

ZWEIHANDER



O-WEEK 2004



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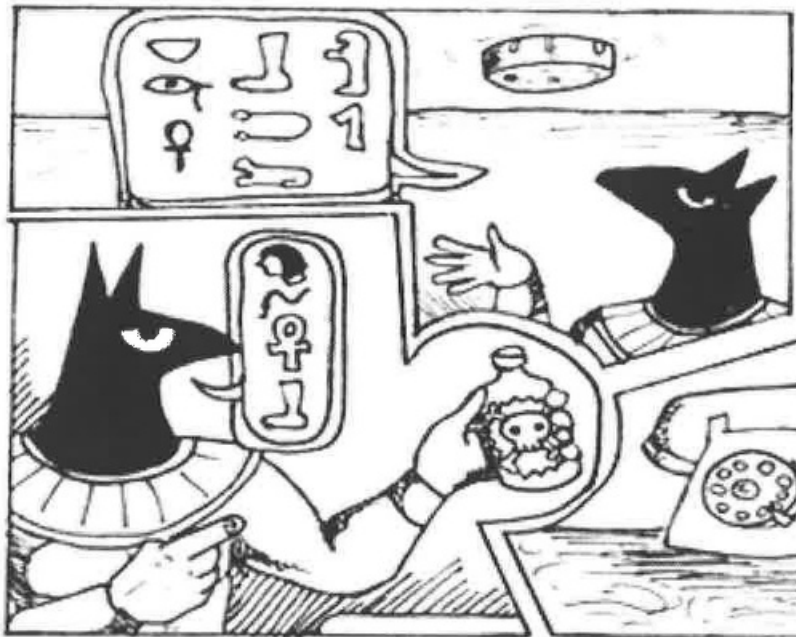
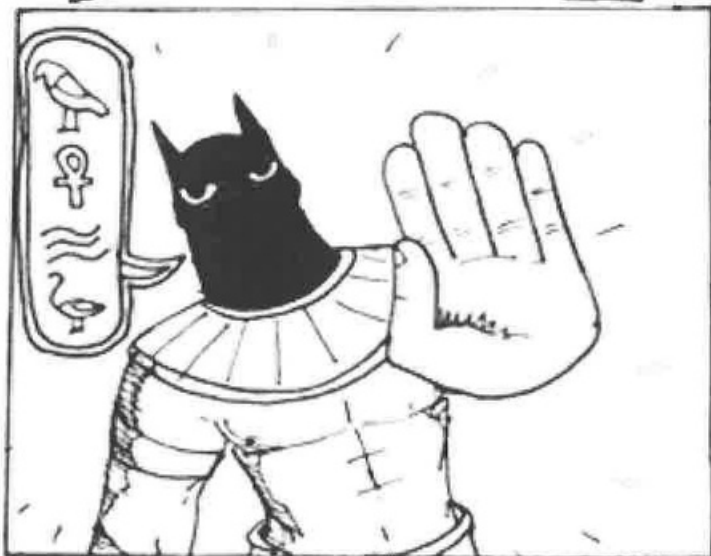
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SAFETY TIPS FROM ANURTS



CUTTING EDGE

Hello and welcome to the first issue of Sutekh's clubzine *Zweihander* for 2004.

Trivia: The zine is named for the two-handed sword from the original release of *Dungeons and Dragons* back in the 70s that was a perennial favourite of many players. The club itself has also been around since that time.

But enough history for now.

The purpose of *Zweihander* is pretty much to be a hard-copy clearing house of articles, reviews, trivia -- and all importantly -- a venue for advertising the many wonderful shops that provide club members with a discount on merchandise. But more than that, it provides a common denominator for getting a whole host of things out to club members who don't spend a lot of time hanging out on the internet

There's always at least two issues of *Zwei* a year, one at the beginning of each semester to give people something solid to hold onto with all the important

dates for club activities. Whether there are any more than that is entirely dependent on what members want to contribute. We're not snobs: we'll publish pretty much any old thing -- many past issues have been little more than a collection of reviews. Essays and game modules are particularly welcome should you feel so inclined.

To do that, there's a couple of ways you can try. The first is logging on to the Sutekh forum at <http://forum.sutekh.info/> and posting something on the *Zweihander* board. The second is contact me directly via email: evil_lord_zog@spin.net.au to discuss ideas for articles. Alternatively, if it's hard copy only, you can give it to me via hand when I can be bothered to turn up to meetings.

Evilly yours,

Lord Zog.

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Zweihander 2004 Issue #1 - The O-Week Issue. A non-profit publication on behalf of Sutekh. Proudly supported by the Sydney University Student Union. All copyright reverts to author upon publication. Thanks to everyone who proofread the issue or contributed to it.

ARCANA UNEARTHED

Hi and welcome to Sutekh.

My name is Andrew Bennett and I am the President of Sutekh this year. The purpose of Sutekh is to facilitate roleplaying, computer gaming, and the appreciation of pop culture. We are running pizza and games nights every Friday (probably in the Common room in the Holme building check the Daily Bull for details) from 6-7 till about 11 during semester and we regularly meet in the glass room (actually called the Logia Room and located on the middle level behind the what the hell is the food place called?) in Manning.

This semester we are running a bi weekly freeform entitled Behind Courtliness (check page 13 for more details) and on the alternative Fridays we will be running a variety of board games as well as a one off roleplaying game each week. If you are interested in being involved in a Roleplaying campaign we will probably have a few of those running as well however at the moment we are desperately short of GM's who are willing to run.

The best place to find a game and to get involved with Sutekh as a whole is to check out our web board (<http://forum.sutekh.info/index.php>). Also if you are interested in running a game no matter what the system we can offer assistance in finding you players and a venue.

Sutekh also offers discounts to a lot of the local stores in the Sydney area:

- **Sydney Gaming Centre**

(<http://www.sydneygamescentre.com>)

One of the newest stores it is run by the TO of Magic: the Gathering (the most popular collectable card game). Located in Burwood you can almost always find some Magic players in action and various other card, miniature and roleplaying games get run through the week (check out the website for details). They offer us a five percent discount on all stock bar food and although they have a relatively small roleplaying section they are perfectly willing to order stuff in for you.

- **Games Paradise**

(<http://www.gamesparadise.com.au/>)

Games Paradise have stores in the city and in Warringah Mall. They offer a large selection of board games, card games and puzzles as well as the usual assortment of CCG's, roleplaying books and collectable miniatures. Their city store has probably the largest selection of out of print stuff in the city and they also have tables upstairs for gaming. They offer a 5% discount on all roleplaying and board games.

SEMESTER 1 TIMETABLE OF FRIDAY NIGHT EVENTS

- 12 March - Intro night: Beer and pretzel games and stuff
19 March - Freeform night: Behind Courtliness: The Subtlety of Court, session 1
26 March - One-Shot Games Night: 'Mecha Pirates' GURPS game - *Shaun Tabone*
2 April - Freeform night: Behind Courtliness: The Subtlety of Court, session 2
9 April - Easter break no games night
16 April - Easter break no games night
23 April - Freeform night: Behind Courtliness: The Subtlety of Court, session 3
30 April - One-Shot Games Night: *Mark Kramerzieski's* Con game
7 May - Freeform night: Behind Courtliness: The Subtlety of Court, session 4
14 May - One-Shot Games Night: Horror game? - *Alan Takayama*
21 May - Freeform night: Behind Courtliness: The Subtlety of Court, session 5
28 May - One-Shot Games Night: Colonial marines and space hulk game - *Nick Gilbert*
4 June - Freeform night: Behind Courtliness: The Subtlety of Court, session 6
11 June - One-Shot Games Night: 'Hunter: The Reckoning' game - *Chris Adams* and 'The Shom', GURPS Darksun - *Shaun Tabone*

Any new GMs wanting to have a go at running a game are fully invited to do so.

ARCANA UNEARTHED

- **Tin Soldier** (<http://www.tinsoldier.com/>)
Tin Soldier focuses on miniatures and if you are looking for that hard to find figure this is the place to go. They also have a large collection of roleplaying books and CCG's. They also have quite a few table set up for miniature gaming. They give all Sutekh members 5% off on all non-discounted items.
- **Galaxy** (<http://www.galaxybooks.com.au/>)
The oldest Science Fiction Fantasy and Horror

specialist bookstore in Australia they offer a huge selection of books from those genres. They also have a very cool Dracoliche above the stair case going into the store. They offer 10% off all books to Sutekh members.

- **Kings Comics**
(<http://www.kingscomics.com/>)
The premier comic store in Sydney they offer a huge range of comics and comic related merchandise.

THE LIBRARY

Somewhere in the dark and nasty regions, where nobody goes, stands the Holme Building. Deep within this dank and uninviting place is a corridor, little frequented by the people upstairs. But that's nothing compared to the horrors that lurk within the Library. For there's always something down there, in the dark... waiting to be loaned out.

Unlike most other clubs on campus, Sutekh maintains its own private library. Located in a cramped room underneath the Holme Building and accessible via the street-level entrance to the Footbridge Theatre, it's stacked floor-to-ceiling with shelves full of books, magazines and games of many types. Some of this stuff is decades old and unavailable to the average individual, thus being of potentially great historical interest should your thesis or just plain old curiosity lead you in that

direction.

In order to access the Library, you need to grab a hold of our Librarian. Dan is the man with the key to this fell domain of dread knowledge, and is usually to be found

lurking around the glass room with most other Sutekhers. Failing that, get in touch with him via the webforum and state with much demandment the desire to visit.

Finally we come to the little fellow in the middle of the article: Chexi the Librarian. Back in the early 90s, the club's then Librarian was a woman with a fondness for pet rats; Chexi was the resident animal

companion when one of the more artistic-ally gifted members of the time decided the little chap would make a fine inspiration for a mascot. Thus was the legend born. When you visit our fine repository of printed stuff, you'll see a picture of him on the door and now you'll know the story behind him.



^o^

Game On

There are many different types of games, settings and systems that Sutekhers play that might be unfamiliar to the members of our society, new and old alike. What this article will attempt to do is give a brief idea of what they all are.

Types of Games

Everyone is doubtless familiar with board and card games of the ordinary mode - Monopoly, Five Hundred, Game of Life, that sort of thing. There are games of those types that Sutekhers play -- *Settlers of Catan* and *Munchkin* being the most noted -- but for the purposes of this article we'll ignore what are essentially a novelty niche of a more mainstream tradition and instead look at the more esoteric types of game that the club fosters an interest in and love of.

CCG: Collectable Card Game. Typified by *Magic: the Gathering* or *Legend of the Five Rings*, the object is to play acquire vast numbers of card to be played in successful combinations; each card is allocated specific (and sometimes quite powerful) mechanical properties within the game, and is of variable availability hence making them "collectable".

CRPG: Computer Role Playing Game. An extension of the RPG (see below) that typically involves a single player micromanaging a team of several characters as they conduct their heroic quest.

Freeform: Live-action roleplaying. Which means you get to physically act (and dress) as your character. With a wildly variable player base (as little as 6 to as many as 60), it is an attempt to move away from the tradition pen-and-paper style of roleplaying into the realm of amateur dramatics, and can be held anywhere there's enough open space. There can be combat (handled in different ways depending on the game), but mostly you talk and plot and scheme and mingle and look fabulous.

PbM / Pbp: Play by Mail / Play by Post. Originating in the ancient past before the dawn of the internet, it was correspondence tactical gaming that allowed people who didn't live near each other to game on. Movements for a given period of time were written down by the players and sent off to the person running the game whom then decided what effect this had on all the other players and mailed the results back out and the cycle continued. In the days of the web forum and email, it's possible to effectively run a conventional tabletop game, if somewhat more strung out.

RPG: Role Playing Game. The meat and drink of the industry as it were, most famously typified by *Dungeons & Dragons*. At its most basic an RPG involves a group of people sitting around a table in a game of make-believe pretending to be other more fantastic people like superspies or ninjas or

supernatural investigators or creatures of the night with the help of a book of rules and mechanics. Though vast ranges of accessories for a particular system can cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars, unlike CCGs or Wargaming you can usually get by with only a single copy of the core rulebook.

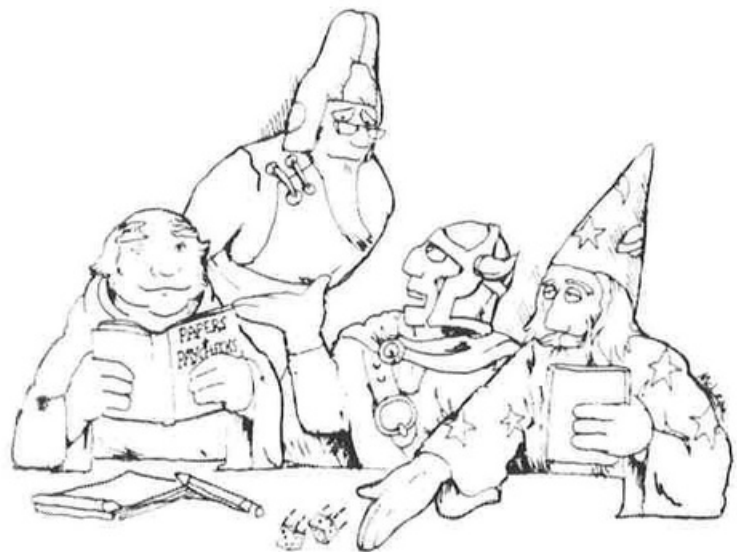
Wargaming: Simulated tactical combat using miniature figures. *Warhammer* is probably one of the better known examples of this type of game. These days, there is a certain crossover with RPGs - hardly surprising given they originated as a subset of this type of game back in the 70s - using miniatures to help resolve tabletop combat sequences, while huge armies can now be led by distinct (and distinctively empowered) individuals.

Game Mechanics

There are almost as many different ways of running a game -- the mechanics -- as there are games themselves. Most often they make reference to the type of dice being used. Pretty much all of them use a concept called Experience Points to chart the progression and accomplishments of characters, though the implementation of this varies between systems. As with the PC vs. Macintosh or the Windows vs. Linux wars, you'll find each mechanic has its champions and detractors.

These are some of the most popular in use at the moment.

d20: Since its release a few years ago, this system has pretty much become the Microsoft Windows of the role playing industry. Originating as the mechanic of the third edition of *Dungeons and Dragons*, it's canny creators have released it for use by any other game design company practically free of charge to ensure the greatest possible compatibility and availability of game accessories and settings; several companies that have taken up the offer have produced their own tweaked



"It's a great new fantasy role-playing game. We pretend we're workers and students in an industrialized and technological society."

versions of the mechanic. It utilizes a single 20-sided die for pretty much every important random event, while character advancement is determined by level.

Examples: Dungeons and Dragons, D20 Modern, Star Wars d20, Spycraft, Farscape, Stargate SG-1

GURPS: Generic Universal Role Playing System. All random events are determined by rolling a number of six-sided dice, while characters and their abilities are determined by how many points are allotted to their creation. Potentially complicated, pretty much every RPG in existence has at some point been converted to run on the GURPS mechanic.

Examples: Transhuman Space, Steampunk, Discworld, etc etc.

Storyteller: AKA "A Fistful of d10s". Like GURPS, characters are created using a (far smaller and differently applied) point system. All random events are resolved using as many d10s as the character has dots in the specific abilities affecting the task in hand. Unlike the hack and slash approach of DnD, the Storyteller was designed to facilitate a more narrativist approach to character design

Examples: World of Darkness, Aeon Continuum, Exalted.

Settings

The real reason people play these games is the worlds they can take you to. Some of these are properties licensed from film, television and literature, others are merely derivative. This listing is far from exhaustive.

Aeon Continuum: Initially released as a Storyteller game and coming back as d20, the Aeon setting picks up in the heroic pulp era of the 1920s with *Adventure!* where the players exploring the Hollow Earth, fighting Nazis and doing the impossible with panache. Flash forward to the beginning of the 21st century with *Aberrant* as super powered beings make their presence known to humanity; the pinnacle of human possibility, they slowly become tragically warped monsters. Finally at the dawn of the 22nd century, *Trinity* shows us a world where the political landscape of today has been totally reversed and a new generation of psionically gifted humans must defend the world against the horrors from beyond the stars and the insidious evils that have grown amidst the foundations of Earth's fledgling stellar colonization.

Big Eyes, Small Mouth: A generic system designed to mimic what ever anime or manga setting you feel like indulging in, from super-powered kung-fu to mecha combat against invading aliens.

d20 Modern: Sometimes characterised as DnD with Guns, this variation on the core D20 mechanic allows you play in cinematic stories of urban adventure, be they mundane (inspired say by *NYPD Blue...*) or fantastical (...or by *Buffy*). Employs a mechanic for pulling off spectacular stuff, but not as effectively implemented as that used by *Adventure!* or *Spycraft*.

Dungeons & Dragons: Literally the mother of all

RPGs, players take on the roles of warriors and wizards and rogues fighting heroic quests, traversing the deepest and most perilous dungeons, and rescuing fair royalty in distress for outrageous sums of money and magic booty.

Exalted: A fantastic anime-inspired world from before recorded history full of magic and terror, where the players take on the roles of reincarnated gods hunted and feared by their enemies.

Legend of the Five Rings: Epic samurai adventures. See the *Rokugan for Rookies* article on page 13 for more information. Starting as a CCG then becoming an RPG, the results of the various CCG tournaments directly affect the setting's metaplot (who becomes Emperor, the fate of certain personalities, the fall of provinces, and so on).

Shadowforce Archer: The official campaign setting for Spycraft (below), it adds super humans, ancient magic and the world beyond the grave to the espionage milieu. The Archer Conspiracy is a shadowy organization secretly protecting humanity from its own worse excesses. While playing its own factions against each other as much as they cooperate to prevent corruption setting in -- a tactic not always successfully executed. Like its stablemate *L5R*, it has an ongoing metaplot that is directly affected by input from the players themselves

Shadowrun: An unusual but reasonably popular at the time setting, it combines traditional high fantasy with the then novel cyberpunk aesthetic. Magic returns to the earth, resulting in people spontaneously mutating in elves, dwarves, orcs and so on who then breed true. Magic users, shamans and the usual array of mythic beasts wage war against cyborg street samurai, mercenaries and corporate wage slaves. The political borders of the world are redrawn, leading to Native Americans resuming sovereignty over large chunks of the USA and the new races establishing their own nations while the Corporations try to carve up the world amongst themselves.

Spycraft: 'Traditional' espionage ala *James Bond*, *Ronin*, Len Deighton and *The A-Team*. Heroic superspies take on and take down evil Masterminds. It has a mechanic that allows players to pull off outrageously cinematic stunts on regular basis.

Stargate SG-1: Utilizing the same version of D20 used by Spycraft and fully compatible with it, SG1 allows players to explore strange new worlds just like the TV show.

Star Wars: Yup, the RPG of movie, allowing players to adventure in a time long ago in a galaxy far far away. It covers not only the events of the movies, but everything that has happened in the spin off comics and novels (referred to as Expanded Universe material) from the founding of the Old Republic to the devastating galaxy-wide invasion by the Yuzan Vong.

Warhammer: Started off as a wargame and branched out into a RPG, *Warhammer Fantasy* (elves and magic) and *Warhammer 40,000* (aliens and tech) tell the story of a vast and terrible time of war against the evil forces of Chaos as it attempts to purge or corrupt Humanity from the face of the world. Equal parts baroque horror and combat.

World of Darkness: Gothic punk horror setting

where players take the role of secretive vampires, eco-terrorist werewolves, arrogant mages, tormented wraiths, capricious changelings or just about any sort of fantastic creature humanity's ever told stories and had nightmares about. Currently the storyline -- and the current version of the setting -- is being wrapped up in preparation for its relaunch as something similar but different in the 2nd half of the year.

Vulgar Argot

Naturally, all these games have led to a variety of terms those familiar with them can sometimes tend to toss about with reckless abandon confident people know what they're talking about. You've been introduced to some of the main one at the beginning of the article, so here are some more.

Campaign: A gaming period that stretches over multiple sessions. It may be a singular adventure, or a number of them conducted by the same group of characters.

DnD: Unsurprisingly, an abbreviation for *Dungeons and Dragons*.

Dungeon-bash: A scenario where the sole objective is essentially to kill lots of thing and steal their treasure. Does not have to occur in a dungeon to qualify. The emphasis is on how well you roll rather than how ell your role play.

GM: Short for Games Master, a generic term for the person who runs a roleplaying game. Some systems have their own title for the role -- ie. Dungeon Master for *DnD*, Game Control for *Spycraft*.

L5R: Legend of the Five Rings, abbreviation there of.

Metaplot: A setting's overarching umbrella



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theme against which individual campaigns and adventures take place. Things like the slow revelation of the nature of the Vorlons & Shadows from *Babylon 5*, Clark's origins & Lex's fall into darkness in *Smallville*, or the machinations of Voldermort in *Harry Potter* are all examples of this.

Munchkin: A term of derision derived from hacker-speak, referencing a power-player who attempts to bend (or hack) the rules and mechanics of a given game to their best possible advantage without regard for the effect this has on their fellow players or the game itself.

Oneshot: An adventure designed to be played in one sitting.

Tabletop: Reference to where most RPGs tend to get played.

WoD: World of Darkness.

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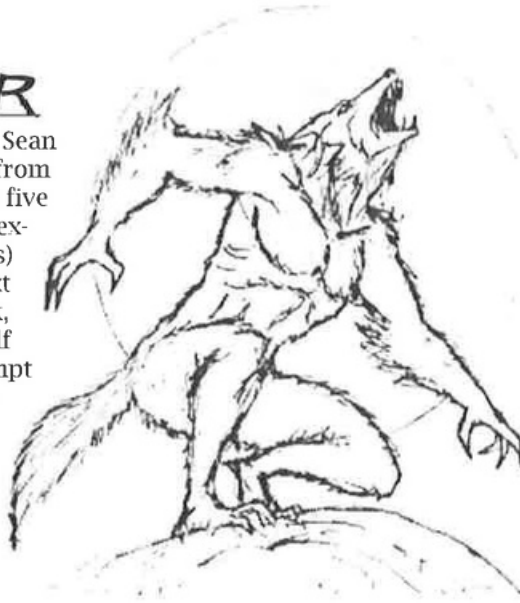
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THE NIGHTMASTER

What follows are two posts made by Sean Riley on the Time of Judgment forum from the White Wolf website. They detail the five forms that the Nightmaster (an ex-Shadow Lord that now rules the Abyss) takes during the apocalypse. This text wasn't included in the *Apocalypse* book, and since the threads on the White Wolf forum aren't archived, this is an attempt to put it somewhere more usefully permanent.

WARNING: This might spoil the Last Battleground adventure for you if you are a player.



The Nightmaster is designed as a recurring character, someone to personally dog the PCs. Ideally, you want the Nightmaster to potentially trick, ally with, betray, and otherwise really piss off the player characters. In most games, he will likely turn up at the Last Battleground and represent the true grudge-match for the players. In other words, he's there to provide a face for the Apocalypse. The Wyrm is easy to fear, but difficult to truly hate. Nightmaster has a really punchable face, by comparison.

His five forms are a warped version of each of his Garou forms, and are presented in an escalating fashion. While the Black Wolf will lure your players in, the rest are designed to horrify, and then attempt to kill, the characters.

While you're free to follow any path with these forms, most STs will most probably find the following pattern useful: Use the Black Wolf to lure your players into halfway trusting the Nightmaster. Since it's a bastard Wyrm thing, this won't last. Use the Nothing Man to make sure that falling out will make the pack truly hate his guts. Later on, give them another encounter so they don't think he's gone: Use the Blasphemer for packs who are focused and determined, or the Typhon Beast for packs who are dragging their paws. Finally, bring out the Heart of the Abyss for the Last Battle, giving the players a personal grudge to be settled at the end.

CONSTANTS

The following are the stats that remain true regardless of which form he is in.

ABILITIES: Alertness 5, Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Dodge 5, Intimidation 7, Primal-Urge 3, Crafts 2, Leadership 4, Melee 5, Performance 3, Stealth 5 (in all but the Heart of the Abyss form, which has Stealth 0), Survival 4, Enigmas 5, Medicine 3, Occult 5, Politics 3, Rituals 5.

GIFTS: Any the ST wants to give it. It's had a long damned time to get them. Also...

- Stealing the Soul (Level 5) The Nightmaster can focus upon one opponent and, by making an opposed Gnosis roll (difficulty of his opponent's Gnosis) against his victim (Who rolls against diff. 10). Every success drains two points of temporary Gnosis from his

opponent. This is the only way the Nightmaster can regain Gnosis.

RITEs: Any and all.

FETISHES: Whatever you want to give him. Be creative. Think 'pain'. 'Humiliation' is also good.

POOLS: Rage 7, Gnosis 10, Willpower 10.

THE BLACK WOLF

Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 8, Charisma 5, Manipulation 7, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Empathy 4, Subterfuge 5

Image: The Black Wolf, the Nightmaster's Abyss-tainted lupus form, is the closest to a natural body it possesses. Despite missing its front-left leg, it is otherwise a normal looking wolf with black fur. The fur isn't glossy and clean, but ashen and dirty. It seems to contain a multitude of shadows hidden within the fur. As with all his forms, his eyes are empty pools of darkness.

Powers: What distinguishes the Black Wolf from a normal lupus form is that it can speak, in any tongue at all. It can speak to the spirits in their own language, any human tongue, or to any animal. What's more, this lingual capacity extends to non-verbal methods as well... the wolf's body language will be instinctively picked up by a human being as well as they'd read another human's.

Roleplaying Tips: The Black Wolf is here as the first contact form. There's always been a sense in Werewolf to assume homids as the tricky, more political breed and the lupus as the more forthright, direct ones. The Black Wolf inverts this -- The Lupus form here is made for trickery and gaining the trust of the players.

This is the form for Storytellers to use as a way to screw over your players later. Don't play 'nice guy' with it, that will spoil the homid/lupus inversion. Just play it like a standard lupus NPC. The Nightmaster will admit, yes, he's not always been the most faithful of Garou to the cause. But he's got as much to lose as anyone from the events happening in the Umbra, his sun-forsaken realm will be destroyed like anything else. And hint, very

carefully at a deep abiding desire for redemption. Suck those players in and turn 'em around, so you can stab them in the back later.

THE NOTHING MAN

Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance N/A, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Subterfuge 2

Image: The Nothing Man can barely be seen. He is a shadowy insubstantial entity, vaguely man shaped but barely more than a wisp of smoke upon the breeze. Within the Abyss, he is utterly invisible. In a well-lit room, he might be glimpsed barely as a black breeze. Should he be seen under the light of the sun, or something as bright as an industrial halogen lamp, he would stand revealed as a human-shaped black shadow. (Indeed, the Nothing Man is a perversion of the Homid form.)

Powers: The Nothing Man cannot be harmed in this form. However, the Nothing Man also cannot harm anyone, nor even physically interact with the world. However, he has a simple way around this -- by physically possessing any living humanoid creature he encounters, simply by stepping into it. He makes no roll for this, though any shapeshifter who is aware of the attempt can resist, pushing the Nothing Man away by rolling Strength + Enigmas. (Difficulty 8, and may I take the opportunity to say HA! Bet you never thought you'd see that Attribute/Ability combination!) A possessed victim is entirely aware of everything they're doing while possessed, they simply can't stop it.

Once a victim is possessed, the Nothing Man can make a number of things happen automatically:

- Anything the victim could normally voluntarily do. Yes, this includes doing harm to themselves, up to and including suicide. Storytellers, be sane with this power. Don't preclude the possibilities, but give players a chance to leap on their friends and pin them down.
- The Nightmaster can force their victims' internal organs to function or malfunction. Causing victims to vomit blood, for example, is possible.
- Most importantly, the Nightmaster can speak through his victim's lips, in their voice. He can attempt to pretend to be the

victim, but this isn't what the form is designed for. He cannot access his victim's memories, either.

The good news is that the Nothing Man has very few Health Levels (-0, -2, -5, injured enough to no longer be a factor in scene, and if Storyteller prefers, dead) and any attacks that injure a possessed victim will likewise injure the Nothing Man. As such, injuries to his host will quickly force him to abandon it.

Roleplaying Tips: The Nothing Man has two purposes. Firstly, he's a show-stopper, designed to demonstrate how little power the characters can have over him. If they do make a deal with the Nightmaster and turn on him, then don't hesitate to have him suddenly vanish, and then someone starts puking blood before issuing harsh threats, ending with the victim collapsing and the Nightmaster vanished... until later.

Secondly, the Nothing Man is a classic defiler (and Defiler) archetype, taking hold of the victim's mind and body and commanding them as his own. Play up the sense of violation this should engender, since that's exactly what it is. A victim of the Nothing Man should be, come a final showdown with the Nightmaster, be itching to get revenge.

THE BLASPHEMER

Strength 7, Dexterity 3, Stamina 7, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5.

Image: The Blasphemer is a massive hulk of a man, a clear perversion of the Glabro form into a grotesque parody of the human body. His physical weight is entirely misplaced, with about 80% of his body weight seemingly located in his upper torso. His head is likewise twice as large as it should be, and is wildly disfigured with a massive jaw. Above the ears, it tapers away into a tiny little dome, with his two dark eyes jutting out. Most noticeable, however, is the scar-tissue that he has in place of a mouth, as if someone had sliced away his lips and sewn the orifice together to let it seal over. As with all other forms, he lacks his left arm, which makes him seem even more malformed and monstrous.

Powers: The



Blasphemer has no mouth and sings constantly. In a horrible "voice" that is quite genuinely audible yet emerges not from the Blasphemer but around him, the Blasphemer sings forth a hideous psalm to the Wyrn that can be understood by anyone wise enough to not want to. Every turn of combat (and on a regular basis should they for some reason not be fighting this beast) anyone not allied with the Wyrn and possessing Gnosis rolls Intelligence + Enigmas, difficulty 7. Each success knocks off one point of temporary Gnosis from the character.

You can raise this to difficulty 10 by covering your ears with your hands, but this will raise combat difficulties, to say the least. Industrial baffles will, however, eliminate the danger entirely.

Roleplaying Tips: This guy's half-splatterpunk, half-Cthulhu horror, all force for desperation. He's a Guardian at the Gate type, designed to throw off your players should they be a little too hot on the scent. In other words, if they're roaring through scenes, hunting down the Apocalypse and sniffing that Last Battlefield, throw the Blasphemer at them to shake their confidence. Nothing says, "Well, crap," like seeing your Gnosis fall to zero in no time flat. For added fun, make them roll Willpower to avoid falling into Harano.

That said, don't screw the players solid right here and now. An excellent choice for when to spring this on your players is right before they have a chance for a major victory: Rescuing Gaia from Summer Country would be ideal, and Pangaea's or Erebus' major scenarios would also qualify. Use the ties of scenarios here to restore some Gnosis on an ST fiat basis, assuming your players bounce back and step up to the challenge. This is a final test of their mettle, not the Last Battle.

But make it more than a road-bump. Shake the bastards up. This is a horror game, after all.

THE TYPHON BEAST

Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8, Charisma 3, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Image: The Abyss has warped the Nightmaster's Hispo form into a hideous, perverse Cerberus. Three wolves' heads run down the length of his spine, their long necks writhing back and forth, biting all that their teeth can make purchase on. No fur covers the body of the Typhon Beast, and its black shiny skin is pulled taut over its skeleton. The vertebrae along those three long twisted necks are all too visible.

The tongues of the Typhon Beast are flecked with shards of metal; the foremost head, sitting solidly between the animal's shoulders, has a tongue filled with iron. Sitting furthest from it in the middle of its back, the third head has a tongue of gold. And silver cuts line the tongue of the second head, which sits between the other two.

Powers: The three heads of the Typhon Beast represent the three paths into the Abyss, and their tongues carry tiny pieces of those paths. Anyone hit by a successful bite attack from the Typhon Beast in the physical world must *fail* a Gnosis roll (difficulty of the local Gauntlet) or be immediately

sucked for a single turn into the very nadir of the Abyss. Those already in the Umbra get no roll to resist, but are deposited back where they came from one turn later. Victims with no Gnosis *are* sucked into the Abyss and do not return.

Held in its deepest voids, the victim exists in nothingness. It is not that he sees nothing, but cannot see -- No light touches his eyes. It is not that she hears nothing, but cannot hear -- No sound exists. Nothing exists. This is the anti-creation. It is the truth of Apocalypse, the Wyrn's goals come to fruition.

Being held in the Abyss this way can result in shock. The victim must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 10. Success indicates shock, but not so bad that they can't fight on. Failure means that the shock has been severe. Roll Rage, difficulty based upon the phase of the moon. If enough successes are gained to go into Frenzy, a Fox frenzy automatically results. Otherwise, the victim curls into the foetal position and tries to blot out what they saw for three turns.

Finally, the Typhon Beast has two additional bite attacks per round.

Roleplaying Tips: The flipside of the Blasphemer, the Typhon Beast is here to jolt your players into realising that the Apocalypse is all too real and is happening right damn now. Being jolted into the Abyss is a way of showing the players what will happen if they don't get their asses in gear. Play that up by describing the feeling of their encounter even after they recover from the shock -- It's a place without Gaia, at all. With no hint of connection, with no reason or understanding. There are no spirits breathing life into the air and the water. There is nothing at all.

Make them feel hurried to get to the Last Battleground. Apocalypse is coming. Gaia's warriors must be ready.

THE HEART OF THE ABYSS

Strength 12, Dexterity 1, Stamina 10, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5. (I highly suspect you'll need no more than those physical stats and the Wits score, but players are known to be weird.) Brawl 8

Image: The most horrific form of the Nightmaster, the Heart of the Abyss is a gigantic, lumbering exaggeration of the Crinos form. Standing a full twenty feet tall, his burnt black fur tumbles from his body, hiding grotesque knots of muscle underneath. His arms reach ten feet out in each direction, as thick as small trees. Five claws, each a foot long, stretch from each paw. Veins as thick as a baby's arm cover his entire body, visible beneath his fur, pushing blood through to his mouth, where it seeps out and pours between his teeth, and also to the pulsing black heart that juts from his chest, heaving as it sucks in and flushes out that foul liquid. The massive organ seems to suck in the light around it, making it impossible not to look at. Though his face, bitter in hate and twisted zeal, burns with Rage, it is that heart which is most horrible.

Powers: The Heart of the Abyss needs little in the way of powers. As a massive hulking beast of pure destruction, it does its job nicely. However, a few special rules do apply.

- All attacks of the made with an extra two dice to represent the larger target he presents
- He has an extra three -1 health levels, and an extra -2 health level.
- His claws do Strength + 3 aggravated damage.
- His bite does Strength + 5 aggravated damage, on account of the blood seeping about its teeth.
- His blood is caustic. While most attacks will not cut him deeply enough to affect the attacker, any Brawl-based attack that does four levels of damage after soak will cover the attacker partially with blood, doing 3 levels of lethal damage. Furthermore, the Nightmaster can attempt to force blood down a victim's throat (either flowing from its mouth, a wound or even a severed vein); such an attack is at difficulty 9 but would be surely fatal.

Finally, his heart represents a weak spot. Anyone making a Perception + Enigmas roll (difficulty 7) could see that it is clearly pushing blood around

at the Heart Abyss are



^o^

this body, and is a vital organ. Attacking the heart is hard due to its height, adding +3 to the attack's target number. In addition, this is made without the bonus two dice given for attacking generally. However, an attack doing three or more levels of lethal or aggravated damage with a Brawl or Melee attack will rupture the heart, killing the Nightmaster once and for all. But whomever delivers the attack will likewise perish as his blood spills forth in a great fountain. All others who remain in combat with him will also suffer three lethal damage.

Roleplaying hints: None needed, really. This is the big guy. He's there to kick your characters' collective ass on the Last Battleground, and they're there to kick his in turn. Use him as punctuation in the battle, as a minor victory within loss, as the culmination of the characters' Rage and vengeance.

Don't forget, though, to give him an appropriate send-off, either. Give him words. Let him sneer and taunt the characters, reminding them of their humiliations and threatening worse before he dies. Make them truly, truly hate him before they kill him.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

In which your friend and ours, Mr. Silas P. Curmudgeon, examines the road less taken with regards to Harry Potter



"Trend" is a word that today describes the trial period that something must go through before becoming an accepted part of our culture. Many look back on certain trends and shudder - pink leg warmers and the Macarena, for example - and many embrace them as if they were old friends that had always been there, such as is the case with Harry Potter. The Harry Potter "phenomenon" offers people a chance to enjoy mythological figures and fantastic, well-told tales without having to go to the trouble of reading anything too complex. And therein lies its trouble. Harry Potter isn't encouraging children to read; it's encouraging them to read Harry Potter. I doubt very much that many of today's children will pick up the Narnia chronicles, for example, because they haven't been turned into movies recently. More than that, since the release of the HP movies, the execs have realised that they can appeal to adults every bit as much as they can children, leading one to wonder when we'll be seeing sly little jokes about the size of Harry's wand. Whilst it is ludicrous to agree with overzealous Christians who want to ban its pagan ways, perhaps Harry Potter is being treated with a little too much respect for what it is. What happens when Harry is old hat? Will the next generation suffer their parents thrusting books the thickness of bricks upon them, saying it's the greatest tale ever written and quizzing them about the details of Gilderoy Lockheart's favourite vest? Harry Potter is a bit of fun, letting us relive the days where Cinderella was a fresh story and the *Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* was the gospel, but in the end, it is a trend. It will produce the same tonne of unwanted junk on the discount rack at Target as Care Bears and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles did, and like those 'fads', it is best left to the young and impressionable. If you want adventure, give me Arthur Conan Doyle or Edgar Allan Poe over Ms. Rowling any day. Or if we must have Ms. Rowling, give her a good, character-building case of Tuberculosis. Then maybe she'll be a decent read.

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WILL'S CHAOS CULT: THE PARSEES

Chaos God: Ahura Dharaka: The Voivode of Irritation.

Ahura Dharaka is a Chaos God who has existed for as long as irritation, frustration, anger and hatred. It is these emotions that he feeds upon, and these he fuels. He has played a role in the separation and division of the Chaos Gods, which while small, was significant.

The Parsees, as his followers are known, worship him through fire worship and the continual irritation of others - it is for this reason that the other traitor legions are reluctant to ally themselves with the Parsees (the name "Parsees" is derived from the name of the forgotten Legion that used the name during the Golden Age of the Empire and joined Horus during the Heresy).

Their Primarch - Artsuhtaraz - was known as the most irritating of the primarchs, even before the Heresy, as could be seen by the strictly enforced rule of screaming "The sky is falling!" whenever a vehicle of any description started to move in a Parsee controlled system, on pain of death.

When Ahura Dharaka revealed himself to Artsuhtaraz during the Heresy (as a talking Chihuahua no less) a feeling of camaraderie was instant and mutual, and Artsuhtaraz subjected himself to Ahura Dharaka's will in return for immortality and great rewards.

Needless to say the Heresy spawned much anger, frustration, hate and most importantly irritation. Ahura Dharaka thrived, his powers almost reaching that of the four main powers. Ever jealous, though, the four powers sought to quash this upstart warp entity before it became too powerful and after the failure of the Heresy the Parsee legion was all but erased physically and in memory, relegating him back into the position of minor god.

Ahura Dharaka is slowly clawing his way back to power, and as the endless conflict of the 41st millennium grows and breeds frustration so Ahura

Dharaka and his followers experience a renaissance in power and influence.

Chaos Legion: The Parsees: The Slaves of Frustration.

Widely known among the first founding Legions as the most irritating Legion, the Parsees ranks were made of tricksters and deceivers. The main use of the Parsees was to trick colonies into rejoining the Empire and win wars with as little bloodshed as possible.

Given the most extensive and high tech communications equipment to help further their Emperor given role, Artsuhtaraz's defection to the traitor legions was a major blow to the loyalists, as the legion's considerable communications knowledge was turned against them. It was the Parsees who hid the build up of the traitor legions from the loyalists, and it was they who delayed the arrival of loyalist forces to Terra.

After the defeat of the traitor legions and the retreat to the Eye of Terror the four main powers conspired to weaken Ahura Dharaka, and in doing so all but destroyed the Parsees, indeed the only survivors were those who were still manning the listening outposts in the Empire. It was during this Dark Age that the surviving Parsees decided to pull off the grandest trick of them all: remove themselves from history, leaving only enough information about themselves to irritate those who would investigate. Thus for the last 10,000 years the Parsees have been steadily seeking out and destroying all but vaguest information about themselves.

Recently Ahura Dharaka's power has been growing though, and reflecting the re-emerging power of their patron Parsee numbers have been growing as Uzuzap (the Legion's leader as Artsuhtaraz was killed in the suppression of the Parsees) has secretly enlisted the help of Fabius Bile in re-engineering the Parsee gene seed.



SPECIAL RULE, HATRED:

Any model that *hates* their enemy may re-roll any dice that miss in the first round of combat (and only the first round) once, and should they win combat they must attempt to run them down, although they do gain an additional D6 inches movement for this.

PLAYING A PARSEE ARMY:

Communications Masters:

As masters in the arts of communications the Parsees can read and interpret enemy information, giving them a huge tactical advantage before the battle lines are drawn. This gives them the ability to deploy and respond to the enemy plans before they are enacted (giving them the chance to severely irritate the enemy).

Parsees have a strategy rating of three.

Irritating Magicks:

The Parsees are servants of Ahura Dharaka, but to wield the sorcerous blessings of this god, the Magi of the Parsees must dedicate their lives solely to him, and are only released into service after the correct supplication to Ahura Dharaka is made.

Parsees must summon Magi as if they were daemons.

The Blessing of Irritation:

As followers of the God of Irritation the Parsees may call upon his blessing to irritate their enemies.

Parsees may force an enemy to re-roll any one dice roll once per game.

The Envy of the Divine:

The four main gods of Chaos despise Ahura Dharaka and wish to circumvent him at all times. The main exception to this rule is Tzeench who as the Lord of Change swings from love to hate towards Ahura Dharaka.

An army led by a character bearing the mark of Ahura Dharaka may not have models bearing the marks or Khorne, Nurgle or Slaanesh.

Daemons and Greater Daemons of Ahura Dharaka:

As a rule of thumb the Parsee general should use the statistics and rules presented in *Codex: Daemon Hunters*, with the exception that the Greater Daemon may possess Aspiring Champions instead of the Commander of the Army (consider it as one of the advantages of playing a Chaos Space Marine Army as opposed to a mere Cultist Army).

Sacred Number:

Roll 3 D6 when creating your army list. Add the results together and that is the sacred number of your Parsee army.

GIFTS ⊕ AHURA DHARAKA:

The Mark of Ahura Dharaka, 10/5 points:

Ahura Dharaka's mark, as the god of irritation, is a mixed one and is rarely the same gift twice. To reflect this each unit/independent character bearing the mark must roll a D6 to determine its effect.

1-2: *Apathy and indifference*: Unit/Character can never be pinned or fail a morale check (they just don't care enough!).

3-4: *Irritation and frustration*: The affected Unit/Character under this power gains +1 strength reflecting the power that comes with focused anger and frustration.

5-6: *Hate and Malice*: The Unit/Character *hates* the enemy.

The Defixio, Icon of Ahura Dharaka, 50 Points:

This icon is made of a solid lead tablet that disappears from sight when you look directly at it, just to irritate all who look at it. Its presence, however, is far more irritating to the enemies of Ahura Dharaka, causing all weapons within its range to malfunction, even the most basic of weapons will start to break (e.g. a dagger's hilt slips and the blade becomes loose mid-combat) under its malign influence.

All enemy models within 12" of the model must roll a dice, if the number rolled is a 2 or a 5 the enemy may not use its weapons that turn.

Suicide Aura, 50 points:

This incredibly potent but ultimately self-destructive power creates an aura of complete frustration, driving all around the character so afflicted to attempt to kill themselves. However the character wielding such a power is ultimately the most self destructive of all, and after he has exhausted the thrill of combat tries to kill himself.

All models (friend or foe) within 2 inches of a character bearing this gift must take a leadership test at the beginning of each turn. If failed the model must attempt suicide using the most effective means possible (eg if a model has a laspistol and a power sword the model must use the power sword). There is no roll to hit, although rolls to wound and save throws are taken as per usual. This is performed before movement, and replaces the models ability to move, shoot, assault and fight in combat if the leadership roll is failed. The main drawback to this power is that when selected no matter what the outcome might be, the opposing player gains the victory points as if they had killed the character.

Itching Powder Grenades, 10 points:

Perhaps the most irritating substance in existence, itching powder is a staple prank tool galaxy over. This, however, is no ordinary itching powder as it has been blessed in such a way as to cause all who come under its effect to attempt to scratch themselves to death.

THE MINOR POWERS OF AHURA DHARAKA

1 - No Power

2 - Tap on the Shoulder. Phase: Shooting. Psychic Test: Yes. Range: 24"

One of the more irritating acts in life, this power simulates its effect by distracting the enemy in such a way that they are so distracted that it becomes impossible for them to fire.

The Magi selects a unit and rolls a dice, if he rolls over the initiative value (or a 6) of that unit, it may not fire in its next shooting phase.

3 - Lust for Hate. Phase: Shooting. Psychic Test: Yes. Range: 12"

The Magi calls forth the hatred that lingers in the soul of every creature and further fuels it to excess.

The Magi makes any friendly unit hate the enemy until the Magi's next shooting phase if they do not already do so.

4 - Flames of Resentment. Phase: Shooting. Psychic Test: Yes. Range: Flamer.

The Magi summons the power of Ahura Dharaka and sends the flames of his resentment to consume his enemies.

The Flames of Resentment twist and distort the limbs of any enemy, and is treated in much the same way as a flamer, save that for every 3 models killed in a single shot a chaos spawn is created.

5 - Blinded by Hatred. Phase: Shooting. Psychic Test: Yes. Range: 6"

All unfriendly units are blinded by their own contempt for the Parsees unless they can control their hatred, and remove the cataracts of contempt.

The Magi selects a unit within range and unleashes this power. If the unit fails a leadership test they may not move, shoot or engage or continue in combat as they are blinded by hate. If they lose combat while blinded they flee their default distance, but in a random direction (use a scatter dice).

6 - Bitter Aura. Phase: N.A. Psychic Test: N.A. Range: N.A.

This power creates a sense of frustration where the enemy should feel elation, preventing them from pressing a hard won advantage.

If the unit the Magi is attached to should lose combat and withdraws the opposing player may not follow up or press their advantage in any way and gains no victory points for any fatalities from the Magi's unit.

The character throws this grenade 2+ Strength inches in the shooting phase instead of firing his gun. When it explodes it uses the 2" blast marker, and all who are under the marker (even partially) must take a leadership test or instantly suffer one wound. At the beginning of the next turn the same test must be taken except at -2 difficulty (to reflect the weakening effect of the powder).

Fuel For Suffering, 10 Points:

This ancient scroll has the ability to either soothe or inflame the blessings of Ahura Dharaka, and is penned by the Viovide's own hand. It may be used only once per battle, and only one can be taken in each army - such is their rarity.

Fuel for Suffering must be used at the start of the Parsee player's turn, and may only be used once. It affects one unit bearing the Mark of Ahura Dharaka and has a range of 36 inches. The model using the scroll must undergo a psychic test (wether they be Magi or otherwise). If passed the unit affected by the power may change the effect of the Mark of Ahura Dharaka to any effect they so desire for the rest of the turn.

Suicide Bomber, 15 Points:

The most irritating figures in history are nearly always the self-righteous, therefore it should not surprise any individual of intellect that the ultimate

expression of this is suicide in someone else's name. However far from discouraging this among his followers Ahura Dharaka actively encourages it, often providing his chosen followers with the means to kill themselves in his name on the glorious field of battle.

In order to become a suicide bomber a model must be elected as an aspiring champion (and paid for if the need be). A lord or lieutenant cannot become a suicide bomber. Once this is done a further 15 points must be paid. Once a model has become a Suicide Bomber it automatically becomes an independent character (it can still join a squad though), is fearless and gains a detonation pack (A detonation pack is a strength 9 AP 1 weapon, using the blast marker). In order to use a detonation pack the model must be in base-to-base contact with a target. Once in base-to-base contact the model can choose to detonate the pack, instantly killing itself. Any other models caught under the template are affected by the pack in the prescribed way.

Lens Flare Projector (Daemon Weapon), 20 points for Cannon, 10 for Pistol:

Any individual who has ever operated a device for recording visual images can tell you that lens flares are most annoying, what they cannot tell you, though, is how they came into being. Some claim that it is because of the way that light refracts in a lens, and while this is plausible, it is not the truth.

The horrid, brutal truth is that Ahura Dharaka, the Voivode of Irritation, created them at the dawn of time when the first civilisations created the first

Uzuzap	Pts	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Sv
	260	6	3	5(8)	5	4	5	3	10	2+/5+

lenses to be flared and in the billions for years since he has reaped a bountiful harvest of irritation.

Unsurprisingly his most dedicated followers, the Parsees, devised a weapon that harnessed Ahura Dharaka's mastery of the lens flare to a particularly diabolical effect. This infernal device is based upon the Imperial las-weapon designs and is imbued with the essence of a daemon servant of Ahura Dharaka. When fired the Lens Flare Projector has two settings: A "Las" mode and "I" mode. The Parsee must decide before firing.

The Lens Flare Projector Cannon is a weapon that can replace a Lascannon in a Chaos Space Marine squad (and still retains its Daemonic Weapon status). In Las mode it has the same qualities as a Lascannon save that it has a range of 24". In "I" mode it has a range of 48". If the Parsee hits, he powers up the Lens Flare Generator. The effect this has on a vehicle is that it counts as Crew Shaken for the rest of the turn with no Armour Penetration roll and no disqualification effects allowed (the daemon in the weapon overpowers any items that might over rule this effect).

When used upon a unit of non-vehicles it counts as a Lascannon for hitting and wounding purposes, but instead of killing the model it merely blinds it: i.e. it may not fight but may move (as it is assumed his squad help him).

The Lens Flare Pistol operates in a very similar manner to the cannon, save that in Las mode it has a range of 6" and is Strength 5 (reflecting [or is it refracting?] the power of the daemon in it). In "I" mode it has a range of 12" and instead of blinding a model it merely reduces its attacks by one until the Parsee players next turn. It affects vehicles in the same way as the Cannon though. It counts as a pistol in close combat and for shooting purposes.

Special Character: Uzuzap, Daemon Prince of Peevishness.

During the Golden Age Uzuzap was widely renowned as the Parsee's greatest and most prolific trickster, and during the Heresy he honed these skills down to more than a fine art, becoming a trickster to rival even Artsuhtaraz in the range, scope and sheer irritation factor of his tricks. It was for this reason that Ahura Dharaka chose him as the second in command of the Parsees, much to chagrin of Artsuhtaraz and the legion as a whole.

After the failure of the Traitor Legions and the retreat to the Eye of Terror the four main gods turned on Ahura Dharaka and unleashed their Legions upon the Parsees housing in the Eye of Terror, annihilating all of them. The surviving Parsees rallied around Uzuzap and his new weapon,

a gift from Ahura Dharaka, named Artsuhtaraz in honour of their fallen Primarch.

As the millennia have worn on Uzuzap has led the remainder of the Parsees in their attempts to erase themselves from history, and continues to do so to this day. Through his guidance the Parsees have slowly been growing in size as Fabius Bile re-engineers their gene seed for mass production, and they once again find themselves becoming major players in Chaos politics.

Any Parsee army may be led by Uzuzap. He may be accompanied by a retinue of Chosen selected as normal but otherwise must be fielded exactly as specified.

Wargear and Gifts:

Greater Mark of Ahura Dharaka, Armour of Trickery, Artsuhtaraz, Daemonic Stature, Daemonic Flight, Daemonic Essence, Daemonic Fire, Daemonic Rune, Spiky Bits, Personal Icon.

Greater Mark of Ahura Dharaka:

The greatest gift of Ahura Dharaka allows Uzuzap to harness the blessing of the God of Irritation in any way he sees fit.

Uzuzap may choose the effect of the Mark of Ahura Dharaka upon himself and falls under the special rule Servant of Irritation.

Armour of Trickery:

Before becoming a Daemon Prince Uzuzap wore a unique Terminator Armour Suit that refracted light in such a way as to make him very hard to see. Needless to say that this was not only very useful in irritating people while in conversation, but also in combat as those who would harm him would have to look twice to get a good shot. When granting Uzuzap daemonhood, Ahura Dharaka preserved this feature so that they might be further irritated.

In addition to conferring a 2+ regular save and a 5+ invulnerable and the ability to deep strike, all models that attempts to hurt Uzuzap must a roll 3 D6 and multiply the result by 2. If the result is a multiple of 7 or 5 they cannot hurt him that turn.

SPECIAL RULE, SERVANT ⊕ F IRRITATION ⊕:

Ahura Dharaka has a particular interest in keeping Uzuzap alive, and for this reason he cannot truly be killed.

This rule is only effective during a campaign. Uzuzap may essentially be killed during any mission (i.e. for victory points purposes and to be removed from the board), but may always return to lead a Parsee army in their next battle.

Artsuhtaraz:

Uzuzap's prized Dark Blade contains nothing less than the trapped soul of the Primarch that shared that name trapped eternally within its hilt, leaking out the irritation it feels towards its' insufferable fate. Over time Uzuzap has managed to control this frustration into a visible manifestation of Ahura Dharaka's will.

In addition to behaving like an ordinary Great Dark Blade, Artsuhtaraz allows Uzuzap to choose one power from the Ahura Dharaka minor powers list before each battle. He may choose to cast this power either once per battle without a psychic test, or normally with a psychic test (the player must choose at the start of the battle).



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THE ⊕BLIGAT⊕RY SH⊕RT ST⊕RY

Laid low by the Daemon Blade Artsuhtaraz, the Grey Knight Commodus finally gave up his life to his slayer. Taking the moment to recapture his thoughts Uzuzap stopped, folding his wings about himself. Soon many small shells exploded upon his metallic wings, sending soothing waves of pleasure along his spine. These he ignored, as his master forbade him to enjoy his gifts.

As Uzuzap regained his mind, the Voivode spoke to him through the blade in a language incomprehensible to all bar one. After hearing his Father's words Uzuzap unfurled his wings and took to the sky, leaving the battle below him for those without his gifts. Above him he spied a guardsmen transport, and as his Father commanded him he flung his blade at the vessel. As it fell from the sky towards the crimson earth he smiled, for its engines produced a noise that pleased him. It reminded him of cats during heat.

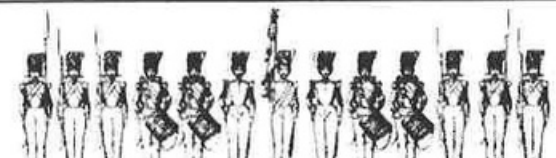
* * *

Open before Uzuzap was the Axis Mundi, a great repertoire of knowledge that had survived since the Heresy, and it was one of the few machines left that still contained accurate details about the Parsees. Uzuzap then punched in a 124 character code into its interface and then finding the files that he needed he depressed a single character.

* * *

As Uzuzap's flagship the *Prince of Peevishness* left the system, Uzuzap raised his voice in prayer to the Emperor of Men. He thanked him for the incompetence of his servants.

^o^



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ROKUGAN FOR ROOKIES

If you hang around Sutekh for any length of time, you'll quickly notice that a place called Rokugan attracts a lot of interest. This article is designed to give newcomers an over view of what's got so many people hooked.

It's also designed as something of a primer for people who want to play in the *Behind Courtliness: the Subtlety of Court* freeform (live action) campaign kicking off at the beginning of the semester. As a result, one of the most important things to keep in mind as you read this article is that this deeply textured pseudo-Japan reflects certain modern sensibilities: both men and women make up the heroes, villains and leaders of this world.

Legend of the Five Rings

Legend of the Five Rings (L5R) is a set of games set in Rokugan, a land of heroic samurai, mystical shugenja, and fearsome creatures from the Shadowlands. It is a land of heroic conflict on an epic scale as well as deep political intrigue. A samurai's life depends not only on his skill with his blade, but on the depth of his honour. A misspoken word can slay a bushi as quickly as an assassin's blade in the Emperor's court, and the horrors of the Shadowlands wait eternally to corrupt the unwary.

It is a high-fantasy samurai epic, exploring the theme of honour against the backdrop of sweeping battles and lightning fast *iaijutsu* duels..

The Celestial Order

The Emperor: Toturi III, also known as Toturi Naseru and the Righteous Emperor owns all land within the Empire but allows the clans to manage it for him. His word is law. He is the head of Rokugani religion and the voice of the Celestial Heavens. He controls the Imperial Legions, with his half brother Kaneka holding the title of Shogun. The emperor's brother Toturi Sezaru holds the title Voice of the Emperor and is a powerful shugenja.

Samurai: Noble warriors from one of the Great or Lesser Clans who follow Bushido, the Code of the Warrior. Only those with the rank of samurai may carry the two blades - the long katana and the smaller wakizashi.

Shugenja: Priests of Rokugan. They come from among the ranks of the Samurai, thus they carry a Wakizashi. They communicate with kami - elemental spirits - to cast magical spells.

Monks: Contemplate the Tao of Shinsei, the chief book of spiritual wisdom in Rokugan, and tend the shrine and temples to the divine Fortunes.

Heimin: Commoners, the highest ranking of whom is the peasant who feeds the empire. This caste also includes craftsmen and merchants.

Eta: People whose professions make them "unclean" such as through contact with dead flesh or blood. Tanners and morticians are among their number.

The Shadowlands

To the south of the Empire lies the Shadowlands, a domain tainted with evil and populated by demons known as Oni. Anyone who spends too much time in the Shadowlands risks falling to its corrupting touch.

Within the Shadowlands lives a culture of fallen samurai within the City of the Lost, once ruled by the Dark Lord Daigotsu, the blood sorcerer Iuchiban has recently usurped his position and casts a malevolent eye towards the empire.

The Clans -- An Introduction

Rokugan is ruled by eight Great Clans, each comprising several noble families and thousands of samurai. Every family is ruled by a Daimyo, and the most powerful of these bears the title of Clan Champion.

In as courtly a society as Rokugan, opinion matters, and for every voice lifted in praise there is one lowered in scorn. What follows is an overview of each Clan, accompanied by the names of the most prominent families within it

The Crab: Guardians of the Wall, they stand against the hordes of the Shadowlands. Famed for their strength and their devotion to their grim duty, the Crab also boast canny merchants, brilliant engineers, and thorough hunters after those who bear the Shadowlands Taint. Some may call them crude, but the Crab would point to the realities of their existence as excuse enough for any ignorance of the finer points of etiquette.

- Families: Hida, Hiruma, Kaiu, Kuni, Yasuki and Toritaka.

The Crane: The Emperor's Left Hand, embodiment of excellence. Their duellists are famous for making swordplay an art no less than that of poetry or music and their courtiers are perhaps the most skilled in the Empire. Though some deride them as effete, the Crane are truly the most cultured and civilised of the Great Clans.



- Families: Doji, Kakita, Daidoji, Asahina and Yasuki.

The Dragon: Enigmatic mystics, they seek enlightenment down paths others do not tread. Besides their mysterious tattooed monks in remote mountaintop monasteries, the Dragon are also well known for their duellists, who rival the Crane in skill with the katana. Many who misunderstand the Dragon Clan's devotion to philosophy dismiss them as riddlers afraid of the real world, though the wise recognise the truth

- Families: Togashi, Mirumoto, Hitomi, Tamori, Kitsuki and Hoshi.

The Lion: The Emperor's Right Hand, the Empire's shining sword. The greatest generals in the Empire have been Lion, and the clan's devotion to martial prowess is unmatched. The honour of one's family is prized by the Lion; their historians and shugenja maintain the relationship between the living and their ancestors. Often characterised as arrogant and violent, the Lion would argue that the honour of the empire depends on the glory of its warriors.

- Families: Matsu, Ikoma, Akodo and Kitsu.

The Mantis: Ambitious and ruthless, rulers of the high seas. Formed of an alliance between Minor Clans, the Mantis boast some of the most practical and forward-thinking samurai in the Empire, along with their skills as sailors and archers. Often dismissed as upstarts and pirates, the Mantis have proud traditions of their own and are a mercantile power not to be trifled with.

- Families: Yoritomo, Tsuruchi and Moshi.

The Phoenix: Guardians of secret knowledge, cursed with visions of the future. Their skill with the elemental magic of the kami is peerless, and the hidden lore possessed by the clan is almost beyond measure. The Phoenix are famed for their pacifism; even their warriors are protectors first and foremost. Alternately scorned as arrogant weaklings and distrusted for their magical power,

the Phoenix prefer to let their critics continue in their ignorance.

- Families: Isawa, Shiba, Asako and Agasha.

The Scorpion: The Emperor's Underhand, stealth and secrecy are their weapons. Widely distrusted and often feared, the Scorpion keep their founder's promise to sacrifice their honour to guard the Empire from hidden threats. Though none could ever prove it, the Scorpion possess ninja and spies without equal, and deploy them to inscrutable ends. The distaste of many for their honourless activities is open, but the Scorpion know that no other is willing to do their duty.

- Families: Bayushi, Shosuro, Soshi and Yogo.

The Unicorn: Outsiders, explorers, nomads, they know no home save the next horizon. The strangest clan in the Empire, the Unicorn's centuries of wandering in foreign lands have given them a culture all their own. Masters of cavalry, they rival any clan for military power. Reviled by some as foreign barbarians, the Unicorn find strength in their bizarre-seeming ways.

- Families: Moto, Utaku, Shinjo, Ide, Iuchi and Horiuchi.

Secret Societies

Since the dawn of the empire, Rokugan has been under threat from secretive groups bent on controlling, or destroying, the empire. A member of any clan could be a member of a secret society.

The Kolat: Committed to the overthrow of the Celestial Order and establishing a new empire under their control, the Kolat are a cadre of fanatics skilled in assassination, brainwashing and manipulation. Once thought destroyed, recent evidence has shown that the Kolat are merely hiding quietly amongst Rokugan's loyal samurai, waiting for their moment.



The Gozoku: A conspiracy to manipulate the emperor and control the empire through culture and politics, rather than domination, held sway centuries ago. After the leaders of this group were executed, it was thought that it could never happen again. The wise know differently.

The Bloodspeakers: A cult of power crazed sorcerers and villains, the bloodspeakers have gone from a secret evil feared in the dark to a terror that is gripping the empire with the ascendancy in the Shadowlands of their master, Iuchiban.

And so it ends...

Well, there you go - a quick and dirty introduction into the basics of Rokugan and the world of L5R. If it interests you, there are a number of ways you can pursue it.

The first, and most obvious, is the collectable card game that spawned the phenomena. Just tap one of the many... devoted... Sutekhers in the Glass Room and saying "Hey that looks fun, can I play?"

If that's not quite your scene, try asking around for a gander at the roleplaying game. A number of people have books for it.

Last of all, why not pop along to our Legend of the Five Rings freeform, advertised opposite?



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BEHIND COURTLINESS: THE SUBTLETY OF COURT

Toshi Ranbo is in an uproar. Part of the city has been devastated by arson, and all of the empire has been assaulted by the madness-inducing Rain of Blood. The clans go to battle, and the people of Rokugan live in fear.

After five years of aiding the empire, the Sanraku Tribunal is overwhelmed with tasks beyond its authority to combat but too dire for it to ignore. In desperation, samurai from all clans have been given the opportunity to aid the Tribunal in aiding the empire.

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Within each samurai is the chance for greatness and the chance for treason. But can either of these overcome simple human weakness?

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Kicking Off

Getting an idea for a new campaign is easy; inspiration is everywhere. But once you've reached the beginning, what do you do with your players? An old hand at Gamesmastering, Jaime "President of the ex-presidents' club" Lawrence, looks more deeply at where a beginning ends and a campaign starts...

Irongrom Longbeard looked around the tavern, his keen eyes attempting to pick out something of interest. It was a common misconception that adventurers came to taverns because they liked them. The actual reason was to kill time between adventures.

His eyes alighted upon an Elven man in robes sitting in a darkened corner. Elves in robes usually meant trouble, but even if this one didn't have some fantastic quest for him, he could still be a bit of sport...

Altogether too many games start with phrases like "You're sitting in the Tavern" or "You're called into the chief's office". By doing that sort of thing, you're denying the players a valuable game opportunity, and denying yourself the pleasure of seeing the characters grow.

Especially if you are starting a long campaign, these formative times are important. The stranger that enters the tavern, drawing everyone's attention, should be a player. Let the other players deal with him. Let them really flesh out their characters and their relation to others by experiencing it first hand.

Let's face it; in a fantasy setting, no-one is going to go into a combat situation with a thief they've just met watching their back - it's dumb. Thieves steal things. They can't be trusted. And yet, apparently, if you've shared a mug of mead, he's as trustworthy as your own brother.

No, the tavern is too hackneyed for words.

Consider starting your adventure with an event that forces the players together, some catastrophe or being handpicked as a fellowship. But don't expect truly great character banter to come from a pub - nothing good ever does.

Jason Race looked at the naked form that lay beside him, a smooth hip uncovered by the tangle of sheet, a pert breast barely concealed beneath a tanned arm... He wished he had more time to stay, but England had called, and he could never refuse her. He gently placed the note on the bedside table, and moments later, was tearing down the freeway in his black Aston-Martin.

He pulled into a quiet London side street and entered a grey building, proceeding via the elevator to the 15th floor. He entered the briefing room, and was momentarily surprised by the occupants. He was used to solo missions.

Looking around the table as he took his seat, he recognised Charles Ream, a CIA operative with whom he had worked many times before, and of course the chief of

staff, Noir, smoking his signature Brazilian Cigar. The other two were a mystery though. One, a young woman, was smiling at him under freckled cheeks and a shock of red hair, the other, a brute of a man with a long scar on the line of his jaw, sat impassively, staring into space.

"Good morning, agent Nighthawk" said Noir, "We were beginning to wonder if you'd forgotten us..."

Another compulsion that many gamesmasters feel is the need to start all the characters off together in one place. This is understandable, as it can be a bad thing to leave most of your players sitting around chatting while you're off talking to one in particular, but often you'll find the players appreciate it more if you take them individually.

Not only does this allow the player to get into character, but it allows you to find out a little more also. No character is the same on paper as he is when played; roleplaying, by its very nature, is about the creation of new individuals from the imagination, and those individuals change and grow as your players do. You don't have to run mini-epics and you can skip the part where the character has breakfast, shaves and does the dishes, but a little solo time goes a long way.

One of the worst questions I've ever heard asked is "Ok, so how close to on time does each of you get there?" This not only assumes that the character is totally in control of his actions, but that he thinks especially hard about these things. If a player wants to be at a meeting-place early to search for traps or whatever, let them tell you that.

And don't forget, both super spies and superheroes have to perform mundane tasks sometimes. Roleplay them going to work, doing their normal duties, and then tease them into the adventure just as they look to be getting bored. The realistic touches you add will be useful to the players in defining themselves.

Datur had practised the ritual movements of cleansing every morning since he was old enough to handle the Quatir pipe, but never had it been more difficult for him. His mind weighed heavily on the summons from the council of Tavec'norar. It was rare for them to summon one of their own kind, but even more infrequent to call an outsider, even a member of an allied tribe like his own.

Perhaps the war against the Skyraiders was going poorly in the Tavec'norar provinces, and they sought to incorporate some warriors of balance and clear-mindedness, having found their own magical defences inadequate. It did not matter really, his Creche-leader

Navot had told him to go.

"It is of vital importance" he had said. "In exchange for your contribution to the Tavec'Norar, we receive that we need the most from them - Starstone. Do as they require, Datur." The gods knew they needed the Starstone. As if the Skyraiders weren't bad enough, the Tnedi alliance had declared war last year, and splitting our warriors to fight against those who should be our allies in repelling the invaders to our world was taking its toll.

Datur was disturbed from his reverie by the sound of a deep horn being blown - the call of the council. Tucking his Quatir pipe away safely, he strode purposefully towards the great hall of Rona City. Upon entering, he was shown to a meeting hall and told to enter. He did so and took a seat. At the far end of the hall, the Tavec'Norar elders sat inside beams of white light, looking impassively on their visitors. As he opened his mouth to announce himself, a voice inside his head said "Do not speak. Be still, and patient, as is the way of your kind. Others have yet to arrive".

Things seemed to move in slow motion from that point on. He heard the heavy doors swing open, and turned his head to see who entered. He stood as he saw the armed Tnedi Warrior enter, standing seven feet tall, a greataxe at the ready, its blade gleaming with starstone, and no doubt with the blood of his people. In an instant, his starpistol was in his hand and the Tnedi's snarling head was in his sights.

"So much for being a warrior of balance and clear-mindedness", said the voice in his head "Put down your weapon before you shoot your new companion..."

Factionalism can often cause a problem in games, and it is not an easy one to escape - factions are in almost all RPG's today, even if you disregard the setting. How can one maintain a party that contains a Cleric of Pelor and cleric of Nerull? A Phoenix and a Dragon? A Ferengi and a Klingon? A Gangrel and a Ventrue? The list goes on.



Writers provide us with fascinating backstories, full, rich worlds from which we draw inspiration for our campaigns and the players their characters. None of us is above it - I'll always be a Settite/ Order of Hermes / Crab Clan / Biokinetic / DC comics / Egypt-loving/ Boccob-worshipping kind of guy. We all have our favourites.

So if your game is set entirely in the lands of Clan A, exactly what are characters of Clans B, F and R doing there? There are many ways to settle such disputes. The most commonly used is telling the players 'create your character as a member of clan A, B or C only'. While this works, it is generally bad to restrict people's choices and creativity - I know I make a good herald of the imperial families, but I make a much better Crab magistrate.

Your NPCs can be of paramount importance here, telling the PC's that a member from each of clans A, B,C, and X are needed to complete this mission, or that representatives from Group Q are here in order to further relations, but this is a technique best left to long campaigns, not mission-based games. For when the mission ends, people are always left asking "Hey, I know that Toreador saved my life, but shouldn't he be getting back to Chicago now before the prince has him served on toast?".

In the end, you can leave it all up to suspension of disbelief, but both you and your players get so much more out of the game if you take the time to answer the whys of party formation. After all, let's not forget that there has never been a tale that started without a beginning...

^o^

The Roles We Play.

By Gareth Williams.

Sutekh caters to a variety of interests. You can hang out and talk to people about your favourite comic books and TV shows, you can go along to see new science fiction films with a group of people who share your enthusiasm and you can discuss the merits of creating an army of tiny headed clones in order to take over the world. Sutekh is a social club that lets helps people make friends with other students who share their interests, or introduce them to new exciting past times. But there is one hobby that Sutekh doesn't just provide a social environment for, a hobby it actively facilitates: Gaming.

Now, there are a lot of types of gaming, but I'm the guy who seems to be looking after roleplaying this year, so I'll be discussing that. You might have been roleplaying for years, or you might just have joined after watching Return of the King and thinking "Elves are too cool." Roleplaying games take a variety of forms, but at the core they are all interactive social entertainment. Of course, that interactive means other people, rather than interacting with a computer, but fortunately there is a university society to help you out with that, yes, that one with the inexplicable name.

The traditional roleplaying game involves half a dozen or so people sitting around. One of them is telling a kind of story. Everyone else is deciding what the focal characters of that story do. It might be a story of the epic overthrow of empires, or how a couple of self-interested low-lives beat up some goblins and stole their boots. Like movies, roleplaying games can tell many kinds of stories. Some games are careful, tactical affairs about precise combat decisions and exact decisions. Some games are B-Movie contests between ninja with guns and other ninja with different guns. Some games are poignant stories of people making

sacrifices to protect the things they love, or slowly losing sight of themselves as they fall to hubris and corruption.

A more unusual form of roleplaying game is the freeform. In the freeform there aren't four or eight players, there are many, perhaps sixteen, perhaps sixty. Each player takes the part of a character with goals and resources. In order to achieve those goals, the player talks to the other players, trying to convince others to aid them, usually in exchange for aiding in some other goal. Over the course of the freeform, alliances are made, secrets revealed, and the overall plot brings everything to a head, with some having achieved their goals. During first semester I'll be running a six part freeform on Friday nights called Behind Courtliness. Each player takes the part of a samurai in a fictional land of magic, monsters and honour. Each samurai has been given political goals by his or her lord. Some of the other samurai are allies, some are opponents. Some may prove to be either. Over the course of the game, players will intrigue, decisions will be made, and politics will become ever more tense.

Roleplaying games run the gamut from games that feel like tactical board games to games that bear more resemblance to improvisational theatre. If this interests you, or even makes you curious, I would suggest giving it a try. There is a whole society of people willing to give you a chance to see for yourself. Drop by the Glass Room (the Logia) in Manning at almost any time, or look for events in the Daily Bull (or join the discussion forums at <http://forums.sutekh.info>). If you like fantasy or fiction, take the chance to exercise your imagination.

AgA

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

In which your friend and ours, Mr. Silas P. Curmudgeon, examines the road less taken with regards to Online Comics



Don't you hate it when you tell an anecdote and then discover at its conclusion that it was only funny at the time, for those who were there?

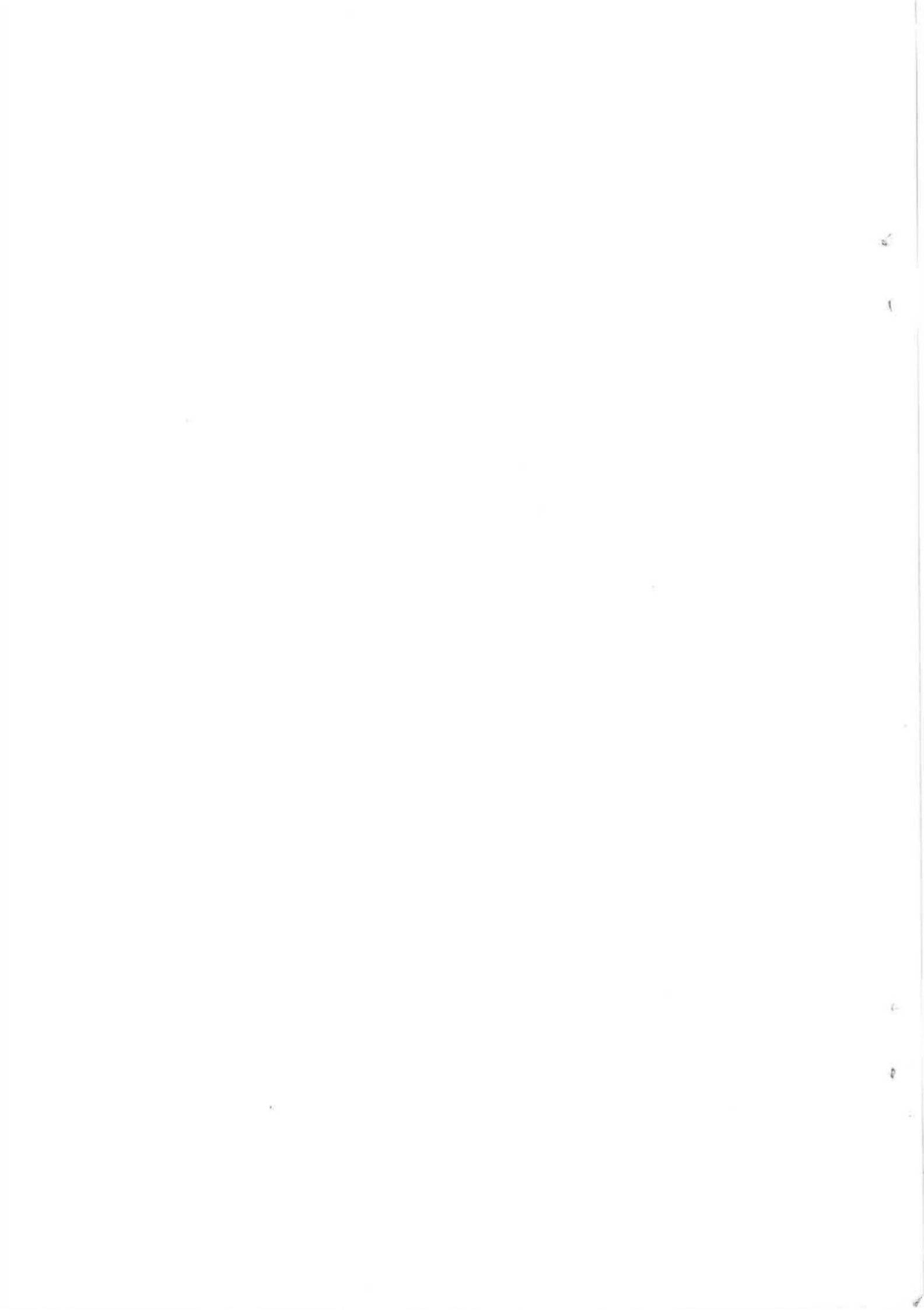
If you answered "Yes" to the above question, then you are obviously not the writer of an online comic. The sad truth about online comics is that they are made by people who, through a tragic lack of talent, cannot make real comics. They are not funny. They are a sad symptom of our social decline into madness. It seems that any fool who has been taught the English language (A privilege I believe should be withheld from the next generation as they'll only muck it up) is able to relate the tale of how his aunty Mavis fell down the stairs onto a garden rake, and some other idiot out there, through the 'miracle' of the world wide web, can take it up and think it is funny. In a more correct world, one would not be allowed to find the maiming of sweet old aunty Mavis entertaining, as it would be illegal for people to post such trash on the web. Let artists show their work to potential employers online, by all means, but only let them do it if they're any good, for God's sake.

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**UNUSUAL
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