QUEENSLAND WARGAMER

Issue 45

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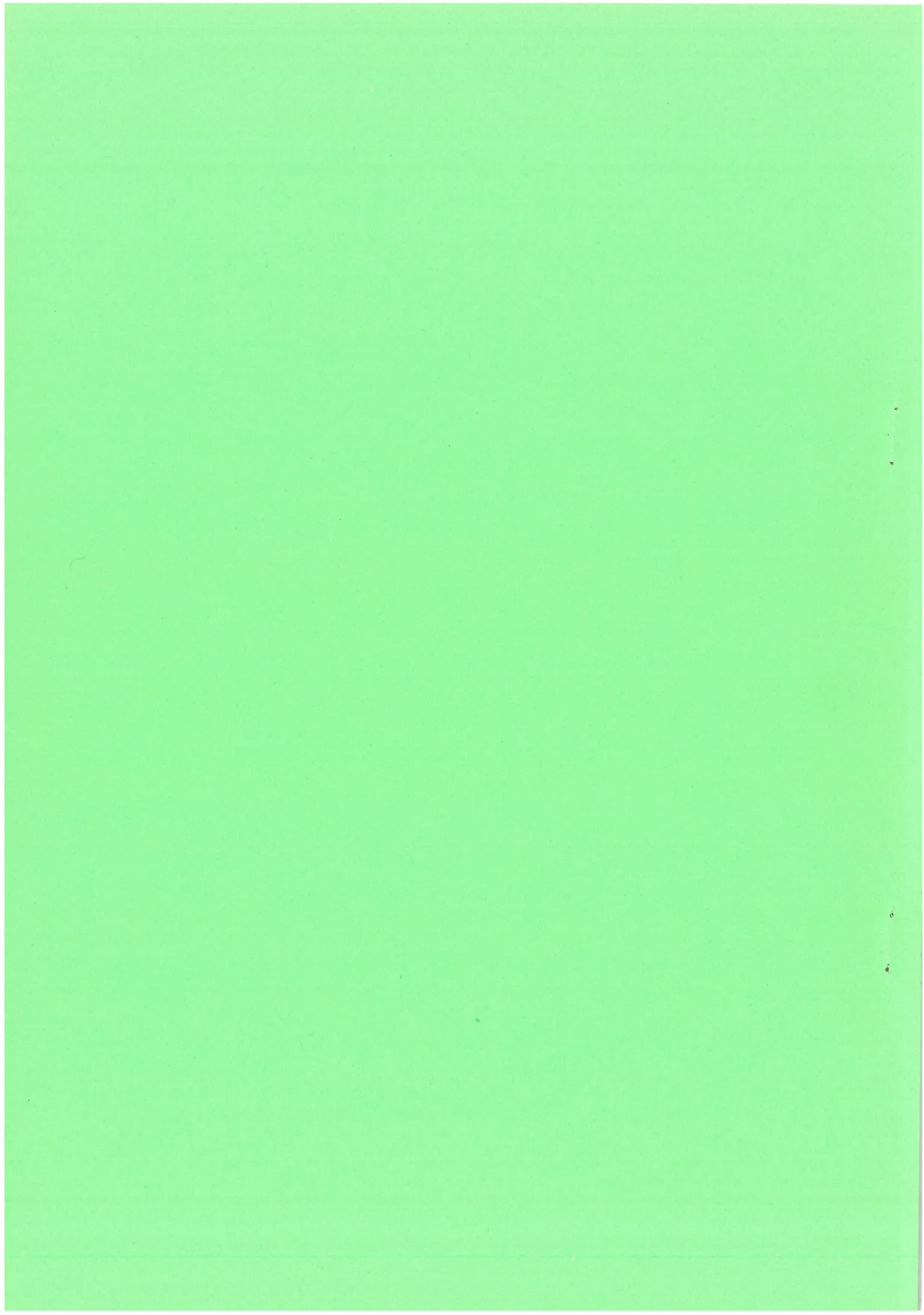
Rurika

Graeme '96

QUEENSLAND WARGAMER

No. 45 September 1996

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Editorial

I went to the movies with some friends and watched *Independence Day* last weekend. It was worth seeing, I guess, even if we did spend the next few hours working out what was wrong or inaccurate about the movie. I don't intend to bag *Independence Day* here, however. (I'm sure anyone who really wants to criticise it can find several people of like mind and joyfully spend many happy hours.) I just want to make a point out of the way the scriptwriters brought the main characters together.

In all role-playing groups, there is some game-world justification for bringing the player-characters together to form the party. Sometimes, it's pretty unsophisticated: "All six of you are sitting around the bar when this guy walks in ..." Other times, it can be very complex. The bringing together of the main characters in Independence Day (the President, the pilot, the computer geek, the President's press secretary, and whoever else you feel makes the grade) is a good example of a complex origin for the party of characters. There are lots of twists and turns, which characters will survive is (supposedly)

in doubt, the characters are essential to aspects of the story-line, and so on. My question is, is this origin a good one?

The answer ultimately depends on the criteria you apply. I can't make a blanket judgement for any of you, though I know my answer to my question. Perhaps the number of coincidences in *Independence Day* will decide the issue for you, or possibly the way the appallingly cute kiddies and the dog survive the movie will prejudice your answer. I don't know. What I can say is that it is worth taking special care over the party's origin, since if you don't like it, it can ruin the whole campaign (movie, play, whatever) for you. A successful campaign is built on solid foundations. Think about it.

Submissions for the next issue of the *Queensland Wargamer* are due by Friday the 18th of October. The *Wargamer* will be available from Saturday the 2nd of November onwards.

Gary Johnson

Letters to the Editor

Dear Gary,

something I found on the net. Why not put in the *Wargamer*?

Daniel Nolan

[Note: the following is typed in verbatim from the Mensa Bulletin, June 1989, p.15. This was from the Special Interest Groups column. They were reprinting articles from various SIG newsletters. This one was from the Role-Playing Games SIG.]

Eric and the Gazebo

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES SIG
by Richard Aronson

Let us cast our minds back to the early days of fantasy role-playing ...

In the early 1970s, Ed Whitechurch ran "his game", and one of the participants was Eric Sorenson, a veritable giant of a man. This story is essentially true: I knew both Ed and Eric, and neither denies it (although Eric, for reasons that will become apparent, never repeats it).

The gist of it is that Eric ... well, you need to know a bit more about Eric.

Eric comes quite close to being a computer. When he games, he methodically considers each possibility before choosing his preferred option. If given time, he will invariably pick the optimum solution. It has been known to take weeks. He is otherwise in all respects a superior gamer, and I've spent many happy hours competing with and against him; as long as he's given enough time.

So ... Eric was playing a neutral paladin ("why should only lawful good religions get to have holy warriors?" was the rationale) in Ed's game. He even had a holy sword, which fought well and did all those things holy swords are supposed to do, including good or evil (by random die roll). He was on some lord's lands when the following exchange occurred:

ED: You see a well-groomed garden. In the middle, on a small hill, you see a gazebo.

ERIC: A gazebo? What colour is it?
ED: (Pause) It's white, Eric.
ERIC: How far away is it?
ED: About 50 yards.
ERIC: How big is it?
ED: (Pause) It's about 30 feet across, 15 feet high, with a pointed top.
ERIC: I use my sword to detect whether it's good.
ED: It's not good, Eric, it's a gazebo!
ERIC: (Pause) I call out to it.
ED: It won't answer. It's a gazebo!
ERIC: (Pause) I sheathe my sword and draw my bow and arrows. Does it respond in any way?
ED: No, Eric. It's a gazebo!
ERIC: I shoot it with my bow. (Rolls to hit) What happened?
ED: There is now a gazebo with an arrow sticking out of it.
ERIC: (Pause) Wasn't it wounded?
ED: Of course not, Eric! It's a gazebo!
ERIC: (Whimper) But that was a plus-three arrow!
ED: It's a gazebo, Eric, a gazebo! If you really want to try to destroy it, you could try to chop it with an axe, I suppose, or you could try to burn it, but I don't know why anybody would even try. It's a @#%$*& gazebo!
ERIC: (Long pause — he has no axe or fire spells) I run away.
ED: (Thoroughly frustrated) It's too late. You've awakened the gazebo, and it catches you and eats you.
ERIC: (Reaching for his dice) Maybe I'll roll up a fire-using mage so I can avenge my paladin ...

At this point, the increasingly amused fellow party members restored a modicum of order by explaining what a gazebo is. This is solely an afterthought, of course, but Eric is doubly lucky that the gazebo was not situated on a grassy knoll.

[Reprinted from the SIG's fall 1987 Spellbook #13, edited by Corey and Lori Cole, via Mensanity, Lewis Wasserman, ed. Send your compliments to the author along with your subscription to the SIG newsletter ($8) in care of L. Mary H. Kelly, 4030 Valley View Lane #233, Farmers Branch, TX 75244.]

The story printed above can be found at the following URL:

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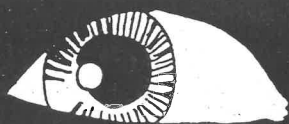
Tricky Telepathy: How to Read Minds without being Noticed

Gary Johnson

Has your telepath ever tried to sneak into someone's mind without being noticed? If so, you were probably disappointed to discover that the power Telepathy does not work that way in Champions game mechanics. Unless your GM is lenient, the subject of a telepathic attack always knows that her or his mind is being read, and will usually know who is responsible for the intrusion. All at once, your dreams of copying the feats of comic-book telepaths like Professor X and Saturn Girl were shattered. The Champions rules are meant to model what happens in comic-books, but in this case Champions characters cannot perform comic-book feats because of the game mechanics. It is time to offer some suggestions that help redress this injustice.

As a GM, I have given a fair amount of thought to how telepathy works in my campaign world, considering both the game mechanics and the special effects. What follows is my approach to the issue being discussed: these suggestions may not suit your campaign, and I urge all GMs to be certain that they can deal with the consequences of allowing their players either of the Telepathy variants suggested below. In the terminology of the rulebook, both suggestions are marked with a stop sign, as they both have the ability to completely alter a GM's plot or scenario.

My first suggestion is that a mentalist can take extra care when probing a subject's mind and thus avoid being noticed by the target. Usually, even if Telepathy is bought with Invisible Special Effects, the target is aware that her or his mind has been read. The target may not know who has done it, but she or he knows it has happened. To read someone's mind without the victim noticing that it has taken place is a modifier of +20 to the target level. (+20 was chosen because the greatest single modifiers to Mental Illusions and Mind Control are also +20.) The attacker must specify that she or he wants to attempt this before rolling Telepathy dice. If the total on the dice (less Mental Defence) does not equal or exceed the desired level of effect, then the attacker has failed to establish a telepathic link with the target. If the total is equal to or greater than the required number, then attacker may proceed to ask questions as usual, but the target is not aware that her or his mind is being searched.

My other suggestion is based on the premise that telepathy can work in two ways. The first way is what I call "telepathic extension", where the mentalist reaches out with her or his mind and creates a link between minds with the target. The Mental Powers in the rulebook follow this model, as does the previous rules variant. The second method is by "passive telepathy", absorbing the thought-waves emitted by people nearby. Obviously, if people don't emit thought-waves, then "passive telepathy" cannot occur. Presuming that everyone is emitting thought-waves all of the time (because brain activity creates them), it should be possible for a properly tuned "antenna" to pick them up. To represent this in game mechanics, take Telepathy with an Area of Effect: Radius (+1) at No Range (−1/2) and with the additional disadvantage "Cannot read anything other than surface thoughts, cannot send thoughts" (−1). The special effects of the power mean that people whose thoughts are being read do not notice that this is happening, though the mentalist may have difficulty sorting out the different messages if she or he is in a crowd!

Ultimately, whether or not you use either of these rules variants in your Champions game is a matter for your GM to decide. However, given that these suggestions translate comic-book feats into game mechanics, I see no reason why any GM should reject them out of hand, unless she or he knows what a pain it is to have a player character with Telepathy. That's another issue entirely ...
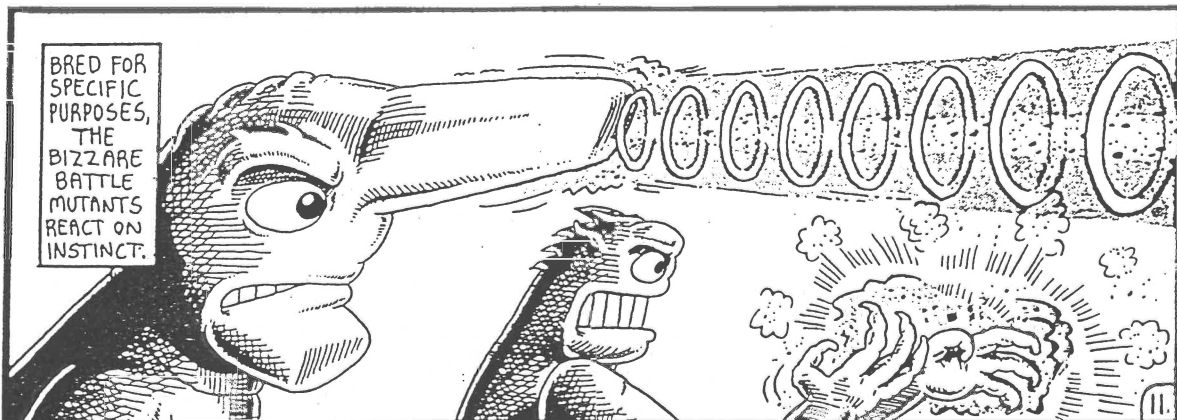
Claws of Bagh Nakh: A Champions Column
Players, Characters, and Player-Characters

Timo Nieminen

The relationship between a player and her or his player-character is a special one; in some ways, in the course of the game, the player **is** the character, at least to some extent. But how far does this identification extend? What, other than the rather obvious physical separation, distinguishes the player from the character during game play? To answer this question, we need to consider what a PC is, how much control the player has over the character, and how the player and the character can affect the game world.

As to exactly what a player-character is, and what it is for, there are many answers: the PC is the player's gaming piece, the PC is the role played by the player in improvised theatre, the PC is a creative work by the player. (How many more can you think of?) All of these contain elements of truth. The emphasis will differ from player to player. In all of these ideas, the PC is the player's interface with the game world, the part of the game world that the player can make decisions for. The player can, of course, also influence the game world through the other players and the GM directly, by suggesting ideas, *etc.*, but it remains up to these other individuals to act on these ideas. Through the PC, the player interacts with the game world in a much more direct way.

The game world, though, has its own reality, its own rules. Some of these rules are enforced by the game mechanics, others by common sense and GM intervention. The PC is bound by this game reality. The most obvious way in which this restricts the PC (and thus the player also) is through the game mechanic controlled event called combat. The player might decide that he wants Captain Cosmic (the PC) to blast the Purple Bladder to bits, but whether or not this occurs is up to their respective powers and the roll of the dice. More subtly, the character is also limited by its concept. If Captain Cosmic is not the kind of hero who would ever do such a thing, Captain Cosmic won't do such a thing, regardless of the player's desires. In many cases, this will be enforced by games mechanics such as Psychological Limitations, but in others it won't be. The description of a character using Psychological Limitations usually stops short of completeness, often when laziness sets in once the 50 point limit is reached. Which brings us to a point worth mentioning about Psychological Limitations, namely that they don't limit a character any more than the basic concept of the character does. The points you get are bonus points for describing how the concept limits the character. (Even in a case where the player wants no limitations whatsoever on the character, how about "will do anything" or "accepts no limits on behaviour" for at least a few points? But who would want to play such a character?)

Do these limits on the personality of the character limit the player? Generally, the player has set these limits for the character, and has chosen to abide by them. True, they may sometimes interfere with convenience, but the player's freedom to choose was still there at the character's origin. If the player gave the matter sufficient thought in the beginning, only the old style D&Desque power-gamer will feel imposed upon. This means that you should choose your character concept with great care. Make sure it is something you will want to play!

The player is also limited by the character's knowledge. The player might know that the Crimson Assassin is sneaking up behind her PC in the middle of the fight (maybe the player can see that red figure on the table right behind hers), but the character can only perform actions justified by its own knowledge. All of which can make for strange detective story scenarios, wherein the players struggle to find ways in which their characters can find out information which they (the players) already know. At least it should make for somewhat more competent detectives than is usual.

In these ways, the game world restricts the actions of PCs. The "physical laws" of the game world determine the success or failure of many actions. The personality and knowledge of the character affect what actions the player can decide to attempt. (This can also make things easier for the player. That cryptography skill roll your character makes means that you don't have to decode that message as a player. Too much of that kind of thing might make for dull play — an exercise in dice rolling only — but it definitely has its place.) The player, however, has a tremendous degree of control over the character beyond these points. Firstly, the player generally designs the character. (Or at least chooses to play that particular character.) While most of this is over before the action starts, it's more influence over the character than the player has over herself or himself! Character creation doesn't stop at the start of the first session of play either, there's all those experience points to spend. Of course, spending those points has to be approved by the GM, and must be justifiable in terms of the game world. The last major way in which the player can affect the game world and the PCs is that she or he can interact with the GM and the other players, by-passing the game world completely.

On this level, the players can decide how their characters will relate to each other: whether they will be rivals, comrades, lovers, or bitter enemies. They can talk to the GM about NPCs, and about their interaction with the players' characters. A player can ask the GM to arrange events for special purposes. For example, the player might decide that her or his martial artist character with minor mental powers becomes a crippled telekinetic telepath. The GM and player can set things in motion so that, within game reality, these events come about. Sometimes events like these need careful planning, as they won't happen without numerous coincidences, and care must be taken to not have the plan foiled by other players who aren't in on the plot. Only the GM, with control over the entire game world except for the PCs, can do these things. Any good GM will be prepared to listen to such ideas, and suggest ways in which they can be carried out, or reasons why they should not be. The GM has a responsibility to the other players as well, and this may force the GM to veto many ideas. ("I want my character to become more powerful than all the other PCs put together!") Part of this is the need to maintain consistency. A way must be found to fit such plans into the game world in a believable manner. Luckily for the GM,

believable in Champions extends up to and beyond space aliens kidnapping and operating on the character.

Planning in this way is independent of the character's plans and desires. The player might want the character to remain perpetually unfulfilled. This will often be necessary for continued playing of the character. A player whose character's sole motivation is revenge against those who killed its parents will not want this goal fulfilled until the player wants to play a new character or to change the motives of the old one. In this way, the player and the character are completely separate. The character ceases to be a role, and becomes a story, an on-going creation. The GM must pay due attention to the plans of the players. Many players will want nothing more than to kick around in the game world for a while, have their characters beat the crud out of bad guys, and hang out and make bad jokes with the other players in the course of doing this. Other players will be mad plotters. Accommodating the plotters and planners can (and should?) be done outside "in character" playing time. It is not a character-game world interaction, and doesn't need to occupy the GM when time should be spent with all of the players. Still, time spent in this kind of planning can bring the players deeper into the campaign, making it more of a joint creation between the GM and the players, and more enjoyable for all. Take a look at the other players and their characters. Even if none of you indulge in this kind of thing consciously, it will still be happening (except in the unfortunate cases of the power-crazed/adversarial GM/player). Maybe a few superheroes are just sadistic brutes who live to pummel villains mercilessly, but most of the PCs would prefer it if their efforts to protect society from evil was less violent. So why do they fight villains so often? Somebody (i.e. the GM and players) must have arranged it that way ...
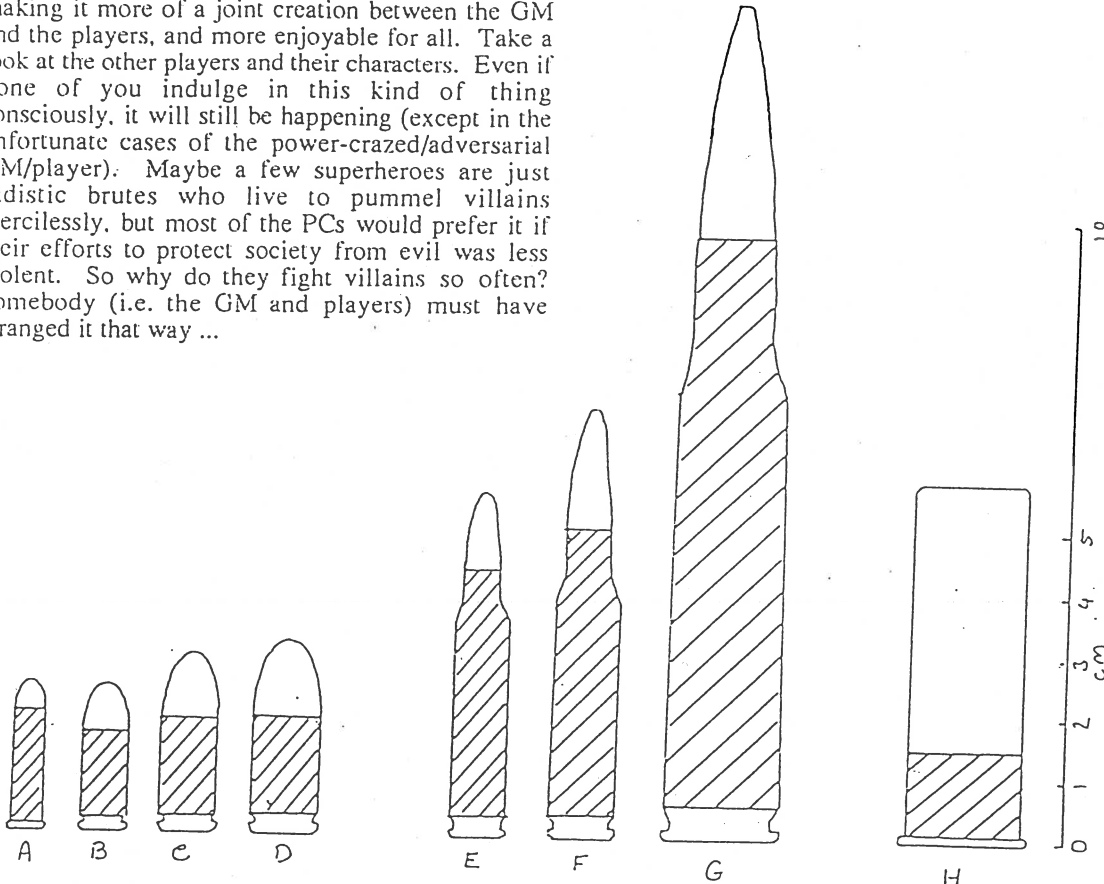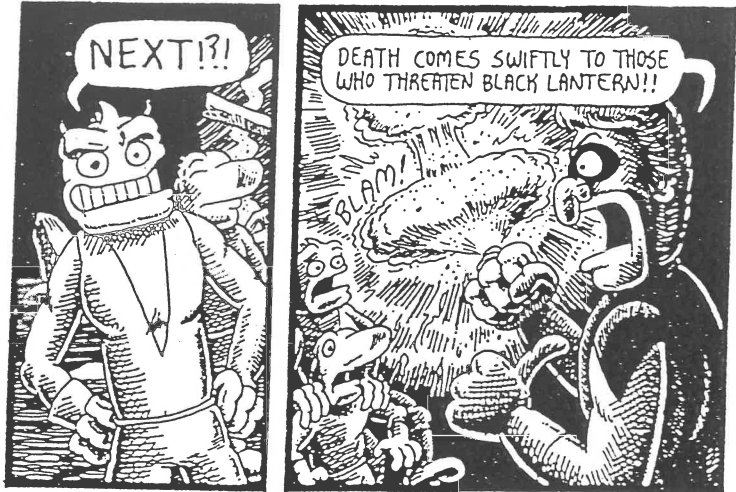
Rounds

The shaded areas are rough indications of the volumes taken up by powder loads.

Pistol Rounds
A.   .22 Long Rifle (a form of .22 Rim Fire)
B.   .32 Auto Colt Pistol
C.   9mm Parabellum (also 9mm Luger)
D.   .45 ACP

Rifle Rounds
E.   5.56mm NATO (also .223 Remington)
F.   7.62mm NATO (also .308 Winchester)
G.   12.7mm NATO (also .50 Browning Machine Gun)

H.   Shotgun 12 gauge

All about Firearms

Alister Whipp

This article is meant to inform role-players (wargamers probably already know all of this) about firearms: how they work and how they are used. The information is not horribly technical, but hopefully covers everything needed to run a reasonably realistic game that includes firearms. I have assumed that any game using this article is set in modern times: to cover the history of firearms would take more space than is available in this publication.

Pistols

Modern handguns come in three basic forms: the auto-loading, the revolver, and the breech-loading. Most pistols fall into the auto-loading or revolver classes (examples of auto-loaders are target guns and derringers). For all pistols, the gun is held in one hand, although two can be used, and the trigger is pressed (pulled in a straight line towards the grip) to fire the bullet. Generally, because of the small size of a handgun, and the limit on barrel length, the pistol is not a powerful weapon. There are very few handgun cartridges that any self-respecting hunter would use to kill an animal that had the same body mass as a human. For this reason, humankind has been searching for ways for firing lots of bullets fairly quickly, so that the net effect is sufficient to kill or at least incapacitate an enemy. Originally, this lead to multiple barrel pistols, but the idea was refined to the revolver, and later other ideas (e.g. the auto-loading pistol) appeared.

The revolver holds its cartridges in a cylinder that has an axle so that it can be rotated by a mechanism and align successive rounds with the barrel. There are two basic techniques for rotating the cylinder. Single action revolvers use the hammer, which must be pulled back (usually with the thumb or the other hand) before the gun will fire. Single action revolvers were the earliest revolvers. Double action revolvers rotate the cylinder using the trigger pull. This speeds up operation, but as the trigger requires significantly more pressure and travel it also reduces accuracy. Most, but not all double action revolvers can be fired single action. [In GURPS, double action can fire 3x as fast as single action but is at –2 to hit, and single action can be sped up with skill rolls against slipping and fanning, for which see the next paragraph.] There is a third form of revolver, but as far as I know there was only ever one model. The auto revolver uses gas pressure from the previous shot to push the hammer back. This requires a fairly complex mechanism, and hasn't been seen for a long time.

There are two ways of speeding up the fire of a single action revolver. Slipping the hammer is a difficult technique where the hammer is operated very quickly with the thumb of the firing hand. Basically, it's the same action that's normally used to cock the gun, but the aim isn't moved (usually the gun is pointed upwards to get the thumb in the right place) and it's much faster. The second and easier method involves two hands and is called fanning. When fanning, the firer holds the trigger down and repeatedly pulls the hammer back and lets it go.

The cylinder can be accessed in several ways to remove spent rounds and load new ones. Probably the most common today is the swing out method, where the cylinder swings out of the frame (usually to the left) when the cylinder catch is pressed and the spent rounds are ejected when the ejection rod is pushed. New rounds can then be inserted, either individually or using a speed loader. Speed loaders hold all the rounds (usually six) in the right alignment so they can all slip in at once. Most modern double action revolvers are swing out models. Another method is the break, where the revolver hinges at the rear of the trigger guard, and swings forward and down so that the back of the cylinder is exposed, letting reloading take place as per the swing out method.

Some revolvers are reloaded one round at a time, because access to the cylinder is via a small port in the side that allows access to only one round at a time. To get to any of the other rounds, you must rotate the cylinder. This method is more often seen as a backup system than as the standard reloading method. Note that the chamber (the hole in the cylinder where the cartridge sits) that is aligned with the barrel when the gun is at rest is not the one that is fired. It's the next one around in a clockwise direction.

All this brings me to a small aside: spinning the cylinder. With the hammer pulled back so that it has rotated the cylinder, the cylinder is freed up, and can be spun. This is next to useless information, but PCs have strange tendencies towards silly games involving revolvers and chance. P.S., here's a nasty version of Russian roulette. Get a double action revolver with one bullet loaded and spin the cylinder. Then, pull the trigger five times in rapid succession. There's a one in six chance of staying alive.

Some final points about revolvers. Firstly, revolvers are often considered to be more accurate and reliable than autos. This isn't actually the case, but *as a generalisation* more revolver manufacturers care about accuracy than auto-loader manufacturers. There are many good auto pistols that will out-perform any revolver in the field of reliability, and many perform very well at accurate shooting. Secondly, there are no revolvers currently manufactured that can be silenced. Because revolvers let gas escape between the cylinder and the barrel, it is not possible to silence them. Finally, not all revolvers are six-shooters; many are five shot or seven shot weapons. The largest capacity pistol revolver that I know of is a nine shot .22 gun.

On to auto pistols. Auto-loading (**not** automatic) pistols use either the force of the recoil or the pneumatic pressure created by firing the gun to reload. Of the weapons that use recoil to reload, there are two types: blowback operated and recoil operated. Blowback operated weapons force the slide back and toss the spent round out the side. Then the return spring forces the slide forward again to pick up a new round, and on the way the hammer stops early so that when the end of the reload cycle is completed the weapon is cocked and ready to fire. Recoil operated weapons go through the same procedure, but they also move the barrel. At the beginning of the slide's movement the barrel comes with it, and it's picked up on the way back. This ensures that the firing chamber isn't open (to eject the spent round) when the bullet is still in the barrel, as that would

blow hot gases out the side of the gun. Generally, blowback pistols are used for rounds that are relatively low-powered, so that the weight of the slide and the force of the recoil spring are enough to delay the recoil stroke long enough for the bullet to leave the barrel.

On the last round of the magazine the slide stays back and the old magazine is slipped out by pressing the magazine catch. Then a new magazine is inserted, the slide stop is pressed, and the gun completes the reload cycle as it normally would. Auto-loading pistols come in single and double action versions, where the difference really only applies to the hammer and only on the first shot at that. Normally, when carrying around an autopistol the gun has a full magazine, no round in the chamber, the hammer in the decocked position, and as many safeties as it comes with on. To fire from this state, you need to put a round in the chamber (something a revolver does better). For an auto-loader, you have to manually pull back the slide and drop it back. Next you need to take all the safeties off, and if you're using a single action auto, you have to pull back the hammer as well. Alternatively, you can carry around a gun with a round in the chamber by loading a round, pulling out the magazine, adding a round and replacing the magazine. Now only idiots leave the gun cocked with the safeties off, but some do anyway. "Combat loading" is full clip, one round in the chamber, the hammer back and the safeties on. Sort of scary that there's a name for it. In contrast, the standard police load is a revolver with the bullet under the hammer empty, so that the gun will not go off if it is dropped and the hammer struck.

Gas operation is the system most often used for assault rifles and semi-auto rifles. It appears in very few handguns; to my knowledge, only a couple of Steyr pistols and the "desert eagle". To avoid many details, the reloading cycle is driven by a pneumatic system running of the gas pressure generated by firing the round. This restricts these guns to jacketed bullets (lead clogs the gas vents), but it is a tried and trusted method. Otherwise the operation (though not the field stripping) is the same as the other semi-auto pistols.

Safeties are many and varied. Virtually every gun has some sort of safety: most use a lever within reach of the firing hand. Often the safety is duplicated on either side so it can be used by either left or right handed gun nuts. A few of the odder safeties are the grip safety used by Heckler and Koch and the trigger safety used by Glock. Both safeties are deactivated by holding and firing the gun normally. The trigger safety is more reliable and safe, as it's harder to bump or hit accidentally. Many police and gun nuts regularly carry trigger safetied combat loaded Glocks (with no other safety) and don't have problems, so it's obviously a good safety. Can't get much feedback on the H&K P9, as it's horribly expensive and no-one bought any.

Auto-loading pistols have clips or magazines that contain the cartridges they fire. These need to be loaded with rounds before they are themselves loaded into the gun. Pretty simple concept, but you don't want to be stuffing around trying to get loose rounds into a clip while someone's shooting at you. It's a good thing to have some spare clips already loaded and ready to go. Many guns have extended clips available that contain more rounds than normal. At the extreme end, there are 30 round clips for Glock pistols that normally take 17. Most clips cost around ten to twenty bucks, and up to fifty dollars or so for the fancy extended ones, but check with your GM in case the campaign uses different prices.

Breech-loading pistols don't reload quickly. Basically, to reload you open the gun, take out the old rounds, and replace them with new ones. Double barrel shotguns are reloaded in this way, and so are most breech-loading pistols (except for bolt action pistols, which are usually target guns). The common breech-loaders that PCs will use are the derringer and the howdah. Derringers are one to four barrel small guns designed for concealment, to the detriment of everything else. They can literally be hidden in the change pocket on a pair of jeans. The other gun, the howdah, is at the other end of the firepower scale. Originally designed as a last ditch defence against tigers, it's intended to scrape tigers off the elephant you're riding (the basket on top of an elephant is called a howdah). Essentially a small bore shotgun converted to fire single bullets, cut down to the size of a large pistol, and with a pistol grip. For a one shot backup weapon they cannot be beaten.

A pistol round or cartridge consists, in most cases, of a bullet, the brass, the powder and the primer. The firing pin hits the primer, which contains an impact sensitive explosive, and it explodes, setting off the powder (usually a double base smokeless, i.e. nitrocellulose and nitroglycerine) which propels the bullet down the barrel. Most pistol rounds are fairly low velocity (800–1400 feet per second) and use a bullet the same diameter as the brass. Generally the bullets weigh between 25 and 300 grains, and vary between .22" and .5" in diameter.

When someone describes a round they normally give the brand and calibre (diameter). Calibre is expressed in either inches or millimetres. Thus a .38 ACP (auto colt pistol) is a .38" diameter bullet in the ACP range of bullets. It's common for bullets to have multiple names: the .38 ACP is also called the 9mm short. Another confusing problem is that often the bullet is not the listed size; someone just thought it sounded better. The .38 ACP is actually .357" in diameter, as is the .38 Special, the most common revolver round in the world. As a general rule of thumb, the heavier or faster the bullet the more damage it will do. As an increase in diameter allows both more weight in the bullet and more powder (and consequently more speed), rounds become more dangerous as the calibre gets larger. Note that this is not always the case (e.g. the .45 ACP is considerably less powerful than the .44 [actually .429"] Remington Magnum), and rifle rounds have to be considered according to a completely different scale, because they use a different design (although within the group of rifle rounds this principle kind of works).

The most common round is the .22 Rim Fire, which is a pitiful excuse for a round but is really cheap and lightweight, and has its uses. The .38 Special is also a very common revolver cartridge (it's the most common round used by the cops), and is partway between a high and a low powered round. The 9mm Parabellum (sometimes Luger) is similar to the .38 Special, but mostly used in auto-loaders. The .357 Remington Magnum is a high velocity round firing the same bullet as the .38. Revolvers designed for .357 mags can fire .38 rounds, making them somewhat flexible (this doesn't work in reverse). 10mm Auto is the product of the FBI ballistic labs, is reasonably new, and packs a fair kick. The .40 Smith and Wesson is similar to the

10mm but has a bit less power, which makes it more controllable (and popular). The .44 Magnum is a big nasty cartridge designed for hunting, making a good round for big bastards. The old and venerable .45 ACP has been around for an awfully long time, and some would say it's still the best. It packs a less penetrating punch than a 9mm but is more damaging than a .357 and subsonic, which means it can be very effectively silenced.

When selecting pistols, most PCs will tend towards those that cause the most damage, or have the most rounds, or the fastest reload, or whatever, but that's usually not a very good choice. A good compromise is usually the better choice. It can depend on the detail inherent in the game your playing. Also, style is (depending on the player) possibly more important than any other thing. In general, go for the biggest gun your character would feel comfortable with. Don't get a gun with no punch, or you'll regret it when it comes time to use it, but don't get a huge hand cannon either, or you'll regret it the rest of the time. If you need something huge get a real firearm; handguns are for concealment and easy of carry.

So what would I suggest as a good selection of firearms? Well, that depends strongly on what the purpose and who the character are, as it always does. You should never be conned into thinking that there is one true way to be the best. First off, if there was one it would rapidly become a very bad way to stay alive, and second, what on earth has being the best got to do with anything? Role-playing is about, well, role-playing. If your character is a little weed who's annoyed about being pushed around and knows nothing about guns, then sure, go for the biggest gun you can find. Which brings us to ...

Rifles and Shotguns

Rifles were originally those long firearms that had a helix (i.e. a rotating pattern like a screw thread or a spring, although rifling is much more stretched out) "carved" into the inside of the barrel. Because this is so useful (it helps stabilise the bullet in flight) it is now so common that virtually all firearms have rifling, and the term "rifle" has come to mean a two handed firearm that propels a single bullet at a time. Shotguns are a separate category of gun because they are not rifled, but are the largest example of smooth bore (the inside of the barrel is referred to as the bore) weapons.

The difference between a rifle and a shotgun is mostly in "bullet" design. Rifles use a single heavy, shaped piece of (usually) lead jacketed (plated) with steel or copper. The rifle bullet is shaped for efficient supersonic travel. In contrast, shotguns fire a multitude of small round pellets that spread out from the end of the barrel. Generally speaking, a shotgun's penetration is not very high, so they are not very good against armoured targets, but the spread of shot (the pellets) causes a large amount of damage and makes aiming easy (in extreme cases, i.e. sawn off double barrels, the shotgun needs only to be pointed in the general direction). Shotguns have a lot of kick because they throw a lot of lead at the enemy, so the gun nut must cope with a lot of recoil. For this reason, and for the wounds they cause (very nasty), shotguns are very intimidating, especially if the intimidatee gets a look at the size of the bore, which is universally very large compared to other firearms.

Gauge is the normal measurement of calibre for shotguns. This is a reverse measurement, i.e. a twelve gauge is larger than a twenty gauge. The gauge is determined by the number of spherical lumps of lead that fit exactly inside the barrel that are needed to make up one pound. The barrel of a twelve gauge (the most common) is about 19mm wide. Gauges range from 28 to a massive 4. Shotguns can fire single bullets, but they work better in this case with a rifled barrel. A shotgun with a rifled barrel is called a slug gun. A four gauge slug gun is often called an elephant gun.

Rifles vary an awful lot in power. At the low end of the scale is the .22 rim fire, which was originally designed for a low powered revolver, and is mostly used for target shooting and dispatching small pests. At the high end are monsters like the 12.7mm NATO and the 15mm Steyr, both rounds that are not designed for shooting living targets, though the 12.7 has been used for that since before WWII. In the middle of the range are rounds like the 5.56mm NATO (or .223 Remington) and the 7.62mm NATO (or .308 Winchester). Most rifle rounds are full power rounds, and will probably drop an enemy if placed in the torso or head of the target. The bigger and nastier the round the higher the likelihood, but even low powered rounds like the 5.56mm NATO (used by most assault rifles around the world) will incapacitate a foe more than fifty percent of the time if you can hit the torso. Most hunters would consider the 7.62 as a good medium round, suitable for large deer or small bears. To drop larger animals (polar bears, elephants, werewolves, Cthulhu) sensible people would go for larger weapons, and there are plenty of options. Hunters have a system for working out the best round for the job called an "optimal game weight". The 5.56 comes in at around 50–80 lbs, the 7.62 scores up to 800 lbs, but psycho PCs can also use the 12.7, which weighs in at around 8000 lbs. However, PCs will usually end up shooting at fellow humans, and should plan for this. Something in the middle to low range will put a human on the ground, so there is rarely reason to go for anything larger.

Rifle and shotgun mechanisms are essentially the same, although each tends towards different types. The basic categories are breech-loading, bolt action (in both repeater and single shot), pump action, lever action, and semi-auto (all three types, gas, blowback and recoil). Breech-loaders are usually double barrel shotguns, but there are rifles that use a similar mechanism. Bolt action rifles are very common, originating in late nineteenth century. To reload you rotate the bolt (with a lever) and pull it back, exposing the firing chamber. This usually ejects the spent round, letting you add a new one. Then you push the bolt forward again and rotate it into the firing position. Back in 1880 an army officer in Britain fired 40 rounds in one minute with a five round bolt action rifle, and this time included reloading the non-detachable magazine. Bolt action rifles are very solid, and there is nothing that throws your aim off when firing, so they are very accurate (and thus used by most people who want accuracy). Repeaters have an internal magazine that tops up the gun for you, and greatly speeds up the process of reloading. The Steyr AMR (anti material rifle) uses a bolt that blows itself back, like an artillery piece, which not only speeds up the operation, but also helps to reduce some of the huge recoil.

Pump and lever action mechanisms are very similar to each other. Both use an external lever to

drive a reloading mechanism that tops up the gun from an underbarrel pipe style magazine. The rounds are normally placed one at a time into the magazine, which makes them slow to reload. If you want to look at pump and lever action weapons in action, just get out any western ever made, and wait. There is not much to choose from between lever and pump actions, but for some reason shotguns tend towards pump and rifles towards lever. Note that because the rounds are stored end to end a short stubby blunt round is normally used, both to increase storage capacity and to reduce the chance of the bullet noses impacting on the primer. Thus lever action rounds are more like big pistol rounds than rifle rounds, and tend to have less penetration than you would expect from a rifle. Some pistols actually use lever action rounds, and vice versa.

Semi-automatic rifles are usually gas operated. The power of most rifle rounds makes the recoil and blowback systems a bit dangerous and inconvenient. Semi-auto rifles require cocking just like their pistol cousins, but this is not done with a slide. Instead, a lever exists on the outside of the main body of the gun (usually on the right hand side, but sometimes on the top) that acts the same way. Gas operation comes in two basic forms, the slide locked and the rotating bolt: both are systems to delay the rearward travel of the bolt. Incidentally, on very powerful rounds the recoil system comes back, and a few rifles use it because it helps to deaden recoil. The basic use of the weapon is the same as for a pistol.

Semi-auto shotguns exist, but are unreliable, because the standard shotgun round doesn't have the strength to withstand being shifted around as violently as an automatic system does. There are two basic fixes to this. One is to make a stronger shotgun shell, but as far as I know brass shotgun shells are still restricted to military arsenals. The other is to use a combination pump/semi-auto mechanism. Shotguns that are normally semi-auto but that can be cleared if a round jams by use of a pump action mechanism are fairly common (the Franchi SPAS 12 springs to mind).

Fully Automatic Weapons

Fully auto weapons come in three basic categories: submachine guns, assault rifles and support weapons. Submachine gun is the term normally applied to full auto weapons that fire pistol rounds. They are operated by a gas, recoil or blowback mechanism. Some (usually the more expensive) allow semi-auto firing and possibly three round bursts. Assault rifles are rifles that fire on full auto. They are larger and more powerful than submachine guns. Support weapons are designed for fire support, and are not readily transportable, but usually a few people can disassemble them and split up the load between them. The majority of assault rifles and support weapons are gas operated, although a new form of mechanism appears on some support weapons. Because they are so large, and because sustaining fire is important for support weapons (even if a round is a dud!), the true machine gun is a fairly common feature of support weapons. A machine gun is a weapon that fires and reloads in a cycle driven by an outside engine, usually electrical. They can be divided into chain guns and rotary cannons (the difference is that rotary cannons do not use multiple barrels to maximise cooling). What most people call a machine gun is actually a gas actuated automatic weapon (which is a long and

cumbersome way of saying it, so everyone just says machine gun).

PCs often go for fully autoweapons, because they provide a heap of firepower in a small package, and most characters are not facing protracted battles or supply problems. The main problems with automatic weapons are overheating and ammunition supply. Most squad level (M60 or so) automatic weapons have barrels that can be changed quickly, and heavier than usual barrels that reduce the damage from heat. The problem with ammo supply is fairly obvious, and the only ways around it are to either carry more or use less. The are quite a few submachine guns that can empty their magazine in under a second, so this is a fairly big problem.

Ammunition

Ammo comes in varying forms. For both rifle and pistol rounds there are a multitude of different bullet designs constructed to behave in various ways when they hit a target. They can be roughly split into deforming and non-deforming bullets. A deforming bullet is "squishy"; when it hits a target it spreads out and dumps its energy more quickly than a non-deforming bullet. This has the double attraction of reducing the chance of overpenetration (a major concern for police) and increasing the size of the wound. Hollow points, dum-dums, and glasers are all examples of deforming bullets. The problem with deforming bullets is that they tend to stop when they meet armour. If armour is the normal state of existence for the "bad guys" in your campaign, I strongly suggest you don't use deforming bullets.

Non-deforming bullets can (but don't have to) be armour piercing, which means they are designed to penetrate as easily as possible. Generally this means that the bullet is pointy and has a strong, non-flexible construction, but at the extreme it could mean that the bullet is a sub-calibre fin stabilised flechette. Armour piercing rounds are usually best when you know you can't get though the armour without it. They lose a lot of their capacity to cause extensive wounds, but penetrate much deeper. If you can aim for vital locations (assuming the rules allow it, and your character is skilled enough) armour piercing bullets are a good thing, because they enable you to penetrate to the vital point regardless of the target's armour.

Shotgun users have a greater range of ammunition choices. Shot comes in pellet sizes, from OOO Buck (the largest) to dust shot. The larger the pellet size, the greater the range and penetration, but the fewer pellets and the more uneven the spread of shot. For hunting humans, something around 4 Buck is best. Note the total damage probably won't change between shot sizes, but the shape and distribution of the damage will.

Gun Nut Book List

For GMs who wish to add details about firearms to their game, I strongly suggest you purchase a *Guns&Ammo Annual*, which appear at the newsagents around November or December each year. These yearly magazines include large catalogues and extensive amounts of ballistic data. Alternatively, you can get in touch with me, and I can probably convert some of the stuff I use into whatever system you're using. To contact me use either the phone (3356 8374), which is horribly unreliable but traditional, or e-mail (alwhipp@gil.com.au).

Guns&Ammo: Complete Guide to Modern Firearms, Petersen Publishing Company.
Guns&Ammo 1996 Annual, Petersen Publishing Company.
Charles Ryan, *Millenium's End: Ultra-Modern Firearms*, Chameleon Eclectic Entertainment Inc.
M.L. Fackler, MD, *What's Wrong with the Wound Ballistics Literature, and Why*, Letterman Army Institute of Research Report, no.239, July 1987.

Michael Hurst, *GURPS High Tech*, Steve Jackson Games.
Kevin Dockery, *Edge of the Sword vol.1: Compendium of Modern Firearms*, R. Talsorian Games Inc.
Edward Matunas, *Metallic Cartridge Reloading*, 2nd ed., DBI Books.
Ian V. Hogg, *Modern Small Arms*, Bison Books.
The Terrorist's Cookbook.
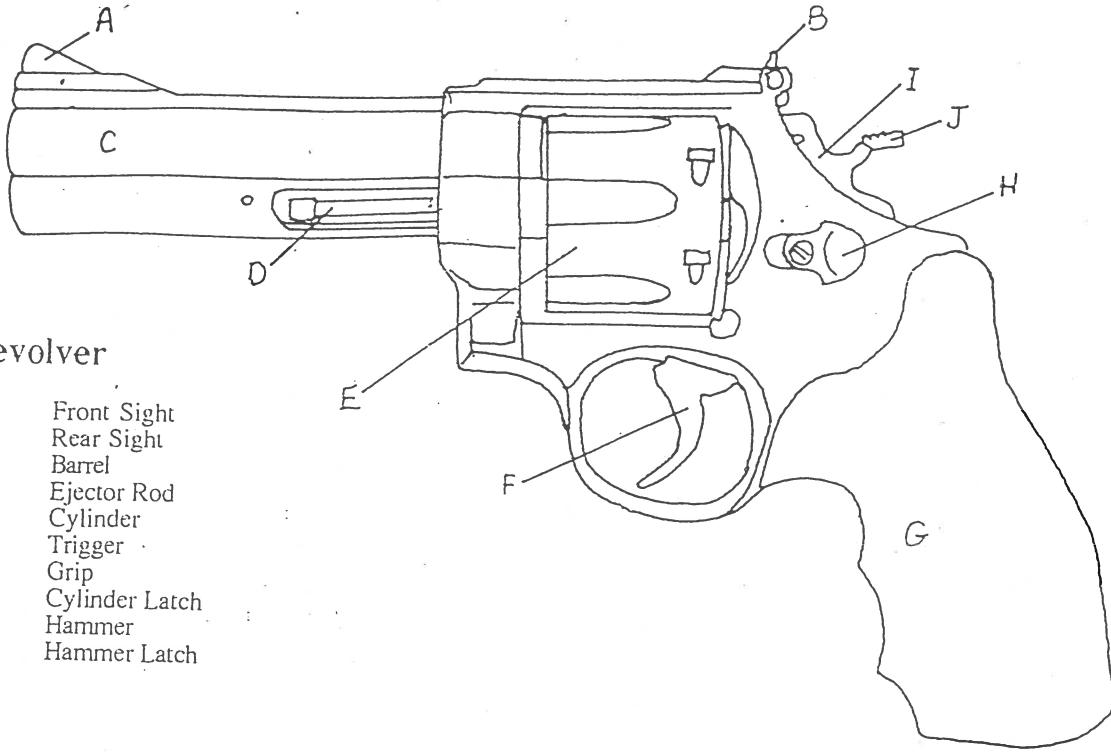
Revolver

A. Front Sight
B. Rear Sight
C. Barrel
D. Ejector Rod
E. Cylinder
F. Trigger
G. Grip
H. Cylinder Latch
I. Hammer
J. Hammer Latch
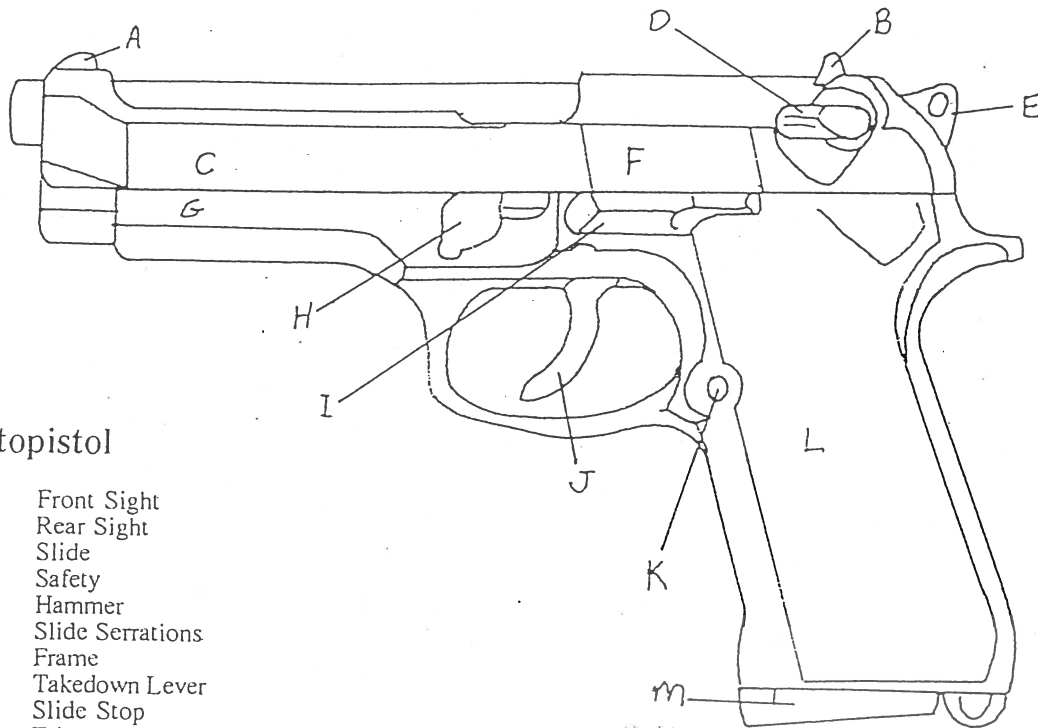
Autopistol

A. Front Sight
B. Rear Sight
C. Slide
D. Safety
E. Hammer
F. Slide Serrations
G. Frame
H. Takedown Lever
I. Slide Stop
J. Trigger
K. Magazine Catch
L. Grip
M. Magazine

"When Will I Ever Think? Play-test *Before* You Print!": Target Numbers and Success Rolls in *Tripod of Light*

by Gary Johnson

Over the last six months, I've received some valuable feedback on various aspects of *ToL*. When combined with my experiences applying the rules in play, it has become painfully obvious that I approached the issue of how to resolve success or failure when using skills from the wrong angle. Because I was developing *ToL*'s game mechanics from a basic kernel of rules for combat (i.e. it is, as one friend observed, "a D&D hack"), skills were tacked on more as an afterthought than as an integral part of the design concept. This is why carrying out a task is given an equivalent "AC" for the player to "hit" with her or his die roll. With the benefit of hindsight and criticism, I see that this approach can confuse people trying to play *ToL*; furthermore, I've changed my view on how to represent the effects of armour on combat in game mechanics. As I've been informed that "armour class" is a registered trademark of TSR, this seems like an excellent opportunity to move away from "armour class" and towards a more intuitive game mechanic: target numbers.

Succeeding and Failing

Many things that players will want their characters to do are not, and should not, be "sure bets". We don't always succeed in hitting the ball when batting, and we don't always paint a masterpiece. The range of possibilities that we encounter in certain situations are represented in *ToL* by comparing the result of a d20 roll (the Success Roll) with a particular number (the Target Number, or TN). If the Success Roll equals or exceeds the Target Number, the character successfully carries out whatever she or he was trying to do; if lower, the character has failed.

Note that Success Rolls and Target Numbers are the terms used to describe any situation where a player has to roll equal to or greater than a certain number, not just when trying to use skills or when fighting. Thus, Resistance Rolls are a particular category of Success Rolls, and working Miracles also requires Success Rolls.

Target Numbers

Target Numbers are usually determined by the degree of difficulty of the task (some other modifiers that can alter a Target Number are dealt with later in this article). For the sake of brevity, much is left to the individual GM to adjudicate.

Success Rolls

Some tasks require no die roll to succeed. If the character possesses the appropriate Skill, she or he can carry out the task without difficulty. Examples include Climbing (the 1+ in 20 chance of falling represents unluckiness, not incompetence), Languages, and Trapping (only when setting traps), as well as a multitude of occupational and social Skills (e.g. Blacksmithing, Dancing, Farming, Fletching, Public Speaking).

As a general principle, a player is not required to make a Success Roll **unless** there is some kind of "resistance" to be overcome **or** the degree of success is important. If another character is trying to interfere with or stop the character using her or his skill successfully, there is "resistance". Both missile and mêlée combat are always "resisted". Filching, Hiding, and Sneaking are good examples of "resisted" Skills. Note that the other character does not have to be actively engaged in looking out for pickpockets, searching for concealed people, or listening for people creeping by: merely being around and having to be deceived by the character meets the requirement of "resistance". Indeed, inanimate objects can be sources for "resistance": Lockpicking and Trapping (when disarming) both allow the character to alter an object in a way that someone else doesn't want (i.e. an unlocked lock or a disarmed trap), and this constitutes "resistance".

The degree of success may occasionally be important. If two or more characters want to determine who does a better job of carrying out a task, the players can compare the amounts by which they make (or fail) their Target Numbers. Sample situations include a singing competition, determining who made the better sword, saddle, or whatever, and who does a better job of playing her or his role in the school play. As a general principle, however, someone who has the Skill will usually be much better than someone who does not, and someone with comparatively many Levels (i.e. more experience) will usually be better than someone with comparatively few Levels. A Success Roll is perhaps suitable for determining who wins the part of Hamlet at an one-off audition, but Skill and Level should be used to determine who plays the better Hamlet over, say, a two-month period.

Degree of Difficulty	TN	Examples
Easy	10	hiding from or sneaking past someone who isn't looking out for people
Average	10	hitting someone in missile or mêlée combat
Hard	15	hiding from or sneaking past a diligent guard
Very Hard	20	climbing up a reverse overhang, hitting someone where she or he isn't armoured*
Next to Impossible	25+	climbing up a reverse overhang in a strong breeze

* optional rule (see the section below on armour)

Skills

Whether or not a player's character has a particular Skill can make a great difference to her or his chance of making a Success Roll. Characters who have spent a 1/2 Character Slot for a Skill gain a modifier of +5 to Success Rolls involving the Skill, and can add a cumulative +1 Modifier for every two Levels after 1st Level. Characters who haven't purchased the Skill cannot claim either Modifier.

Some Skills allow repeated attempts to succeed at a task that the character failed at the first attempt. There is a cumulative –2 Modifier for every unsuccessful previous attempt.

Training Packages

Both Warriors and Spellcasters undergo a particular training regime during their youths, from which they learn two Skills (total cost 1 Character Slot). As a convenience, *ToL* calls these common backgrounds Fighting Training (Combat Training & Mounted Combat) and Spellcasting Training (Language: *Magic* & Magic Theory). For those who don't want, for whatever reason, to have both Skills, brief descriptions follow.

Fighting Training

Combat Training

A character with this Skill knows how to fight, both in mêlée and at range. The modifiers for having this Skill can be divided between your character's Success Roll and Target Modifier (i.e. for offence or defence).

Mounted Combat

A character with this Skill can attack from horseback, ride a warhorse in battle, and charge opponents while on horseback. Without this Skill, a character can still defend herself or himself, but offensive action is not possible and she or he may lose control of the horse (GM's discretion).

Spellcasting Training

Language: Magic

All Spells are cast in this language. *Magic* is a dead language, and it is no longer possible to converse in *Magic*. There are rumours that some members of the magical races (e.g. Dragons, Elves) know more than the phrases for casting Spells, but these rumours seem unfounded. Also, such conversations would be so dangerous that surely they do not occur! See the entry on Languages in the *ToL* rules (p.5) for more details about languages.

Magic Theory

An academic discipline. Those skilled in Magic Theory understand some of the principles by which spoken words of *Magic* make Spells occur. However, there is not a complete theory of Magic, as most people's understanding of the discipline depends on their natural talents to understand and manipulate Magic forces (i.e. the intuitive ability to guess or deduce what new combination of words and syllables in *Magic* will cast a Spell). For this reason, the GM can limit the creation of new Spells by ruling that the character is not capable of creating a particular Spell, or even decide that no new Spells can be created (i.e. *Magic* is actually a dead language, knowledge of most of which is lost, rather than being a collection of "made-up" words that cause supernatural events to happen). If this is the case, then any new Spell would have to be found in an ancient library, or learnt from an ancient being (once again, Dragons come to mind). Ask your GM what explanation she or he intends to use for Spellcasting if you consider the matter important.

COMBAT

Resolving Attacks

To hit another character, whether in missile or mêlée combat, a player has to make a Success Roll with an initial Target Number of 10. If successful, the character has hit her or his target, but might not do enough damage with the blow to penetrate the target's armour, if any.

Combat Modifiers

As a general guideline, anything the attacker does modifies the Success Roll, and anything the defender does modifies the Target Number. See the tables at the foot of this page for details.

Armour and Reducing Damage

Passive defences (i.e. those that don't try to intercept attacks but instead absorb blows that hit) reduce the amount of damage the character takes from a hit. It is possible to take no damage from an attack. Although the net amount of damage caused must always be at least 1 point, even if a character's Strength Modifier reduces the total rolled to less than 1 point, armour can reduce the damage that the target takes to 0 points. The three types of armour used in *ToL* have difference Damage Modifiers (see the table on the next page).

Condition	Modifier to Success Roll	Condition	Modifier to Target Number
Strength (in mêlée)	from –3 to +3	Dexterity	from –3 to +3
Dexterity (at range)	from –3 to +3	Shield	+1
Combat Training	+5*	Combat Training	+5*
Levels	+1 for every 2 Levels after 1st*	Levels	+1 for every 2 Levels after 1st*
Extreme Ranges	+2 (short) or –2 (long)	Unseen Attack	negates all bonuses except for Shield
Surprise	+2		
Unseen Attack	+2		

* this bonus is split between the Success Roll and the Target Number; do not apply it twice!

Armour Type	Damage Modifier
leather armour	−1
chain mail	−2
plate mail	−3

To calculate the Damage Modifier of Spell Effects and the natural defences of some monsters, divide the former Armour Class bonus by 2, rounding upwards, and use it to reduce damage. Thus, *Warding* confers −1 damage on the Miracleworker, and a Dragon's scales are worth −4 damage in protection.

Optional Rule: Bypassing Armour

If the Success Roll for an attack exceeds the Target Number by 10 or more points (i.e. the equivalent of a Very Hard task with a starting Target Number of 20), the attacker has aimed accurately enough to hit an unarmoured part of the defender. Note that this rule assumes that part of the defender is not covered by her or his armour. The armour types detailed above do not protect all of the arms and legs, and have at best an open-faced helmet. If a character was wearing a suit of armour that covered her or his entire body, such as a fully articulated suit of plate armour, bypassing armour in this way is not possible. Whether or not non-human beings are fully protected by their body armour is up to the GM.

In Conclusion: About the Omissions

Anyone who has read the various *ToL* publications over the last three issues of the *Queensland Wargamer* has no doubt noticed that *ToL* leaves a great deal up to the individual GM and/or players. Not everyone likes this approach in a rules system, and I agree that extensive and detailed rules can be reassuring and save a lot of time and aggravation. However, I don't have the time or inclination to construct such a rules system. My intention with *ToL* was to present a basic structure that is easy to use, provides opportunities for you to have fun, and may prompt you to exercise your imagination and your creativity. I think I have met this goal, and now I intend to leave *ToL* alone. Let me know if you want guidelines or suggestions about anything else.
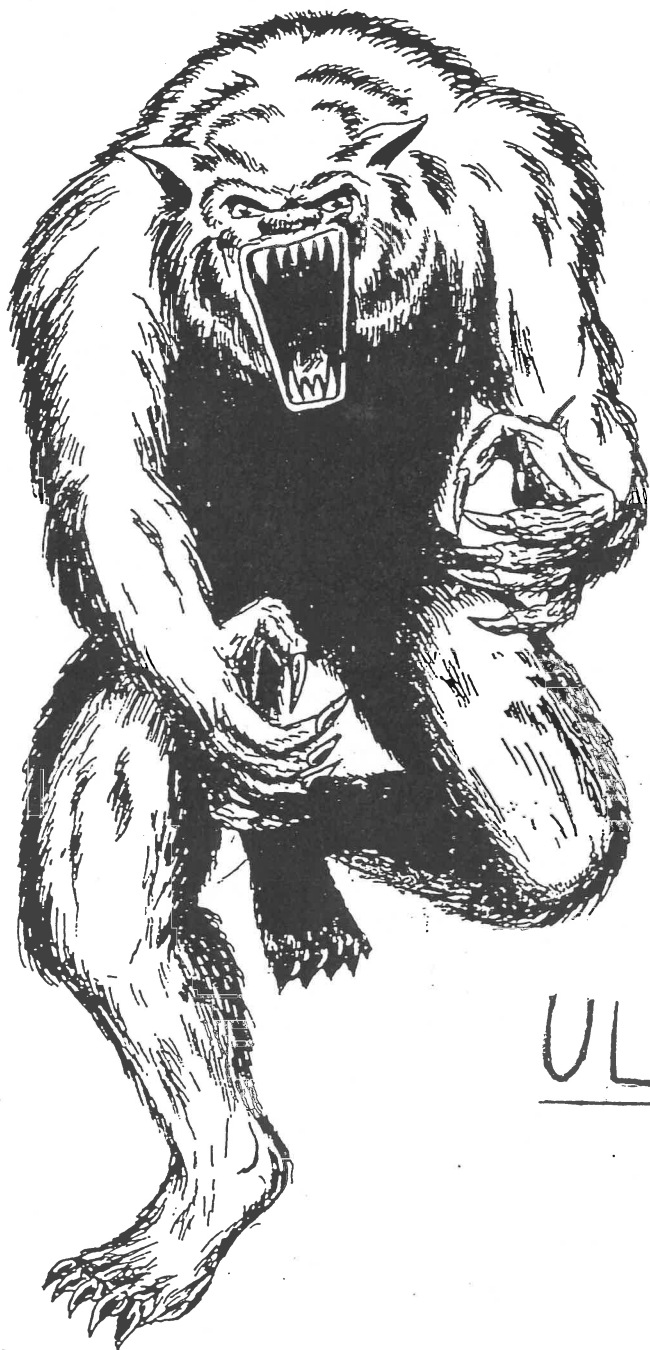
ULF

Characters for Champions: Kveld-Ulf (Nightwolf)

character concept and background by Graeme McCowie
technical stuff by Gary Johnson

Value	Char	Cost
45*	STR	30
20/26†	DEX	44
30	CON	40
15	BODY	10
10	INT	0
15	EGO	10
20/25†	PRE	14
14/6†	COM	−2
12/22*†	PD	11
10*	ED	3
4/5†	SPD	13
14	REC	0
60	END	0
50	STUN	0

100+	Disadvantages
0	Identity: Kveld-Ulf Hallgerdsson
5	Distinctive Feature: Half-Human, Half-Aesir
5	Distinctive Feature: Large, red-haired man in expensive clothing
10	Unfamiliar with the Modern World (infrequently, greatly)
10	Tries to Maintain Social Order (moderate)
10	Brave (moderate)
10	Inquisitive (moderate)
10	Too Self-Reliant (moderate)
10	Dislikes Unnecessary Killing Attacks (strong)
137	Character Bonus

Cost	Powers	END
18	1 1/2d6 HKA (3d6+1 with STR), 0 END, OAF sword	0 (2 with STR)
15	1d6 HKA (2d6 with STR), 0 END, reduced penetration, claws/teeth†	0 (1 with STR)
10	+3d6 PRE Attack, only while howling (−1/4)†	
7	Damage Resistance 5r PD, 5r ED, + 5r PD (total 10)†	
7	1 Density Increase, 0 END, persistent, always on	
3	LS: Diseases	
7	Perception 14−†	
3	+3 Sight Perception, only vs. darkness penalties (−1)†	
5	Instant Change into Lupine Form	
3	3 pt. Language, variable special effects, costs END, magic spell	1
3	1" Change Environment (creates faint light), no range, magic spell	1
3	Sense Poison, costs END, magic spell	1
3	LS: Water Breathing, costs END, magic spell	1
3	+2 Stealth, costs END, magic spell	1
	Skills & Talents	
3	Combat Sense 11−	
3	Linguist	
3	Navigation 11−	
3	Riding (Horses) 13−/14−†	
3	Stealth 13−/14−†	
3	Streetwise 13−/14−†	
3	Survival (Arctic) 11−	
11	Languages: West Norse (native), English, French, Russian (fluent), Danish, Modern Greek, Modern Icelandic, Polish, Swedish (fluent conversation)	
2	AK: Tenth Century Scandinavia & Iceland 11−	
10	+2 Hand-to-Hand Combat Levels	

* effects of Density Increase already figured in	† only in lupine form (Hero ID)

OCV: 7/9†	DCV: 7/9†	ECV: 5	Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12/3,5,8,10,12†

Costs:	Char		Powers		Totals		Disadv		Base
	173	+	134	=	307	=	207	+	100

Extract from *Thaettr Kveld-Ulf Hallgerdarsonar* ("The Story of Kveld-Ulf Hallgerdsson"):

There was a man named Arni, the son of Thorstein Arnason and Aud Ingjaldsdóttir, who owned a large farm in Trøndelag. He had two sons and a daughter named Hallgerd, who many considered to be one of the best matches in the district. It happened one summer that when she was walking home across the fields she met a stranger, handsome and fair of face, who called himself Lopt. He was clever with words, and amused her with stories of the Aesir. One evening it happened that Arnkell, her brother, found them together and made to strike Lopt with the wood-axe he was carrying. Lopt seized Arnkell by the arm, forcing him to drop the axe. It could be seen that where Lopt's hand had touched Arnkell, the flesh was burned as though by fire. Things might have gone worse for Arnkell, but at that moment his father and brother ran up with weapons drawn and Lopt disappeared from their sight. Arni said that this had been an evil thing that had happened to his children, and for the rest of the summer he would not allow Hallgerd to go anywhere alone in case Lopt returned. Arnkell's arm healed, but he was never able to have the full use of it that he had before the stranger injured him there.

The next summer a son was born to Hallgerd, and she named him Ulf. He was a large child and grew quickly. When he was only ten winters, he was already as tall and strong as many grown men, and was becoming difficult to keep out of trouble, for he would often provoke the men of the district into fighting with him, and many were injured. One day Ulf asked Arni if he would arrange for him to join a viking expedition so that he might see more of Norway than the surrounding district. Arni agreed, and the following summer Arnkell took Ulf with him on a journey to Denmark, where they fought in many skirmishes. On the voyage home they were attacked by two viking ships and it would have gone badly for them if Ulf had not pushed his way to the front of the fighting and killed the vikings' leaders. All agreed that it was Ulf's strength and skill that enabled them to win free, and when they returned to Arnastad they made much of his achievements. Arni agreed to allow Ulf to accompany Arnkell to the court of Hákon jarl, who was much impressed with Ulf's manner and invited him to join his retainers. Ulf did so, and became known as a formidable fighter. When he was full-grown no man could match him for strength. Hákon often provided him with a ship and equipment with which to keep vikings away from the Norwegian coast, and Ulf fought many battles. Men said of him that at night he wore a wolf's skin, and would go among the camps of his enemies spreading fear, and for this they called him Kveld-Ulf ["nightwolf"].

When Hákon jarl was slain and Oláf Tryggvason became king, Kveld-Ulf left Norway and travelled for a time. It is said that he did not trust Oláf, because of the king's hatred for those who would not accept Christianity and his killing of men he considered to be sorcerers. When Hallgerd died, Kveld-Ulf sold his lands in Norway and journeyed to Iceland, where he settled in Midfjörd at the place now called Ulfsstad. One summer men brought stories of a troll to Ulfsstad, telling of strange fires near the foot of Balljokull. Most men had avoided the area, but some had gone to investigate and had not been seen again. Kveld-Ulf thought to see whether he might come upon the troll, and set off the next day with the sword Hákon jarl had given him. It is not said that he found the troll, only that no man saw Kveld-Ulf again.

Of Kveld-Ulf this has been told: that he was bigger than most men, and had no equal in strength. He was considered handsome, and had red hair and a beard, and was always well-presented. Most found him agreeable company, although he was sometimes given to taunting those who seemed to him more foolish than most.

Background

Ulf was born in Norway in A.D. 974, the son of Loki of the Aesir and the human woman Hallgerd Arnadóttir. Mindful of the old tales of Loki's other offspring, such as Fenrir the Wolf and Jormundgand the Midgard Serpent, Hallgerd and her father Arni feared that her child might follow suit. When he was born, however, it was clear that Ulf was no monster but an outwardly normal human boy. He was far from ordinary, though, growing quickly and gaining strength every day, it seemed, until as a child of nine he was as strong as any man in the district. With an eye to the potential for harm such strength could bring, accidentally or otherwise, Hallgerd endeavoured to instil in Ulf an appreciation of the heroic values of their society: honour, courage, loyalty, hospitality, and the desire to preserve these values from those who threatened them. Nevertheless, he was still a boy, and still young enough to want to join Arnkell, Hallgerd's brother, on a viking expedition to Denmark.

In the summer of 985, Ulf travelled with Arnkell, and took part in the numerous skirmishes that were part of a viking's life. It was not until the return voyage that Ulf was compelled to fight for his life, when two Danish longships attacked them at sea. Ulf fought in the front line against their attackers, and it was largely due to his strength and ferocity that they were able to repel the attack and capture one of the ships. On arriving home, Arnkell suggested that Ulf should seek a place among the retainers of Hákon *jarl*, who ruled in Norway at that time and had his hands full stopping Harald Bluetooth, King of Denmark, and his son, Sven Forkbeard, reestablishing their rule over Norway.

So it was that in the winter of 987 Ulf accompanied Arnkell to the court of Hákon *jarl*. Hákon took a liking to Ulf, who quickly proved himself the equal of any warrior in the *jarl*'s following. In the years up to Hákon's death in 995 Ulf fought many battles against the enemies of Norway, winning great renown as a warrior and leader of men. He had reached his full-growth by the age of fifteen, and his strength was now beyond reckoning — so much so that in many cases it was simpler for Ulf to operate alone than in the company of others. Soon, his reputation alone was enough to secure peace in whatever district he was guarding at the time.

Around this time rumours that Ulf was a shape-changer began to spread: it was said that at night he roamed the country as a wolf, seeking out Hákon's enemies. No-one had seen him do this, but Ulf did not attempt to discourage the stories, and he was soon nicknamed Kveld-Ulf, or "nightwolf".

In 993 he travelled throughout Kievan Rus and Europe, venturing as far south as Constantinople. When Hákon was killed in 995 and Oláf Tryggvason ascended the Norwegian throne, Ulf was in Denmark seeking his passage home. On his return he found Oláf imposing the Christian faith, killing those of his opponents that he could, and driving others from the country. Ulf and Oláf shared an uneasy truce, each judging it too costly to move against the other. Hallgerd's death in the winter of 997 left Ulf with no ties in Norway, so he sold his lands and journey to Iceland with the intention of leaving behind half a lifetime of warfare.

He landed at Midfjörd in the summer of that year, and bought some land from those already settled there. Soon after he married Aud Gisladóttir, and they had two children. In the winter of 999, rumours spread through the district that a troll had been sighted near the glacier Balljokull in the island's interior. Men who had gone to investigate had not returned, and none could say for certain what had happened to them. Taking the sword Hákon had given him down from its place on the wall, Ulf announced that he would seek out these trolls, if trolls they were, and see to it that they brought no further harm to anyone. As he and Aud bade each other farewell the following morning, neither suspected they would never meet again.

Ulf found the trolls he sought for, although almost a thousand years would pass before he learned that they were extra-terrestrials who had been forced to land on Earth. Allowing him to enter their vessel, the aliens trapped him in a stasis field, and began to examine him to learn more about the human lifeform. Tectonic movement intervened before they began their tests, shaking loose tonnes of glacial ice and rock, effectively entombing Ulf and the aliens. Unable to free themselves, the extra-terrestrials placed themselves in stasis until such time as their computer judged that the ship could be freed.

In 1994, the alien vessel was close enough to the surface that the computer released the extra-terrestrials from stasis. The occupants blasted a clear path to the open air, where they found that the world outside was vastly different. The painful probing of Ulf commenced, and further subjects were found in a geological survey team's nearby camp. Within a week, their absence was noted and reported to the authorities.

One of Europe's superhero teams was despatched to investigate. When discovered, the aliens attacked, and the vessel was damaged in a brief and violent struggle that saw the heroes subdued and captured. Occupied by their latest genetically-divergent subjects, the aliens failed to notice the growing instability in the ship's power systems until a power surge attracted their attention. That power surge caused the stasis field encasing Ulf to shut down, leaving him conscious and free for the first time in a millenium. Intent on revenge, he found his way to the level where the other test subjects were being held and promptly attacked the aliens, shapeshifting into the wolflike form he had kept secret for so long, and laying about him with all the strength at his disposal. The destruction wrought by Ulf gave the captured superheroes an opportunity to escape, and they did so, taking the survey team with them. Ulf was the last to leave the vessel, and only the wounded aliens were still on board when the ship's power core gave up all pretence of stability and exploded.

This left the superheroes with the problem of what to do with an inhumanly strong sword-wielding werewolf that had shown a considerable talent for destruction. Somewhat to their surprise, they found him to be both human and reasonable, albeit slightly taken aback by the discovery that the year was now 1994. With no other options available, Ulf accompanied the group back to their base, where he has remained while adjusting not only to life in the Twentieth Century but also to the loss of everyone and everything he knew from his era. He has accompanied the team on several missions, but has not yet decided if this is the life he wants for himself in this strange new world.

When not on a mission, Ulf can often be found reading or watching television, trying to understand more about modern society and culture. Trips to the larger cities of Europe provide him with frequent

diversions, offering new sights and experiences, as well as further opportunities to move among people and learn more about life and customs in the 1990s.

Personality

Ulf is generally good-tempered and easy-going; the only trait he seems to have inherited from Loki is a mischievous sense of humour. He has witnessed enough death, and has caused enough of it himself, to realise that life is something that should be enjoyed whenever possible. However, his love of a good time is tempered by the sense of responsibility ingrained in him during his childhood. Ulf firmly believes in the duty of the strong to protect society from those who would threaten it. In Norway he did this by defending his country against invading armies and viking attacks; in modern Europe he does it by helping to counter the activities of superpowered beings who threaten the safety and security of ordinary people. He approaches this with a seriousness some might find surprising, although he frequently has trouble understanding the point behind many of the quirks of superheroic behaviour. Despite what many people assume, Ulf does not treat the taking of life casually, and if fact prefers not to have to kill unless it seems necessary: it is the precise point at which killing becomes necessary that Ulf often finds himself debating with his teammates.

Being virtually unique in his own time, Ulf is unaccustomed to having people around him whose abilities rival or surpass his own. He is used to working alone, not in a group. This, coupled with his ongoing uncertainty about the role of self-styled "superheroes", tends to undermine his effectiveness as a team player. It is something he and his companions are learning to work with, however, and thus far Ulf has proven himself to be far more of an asset than a liability.

People generally find Ulf easy to get along with, although he has been known to relieve his own frustrations by baiting teammates to see what will happen. While he is unlikely to forget the sorrow of never seeing his children or wife again, he is pragmatic enough to make a new life for himself. Ulf is a practical man, and adaptable — he is coming to terms with life in the Twentieth Century, in spite of the vast differences between now and the past. His natural curiosity, and the conviction that humanity itself has changed little, stop him being overwhelmed by the enormity of his situation.

Powers/Tactics

Ulf's most obvious power is his sheer physical strength. This, combined with his skill with the sword, meant that he rarely needed to draw on any of the other gifts he inherited from his father. Ulf did make extensive use of his ability to assume the form of a manlike wolf while serving Hákon in Norway, but he rarely allowed himself to be seen in this shape. Possessing heightened agility and speed in this form, along with enhanced night vision, he used it to infiltrate enemy encampments after dark, and would reveal his presence with fearful howls. More than once he prompted the would-be invaders to break camp and flee: it was a particularly effective piece of psychological warfare to use during a dark Scandinavian night, and it has lost little of its effectiveness in the modern world.

Although he has some talent for magic, Ulf has not taken up this field of study, mastering only a handful of spells. Of these spells, the one that lets him understand and speak any new language has been the most useful, whether travelling in medieval or modern Europe. The other spells he knows are strictly utilitarian, and not very useful in combat.

His Aesir heritage gives Ulf certain other physical advantages. Ulf has never been sick in his life and is apparently immune to all diseases, although this cannot be confirmed until Ulf agrees to be tested more extensively than he has been. His body has a higher density than that of ordinary humans, making it harder to injure him. Interestingly, his resistance to physical damage is increased when he is in his lupine form, although why this should be so remains unclear.

Appearance

In the Middle Ages Ulf was an impressive and sometimes intimidating figure. Standing 190 cm tall and weighing 155 kgs, he dwarfed most of his contemporaries. The sight of his heavily-muscled physique was sometimes enough to make even berserks hesitate momentarily. There is no trace of Loki's features in his appearance: Ulf is good-looking, but not remarkably so, and resembles Thór more than he does Loki. In the Tenth Century Ulf wore his red hair long, and grew a thick beard and moustache; now, ten centuries on, his hair has been cut to a normal length and his beard is neat and trimmed. In his own time, and when not occupied with the defence of Norway, Ulf dressed according to his status, favouring expensive linen tunics of deep blues and reds, and cloaks lined with rare furs, taking care to appear well-off without seeming gaudy and extravagant. These days the same inclination has led him to favour Italian designer suits, especially those from Gianni Versace. On the occasions when he has shifted to his wolf-shape while wearing such a suit, the reaction from onlookers has been a mixture of apprehension and amusement.

In his lupine form, Ulf's body remains the same general size and build he has as a human, but is covered with thick reddish fur. His hand and feet end in claws capable of inflicting severe lacerations: for this reason he finds it uncomfortable (and expensive) to transform while still wearing shoes. His head changes the most, becoming decidedly wolf-like. As intimidating as Ulf can seem in his human form, most people — given the choice — would gladly choose it over the alternative.

Possible Uses for Ulf

If your campaign is not set in Europe, you may find it difficult to introduce Ulf to your game. Here are some suggestions:

(i) the PCs can go to Europe for some reason;
(ii) Ulf may be travelling in the PCs' part of the world as a tourist;
(iii) Ulf may be trying to find any descendants for some reason, and they live in the PCs' part of the world (perhaps they're werewolves?);
(iv) Ulf may be used by some evil entity (Loki?) as a weapon against the PCs;
(v) other aliens may come to Earth to see what happened to their friends and decide to invade the PCs' part of the world, so Ulf (and the European superheroes?) get called in as expert advisors;
(vi) the PCs may meet Ulf back in the Tenth Century while time-travelling (then they could meet him again in the present in a later session).

The Etiquette of Gaming
(or, How to Really Annoy Gamers Without Really Trying)

Travis Hall

This Sunday, a small group of people will gather in my bedroom to participate in a role-playing game. Although the composition of this group has changed over the years, the fortnightly gathering has maintained very good continuity for over four years now. In general, the players and I (the GM) get along fairly well. Arguments between players are few (though arguments between characters are plentiful) and generally everyone quite looks forward to seeing each other.

It isn't until I pause and look back at what I have just written that I realise the significance of that last sentence. Yes, my game has been very successful, and I am proud of that, but I cannot claim that it is my skill as a GM that has made it so. Sure, I'm good at it, but so are a hundred other gamers in Brisbane whose games don't work out so well. The players probably don't put much more into the game than those of other groups. Nor is the system or materials any better than most (AD&D is possibly still the world's most popular RPG, though that doesn't necessarily make it the best). But everyone looks forward to seeing each other, and, in the primarily social context of role-playing, that is extremely important.

We all know that if the participants in a game don't get along, inevitably the game will become unenjoyable. Arguments ensue, people get on each other's nerves, and after a month or two everyone secretly desires to strangle at least one other player. Obviously one way to make the game more enjoyable is to get along better.

So why do gamers seem to go to such incredible lengths to crush any hope of getting along with each other?

In his article "Communication between Role-players", Gary wrote "... some players have strange ideas of social behaviour."[1] Though the context in which he wrote this was rather different, this struck me as a very wide-ranging and acute observation. Gamers commonly act in ways which would be simply unacceptable in other social gatherings.

A gaming group consists of half-a-dozen people who will gather in a small area once a fortnight (week, month, whatever) and talk — yes, talk. After all, that is the medium of most role-playing games. And when there is nothing to do other than talk for a lengthy period of time, it is very easy to say things you wouldn't otherwise say. We see so much of each other that we become intimately familiar, and all too often that familiarity does breed contempt. So gamers need to understand why we get on each other's nerves, how we offend each other, and avoid doing it.

Now I will examine some of the grosser ways in which we violate the rules of etiquette which should be followed in the gaming environment.

The first point that springs to mind is the simple courtesy of listening to each other. In other contexts, it is considered rude to interrupt a speaker, and extremely so to shout that worthy down, yet gamers often find themselves interrupted. The GM's voice is a precious and, sadly, finite commodity. It is through that voice that the game must be created, for the GM must (barring visual aids, which are always simply that, aids) describe every detail observed by the characters. If a player is talking while the GM speaks, it makes it much harder for the other players to hear and understand what is happening in the game. Why should the GM have to shout over noisy players? No less important are the words of the players, which must be heard by the GM and often by the other players. No player should be denied the opportunity to act simply because they are unable or unwilling to shout over other noise. We should all have the common courtesy to be quiet when there is no need to speak. Voices should not be raised above normal conversational levels, except for dramatic purposes, and if it is necessary to speak about matters not concerning the game, it should be done somewhere it will not interrupt others, or done so quietly that others hardly notice. If you are one of those players who is naturally unusually loud, try to recognise that and quieten down for the game. (Of course, it should be recognised that sometimes appropriate interruption is not all bad. Just don't do it simply by shouting down the other players.)

A related problem is that of the player who has something better to do. This player is the one who is not paying attention despite supposedly being actively involved in the game at hand. An especially bad example of this are the Magic players occupying themselves with a little game on the side (a scenario which is more widespread than some might think). These players have no idea what is going on in the game, and often disturb the other players. This completely disrupts the flow of the game and discourages the GM. If you really don't want to play the game, simply say so and excuse yourself. Of course, unless extenuating circumstances exist, it is probably best to consider that leave-taking permanent. If you really do want to play but don't feel like it right now, at least try to fake interest. If you were playing basketball or football, you wouldn't let the team down because you "don't feel like it". Don't let your role-playing team down this way either.

As especially difficult variant of the distracted player is the sleeper. While not causing much interruption, a player who is asleep or nearly so can make things very difficult for the GM. It is the responsibility of each player to be able to play when the time comes for the game. As far as possible, arrange not only to be at the game, but to have had adequate sleep the night before. Being hungover (or otherwise incapacitated) is no better. It should be noted that even the most committed player may suffer from this problem occasionally, perhaps due to illness or unavoidable late nights (assignments, *et cetera* — goings to the clubs is not an excuse). When you find yourself becoming a sleeper (and it will happen one day) make arrangements for another player to control your character so that play can continue with a minimum of disturbance, and politely advise the GM

of the problem and the reasons behind it. As a GM, if this occurs in your game, try to be understanding — but remember, players need a real reason. You don't have to stand for a player who just "doesn't feel like it".

Even worse is the player who turns up late, or not at all. While every player will occasionally find that participation in the game one particular day is not possible, you should always inform the GM when you cannot make the game. It is also a good idea to say why. Otherwise, that niggling feeling that you just don't want to play will always remain somewhere in the back of the GM's mind. Being late without warning is also disruptive. If you find that you often cannot make the game, consider excusing yourself permanently. Although there is considerable stigma associated with leaving a game, sometimes it is the best course of action, resulting in an improvement in the game for those players who remain. As a player, I try to arrive a little early for every game, so that I am actually ready to play come the designated starting time. (A caution: turning up too early can be inconvenient for the host.) If you are the host, try to have the place ready to receive the others when they arrive. If you are the GM, you must not only be ready on time, you must also have done any necessary preparation for the game. Not being ready for the players is just as rude to them as them not turning up is to you.

The flip side of the mentally or physically absent player is the player who is not actually involved in the game, but seems more active than the players who are. This player will continually disturb the group with comments or advice despite not having a character present. While most GMs attempt to keep all the players involved as much as possible, every player will inevitably lack a present character at some stage of the campaign. (Some GMs like to give such players NPCs to look after, but this is not always possible either.) Generally, the polite thing to do is sit down and shut up. If you are not interested in watching the others play, or don't want to absorb knowledge your character should not have, wander off somewhere. Not too far — you never know when the GM might want to switch back to your character.

I recommend no further than the next room, with the door open. (See below for the "munchie run" variant.) Another good idea is to have something to keep you occupied when you are not involved. Nothing so interesting that it will distract you when your character is "on-screen", but requiring enough concentration to stop you being tempted to butt in with unwanted comments. (I like to spend my spare moments during a game sticking those protective sticky rings around the holes in loose-leaf role-playing material — hellishly boring, so I'm always ready to participate, but requiring enough concentration to shut me up.)

The previous leads naturally to spectators. Frankly, role-playing is not a spectator sport. Most spectators will find themselves bored out of their minds hearing about characters whose lives mean nothing to them. If you are not invited to spectate at a game, don't turn up. Role-playing is often a rather private activity. If you do have an interest in a game, obtain the permission of the group before settling in as a spectator. As a player, do not invite spectators without asking the GM, and as GM, if you or a player wants to bring along a spectator, ask the players. Do not accept an invitation to spectate unless you really are interested, and as a spectator, you should be seen but never heard. Do not interrupt under any circumstances. If you are an "incidental spectator" — one who is there for another reason, not to play or specifically watch — wait for a break in the game, get your business done, and get out. Spectators often do little other than disturb the game, and disturbance should be avoided wherever possible.

To the subject nearest to gamers' hearts — their stomachs. Don't eat the host out of house and home. At other times, you would ask if you wanted a drink or a snack. Do so at the game (quietly, when it won't disturb play). If you really want munchies, bring them. Even the most well-stocked pantry isn't bottomless, and six gamers can easily eat $30 worth of food during an afternoon. The GM should try to allocate suitable food breaks, and the players should make use of them, rather than interrupting the game. Munchie runs should be made before the game, although if a player is inactive, and likely to remain so for some time, that player might like to obtain permission to do a munchie run. (Don't just go — make sure your character isn't about to reappear.)

I am a firm believer in the idea of "GM's privilege". This principle states that since it is the GM who does most of the work at and before the game, the GM should be awarded a few extra "fringe benefits", if you will. For example, while players will quite often have a little break in which they can refill a drink glass, the GM very rarely gets that opportunity, so when you say, "I'm just going to get a drink (from your personal supplies, or water, of course) out of the fridge," the GM might reply, "Get me one too, please," and you will do it (from his stores). There is an equivalent at conventions in which the GM hands you $1.20 and grunts, "More coke," while gesturing vaguely in the direction of the vending machines. It isn't very much to ask. In fact, one of my players once pointed out that he doesn't care whether it is the GM asking. He would do the same for any player, and that is probably a very good idea, as it helps everyone get along better. However, this is especially important for GMs, as they are often continuously involved in the game, with no breaks whatsoever, so if the GM needs a drink or makes any other reasonable request, make her or his life a bit easier and accede. In fact, you might like to consider

doing things like refilling the GM's glass without being asked. Little things like that can mean a lot to a GM. GMs, don't abuse the privilege. It doesn't give you the right to have players wash the car or give you a pedicure.

Now a little maths: munchies + GM's privilege = ? In my observation, often the solution to this equation is what I call GM Munchie Syndrome. This is when the GM eats all the munchies, continuously stuffing her or his face. I don't know what causes it, but I know I suffer from it, and I am not alone. It seems to get worse when the game goes well. I tend not to notice it at first, and huge amounts of snacks can disappear before I catch myself. Be aware of this problem if you suffer from it, and try not to do it. Perhaps you should have the players put the munchies down the other end of the table. Be especially careful when the players brought the munchies.

A dangerous area of conflict is arguing about the game. While there are many other reasons not to argue with the GM, one of the most important is the fact that it is rude. Often, little disagreements can be quickly resolved after only a few moment's discussion, or the matter might be immediately life-threatening to a character, in which case perhaps the dispute should be resolved immediately, but unless there is a good reason, put it aside until later. Especially don't argue about matters irrelevant to the game at hand. I have had a player pester me for a ruling on a spell he had no intention of using, annoy the other players for second opinions, and then argue the point when dissatisfied with the answers. Maybe if it had been relevant, it would have been appropriate to at least ask the first time, but his behaviour was completely out of line. Leave the major arguments until a break in play. When a ruling goes against you, have the decency not to be insulting about it. Nothing makes a GM's life more miserable than players whining about a ruling made weeks before.

As a GM, when a dispute does occur, listen to the players. Have the courtesy not to abuse your special position as rules-maker. Listen to the players, understand their points, and explain why you have made the ruling you have. Try to avoid falling back on "Because I'm the GM!". Players have a right to understand the game in which they play. While sometimes players should not know all the rules, usually they should know most rules concerning their characters. I once had a GM openly lie about the rules in use in his game, with no reason for the lies ever becoming apparent. That sort of abuse of power is one of the best ways to offend the players and destroy your game.

Say "please" and "thank you". These little words let your fellow games know you are not just taking advantage of them when you ask them for something. It may not seem like much, but over a long campaign it is often the little things that matter. I regard "thank you" as particularly important. I have often had players tell me they liked playing the last game or were really looking forward to the next one, or compliment me on a particular aspect of the game, but it wasn't until after three years or so of running my fortnightly game that a player actually said "thank you" for running the game. That meant much more to me than any other compliment. So think: when was the last time you actually thanked your GM?

Be careful what you say. Something that you might get away with in other company might offend a member of your gaming group. For example, there have always been more male than female role-players (a situation that is improving slowly) and so many male players have become used to their gaming being a "man thing". Then a female player joins the group, and suddenly the sexist jokes routinely made by one or more of the players are offensive to another player. Now, many would argue that the sexist jokes were never acceptable in the first place, but at least in the all-male group it didn't cause any conflict. For the female player, this might cause great distress, so the guys have to be a little more careful. (Note to the women: anti-male jokes aren't any better.) The same goes for comments about race, sexuality, religion, height, weight, hairstyles, musical tastes, favourite ice cream flavour, or anything else meaningful to a given person. And believe me, some really obscure subjects can be touchy for some people. Also, don't assume that because no player is a member of a given group, nobody will react to comments about that group. Many men are offended by sexist comments these days, for example. We have to talk about something, though, so apart from the obvious ones, just keep an eye on how people react to a comment, and if they don't seem to like it, don't say anything

similar again. Also, if someone says something that offends you, let that player know so as to avoid the problem afterwards.

As well as watching what we say, we need to watch what we do. Don't pick your nose during the game. That's sure to gross out somebody. Don't make annoying little noises, rattle dice forever, put your feet on the table, sleaze on the new player from the previous example (I have seen this done surprisingly often — save it for later, and only if she is amenable), or knock over your neighbour's dice tower just to get a reaction. Come to that, don't build the tower out of other people's dice if they don't want you to. Or suck on someone else's die or pencil (I have seen both done). Any other annoying or offensive mannerisms should be suppressed also.

Don't form cliques. Little groups within the group exclude others and make for more potential conflict. This is especially important for the GM, who must not favour one player over another. It also goes for romantically involved couples within the gaming group. You are there as part of the group, not on a date. I know it can be difficult, but put it aside until after the game. Be open and responsive towards all the other players, or at least try, since sometimes when you find yourself in conflict with another individual it can be very difficult.

By now many players may have noticed that their characters break many of these rules. A certain amount of anti-social behaviour is integral to many characters, especially when it comes to the rampaging band of orcs intent on removing integral parts of the character's anatomy. However, make it clear to the players that such behaviour is only in-character, not directed towards them, and don't force such behaviour on the group to the extent that it becomes offensive to the players rather than their characters.

Also on the subject of player-vs-character difficulties, don't niggle a player about a mistake made by a character. Often a well-played character will do something that the player knows is not the correct thing to do. That player has acted correctly to portray the character that way, and hassling said player during or after the game can become extremely irritating. Hassling in-character may be acceptable, but don't overdo it, and keep it in-character.

Don't persecute a player. Everybody is there to take part in the game. Don't play so as to deliberately exclude another player. I have seen certain players go to extreme lengths to make other players' characters unable to take part in the adventure, often killing or incapacitating particular characters. While sometimes in-character conflict might lead to this, it should not happen to whole strings of characters played by one particular player. If the character is that anti-social, perhaps the player should admit that there is no chance it will ever fit into the group and retire it.

The points I have examined here are only a few of the ways in which gamers often and flagrantly violate basic rules of etiquette; there are many more. I don't pretend that I do not violate any of these rules — in fact, I am particularly prone to certain of them.

There are undoubtedly many ways in which you can be annoyed or offended by others, which have not been mentioned here. It is very important to let people know when you would rather that they modify their behaviour. Otherwise, the problem will continue until you cannot stand it any longer, and more problems will arise. Most people will be reasonable in these matters, as long as you calmly, politely and rationally tell them what the problem is.

GMs should remember that these rules apply just as much to them as to their players. In fact, the GM should set an example for the players. After all, it is usually the GM who is the driving force behind the campaign, and the players look to her or him to see what is acceptable in the game.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is the Golden Rule. (No, not "The one who has the gold makes the rules.") "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." We all have the potential to annoy each other in many little ways. All it takes is a little consideration, and everyone will get along much better, resulting in a more enjoyable game and friendships that may carry you through many years of gaming.

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1 "Communication between Role-players", by Gary Johnson, published in *Queensland Wargamer* 43, February 1996. This article addresses a subject tangentally related to the subject of the current article, and, in fact, provided much of the inspiration.