know the rules anyway.

After long thought, I still have a personal preference for the universal type of design. In fact, that's the one I chose when I started over. No, I'm not dropping *GURPS*! But I'm working on a new game system—a *miniatures* system—called *Hot*

*Lead*. It will not be “*GURPS* on a tabletop,” though there will be hooks to the *GURPS* mass-combat system, for those who care. But it *will* be a multigenre system, and it will take the “universal” approach. If *Hot Lead* works the way I want it to, it'll support skirmish-scale miniatures combat—that is, one figure equals one fighter—for any period from Stone Age to space fantasy. Granted, an army of Space Knights will be worth a lot more points than an army of Zulus—but then, it should be!

The question will be: Can a thousand points of Space Knights have a fair battle against a thousand points of Zulus? It should; otherwise, the points don't mean much. But some might expect that *no* number of spear-wielding tribesmen should be able to bring down a man in a battlesuit.

And if a battlesuit is fully invulnerable to spears, then, *relative to a battlesuit*, the point value of a Zulu is 0. But a battlesuit would *not* be invulnerable to, say, enough Rangers with 20th-century automatic weapons. Yet those same Rangers, if enough outnumbered by Zulus, would be in trouble. Interesting problem, no? Yes.

This all gets back to the basic problem with a fully universal rules set: Making a wide cross-genre jump can be a strain. And since the *Hot Lead* rules aren't *done* yet, I can't say how well I've succeeded.

Hide and watch....

*Steve Jackson is the founder of Steve Jackson Games. A professional designer since 1977, Steve is famous for such games as Ogre, G.E.V., Illuminati, Car Wars, and GURPS (Generic Universal RolePlaying System), as well as many others.*



The **Mythus™** game is very detailed, but it is based upon relatively few, simple, straightforward frameworks. This GMs' screen collects those frameworks together with commonly used tables into one easy-to-access tool that also serves to hide the GM's secrets from the players' prying eyes. Included is a book of other play aids, such as maps and floorplans that can be used for combat scenes, and photocopyable sheets for keeping track of GM and player persona abilities and equipment.

**GDW:5003 \$9.**





# Any Port IN A STORM

by Lester Smith

This adventure is intended as a one-session adjunct to your normal campaign. Toss it in sometime when your Heroic Personas are travelling overland through wilderness. You can set the encounter wherever you like, but because it involves the ruins of a monastery, it would be most appropriate someplace in *Aeropa*, the Middle East, Azir, or northern *Afrik*. Just make sure to place it in an area that the HPs are not native to, however, so that its history will be unknown to them.

## BACKGROUND

Five hundred years ago, a full-fledged monastery—with a church, dormitories, kitchens, bake houses, brew houses, guest houses, infirmary, baths, fowl houses, granary, workshops, mill, hospice, stables, kennels, sheepfold, servant's houses, cloister yard, gardens, orchards, and cemetery—stood here in the wilderness. But for some reason now centuries forgotten, a bandit lord took exception to the monks cloistered there, and pillaged the monastery. Since that time, all that has remained standing are two of the original buildings—the house for distinguished guests, and the other its attendant kitchen, bake, and brew house. During those years, these two buildings have served as a hermitage for a few adherents to the original monastery's order. But recently (mere days before the HPs arrive), the ruins were raided once again, this time from underground! A hideous race of Subterranean antmen broke through the ground by night and set upon the dozen hermits dwelling here, dragging them into their underground warrens, to be used as slaves...and food!

## ADVENTURE INTRODUCTION

(If your HPs act fairly predictably, the course of this adventure will flow as described below. If they do not—and every GM knows that HPs are full of surprises—you can improvise, based upon the general situation and the desires of the "False Monks.")

While travelling through wilderland regions foreign to them, the Heroic Personas are caught outside toward evening with a severe thunderstorm threatening. But in the near distance, they can see a set of ruins, with two shabby buildings remaining standing, and with ragged garden plots evident here and there, as well. Here, then, is welcome shelter for the night.

As the HPs approach or hail the buildings, a trio of rather short, stooped figures in loose monk's robes exit the larger building (the old guest house) and stand, waiting, at its door. (The antmen have sensed the HPs coming, and have prepared for their arrival, as you'll see.) Their heads are humbly bowed within voluminous hoods, the robes cover their bodies completely to the ground, and long sleeves cover their hands. One of the figures waves a slow welcome and beckons the HPs nearer. If they call out or ask questions, he hesitates, then says in a raspy voice, "We have taken a vow of silence, which you are forcing me to break. Ask no more, but thankfully accept our hospitality." (This antman is using a very short duration Special Casting Charm to imitate the human speech of the local language. He can make utterances of no more than 3 CTs duration each time

the Charm is cast, and must spend a CT casting the Charm each time he wants to speak.)

When the HPs reach the front of the building, they smell a heavy incense wafting from its open doorway. For a moment, the horses are skittish, but then they calm. (The incense covers the antmen's alien odor.) One "monk" heads silently toward the bake house; the others hold the horses' bridles while the HPs dismount (grasping the bridles through the cloth of their sleeves, without letting their "hands" show), then lead the horses into the building, taking them through to the stables. The HPs are left to follow.

Soon, a pair of monks arrive from the bake house, carrying pans of hot water, towels, and bed clothes. They carry these into the guest rooms, again speechlessly expecting the HPs to follow. When they have set these materials down inside the rooms, they leave, just as silently. Finally, another pair arrives and sets out food on a table in the dining hall. It isn't very fancy, just stale bread, gruel, slightly moldy cheese, and a thin, sour ale, but it is hospitality of a sorts. While the HPs eat, the storm outside begins in earnest. (Be sure to emphasize its violence. It will last throughout the night.) All of the "monks" have left, apparently taking shelter in the bake house and leaving the HPs to their own devices for the evening.

## THE ATTACK

Once the HPs settle in for the night, the antmen attack them *en masse*, swarming out of holes in the floors of the servants' privies and in the larder of the bake house. The antmen will pen the HPs inside the guest house, then struggle to capture them so as to add them to their subterranean slave pens and larder. If pressed, the antmen will fight to kill, rather than to capture. If they begin losing even then (and that's the idea, GM), they will try to flee back into their underground warrens.

If the PCs pursue, a few antmen will be left at the mouths of the tunnels to play rear guard while the rest of the colony packs up and flees deeper into Subterranean *Aerth*. They will fight to the death, or until the HPs withdraw. In the first instance, the HPs will find seven of the real monks bound and gagged, but still living, within the tunnels. On the other hand, if the HPs withdraw and leave the rear guard even a few moments of peace, these antmen will slay the monks before following their colony.

After all is said and done, if the HPs want to explore deeper into the now abandoned tunnels, that is up to you, as GM. But it could be a great way of introducing a Subterranean *Aerth* campaign, should you so desire.

## REWARDS

It has been said that doing good is its own reward. That just about sums things up in the case of this adventure. The antmen were fairly new to the surface world, and they had no possession of any real value, barring whatever weapons you decided to equip them with. Any living real monks will, of course, be extremely grateful to the HPs, but they have taken a vow of poverty, and can't really offer much in the way of a tangible reward. (Unless you, as GM, want to use this as an opportunity to pass along a mysterious magical item long held in utter secrecy by the monks!)



## SOME GM ADVICE

In the descriptions above, all secrets are laid bare to you, as the GM. That doesn't mean that you should emphasize the strangeness of the "monks" to your players, however. Mention at first sight that they are covered head to toe in the robes, then avoid making any further mention of the fact, doing everything you can to set your players enough at ease that they will have their HPs settle in for the night. They should get the idea that something is strange about the "monks," but as religious hermits and foreigners, the strangers should be expected to have some odd ways about them. And with the storm raging outside, where else could the HPs go for the night?

Due to space constraints, some preparation work has been left to you, as GM. For example, you should set the total number of antmen present as seems appropriate to give your HPs a good fight, without overwhelming them, and you should set their exact combat abilities with the same thing in mind, based upon the guidelines in the sidebar.

## THE FALSE MONKS

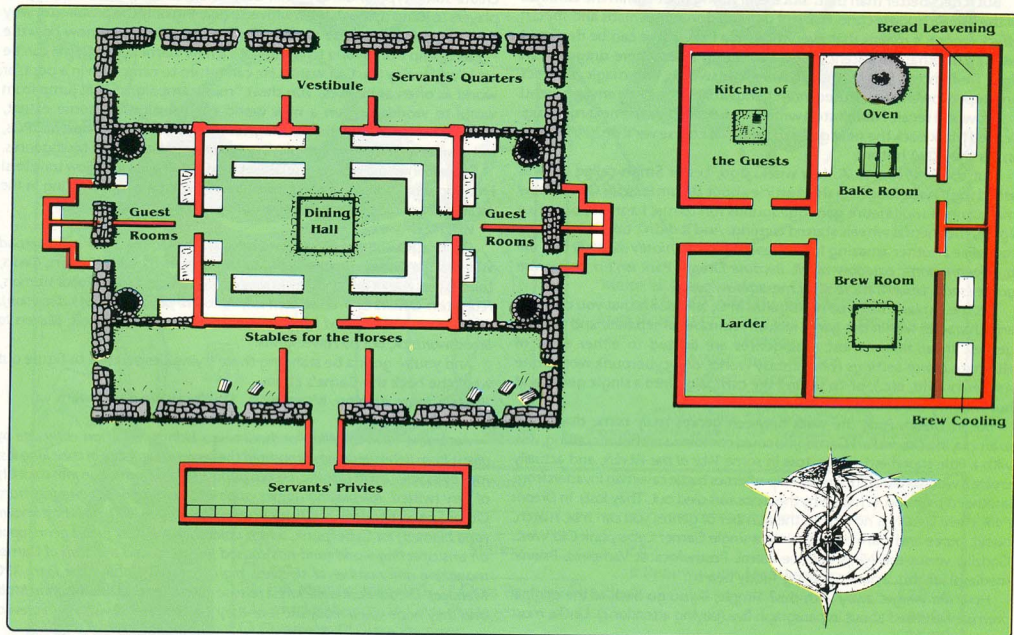
(Note: The following information is set up in *Epic of Arth* notation. Most information is based upon standard human base or outlook. Sensory notation is explained in the footnote.)

**Antmen:** Call themselves the "Chk-bzzz." M: -1, P: -2, S: +2. Attractiveness: {-2}. **Heka use:** Minor only. **Sensory\*:** FX, HU, SX, TD, XA. Height: 4.5', Weight: 90 lbs. Omnivores. Malign (due to propensity toward human-flesh eating).

A previously unknown race of sapient humanoids from regions of *Shallowshadow* in Subterranean Arth, antmen have such an inhuman mindset as to make cooperation or negotiation between them and humans very unlikely. Each antman is an integral part of its hive, linked to the others in a joint aura, and feeling no need for interaction with beings outside the hive...except as food.

In appearance, antmen resemble their namesakes, ants and humans. They stand nearly erect, like mantises, on their four rear legs, with head and thorax vertical, abdomen generally horizontal (but able to be held vertical between the legs—though awkwardly—for short periods of time). Their heads have no eyes, but do possess insectoid mandibles and a pair of short, sturdy antennae that are capable of lying flat against the skull.

\*FX= Feeling, Excluded: Little or no sense of feeling in human terms. HU= Hearing, Ultrasonic: Ability to hear ultra-high frequency sound waves and minute noises. SX= Sight, Excluded: Little or no visual capacity in terms of human norm. TD= Taste/Smell Discrete: Ability to distinguish such things as animal, vegetable, mineral, living, dead, etc; and thus discern as much as might any visual sense. XA= Extrasensory, Aural: Sensing of auras generated by life forms: Ranges from state of health, to Heka capacity, to emotions, etc. (See *Aura Reading* in the *Mythus Magick* book.)





# DREAM PARK

or, New Dimensions in Meta-  
(not Multi-) Genre Gaming

By Mike Pondsmit

It all started something like this...

A couple of years ago, a good friend (Mark) called me up with a proposal. The Talsorian Mob be interested in writing an RPG based on the very popular *Dream Park* novel series by Larry Niven & Steve Barnes? The authors were up for the idea, and Mark had assured them that if anyone was good enough (and crazy enough) to do their creations justice, the Talsorian crew was it.

Hmm, I thought. I'd read the original *Dream Park* novels; heck, they're probably required reading for any true roleplayer. After all, what game can resist the idea of a Disneyland devoted entirely to running real, live-action games? But there was an obvious catch; how do you do a roleplaying game about a fantasy park where you go to play a roleplaying game?

Then it hit me. We had one of those really amazing opportunities here; one of those once in a lifetime shots. Because a quick re-read of the novels cued me into an amazing secret; *Dream Park* Games are not only roleplaying. Nope, they're meta-roleplaying!

Take the novel's premise; elite teams of Gamers get together to compete for points against elite Gamemasters who make the toughest Games ever. The Games can be set in any time, place or reality the GM can dream up. He doesn't tell the Players anything about what they'll be up against; he just drops them in and challenges them to survive. Those Players unlucky enough to be killed out of the Game don't permanently lose a character; just points (equivalent to losing gaming levels in a regular RPG), and even have the option of regaining points by playing a "bad guy" for the GM. In addition, each new Game can be played in a new setting, allowing Players to compete in the widest possible arena.

But it gets better than that. Since everything is set within the confines of the Park (a huge techno-maze of gaming domes, techlabs and special effect shops), it means that everything in a Park Game can be designed with an internal consistency; you can set up rules where dragons can fight Tie-fighters, barbarians can have lightswords, and magic, psionics and superpowers can be used interchangeably in the same environment!

Wow. As I recall, I didn't stop writing notes until five the next morning. I called Mark back the next day and said, "Of course we'll do it." The rest is, (as they say) history.

Cut to the Present...A few weeks ago, Lester Smith called up and asked me if I would write a short article about *Dream Park* for GDW's new magazine of multigenre gaming. Sounds fun to me, I agreed, but once again, the mental wheels started turning. And it didn't take long for me to realize another amazing fact: *Dream Park* technically didn't fit into the multigenre game category at all. Because *Dream Park* isn't a multigenre game (sorry, Lester). It's really a metagenre game.

Let me explain. In a true multigenre RPG, the idea is that you can take any character within the game into any number of separate and distinct genres. In addition, most multigenres are limited to either a set of alternate genre-settings (one fantasy world, one cyberpunk world, one modern world, etc.), or to setting the campaign into a single genre and not moving around much.

But in *Dream Park*, the walls between genres really come down. For example, in a *Dream Park* Game, you could combine a prehistoric setting, mix with a little superhero comic, toss in some *War of the Worlds*, and actually create a world where dinosaurian superheroes battle caveman invaders from another dimension. (That's why the dinosaurs died out. They lost). In *Dream Park*, there literally is no limit to the number of genres you can mix, match, blend, puree and cram together into a single Game. Cyberpunk Old West. Godzilla versus the Ninja Science Patrol. Postholocaust Vampires. Psionic medieval knights. Space travelling Teddy Bears...

How did we get away with this? Simple; if you go back to the original premise we talked about in paragraph five (paying attention?). Unlike most

"multigenre" games, *Dream Park* is specifically designed to genre-blend. Instead of starting out with a fantasy or superhero system and then adapting it to another genre, we started out with a system that already encompassed as many genres as possible. For example, nine classes of damage interact with nine classes of armor to span fantasy, historical and science fiction creations equally; so that when a dragon (Huge Claw, Huge Bite, Slow Flyer, Heavy armor, 20 wounds) meets a starfighter (Extremely Deadly Med. Energy Cannon attack, Light Vehicle Armor, Superfast Speed, 16 Wounds), you automatically have a baseline in which these two combatants can meet and fight to the finish. There's no cribbing or re-writing needed; no extra rulebooks or add-ons. The system is designed to be internally consistent within its own reality—the reality of *Dream Park*.

Another big problem with traditional multi-genres is that it's hard to transfer a character from one reality to another; if you create a Barbarian, he's always a Barbarian, even in a futuristic campaign. But because the Park reality is internally consistent, it also allows us to re-structure your character for each new Game. Only your ten Basic Skills (useable in any genre) remain the same. Players can then use their Game Points to buy Optional Skills, Spells, Powers, Superpowers and Gear for each Game they will enter. This actually allows you to create any number of combinations; if you've ever wanted a futuristic magic-using psionic-superhero-barbarian-thief, *Dream Park* is the place to do it.

*Dream Park's* Option system means if you're going to be in (what you think is) a science fiction campaign, you can easily cash in your warhorse, sleep spell and archery skills, and exchange them for a spacefighter, psionic stunt and spacefighter pilot skills. It's almost like betting; since you never exactly know what the Game is about, you have to gamble that you'll spend your Game Points in exactly the right way for the situation.

Finally, the Park setting also lets us get around the last big problem with traditional multigenres; how the heck do you get your players around between world-genres? Cramming eight or nine genre-realities into one world is one solution, but begs the question of how all these alternate worlds come to exist in a single place. Another solution is to create some type of dimensional Gate or other dodge that allows your players to jump through the multiverse (leaving only the problem of why they're going to all these places). But in *Dream Park*, we know how the Players jump from world to world—it's a new Game! Each Game can be set in any reality the GM wants. He can return to campaign in a popular world as often as he likes, run short "mini-campaigns" that jump from world to world, or run a new world each session! To some extent, metagenre gaming is the next logical step in the progression of RPGs, from Fantasy games, to Roleplaying systems, to Genres, to Multigenres.

So welcome to the New Age of Metagenre Roleplaying, fellow travellers! From now on, you can expect an entirely new type of game listing in the catalog of your local gaming convention; a listing that starts with:

## WANTED

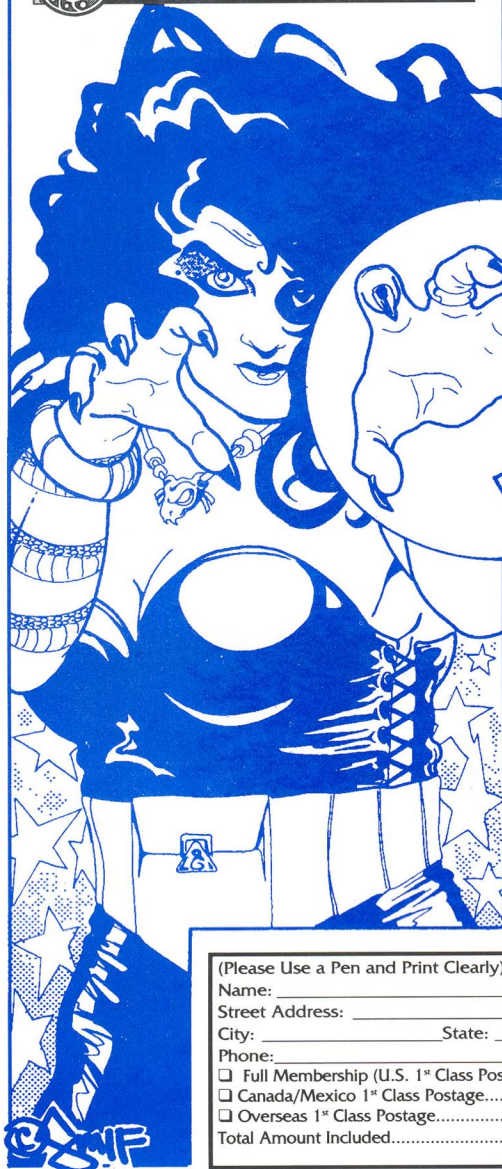
Six Brave Adventurers to brave an Unknown frontier. The Game is The Second Wizard's Star Game. Time period is Modern. Superheroes, Magic Users, Clerics, Loremasters, Barbarians and Pirates suggested; will accept Giant Robot Warriors, Federation Officers or Thieves from any historical period (at GM's discretion). Superpowers, Psionics and Magic allowed. No Necromantic Spells. Blasters to Broadwords ok, but no Power Armor.

And you're gonna be standing there trying desperately to figure out what the heck the Game's about.

Metagenre gaming. It's coming. Don't say we didn't warn ya.

According to RTG, Mike Pondsmit was kidnapped at an early age by aliens from Betelgeuse, who imparted the secret knowledge of their long lost race by psychic mind transfer. He has parlayed this information into a variety of very twisted roleplaying games, such as the infamous Teenagers from Outer Space, Mekton, and Buck Rogers: XXVC (for TSR). He is best known (and blamed) for Cyberpunk, which unleashed the dark future genre upon an unsuspecting world (and has caused Jim Ward and the Staff of Gamer magazine any number of sleepless nights worrying about the Dark RPG Menace). *Dream Park* is the latest release from Mike and the Talsorian Mob, and they hope you'll really like it or they'll all come and visit you. Forever.





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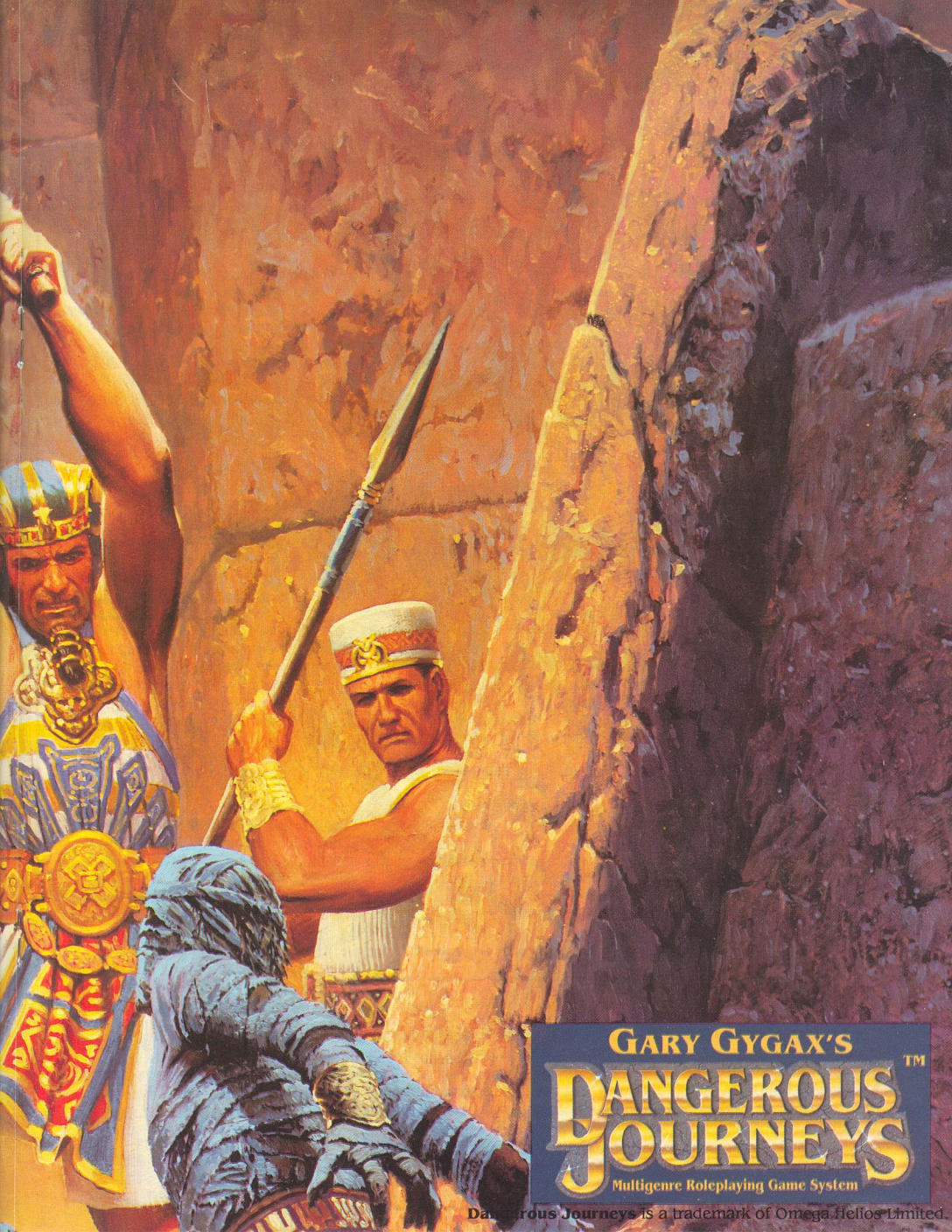
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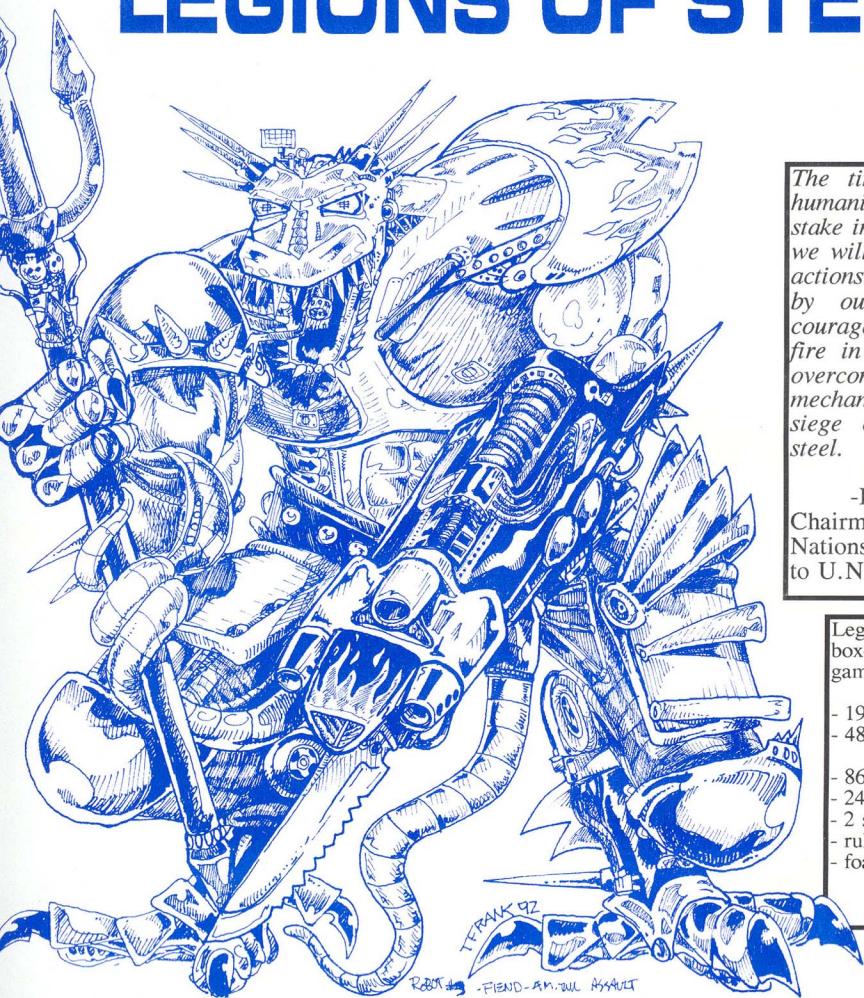


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Chairman of the United Nations of Earth speaking to U.N.E. troops.

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# A Short History of AMBER DICELESS ROLEPLAYING

Due to other commitments, Erick Wujcik, the designer of the Amber Diceless Roleplaying game (as well as author of numerous other titles, including *Palladium Books' Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *RECON*), was unable to write a piece for this special, collector's issue of the *Journeys* journal. However, he graciously agreed to a telephone interview, which we will print in two parts: one this issue and one next.

For those who might not be familiar with the Amber RPG, it is based upon a series of novels by Roger Zelazny, involving the ruling family of the one true world, of which all others (including our Earth) are but "Shadows." Players create junior members of that family and go adventuring across all imaginable worlds.

**Lester Smith (hereafter "LS"):** The first question that occurs to me is: What got you started with the idea of doing an Amber roleplaying game in the first place?

**Erick Wujcik (hereafter "EW"):** I had used certain elements of Amber in previous roleplaying campaigns, long before I ever got the idea of designing a whole roleplaying game around it, because I had always loved Amber.

What really spurred things on was that back in 1985 I found out that West End Games had gained the rights to it. I immediately got in touch with the people there, who I had already done some work with (I had done *Clones in Space* and some *Acute Paranoia* contributions), and I said "I really, really want to do this. The idea of doing an Amber roleplaying game is too exciting for me to bear."

They basically said, "We're interested in doing the boardgame. We don't have anybody working on the roleplaying game, so go right ahead. It's purely on speculation; we can't make any commitments. But if you do something we like, we're interested."

Within a few weeks of talking to them, I had put together a roleplaying system.

As I was putting it together, my philosophy of gaming up to that point was pretty straightforward. I had always thought that the best way to do a roleplaying game is to aim for, as I put it, "a minimum of innovation." In other words, you don't try to come up with bells and whistles just for the sake of having more bells and whistles. You try to come up with as clean, as slick, as streamlined a roleplaying system as you need for whatever genre/milieu/setting you're aiming for. And at that point, I'd already done quite a few roleplaying games: I'm an experimenter; I generally write up for my own amusement a couple of roleplaying games a year, and I'd done quite a few before that point. I had noticed in that year and the year before—it had become more and more obvious to me—that a lot of the rules that called for using dice were really unnecessary gaming...chalk. I don't know what else to call it, but stuff that you really didn't need for scenarios or situations. So when I started doing the Amber thing, I said, "I'm going to leave the dice out whenever possible, so that I'll only have the dice that I'll absolutely need." In fact (a little piece of Amber history here), the first couple of times that I ran Amber, I actually had dice sitting on the table, waiting to be used.

Now, in designing the attribute auction, I loved the idea in games like

*Champions* that you could put together a whole character just based on points. But I thought that was too rigid a system for Amber, where there had to be a competitiveness built in. So the auction idea, when it presented itself, seemed to me to be perfect: It got away from this whole idea of dice. Everything you do you do by choice, but you're not doing it in a vacuum; you're having to compete against the other players. That, to me, was an ideal way of approaching Amber, since you're going to be playing brothers and sisters. In the books, the brothers and sisters were at each other's throats, and I wanted to get across that same idea. But in the books, they have to join together against a common threat. In the roleplaying system, I wanted the same thing to be true. All the characters would be in competition—they would have very complex relationships with their elders (their parents, aunts and uncles), and they would be at each other's throats, but we would build into the roleplaying system the tension required to bring them together.

So when I started running the game, since I had put together every piece of it without requiring any dice rolls, it just worked out that I never needed the dice. And after a few months of play, it was obvious that the dice were really unnecessary.

Unfortunately, that idea of dicelessness did not sit well with most of the people in the roleplaying game industry. The people at West End Games were definitely not interested in publishing a diceless system. And there followed a long period of chaos, where various negotiations took place between myself and West End Games. At one point, Palladium Books was involved, and Zelazny's agent. Along the line I also sent through Zelazny's agent packages of materials to Zelazny, so that he could see what I was doing in case he had any problems with it.

This situation kind of meandered on for years, until in 1990 West End's rights finally lapsed. With the roleplaying rights up for grabs, I stepped in myself and said, "I really want this personally." Fortunately, Zelazny really liked what he had seen from me, knew that I loved Amber and didn't want anything "bad" to happen to it. He trusted that it had got to me, that I really cared, so we cut a deal. There was an interim period where R. Talsorian Games was going to publish it. Unfortunately, that didn't work out, and ultimately I was sort of desperate and cornered. Eventually I had to create my own publishing company, Phage Press—which has been an outrageous success. But starting a game company was something I had never really planned on doing. I was not looking forward to it, and to this day I'm just counting the days until I can get out of it.

**LS:** Yeah. I think I read a comment on GEnie that was attributed to you, something about that you were planning on doing some travelling but now you have a game company chained to your foot.

**EW:** That's exactly right. Yes, I would very much like to do some around-the-world travelling, but I'm just going to have to put that off for a few years.

*Next issue, we'll continue with a discussion of the Amber RPG's multigenre suitability, of Amberzine and Ambercon(s), and of other releases planned for the game.*







# TORG

## Building the Possibility Wars One Reality at a Time

by Bill Slavicek

For those who don't know, West End Game's *Torg: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars* is a roleplaying game that allows players to take on the roles of characters from a wide variety of genres (in the game, each genre is called a reality) and play them in a coherent and linked setting. In the vernacular of today, *Torg* is a multigenre roleplaying game. That's what we set out to create; that's what we created; and that's what West End Games continues to create even now that the original creators have moved on.

In the game, Earth of the Year Now has been invaded by other realities. Each reality follows the laws of a particular genre of fiction. In the Near Now, horror, primeval, magical fantasy, dark high tech, cyber-religious and action-pulp realities smash into Earth. Where these realities take root, Earth is changed into someplace else. The France, North America, Great Britain and Middle East that we know now resemble strange new worlds, and the laws of reality operate differently. In some, magic works, miracles occur, or high-tech science operates beyond the limits of 20th-century Earth.

These realities are led by foul, evil beings known as High Lords. They have come to Earth to steal the planet's living energy—an energy they call possibility energy. For with possibility energy, the High Lords can accomplish their vilest dreams, and one of them can become the High Lord of legend and prophecy. One of them can become the immortal and all-powerful *Torg*!

Earth, however, is not without its defenders. The planet so rich with the energy the High Lords crave gives this energy to its children, creating heroes who carry their own realities with them, and who can use possibility energy to change events around them. These are the player characters, and through the course of a single adventure, they may find themselves moving through an area where high-tech weapons function normally, to a realm where nothing more advanced than a simple spear will operate. Of course, heroes can keep their items working due to their ability to maintain their own realities, but even they run into trouble every now and then.

The heroes, whom the High Lords call stormers (because they have the ability to weather the storms of changing realities), come from those portions of the Earth which still hold the world's original reality, as well as from those portions that have changed, and even from the invading realities as well. They call themselves Storm Knights, because stormer is used as a derogatory term by the High Lords and their minions.

That's a bit about the setting and situation in *Torg: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars*. Now let's turn back the pages of history to the very beginnings of what was going to become *Torg*. It was GenCon 1988, and I had just taken over as editorial and creative director of West End Games. Greg Gordon, famous for his design of Mayfair Game's *DC Heroes* and his work on the *James Bond 007* game from Victory Games, had recently joined the company. Due to a staff shakeup, he was now West End's senior designer, and we were discussing what

kind of subject we should tackle for our first new game as West End's top creative people. Why did we even contemplate a new game? Weren't there enough roleplaying games on the market as it was? Well, there were a number of reasons.

At the time, West End's biggest roleplaying game line was *Star Wars*. It was doing very well, but the other lines in the company stable were beginning to lag behind. *Paranoia* and *Ghostbusters* were slowing down with each new release, and the company needed something solid to complement the *Star Wars* line. That was the first consideration.

The second consideration had to do with the fact that both Greg and I saw the need for a new kind of game system. We looked around the convention and realized that the next big thing to hit gaming was going to be games which combine familiar elements in ways that were never tried before—at least on the scale that we were contemplating.

The final decision was less of a business decision than a personal one. Everything we were currently working on owed at least some small debt to the people who had gone before us at West End. They had set the stage for us, but we wanted to show what we could do with something new.

As the convention continued, Greg and I threw ideas back and forth. We wanted a multigenre setting and system which approached the combining of genres in a logical and coherent fashion. We wanted a strong story, for that's what West End's roleplaying games were known for. We wanted the action to be heroic, the characters to be heroes pitted against the darkest villains we could devise. We wanted to create a game and world that could be played as we envisioned it, while also allowing players and gamemasters to pick and choose the elements they liked best to use in whatever way they wanted—with the *Torg* rules, with the *Torg* story or with their favorite game system from some other company, in whatever combination of elements they could imagine. And we wanted to do the whole thing in a big way—novels, rules, sourcebooks, adventures, new props, comics, the whole ball of wax. With these rules, a few concepts and an old campaign model from Greg's gamemastering days, we approached the powers that be at West End Games and made our presentation. We got the go ahead and began to plan what we would have to do to accomplish every goal we had set for ourselves.

Remember, at the time, the closest things to what we were planning were *GURPS* and a few AD&D crossover modules that added aliens and crashed spaceships to the *Greyhawk* setting. *Shadowrun* was still a year away, and it would be a little while longer before the AD&D realms would appear, or *Dark Conspiracy*, or even *Dangerous Journeys*. AD&D had treated the idea like a once-in-a-great-while diversion from regular gaming, and *GURPS* claimed to be multigenre without really allowing for any crossovers from one genre to another. We wanted to put high-tech warriors side by side with Victorian vampire hunters, magic-hurling wizards beside machinegun-toting New York law men. And we wanted to put them all in a setting and situation that made sense as far as the story and game were concerned.

For the next year, Greg and I worked out the story and world details, while Greg and the design staff hammered out a set of rules to make the fiction work. As far as the story went, we started with the overarching of the mythology behind the invaders and Possibility Wars. Much of this mythology served as background for the rest of the design team while never making it directly into print. It had to do



with the idea of each reality being a separate dimension, or cosm, and it included a creation story that went all the way back to the primeval forces of Void and Eternity. These concepts became the personification of destruction and creation, of entropy and endless possibilities. The Possibility Wars, then, began with these grand mythic concepts and became an eternal struggle between their offspring, the Nameless One and Apeiros. While the Nameless One only wanted to destroy, Apeiros sought to create. She created the cosmverse with its endless dimensions of different realities. But the Nameless One was not without creative powers of his own, though they were crude and malignant. He created the Darkness Devices, which gave the High Lords the power to invade other cosmverse for the Nameless One to follow. (In this sense, the Possibility Wars have been raging since the creation of the galaxy.)

While this level of creation was taking place, it was my job to plan out how we would promote *Torg*. It was decided that we would drop the first hints at GenCon 1989. I proposed a teaser campaign that would last through the release of the game (May 1990) and for a few months after. When people came by our booth that year, they were greeted by a huge poster announcing that in May 1990, West End Games was "going to change the definition of roleplaying games." Hype? Sure, but I believed we were creating something new and different, if not world-shattering. We also handed out little pieces of blue and red plastic that were shaped like tiny stones. We told everyone to hold on to them and bring them back the following year, but we didn't tell them what they were for. (It was amazing the number of people who held onto those things and returned with them the next year! It was eventually revealed that in the game setting, these "stones" were solid chips of possibility energy.) That was the beginning of the teaser campaign, and it had people throughout the convention trying to figure out what we were up to.

It was also during this conversation that Greg and I met with potential freelancers. We had put together a schedule that included a boxed game, three novels, six sourcebooks, a monthly newsletter (more on that in a moment) and eight adventures in the first year of release. Needless to say, with the rest of the West End staff busy keeping our other lines going, we needed help. Everyone we approached left the meetings in a state of shock. They kept repeating two things as they walked away, shaking their heads. Their first response was, "Cool!" Their second, "It's big, really BIG!" A few decided to take a crack at the world (worlds?) we were creating. Two freelancers even came out to wonderful Honesdale, PA, to work on-staff for six more months.

The rest of the teaser campaign consisted of monthly advertisements in *Dragon* magazine. For each month from GenCon to the release of the game, we unveiled another piece of the puzzle. Tantalizing quotes flashed like lightning across a raging storm in each ad, and people were calling and writing to find out more. Finally, in April 1990, we ran the ad which announced, "The storm has a name... *Torg*." The following month, the boxed game, the first sourcebook, the first novel and the first adventure (complete with GM screen) hit the stores. All the work had finally paid off, and West End Game's multigenre roleplaying game quickly became the company's number two seller (right behind *Star Wars*).

Like any labor, the work leading up to the release of *Torg* was not always fun, not always painless. Sometimes we even became daunted by the scope of the game world we were creating. It took

a lot to keep all the elements together. But we did it. How? Well, one of the most important elements was the 50-page outline Greg and I put together as a story bible for the novel writers. They had strict instructions to follow the outline, as all three authors were working at the same time. As they turned out pages, it was up to me to make sure the story flowed smoothly and to check with Greg to see if the current version of the rules still allowed the novel characters to perform according to the outline.

Another important element was that Greg was overseeing the work on the rules system, and we had regular meetings to coordinate rules and story. These meetings also served as pauses to take stock of where we were and to make sure we were still on course. Sometimes we took a few stray turns, but we always got back on track. It was exhilarating. It was frustrating. Near the end, it was frantic. As the deadline loomed, we were putting in more hours than there were in a work week, and sleep became a luxury we couldn't afford. Through it all, we managed to get together a game that is different, exciting and very, very big.

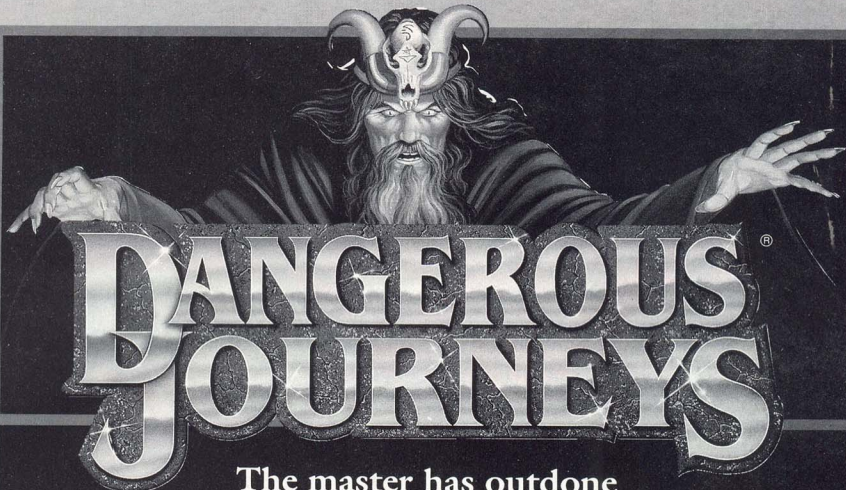
Much of the credit for the game system's innovations go to Greg ("let me run those numbers through the computer") Gordon. Yes, the collective "we" wanted a unique prop to use in the game, but it was Greg and his design team who created the Drama Cards. The cards really help with story pacing and aid gamemasters in the fine art of building story tension. We came up with a setting and background that demanded a system capable of handling everything from primitive weapons to high-tech wonders, magic to miracles. Greg and his team put it all together in a system that is fun to play and promotes heroic storytelling. Finally, we wanted to give the players and gamemasters a chance to actually influence the world we had created. That's where the *Infiniverse Campaign Game* newsletter comes in.

Through the use of response forms and a comprehensive computer program (set up by Greg's wife, Barbara), gamemasters can let West End Games know how the Possibility Wars are progressing in their particular corner of the infiniverse. The computer then averages the responses and tells West End Games which direction to take in future products. The result is a living, growing, changing gameworld that actually evolves due to the actions of those playing in it. In the two years plus since *Torg* was introduced, the campaign has led to the arrival of the techno-demons of Tharkold, the shrinking of the Living Land, the rejection of a High Lord of Earth and some other changes which are still a surprise as I write this. But keep watching!

That's a bit of what we set out to do and how we did it, condensed to fit this space. I've left out some details (like why we chose the realities we did), but maybe I can get back to them in a future article. I'll end this piece by saying that the game and its setting still intrigue me. The idea of putting characters and abilities from different genres in the same setting still fascinates me, and I think that fascination is the key to *Torg*'s success.

*Bill Slavicek worked on the West End Games staff for five years, designing and editing products in all of its lines. He was creative and editorial director throughout the creation of Torg: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars. Now he is a full-time freelancer, working for various companies, including TSR, GDW and West End Games. His latest Torg products include the upcoming Ravagons sourcebook and a novel set in the Space Gods realm.*





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# CUSTOMIZING RPGS

by George MacDonald

The whole object of playing a generic RPG is that you don't have to learn a new set of rules to play a new game genre. Once you learn one set of character creation and combat rules, you should be ready for anything. But if you aren't using a prepublished background, you'll have to make some decisions about which game mechanics apply to your setting. If you make these decisions before you start playing, the new genre will be much more enjoyable.

Actually, almost any set of good game rules can be used as a generic RPG. You could use the *Star Wars* RPG in different genres by adding a few new skills; calling the Force Skills psionics, spells or super powers; and generating a few new pieces of equipment. You could use *D&D* as a generic RPG by defining character classes that fit the new genre and matching them to established *D&D* character classes. The generic RPGs—like the *Hero System*, *GURPS*, *Torg* and *Dangerous Journeys*—make moving to a new genre much easier by defining their game concepts in general terms rather than in terms of a specific background.

## WHY MAKE DECISIONS?

If the background you want to play has been published in a sourcebook for your particular RPG, your decisions regarding game mechanics will be easier to make. For example, if you play the *Hero System*, and you want to play a fantasy game, you can get a lot of reasonable answers about which game mechanics to use in the published *Fantasy Hero* sourcebook.

The tough decisions come when you want to go beyond the published material. You might be trying to create a radical new shift in a published genre. For example, you might use *Champions* superhero level powers and abilities in a *Fantasy Hero* game to represent player character demi-gods in a fantasy universe. Or you might want to use a game system to play in a genre defined by another RPG. You could use *GURPS Cyberpunk* and *GURPS Magic* to play in the *Shadowrun* background. You might even want to make up a whole new genre all together. Perhaps you want to use *Torg* to represent adventures in the Pax Romana of a high-tech Roman Empire. In any case, you will have to make a lot of the game mechanics decisions by the seat of your pants.

## CHARACTER CREATION

Some of the most critical decisions you'll make when putting together a campaign in a new genre regard character creation. The character is the player's first and most immediate access to the new genre. The capabilities and limitations of the initial character will color the player's view of the genre far into the campaign.

Character creation decisions are based in part on how powerful the characters are compared to the rest of the world. Visualize this decision by thinking of a generic rowdy tavern in the campaign. The beginning characters kick the doors down, and a fight begins. Do the characters get defeated easily? Do they put up a good fight but lose? Do they hold their own? Do they triumph after a hard fight? Do they easily clobber all opposition? Use the outcome of this example to help define the capabilities of starting characters in your campaign.

Now assume that the characters have been played for a while and have built up some experience. What happens in the tavern this time? What happens after the characters have been played a long time and have lots of experience? Use the outcomes of these examples to help define how fast the capabilities of the characters will progress and how far they can go.

Make sure the players understand the GM's vision of the power level of the campaign. It sets the players' expectations about how they can react in the game. Telling the players what they can and cannot expect in the way of character growth can be almost as important to them as the genre and background of the campaign.

It is important for the GM to set a range of acceptable values for the game system's important characteristics. These ranges should reflect how the GM expects the characters to start the game and how they will grow.

The values of the capabilities in many generic systems have narrow ranges where players can interact. Often the limits on these capabilities are social limits, set by the GM. For example, in a *Hero System* game, a character begins with a Speed of 2. Even a 100-point Heroic character could have a Speed of 8. But, by convention, Speeds in *Hero System* games often break down along the following lines: Normal characters range from Speeds 1-4; Heroic-level characters range from 2-5; Superheroic-level characters range from 4-7; experienced characters of any level tend to range one Speed higher.

Using these guidelines, the starting range of Speeds in the Superhero-level, demi-gods campaign would be 4-7; the range of Speeds among experienced characters would be 5-8. Even the slowest demi-gods would be as quick as the fastest normal characters. Note that while the Speed values may change between character types, the range of Speed values stays about the same. This narrow range of values can also be seen in characteristics like *GURPS'* Dexterity or *Cyberpunk's* Reflex.

Be especially careful to examine the values that represent combat capabilities. These values include how often characters can attack, how often they can hit with their attacks, how much damage they can do with an attack, how difficult to hit they are, and how much damage they can resist. To make sure the characters are not



effectively invulnerable, defensive values should be under tighter restrictions than offensive values.

Once you find the range of values that represent the characters in your genre, you need to specify what other capabilities the characters have access to. Generic RPGs may have systems for special talents, spells, psionics, superpowers, martial arts, cyberware and a host of other character enhancements. Often these enhancements are what set the player characters apart from the normal NPCs in society.

Use the same criteria when selecting special abilities that you used in setting the ranges for combat capabilities. If the characters are supposed to be vulnerable to normal NPCs, don't give them access to special abilities that significantly raise their defensive abilities. If the characters are supposed to be able to deal easily with normal NPCs, give them a higher range of capabilities.

Make up a list of all of the special abilities that are in your game system. Cross out any capabilities that do not fit your new genre; don't let the characters have these abilities. These abilities might be used by bizarre NPCs or monsters, as long as they do not break the genre too badly.

Some genres may require the characters to have some special abilities. In the demi-god campaign, all characters may require an Extra-Dimensional Movement ability to and from the Rainbow Bridge. Make sure you take all required capabilities into account when balancing the characters.

Finally, the characters need to know if they have any specific target goals for character growth. Say that the object for the characters in the demi-god game is to become full-fledged gods. The GM must decide how godhood benefits the characters, how they qualify and how much of the qualifications the players know about before hand. Target goals with titles like wizard, high priest, paladin or captain are often important milestones in a character's growth.

## GAME MECHANICS

Different genres have different conventions, almost different universal laws. In a James Bond universe, flamboyant characters can swing from chandeliers and be effective. In a John LeCarre spy universe, flamboyant characters get killed—only the smart and sneaky survive.

The rules of a game are like the laws of a universe. The players learn the rules so they know how the universe will generally react. The rules should help support the conventions of the universe, not make them difficult or impossible. If you are trying to play in a James Bond universe, but your game system makes swinging characters easy to hit and poor attackers, few players will have their characters swing from chandeliers. On the other hand, if the rules in your game system give big bonuses for these bits of daring do, then players will quickly learn that boldness is rewarded.

Most generic games have optional rules to cover the main differences between the "laws of the universe" in varying genres. The object is to choose the optional rules that fit your genre best.

The optional rules in many games tend to trade off "realism" for "heroics," or "detail" for "speed." Normally, the more realistic options are more deadly, take more time or both. In the Hero System, there is a whole set of more "realistic" combat options, from Wounding and Hit Location to Critical Hits.

Normally, the "realistic" options would be used in a *Fantasy Hero* campaign. The demi-gods campaign could also use the realistic options, but it might make the demi-gods too vulnerable to mythic

enemies. An option that would reinforce the differences between the mortal and mythic planes would be to use the realistic options on the mortal planes and the heroic options in mythic areas such as the Home of the Gods or the Nether Realms.

Sometimes even small decisions can affect the feel of a campaign. In the *Hero System*, there is an optional Multiple Attacker Bonus in combat. In a realistic game, multiple attackers get a bonus to hit an outnumbered target. In a wild martial arts campaign, like in the Kung Fu movies, multiple attackers are not very effective and so would get no bonus.

One of the most important game mechanics in determining the feel of a genre are the rules on character death. If characters die easily (like low-level characters in D&D) then they will be less likely to take chances. Drastic Critical Hit rules can have the same effect. If characters are easy to knock down but tough to kill (like in *GURPS*), they will be much more likely to act boldly. The availability of healing and resurrection also has a great effect on how bold characters will be.

## CHOOSE WISELY

One of the joys of a generic RPG is the ability to experiment with various genres and backgrounds. To successfully make your own genre, don't just take the game rules at face value. Experiment! Make the characters and rules you use reinforce the style of game that you want to play.

One thing about experiments, though—sometimes they don't work all the way. Don't worry. If you find that a particular rule isn't working, get the players together and agree to change it.

Make sure the players are always up to date on what rules are being used and why. They can help check out how well the optional rules work and test the limits of character creation. Between a flexible set of rules, an imaginative GM and a set of active players, you have the best possible chance to build a great new game genre.

*George MacDonald is co-author of Champions, The Hero System, and other roleplaying products. He is presently engaged in rules editing supplements for Hero Games, including Cyber Hero and The Hero Bestiary. Currently, he works as a producer for Strategic Simulations, Inc.*

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# Back to Basics

by Frank Mentzer

Whenever a new RPG appears, I look at mechanics. As an author of roleplaying games, that has naturally been a primary focus for me, and I've found it to be likewise for most players as well—especially those with experience in multiple game systems. The mechanisms for handling various game elements—such as encumbrance and movement, initiative and combat, and magic castings and effects—comprise the skeleton supporting the system, and offer a primary means of gauging both innovation and completeness of the rules.

But all too often we become immersed in such mechanics, focusing on the skeleton as if it were the body. The arrival of the *Mythus* rules set of Gary Gygax's new *Dangerous Journeys* roleplaying game gives us new rules, to be sure, but it also provides an opportunity to reexamine the most basic elements of play. Let's reconsider the obvious and how it relates to this new game.

We're playing RPGs to have fun—that's Rule One. It's odd how often that basic fact is overlooked. I've seen gamemasters who offer a relatively fixed style (take it or leave it), and others who tailor their styles to the needs and desires of all. The former have only audiences; the latter have viable gaming groups. Most people enjoy adventures that offer a mixture of roleplaying, combat and situational problem solving. By maintaining such a balance, a GM can avoid the known pitfall of overemphasizing one such component. The ideal game session for some players may be a whole evening of noncombatant roleplaying at the local bar; others may become impatient if they can't kill something every five minutes. Both extremes should learn to compromise for maximum enjoyment all around.

But while player input should be the dominant guiding force in a GM's choice of style, this should not imply any sort of democracy. One sure way to bog down your game is to submit topics for general discussion or even (shudder) vote on decisions. Witness the effect on American government! A corporate executive solicits and considers the expertise of support personnel before making a decision, and so should a GM weigh player input. (And the *Mythus* rules are absolutely stuffed with the results of Gary Gygax's 20 years of experience in the field—the best support you'll ever find.) But the decisions are made by the executive alone—the gamemaster.

Yes, the above reiterates the obvious, but its importance should not be overlooked. Back off from your experiences with your gaming group and reconsider the preferences of all. (Don't neglect the GM!) Have your games been reflecting the group's preferences in style? Even if that's a "yes," are minor adjustments in order? Consider experimenting with alternate styles, even extremes, simply for the experience. Many groups become settled in a comfortable rut, content with a predictable and moderately acceptable routine. Any new game, and the *Dangerous Journeys* game system in particular, offers revitalization and an opportunity to look to new horizons.

Style is one thing; preparation is another. The principles of dramatic presentation have been known for over 2000 years—a series of events lead up to a final resolution. And every good RPG session is just such a presentation. In creating an adventure, a GM should have a clearly defined resolution (or goal) in mind. When players assume the roles of Heroic

Personas and enact that adventure, they should be aware of their goal. It is thus very important for a GM to communicate this clearly to the players, either through statements by Other Personas (OPs) or directly, GM-to-players. Given a clear delineation of the goal, the results can be accurately measured. The obvious exception is the "twist" that occurs when the HPs are deliberately fed a false goal, then discover their actual mission in mid-adventure. But even in such cases, a clear goal is visible throughout.

(We've been in all too many "dungeon crawls" where the only goal was treasure. Although I do not denigrate the importance of loot, that being a principal measure of material success, it's a means to an end, not an end in itself. This is a basic philosophy to which many game systems apparently do not subscribe, blatantly emphasizing the material element. *Dangerous Journeys* is not among them; it dwells on higher moral ground.)

The climax represented by goal completion should be prefaced by lesser objectives. As each objective is reached—be it a vital piece of information, arrival at or penetration of a key location, meeting an important person or whatever—there should be a sense that each is a definable step along the road to a goal. The flow (or pace) of the adventure is set thereby, and it should be carefully crafted to produce enjoyable results. More on this in a later column, but one quick tip—combat early in a game session serves to wake everyone up, thrusting all the players into an active mode they tend to maintain, and thereby avoids the game-killing lethargy of slow starts.

Ever been in a good game that came to a screeching halt while someone looked up rules? That's one way to destroy a carefully planned flow. Given the scope of the *Mythus* rulebook, it would seem an inevitable facet of this game. Obviously, a GM should diligently strive to learn all the rules as quickly as possible and teach those rules to players during games, but that will take time. *Therefore I plan to ignore some rules, and so should you.* Sure, as a GM I'll try to learn them, and they'll become second nature in time. But to maintain the flow of the game, and to maximize everyone's fun, I'll skip some rules and "wing it" as needed. The need for a decision—any decision—is a higher priority than finding the correct rule.

Speaking of rules, there's one section of the *Mythus* rulebook you should learn immediately—that concerning adventure award. The basic criteria are Success (goal completion), Difficulty and Roleplaying. No awards are specified for loot grabbing or monster hacking; those elements of the game are relegated to where they belong—events, not goals. The orientation of play subsumed within this award system refocuses the game upon its most important elements.

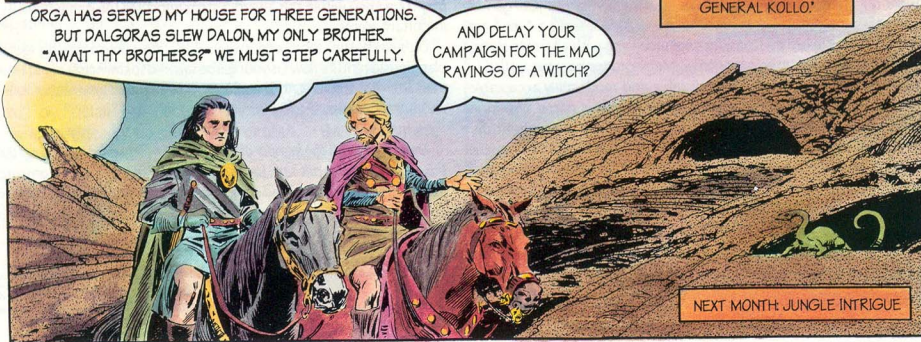
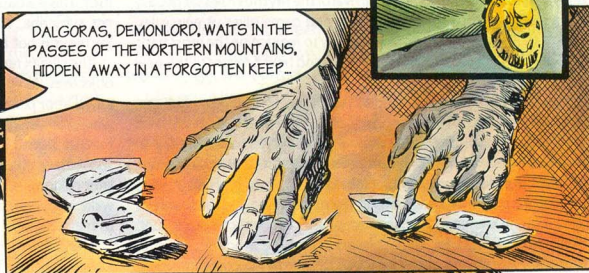
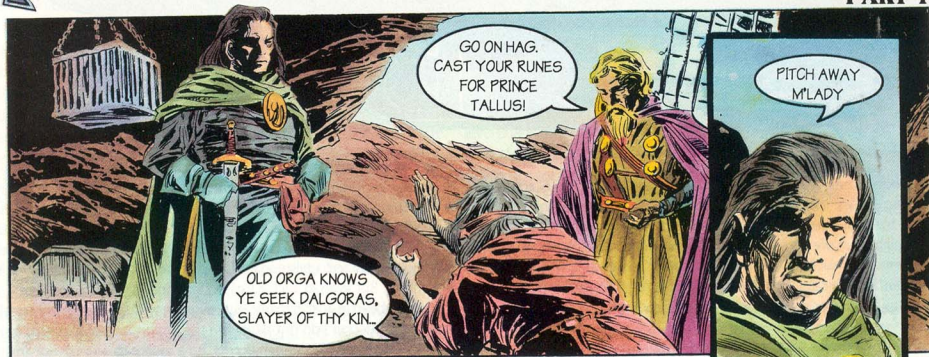
Let's keep this short and sweet. GM, are you specifying goals and planning adventure flow? Is your game tailored to the needs of all? Have you tried alternative styles? And wouldn't you like a new system that reflects all we've learned over the last 20 years?

*Frank Mentzer is the founder of TSR's RPGA™ Network and writer of their five boxed D&D® game rule sets. He is also co-author of the Cyborg Commando™ game from New Infinities, and author of dozens of D&D and AD&D adventures and tournaments. Currently, he occupies much of his time as a desktop publisher and co-owner of a Wisconsin engineering firm.*



# THE INFINITY MIRROR

PART 1





# The Advantage of Skill-Based RPGs

by Dave Newton

As anyone with a broad background in roleplaying games knows, some game systems work better than others. If realism is important to a gamemaster and players, then often the preferred games are complicated affairs, with reams of rules. And it's usually safe to assume that those who desire playability over realism will opt for the simpler systems—games that require a minimum amount of tables and strictures. But there is more to it than that. I submit to you that it isn't so much the amount of rules and tables in a game (or lack thereof), but the approach of the game itself that draws gamers to it.

The quality of a game is in the flexibility of the system—how it approaches all possible situations. Can it provide reasonable results for the unique situations players often find themselves in? Does it allow the level of detail required by realism buffs? Can it be played simply, foregoing mastery of numerous tables and modifiers? Is it flexible, expandable and easily matched to the diverse nature of the multitude of gamers out there?

Roleplaying games have been around long enough for us to know that there are some real gems—and some real turkeys—out there. I don't need to tell you that. What I would like to do is to give you my opinion of what makes a good one tick. Some of you seasoned gamers may already understand the points I'll be presenting. But many of you, like myself, might not have spent much thought on what makes one game system more appealing than another.

Gary Gygax and I had a recent discussion regarding people's excitement about the *Dangerous Journeys* system. We came to the conclusion that we had never really analyzed just what makes the system so special. I remember when I took my first look at the rough draft of the core rules. I was so impressed, all I could say for hours was, "This is great!" On a purely intuitive level, I recognized the ease of play, the possible depth and the flexibility—all common traits of a skill-based game system. Now here I am two years later, and I'm just beginning to recognize why such game systems are better. And that, gentle reader (as Gary might say), is what this article is all about.

Those of you who remember the "Pong" video game know that it was simple and addicting. But there wasn't much to it besides bouncing a bunch of pixels back and forth across the screen. Once you mastered the flip of the wrist required to put some "spin" on the video puck, you had reached your zenith. And yet, I can remember spending countless hours in front of the screen, caught up in playing the game. Eventually, though, I grew tired of the dull repetition and obvious limitations of the static environment, and I moved on.

I think this offers a good analogy of the original version of *Dungeons & Dragons*—except, as with all roleplaying games, the player had a lot more options. The obvious reason is that





as an interactive game, it was able to include the plethora of human actions and reactions that are nearly limitless in scope. But did it, really? After all, there were only so many roles which could be played and only so many variations of each before repetition once again encroached.

As time went on, even the freshest scenarios began to leave me with a feeling that I had been there before. For though the range of character classes added some variation, the characters themselves were essentially two-dimensional. The normal rules and limitations of the game restricted me from venturing in the directions I craved. Sure, my characters could (and did) go up in levels—gaining power, influence and that wonderful sense of invincibility that comes from experience in those fabulous milieus. But I didn't want to go up—what I wanted was depth and breadth. I wanted my characters to gain a sense of dimension not found in hit points or armor class. I wanted—variety.

How many of you have wanted a wizard who, like Gandalf in *Lord of the Rings*, could wield a sword? Or a cleric of Odin who could wade into the thick of battle with his trusty battle-ax (sorry, only nonedged weapons!)? And what about this business of female characters and their Strength limitations? I won't even talk about nonhumans.

Needless to say, we all broke a few of the rules in what was otherwise the best system around—at that time. But why did we have to? Because the game had its limits. Most of those limits were imposed because the system was level-based, and there had to be a balance between characters and their opponents—and their peers. But all we saw were unreasonable restrictions. And the more restrictions any game has, the less spontaneous it can be.

## LIMITATIONS OF LEVEL-BASED SYSTEMS

It is evident that level-based games are inherently more limited than those based on knowledge, skills and abilities.

A level-based game system provides only a narrow definition of abilities, regardless of the level a player character obtains. There is little variation between characters of the same type in a level-based game. The main difference is that those of higher level have more of the same skills and abilities—along with an increased chance to succeed at what they have learned, time and again, in the past. Think about it: What does a Thirteenth Level Fighter have that one of the Third Level does not (besides an ungodly amount of hit points)? More of the same. It hardly makes sense that after a lifetime of facing dire peril, all a character has to show for it is a better chance of hitting someone with a sword, a few more coins in the pouch and, of course, the ever-increasing collection of magical goodies.

Level-based game systems offer little, if any, crossover skills from one class to another. The only exception to this is when characters reach a certain level, whereupon they can then begin another field of endeavor—starting at the bottom, of course. In real life, we gain new knowledge and skills all the time, usually right along with those things we consider to be of utmost importance. Quite often we don't even realize it until we make a choice to broaden our horizons, or perhaps even change our vocation.

And what about the normal, mundane things like how well characters ride a horse? Or how well they are able to interact with the multitude of mundane people who populate a

campaign milieu? These are examples of the unclear capabilities outside the chosen field of specialization—skills that every character needs to possess to make a game session feel “real.”

Add to these the unrealistic playing scope that players must work within. Why must a Thief always steal for experience? Because usually, that's all he is *really* good at! To further illustrate this point, just take a Druid into your standard-issue dungeon. Once there, you have the makings of a laughably outclassed character (probably not very funny to the player, however). Never mind the fact that above ground he is truly a force to be reckoned with!

## SKILL-BASED SYSTEMS AND THEIR ADVANTAGES

Now, let's take a look at skill-based systems, using the *Mythus* game as a specific example. (Note that while the points to be made here use the *Mythus* game system as the model, those of you who are familiar with other skill-based games will certainly find many parallels.)

In developing a Heroic Persona (or HP, for short) in the *Mythus* game, players each calculate a skill rating for each area of knowledge or skill possessed by their HP. These skill ratings are called STEEP scores, short for Study/Training/Education/Experience/Practice. First and foremost are those common skills possessed by every persona, things as Perception and Riding. Next, personas gain roughly 20 Knowledge/Skill Areas (also called K/S Areas) relating to their chosen Vocation. Because the focus is on knowledge and skills possessed, players start with a clearer picture of the persona they will be playing.

Yes, it does take more work up-front, but that's part of the advantage. By putting more effort into generating a persona, players have a better feel for the persona's background and abilities. This translates into a persona we *know* how to play from the start, instead of one who stumbles through the first session or so, as the player tries to identify with the character and his or her unformed personality.

In addition to the knowledge and skills related to Vocation, HPs also receive extra K/S Areas, chosen by the player. These “Bonus” K/S Areas give each persona a flexible background, and even personas of the same profession start with distinct differences. For example, two players who wish to start HPs of the Mercenary/Soldier Vocation may choose completely different backgrounds and enforce these by selecting diverse Bonus K/S Areas. While one player might choose to add additional martial skills, the other could select skills related to thieving and stealth, or even spellcasting K/S Areas.

And so, Vocation represents only a fraction of what the persona knows or can do. In a skill-based game system, it is easier to realistically develop a persona who has a diverse set of skills, some of which have no connection whatsoever to the persona's chosen profession. A skill-based system enables warriors to use magical Castings, and mages to wield swords and wear armor. In fact, as in “real life,” the skill-based roleplaying system allows for anything to be possible in the fantasy milieu.

This “anything is possible” approach enables a broad range of actions and reduces the limitations found in level-based systems. There is no reliance upon the only mage, thief or whoever to solve a difficult and class-specific dilemma for the party.

In the *Mythus* game system, many K/S Areas are further broken



down into Sub-Areas. By concentrating points in particular Sub-Areas, a persona may specialize—gaining an even greater degree of depth. This is done by increasing the persona's skill in one or more Sub-Areas while decreasing the skill in those which remain. For example, an HP possessing the Combat, Hand Weapons K/S Area typically gains proficiency in a number of weapon Sub-Areas, depending on the HP's STEEP. These would include groups of like weapons, such as swords, spears, clubs, *et al.* So, if the persona were to be a masterswordsmen, skill rating in the swords Sub-Area would rise to one-and-a-half times that HP's STEEP score, while effective skill in the others would be at one-half STEEP. This, of course, pertains not only to weapons skill, but any K/S Areas with Sub-Areas.

The *Mythus* game has an intuitive, clearly defined structure for determining the source and amount of knowledge or skill provided by any K/S Area. If more than one ATTRIBUTE influences the skill, the GM merely averages the two. It is likewise a simple task for GMs to invent new K/S Areas where desired. The gamemaster must only decide which ATTRIBUTE would be of most import to the new K/S and use this as the Base STEEP.

But what about developing brand new Vocations? No problem! Because Vocational K/S bundles consist of approximately 250 points of STEEP spread over various Knowledge/Skill Areas, it is relatively easy to create new (and playable) Vocations. More importantly, such development is possible without disrupting the balance of the system or excluding the HPs from gainful employment when adventures are slim. And since the personas have something to do in their "off-hours," it opens up whole new vistas of potential playing scenarios.

Probably the biggest advantage of the skill-based system is the ease with which it lends itself to multigenre roleplaying. This is usually the point in many level-based game systems where the thorny issues surface. For example, how does a GM handle transferring those character types that don't "fit" in the particular genre? It's one thing to take warriors and thieves, quite another when dealing with those whose primary bent is magical.

In a skill-based system, this poses much less of a problem. Where some of the HP Vocations in the *Dangerous Journeys* system may not transfer across genres, many of the skills do. While it may be impossible to take a persona of the Dweomercraft Vocation into another campaign as a Dweomercrafter, the HP would still have skills and knowledge enough to allow for creative adventuring. Such a persona would possess a high Mental score and could acquire a new set of K/S Areas. Therefore, this worthy probability traveller could soon master the technology—and eventually become something more than just a "mage in space."

By now it should be apparent just how much more can be done in a skill-based system such as the *Mythus* game. If you're here, you are excited about what the game has to offer. The horizon for fantasy gaming has never been this broad. And just beyond that horizon lies the vast expanse of future genres in the *Dangerous Journeys* system. Pardon me while I grab my sword and blaster....

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*Dave Newton is contributing author of the Mythus fantasy RPG for Gary Gygax's Dangerous Journeys multigenre roleplaying system.*



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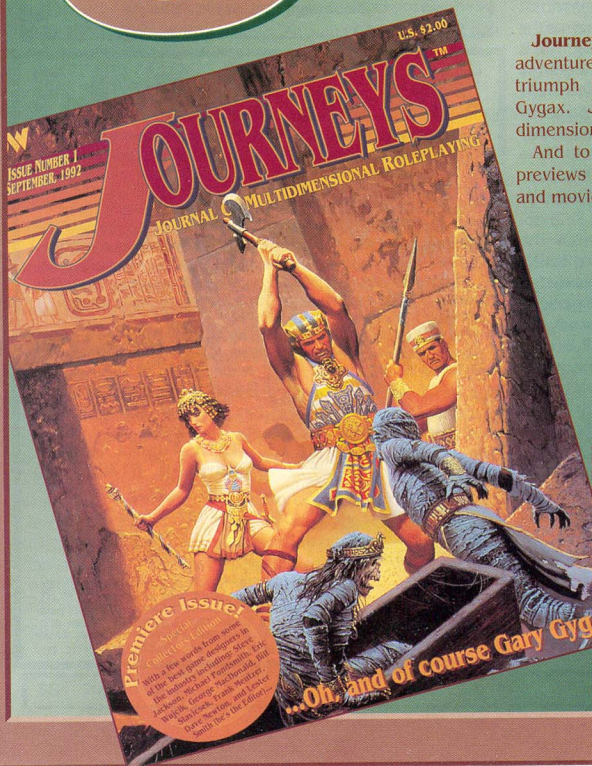
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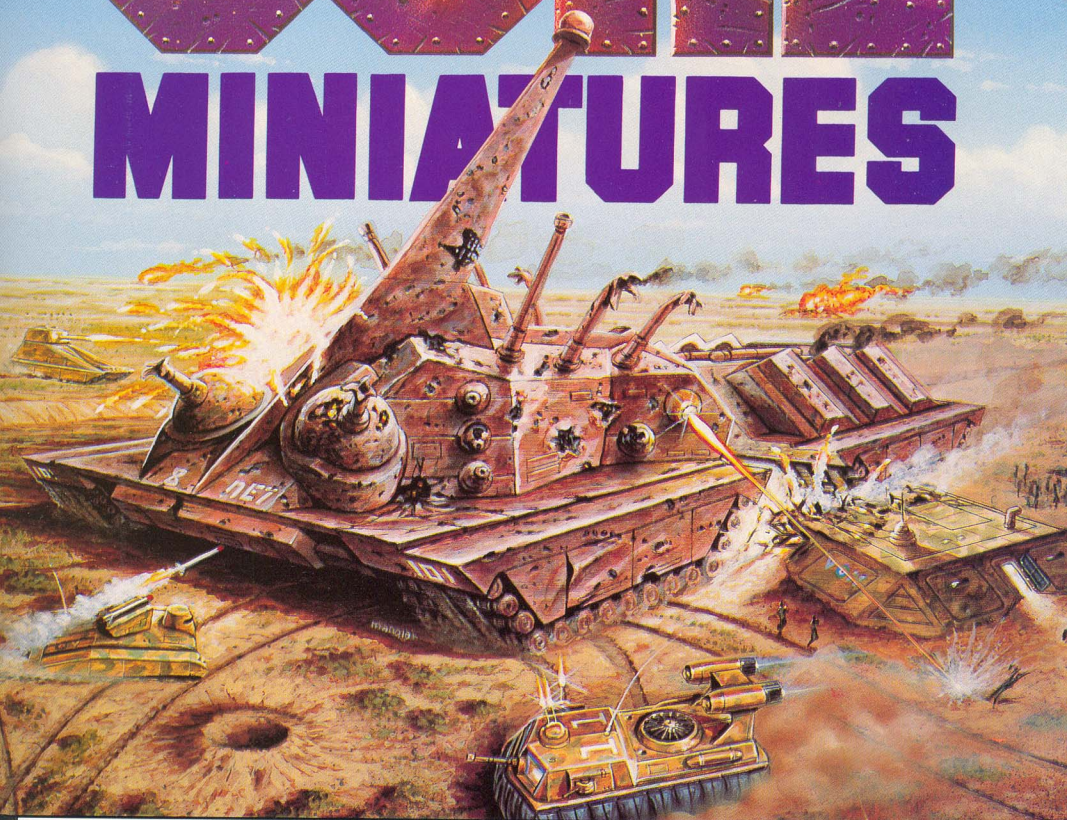
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