Queensland Wargamer

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Table of Contents

Editorial

In their final year, all research science students
are required to take one semester
of Maniacal Laughter.

See you next year!

Gary Johnson

Techniques of GMing

Alister Whipp

So write something on GMing he says. OK, I say. Um, where do I start? GMing is a very tricky subject, even for sober people, so I'll deal with a topic that I know something about. House rules.

House rules are those rules that your gaming group uses which are not stock standard, published rules for the game you are playing, be it poker or Twilight 2000. Personally, I use so many customised rules that my games aren't really GURPS any more, and my players tend to refer it it as GURPSAL. I've changed the combat system, the attributes, the skills, and most of everything else. But this sort of thing isn't for everyone. After all, it takes an awfully long time. For me it started with the idea of having stats of firearms that weren't listed in the rules. From there on it blossomed, and the rest, if not history, is at least mostly past tense. However, I'm still working on it. What drives me to these insane extremes? The certain knowledge (well, vague feeling) that I might come up with a system that works, so I keep at it.

Today I was looking at various manoeuvres and techniques described in *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, and scribbled down some ideas, not the least of which is that of leading. Let me use this as an example.

Leading is the process of encouraging a specific blow from the opponent so as to use a particular counter. This is closely linked to feinting, but as it involves the control of information, primarily about which areas on an opponent are open to attack, its use against PCs is severely limited, unless you regularly tell PCs which areas are open to attack. As this is not normal behaviour for a GM (I think), maybe it can be worked into the riposte system. Perhaps a lead is a sort of set-up for a riposte manoeuvre that can be easily countered with another riposte.

Now I get out my brain and work a few things out. So you roll between the leading fighter and the soon to be dead opponent, and if the leader wins then the opponent thinks she's foiled an attempted feint, and will probably try a riposte, especially if the GM says her opponent is over-extended. Then comes the tricky bit. How much of a bonus do you give the leader if she wins, and does it go to her attack, her defence against the opponent's counter-attack, or as a penalty on the opponent's defence against her counter-counter-attack? I think, perhaps, it should add to the defender's defence against the lead's counter, and also subtract from the opponent's defence to the lead's counter-counter-attack. If you understand what I just wrote, you're doing well. Now, I've written a new rule. That was reasonably easy, but it's not finished. If left as it is, leading is Power Incarnate, so it has to be chopped up a bit.

The final rule goes as follows: a lead is a complex form of feint. You lead the opponent into a false opening. The first step is like a feint. Roll a quick contest between your weapon skill (or feint manoeuvre), and the highest of your opponent's weapon or body language skills. If you will the opponent is told you've made a bad feint, and left yourself open to an attack at a penalty equal to the amount you won the contest of skills by. If she then

attacks at the next opportunity, you get half the amount you won by (round down) as a bonus in defence, and can counter-attack immediately. This attack occurs almost simultaneously with the opponent's attack and is part of the lead, so it doesn't use up the attack, but is not quite simultaneous, so the opponent gets to hit first, unless you use a stop-hit defence. Your opponent's defences against your attack are at a penalty equal to one half the amount you made the feint by, plus one. The lead can be combined with a stop-hit, and the bonuses are cumulative. This tends to give an option in combat that is slightly more powerful on average than a feint but involves more risk.

This is just an example, of course, but it illustrates the basics of rule design. You sit down and think about what you want to achieve, and work out how to go about it. You try to maintain balance, and attempt to fit the new rule in as closely with the existing rules as possible. This example, however, leaves out the most important steps, namely player feedback and play-testing. It's often a good idea to come up with several ways of dealing with the problem, and then, through play-testing and feedback, choosing one that works better than the others.

So that's rules. Rules are only a framework for the game. Never let the rules get in the way of a good story. On the other hand, never let players succeed just because you think they should. If the rules say a character can't do something, and reality seems to agree (say, leap ten metres in the air, with a double back flip and a triple left twist, stabbing the giant in the eye on the way past) then tell the player to be serious. Unless, of course, the game is a silly game and you never intended it to resemble reality in any but cosmetic ways, then you should maybe let the player get away with it, although possibly with the suggestion that stabbing the giant is going to change your angular and actual momentum. Spur of the moment rules are pretty much why we still use GMs instead of computers. Still, it's a pretty good idea to be consistent. For this purpose I like to write down my on-the-spot rulings.

On role-playing, roll-playing and wargaming.

There is nothing wrong with a good dungeon bash, but be aware that it typically isn't the best forum for role-playing. It's more like wargaming in character, and often enough the in-character bit gets tossed, or there just is no character to play. Some players continually draw up min-maxed combat things with no discernible personality, other than "likes to kill <blank>". There isn't a lot you can do about this, but you can encourage role-playing (you can't force it). Try getting the player to write down the character's history, and a description of it's personality. If what's written doesn't mesh with the character sheet (probably combat stuff) then take out that red pen (or eraser, if in pencil). But remember, everyone's there for a bit of fun, some sidetracks, and maybe a beer or two, so don't try to rigourously enforce one view of what a character should be like on the players. I've also made a few mistakes from time to time by not fully understanding who the

4

character really is, what makes it tick. Do your best to find out the player's views on her character. It's her mental picture which is the true one, not any of that stuff on pieces of paper.

There are a few stages of role-playing. First is basically wargaming on a tactical scale. The characters are sets of statistics and so are the "monsters". The second stage is that of wargaming in character. A lot of D&D and AD&D games follow this model. Third is a state that think's it's better than the previous two, but it's actually just different: problem-solving in character. This is when the GM is very happy about her game not just being about combat any more. The final stage is where the game is no longer about success or failure. It ceases to be as competitive and is more about role-playing than anything else. Even if it contains the same content as a straightforward dungeon bash, it's not the same. This is because all concerned, players and GM, have decided to truly role-play.

To get to this point, everyone has to come to the realisation of what role-playing can be separately. You can't tell a wargamer that role-playing is about personality when she's telling you how Grog the Great can kill fifteen orcs without a scratch. Wait till she's telling you how McDougal the Spotted Warrior can slay fefteen coomaanies wi ott breakin a sweet. Aan toss a caber a good twinty feet. Then she's started down that track that leads to truly enjoying role-playing.

This isn't to say that you have to do what I say. If everyone in the group likes the game how it is, don't change. The old "if it's not broke don't fix it" is very true. However, every now and then every group should try something different, even if it's just to get new ideas to take back to the old game.

Research is often a very good way to liven up the game. Go down to a library and get some books on whatever section of the game is still empty. I've learnt more about earth's cultures from role-playing research than I'd ever have gotten through life experience, and the knowledge is useful at other times too.

To conclude: Life is a series of distractions that lead you around, so that you forget that it always ends up like one of Shakespeare's plays. To truly live you've got to embrace the distractions. (Shut up Matt.) But remember what you're there for. Don't be distracted for too long. Stay on track, keep the momentum going, but allow some drift. And have fun!

Techniques of GMing

Peter Fordyce

Firstly, it should be noted that GMing is a skill. Like all skills, you need to practice before you get any good at it. Virtually everyone will be helpless initially and will improve with practice.

I consider game design, use of flow charts, and GMing style to be important. Group participation with one or more GMs can lead to interesting games and should be tried at some stage. Finally, the difference between convention and campaign GMing will be discussed.

In my view, most of the hard work should be put into the design of the game being run. Initially the realism and heroic levels that the GM and players are happy with should be chosen. After doing this, they should decide on the genre (e.g. modern-day detective). The basic world background should now be written. This has to be good enough that each culture has a history and a reason for being the way it is. The GM now has to think of the major plots that will be in the game. Once the plots have been decided, the world background should be completed, incorporating the major plots.

The GM should now work with every player and design their characters. The characters' backgrounds and the world background have to mesh. Often this will lead to the fusion of the backgrounds, improving the quality of both.

Next, flowcharts with the plot points or scenes, and the linkages between plot points, should be made. At this stage, the individual plot points need not be any more extensive than a one line description. It is best to have multiple links or paths between plot points. The idea here is to have thought out the directions that the plot can take. Often a campaign will be based around one major plot. The design should spread from one plot point at the start, to many plot points and links in the middle, to one (or a few) plot points at the end of the campaign. The flowchart should have as many links as possible to avoid the railroading effect. However, you will almost inevitably not think of something that a player will try to do. Expect this. Some of the deviations will be dead ends, but you'll kick yourself for not thinking of some of the others.

Now you should be ready for the players.

I've found that three similar but different styles seem to work well for game sessions. These are treating the session as the equivalent of: one or more chapters of a book; an episode of anime or cartoons; an episode of a TV series. Each different style has a slightly different feel. The styles help you learn how to pace sessions, how to build up expectations, how to deal with plot twists, and how to make descriptions. If you and the players agree on the style, then everyone has some idea of how they are expected to act. This is especially useful for new players or beginning GMs.

One technique of GMing has the entire group participating. Everyone participates in the world design. The major plot points are put forward for group discussion, since they will affect the entire group. Group participation can either have every player taking turns at GMing, or have one player acting as a kind of adjudicator during group plot discussions, but as GM once a plot has been chosen. If multiple GMs are being used, then often multiple major plots are in play at any one time with a particular GM in charge of each plot.

Lastly, I'll discuss the difference between conventions and campaigns. A campaign is characterised by having plenty of time for plot and character development. At a convention, the GM has between two and a half and nine hours to introduce all the characters, introduce the plot, and allow both the characters and plot to develop. The design for a game at a convention has to be very well organised. On the other hand, a campaign need not be as tightly designed as a convention, because there aren't the same time constraints. If you want to get some serious practice in design, take a session you've played in or GMed from a campaign and write it down so that a complete stranger can run the game in a short, fixed time period.

In conclusion, no matter how good or bad a GM is, it is the players who make or break a game. Good players can prop up a bad GM, and make a good GM soar. Bad players can frustrate even the best of GMs and can make a starting GM never want to run a game again. Perhaps we should have a discussion on playing techniques as well as GMing techniques?
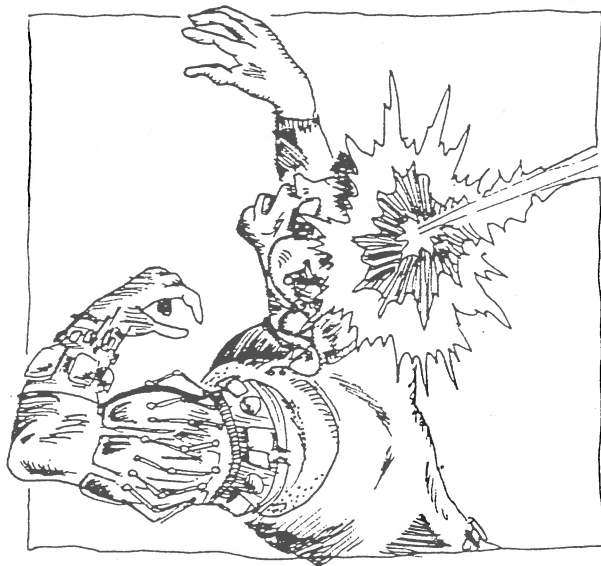
Techniques of GMing

Gary Johnson

From where I'm sitting, I can see into our living room. In that room, the site of all role-playing sessions in our house, there are currently two notice-boards, filled with pictures of people. Forty-eight people, in fact. Those forty-eight pictures, taken from various magazines, clothing catalogues, and so forth, represent the forty-eight NPCs we met last night in Taina's campaign. I can also see the laminated chipboard on which Taina drew the outline of the haunted mansion, and the internal details of the parts we explored. If I look into my room, I can see the smaller pile of pictures I'll be using tonight, sitting on the notes I've made and the rulebook I'll be using. Without a doubt, visual aids are an important part of GMing in this house.

There are tremendous benefits to be gained from using props like pictures or maps. As you're all aware, a picture or image is worth a thousand words. The amount of effort it takes to verbally describe some image can be enormous, whether a person's face, the layout of a building, or a particular sequence of events. Furthermore, different people will get different impressions from your description, so there's little chance of complete agreement between all players about what the person, place, or thing looks like. If, however, you use a picture, everyone sees it for themselves, and you avoid the problems you get when filtering an image through the medium of someone's else description. This saves a lot of time and effort, especially for those people who, like me, are really bad at describing what people look like.

I have used a wide range of visual aids in my time as a GM. As well as pictures (which I have only really taken up in the last two years), I regularly use battle boards. Anyone familiar with miniatures gaming will know what I'm talking about, as will many role-players. When superheroes come to blows with supervillains, it can be a real hassle to consistently describe the location of the battle (especially since different players will have different impressions of what is going on). Drawing a floor plan and putting figures on it not only saves me time and concentration, but lets the players see what's going on and allows those who derive satisfaction from being successful in combat to use their skills as a player to greater effect. For both of these reasons, I heartily recommend battle boards to all GMs.

As well as purely visual aids, I also use audio-visual props on occasion. Television, combining both sound and image, can really save a GM time. In Taina's campaign, we are currently in the Amazon. She showed us a forty minute documentary (borrowed from the Brisbane City Council library at Indooroopilly) about the Amazon, which gave me (I can't speak for the others, but they also looked impressed) a much better understanding of the appearance and sounds of the Amazon than if Taina had sat us down and talked to us for an hour. In my own campaign, I have used video clips to show my players what a particular alien being looked like (namely, David Bowie in *Life on Mars*).

Occasionally, I use sound effects CDs for particular noises. As a general principle, anything that lets the players interact with the game world directly, rather than through the mediation of the GM, is a good thing, because it reduces the GM's workload, takes away some of the pressure on the GM to do everything, and it gives the players a much better idea of what is actually happening or what something actually looks like.

Speaking of players, they can be a very useful source of ideas and details for the GM. Most of you will be familiar with asking the players for feedback and input on the game. However, I consider this limiting, in that it puts the GM in the position of presenting a product (the game) to the consumers (the players) and asking for involvement. Players can be much more than consumers in the gaming group. I go beyond asking my players what they want to do next week, and use them as a source of content and detail for my campaign.

If a player is really interested in something that isn't very important to me as GM (say, the name of the police officer at the scene of the conflagration, or the way Challenger dresses when not on active duty), and I don't have strong views on the matter, I usually ask the group to help me make up the details. "Name auction!" is now a recognised cue for making up a name for a person, inn, village, or whatever. What sort of clothes do the players think someone like Challenger would wear? If there is more than one suggestion, I can make a decision using my executive powers as GM, but it's not my job as GM to know everything about everything in my game world. I even ask players to help me explain away parts of the plot that I'm not sure about, such as how far away the villain's escape jet should be.

My favourite technique for detective stories is to set a problem in the game, let the players try and solve it, and after I've heard their reconstructions of the mystery adopt the best or most interesting story as what actually happened, even if this isn't what I originally planned. Some of my best story-lines came about because I jettisoned the old plan in favour of the much more complicated and interesting theory the players thought up. Death-traps work in a similar way, except I don't really bother to work out how the PCs will escape. I know the players will think of something, and that should do the trick. They get to escape the dreadful death-trap and solve the convoluted conspiracy, and I get to do less work before the session begins. Of course, I do have to do quite a bit of thinking on my feet at times ...

Which brings me to my conclusion. We all make mistakes, in GMing as well as life. Sometimes it worries me that I do so many things wrong; sometimes I feel stupid as well as guilty or embarrassed. However, I have never let my feelings of despair or incompetence stop me GMing. Like pretty much everything in life, GMs get better with practice. We learn by experience: you'll have to find out what works for you and your gaming group the hard way.

Techniques of GMing

Travis Hall

Eye Contact

Some of the techniques which can greatly improve a game are often overlooked because they seem like such small things. One of these is eye contact. Simply by making eye contact with a player, the GM can impart to that player the feeling that the player's character really is an important part of the story. Making eye contact when you ask for a character's action can really put the pressure on the player. It lets players know you are paying attention to them and lends weight to your words, and if a player is unnecessarily rowdy, few things will shut that person up quicker than knowing you are watching. (Unfortunately, the rowdiest players normally aren't watching, so eye contact can't be made.)

Any public speaker or performance artist will tell you how important eye contact is. Don't overlook this simple, easily employed, effective technique.

Standard Accoutrements

Every GM is familiar with certain objects in almost universal use among gaming groups, but few realise that even these omnipresent items have an effect on the game.

Firstly, the table. Most gaming groups gather around a table to play their games, but few groups recognise the effects of the table. I have found that playing around a table tends to focus the attention of a group of gamers. The players will tend to be quieter and less inclined to distraction when seated around a table. The use of a table can help to produce an intense, exciting atmosphere. It also helps to make all players visible to the GM. There can be down sides, though. I have played under certain GMs who only seem to notice the players seated closest to them around the table, ignoring those down the other end. It is very frustrating to be left out of play simply due to seating arrangements. Also, physical interaction (such as playing out the orc snarling in the player character's face) is restricted, so you must plan for the obstruction of the table if you plan to try these techniques.

Some groups or GMs do not use tables. I have played in games in which the players were sprawled about the floor. This tends to produce a more relaxed atmosphere: unfortunately, the atmosphere is often too relaxed, with the GM unable to gain the attention of the players when required, and access to required materials is hampered by the lack of a suitable surface. However, the idea of playing without a table should not be summarily dismissed. If you are aiming for a less involved, more social game, you might wish to harness the relaxed atmosphere of floor-sitting. Be warned, though, the change in attitude is not generally conducive to excitement. Also, you should make sure there are chairs of some sort available for those who find sitting on the floor for long periods uncomfortable.

Some groups prefer the compromise of seats with no tables. Playing on the lounge suite rather than on the floor tends to make players more visible, and the furniture can be arranged to focus attention, but the players may be more comfortable than around the table and a similar sense of ease and openness can result. For long games, it may help ease the stiffness of awkward positions on the floor for those players less adapted to such locations.

In addition to the table, there is the GM's screen. This item is very popular, considered almost indispensable by some. Even some floor-sitting GMs I know will not do away with their screens. The GM's screen serves the obvious purpose of hiding the GM's notes. It also introduces a sense that the GM is somehow different to the players, something even non-gamers will pick up on. The screen says, "I am the GM, I am in control, I am running this game." However, sometimes that sense might not be desired. If you wish to bond a little closer with your players, I suggest doing without your screen for a little while. It may remove both physical and psychological barriers between you and your players. I also find that the GM's screen tends to inhibit eye contact (see above), something I consider very important in my games. I almost never use a GM's screen as a shield from prying eyes, although I do find that some GM's screens can be quite handy as reference sheets, since they often have many of a game's most important tables printed on them.

Playing in Character

Many gamers will tell you that role-playing is all about acting in a manner as much like your character as possible. As a result, it is typical to hear players talking in the manner of their characters. Rather than, "My character tells Zebob the Magician exactly what he thinks of him," you would expect to hear, "Zebob, you cretin from the depths of the Abyss, you must have all the brains of a sea slug, and the spellcraft to match!"

However, it is rare to have a group which remains in character throughout the entire session. Often, doing so is impractical, for most RPGs have mechanics which must be discussed at least briefly during the course of the game, even if only to tell the GM precisely what spell Zebob is attempting to cast his round. Still, playing in character can be extremely fun.

Some groups have rules about talking out of character, and this is kept to a minimum at all times. However, a technique I have found quite useful is what I call the "in character" command. Simply put, when I (as GM) say, "In character," everyone is to remain in character until I say otherwise. Such "in character" scenes give a tremendous opportunity for players to portray what their characters are really like. Everything the player says, the character says, unless the comment is specifically directed at me or describes the character's actions. There are no "take-backs". Once spoken, anything said remains said. Any discussion of mechanics will be greeted with confusion from NPCs and hopefully other PCs, and experience penalties (or some equivalent) may accrue.

A related technique that I have used only once is what I call the "blackout" command. When I say, "Blackout," not only is there to be no out-of-character discussion, there is to be no communication between players at all. In the scene in which I did this, my own communication with the players was limited to previously prepared notes describing what they each

saw happening around them. Through careful consideration of the characters and players, I had predicted what the actions of each character could be, and had cards prepared for all likely eventualities. As it happened, out of eight players, only one acted in a manner I had not been able to provide for, resulting in a brief trip out of the room to deal with his actions. The results of the technique were uncertainty and confusion for the players. The game really shook up some of them, precisely the effect I was hoping for.

Such unusual techniques should be used sparingly, else their effect can be lost. However, such unusual techniques can make for a game which will not soon be forgotten.

Player Control

Most role-playing games have the players running characters under the watchful eye of the GM, who is responsible or such things as game balance and the constraints under which characters must be created. However, given a responsible group of players, much of the burden can be removed from the GM, and given to the players, who can then use these responsibilities to build, rather than limit, their characters.

I once ran a game in which the players created their characters by assigning whatever they liked to their scores. They were given pretty much free reign to build their characters however they liked, though I had final say on choice of magic items (I vetoed one item, which, in addition to being extremely powerful, was very difficult to adjudicate in play). During the game, the players decided how many experience points each character should receive at the end of each adventure. This, I hoped, would lead to a new perspective on quality of play—how much did a player's actions improve the game, rather than how much did they impress the GM.

In practice, I found that this worked up to a point. The players were quite reasonable during character creation. Only one character was presented to me with stats that were too powerful, and when the player saw how much more powerful the character was compared to the others, he toned it down voluntarily. The assignment of experience points worked fairly well, although I found that the views of one player tended to dominate. I believe this is due to that player being an experienced GM himself, and so guiding the assignment of experience points towards the method he used as GM. The other players, less confident, were not as able to criticise each other or him, and so allowed him to dominate.

In the end, the game was a failure. The greater control given to the players eventually led to mistrust between them, as some believed others had ulterior motives. The greater freedom also seemed to lead the players to feel that they were not required to apply themselves to the game. However, for the first few sessions the game produced some extremely good role-playing. I believe that the idea would be worth trying again, as long as it is recognised that the maturity of the players and the GM may limit the lifespan of the campaign. When the campaign is intended to span only a relatively short period of time, such a game may be quite successful, and

conflicts between the members of the group will be minimised by ending the game before the worst arises. Also, the more mature the players, the longer the game may proceed. Perhaps, with good enough players and GM, the campaign may continue indefinitely.

Music

There are many players who will cite music as being one of the best mood-setters for a role-playing campaign. Certainly, the correct background music can do wonders for the feel of the game.

When using background music, make sure the music you choose is appropriate. Don't play "Bat Out of Hell" for a fantasy campaign. When playing a game based on a TV show or movie, the obvious background music is the soundtrack. Nothing will set the tone for a session of Star Wars which begins after the capture of the PCs by stormtroopers better than the Imperial March, and rarely will you get through a game based on the world of Indiana Jones without someone singing the theme from the movies. Otherwise, there is music good for pretty much any setting, if you look for it.

When it comes to playing the music, don't spend too much time fiddling with the tape recorder. If possible, have the tape or CD set up ahead of time, so you can just hit the play button. If it is just background music, rather than keyed to specific game events, make sure you can just let it run (perhaps turning over every half hour, but only when convenient). If possible, put a player in charge of keeping the music running.

If the music is important, try to have some sort of back-up. I once ran an adventure which was designed to depend on "The Music of the Night" from "The Phantom of the Opera". I had it all set up, tape deck ready, I knew just where the tape should be set, I had listened to the music several times so I know just how it went, and half an hour before the game, while rewinding, the tape deck ate the tape. Not my most successful game. I have since realised that running the game from a copy, rather than the original, would have left me with a back-up, and not missing half of "The Phantom of the Opera".

Make sure the music is not so loud that it makes it difficult to hear the players, or for them to hear you. If it is just background, it should be so quiet that it is barely noticed. If it is important, try to turn it up for the important bits.

Music is definitely an option worth exploring, if you are interested in improving the atmosphere of your games. I found it truly wonderful when, as GM, I was describing the panicked flight of refugees from a fortress, the PCs bringing up the rear, protecting them from the evil hordes closing behind them, a dragon rising up to blast them all with its fiery breath, only to be attacked by a second dragon at the last minute, and during all of this the theme to "Excalibur" playing in the background because the host's housemate realised the climax was coming and decided to have a little fun. It did wonders for the atmosphere. A pity the music ran out before the end of the game ...

In the Beginning: Realistic Suggestions for Starting an Adventure

David Astley

Conan burst into the tavern clutching the piece of parchment in his powerful fist and called to his companions.

"Merlin, Stealth, Theodore! The Baron wants some adventurers for a special mission!"

"Okay, we'll see him tomorrow," yawned Merlin without looking away from the fireplace.

Finally, after hours of paperwork, they were granted an audience with the Baron's personal aide. He looked them over and asked sceptically, "What advantages do you have over other applicants?"

Conan blinked. "Other applicants?"

"Yes," sighed the aide. "Why should we hire you?"

Merlin stuttered, "B-b-but we're the Peeseez!"

"Anything else you'd like to add?" said the aide patiently.

"But if you don't give us the job, what are we gonna do for the rest of the evening?" whined Stealth.

"I'm sure you'll think of something," said the aide, who then called for the guards to escort them out.

Introductions

At last, it's Friday night and you gather expectantly round the table, characters before you, snacks nearby and dice at the ready. The GM lets the anticipation build for a minute more, then begins, "Okay, you're all in the tavern when suddenly ..."

"Hey!" interrupts one of the players. "Didn't we all start in the tavern last week?"

"Yeah," chimes another, "and the week before!"

"Every week as a matter of fact!" notes a third helpfully.

"Yeah!" agrees the fourth. "My mage doesn't even drink!"

While using this cliche may get the party off to a quick start, gamers soon see the introduction as something to be gotten out of the way as quickly as possible so they can cut to the adventure. However, the introduction is part of the adventure, not a mere formality. It sets the tone of the adventure and gives the players their first impression of what's to come. If that impression isn't a very good one, the adventure suffers. Would you rather be sitting bored in the tavern, or would you rather be spending at day at the chariot races when suddenly a competitor explodes?

The introduction should help flesh out the adventure by adding to it, providing clues and introducing relevant NPCs. (*A tall red-haired spectator sitting not far from you rises with a smirk on his face. He looks over both shoulders, takes a final glance at the ruined chariot, then starts pushing his way through the amazed crowd towards the exit.*) However, many GMs find that if they remove the standard adventure hooks, the party can sometimes spend the entire game session wandering aimlessly and looking for the start of the adventure. So, how does a party of characters find an adventure?

Getting a Job

The simplest way is to get a job. This isn't as easy as hanging around the bar and waiting: that's a good way to get drunk, not employed. Most jobs these days aren't found at the bar and most employers prefer sober employees. Most jobs are advertised, or people hear by word of mouth *[at the bar? Ed.]*. Often the saying is true—it's not what you know, but who you know.

Most communities have some form of public notices. In these days it is the paper and employment agencies. In the old days there were town criers, posters and public notice boards. In the future, holonets, computer bulletin boards, and maybe even telepathy might be used.

>>>>>[Positions Vacant—Aratech Industries requires experienced jugglers, firebreathers and other entertainers for upcoming sideshow. Apply below.]<<<<<
    —Aratech Andy (11:40:43/6–13–54)

>>>>>[You're Kidding! Who let them in?]<<<<<
    —Space Ace (20:35:12/6–13–54)

>>>>>[Who let YOU in? Juggler means Mage. Work the rest out yourself.]<<<<<
    —Ready Freddy (00:20:54/6–14–54)

The drawback with these methods is that they are public. Anyone can apply for them and anything secret or illegal is rarely advertised. Jobs of a more dubious nature are more likely to be spread by word of mouth, but these jobs aren't going to be spread to just anyone, and especially not by the barkeep or that suspicious guy at the back table. "Good evening, madam. Care for an ale? By the way, I have some friends interested in having Lord Underwood assassinated. Want the job?" Generally, these jobs are only discussed by certain groups, such as the Thieves Guild, smugglers, or a religious group. A better start might be: "Telea, the Guild has decided to offer this mission to you first as it appears that Lord Underwood has at least a passing romantic interest in you."

In these troubled times, getting a job is far from easy. In most role-playing games, times are far worse than they are now. This doesn't necessarily mean that there are fewer jobs as a whole, but given the success of most adventurers, chances are there are several parties in the area who also want that job. A job interview where the characters have to convince complete strangers they can be trusted with a secret mission has heaps of role-playing potential!

Usually the characters will be hired for more mundane tasks before they are offered anything important. Still, once the characters have proved themselves, an employer may remember them when next she has a problem that needs to be taken care of. Players can be given all manner of interesting missions in this way. "This spice shipment isn't as big as the last one, but this time there's a catch. Two, actually. Firstly, I want it there a day earlier. Secondly, it's going *to* Kessel, not from!"

Following Clues

Another way to find adventure is to discover some clues. ("Hey look, guys! There's a clue!!") While this may seem unlikely at first, chances are if the GM points out that the beggar who is always in the corner isn't there any more, the characters might get suspicious and will probably look deeper into things when they overhear someone telling a friend that a different beggar has disappeared. Indeed, a couple of well-placed changes in what the characters find familiar may lead to the adventure of a lifetime. "What's this doing on my ship?" "Jay, some bureaucrat's outside with a bunch of stormtroopers. Something about an anonymous tip and a routine search!" Of course, the subtlety of a clue will have to be modified according to the perceptiveness of your gaming group. Sadly, some parties tend to miss any clues more subtle than a map.

Probably the best time to place clues to a new adventure is not at the beginning of a session, but in the middle of previous adventure. "The scroll you found on the corpse reads, *Tharius, we have slain the dragon of Elondar Mountain. Please send a couple of wagons to help us move the treasure. Marla Axton!*"

Positions Wanted

If characters don't go looking for work, and they fail to notice the strange behaviour of superiors or the disappearance of Jewellers or the increase in sewer rats, then there's always the option of the adventure coming to them. "You're all under arrest for the murder of Larius Ardyne!" "But we've been in this tavern all day waiting for an adventure!"

Going back to getting a job, the characters could advertise their services and wait for a customer to arrive. (*Staco and Friends. Interplanetary Couriers. Officially sanctioned by the New Republic. Deliveries into Imperial-held sectors our specialty!*) This puts them in the position to pick and choose their adventures, but without a reputation they aren't going to be offered many big jobs. In fact, they may instead by harassed by farmers with sick cows, bakers with strangely shaped loaves of bread, or carpenters with boils. Also, many of these clients won't be able to afford the fees charged for the party's services. (*Minimum fee—1000 credits!*)

Missions

Other jobs, especially those favoured by the GM, are inflicted on the PCs. What worthy student would refuse a request from her teacher to collect an item? What Rebel would refuse a mission from her superiors? What Paladin or Jedi would refuse the old widow's pleas that someone should check her cellar? While this is one of the few direct controls GMs have over players, it also takes away the players' right to choose for themselves. *"The Imperials are setting up a base on Vestarn, the canyon world. Here are your IDs. You'll be posing as on-site labourers. Find out why they're building a base. Any questions?" "Don't our holidays start today?"*

Volunteers

It is far better to let the players volunteer for these adventures than to force them to go. What if the players stumble across the dark figure being beaten up in the alley? Surely they will choose to help her of their own free will, and then discover the figure is, in fact, a minotaur with family troubles. The party can choose to ignore the possibly useless map they found in the secret compartment, and no-one is forcing the gambler to accept her enemy's wild dare. *"Another shipment of Imperial parts to Vestarn? That's the third this month! What are they doing? Building a base?"*

No Introductions

When the game starts, the characters may already be in the adventure. This technique is often used in West End Games' Star Wars RPG (my favourite RPG for those of you who haven't already guessed!) and is called *in media res*, which is Latin for "in the middle of things". Running against everything in this article so far, this technique leaves out the introduction altogether, and players may start a gaming session with their characters in a dungeon cell, or running away from heavies.

"Your ship flickers out of hyperspace above the purple world of Mendovin IV."
"What are we doing here?"
"With a last spasm, the spare positive coupler gives out and your hyperdrives die."
"What happened to our hyperdrives?"
"Two TIE interceptors burst through the swirling mass of purple clouds and open fire. What do you do?"
[*Die? Ed.*]

In media res is best used when the characters don't know how they ended up in this situation or when the introduction is standard, simple, or both. Some groups of gamers would rather not spend an hour on an introduction that can be summarised as,"Your mission is to take this to Chloris." If nothing unusual is supposed to happen, it might be better to start the game at the point where the characters discover that Chloris is gone! "Whattaya mean 'gone'? Dragon's don't just *go*!" Again, this method does restrict the players' freedom of choice.

Bringing It Together

Of course, the more freedom of choice given to players, the more possibilities the GM has to cover, right? Not necessarily. If the players can choose between investigating the cult, the goblins, the disappearances or the map, the GM can bring all four games and play the one that's required. [*I've found asking the players what they're going to do next session also works in this situation. Ed.*] After all, the others will certainly be played in the next few sessions, and the GM won't have to write any new material until she runs out of adventures. And if she can't get three games ahead of herself (and let's face it, who can?), the map could be to the nearby lair of the goblins who are buying kidnapped people to sacrifice to their false god. After all, all roads lead to Rome.

"What have we got?
"Hmm. A key to an Aralian door, 5 Aralian gems, some official Aralian papers, 2 Aralian trade bars and a map of the Aralian sewers."
"I see. Well, let's go to Jaminac then!"

So, when you make your adventures, look closely at the impact they will have on the environment

around them. Repercussions will spread out from the events in the adventure like ripples spread from a stone thrown in a pool of water, until finally the characters will be surrounded by these ripples and, in the true spirit of the game, miss every single one of them.

Conan burst into the tavern clutching the piece of parchment in his powerful fist and called to his companions.

"We were second preference, so we get to escort next week's caravan to Estaria!" Conan slid into his seat at the table grinning.

Merlin cleared his throat. "Now that we're all here I'd like to ask you all to help me find some Linfus sometime. It's a vital component for a spell I'm researching and it grows somewhere around here."

"Actually," said Theodore, "the Church has asked me to find the stolen Relic of Deola. They suspect a doppelganger was involved."

The three of them looked at Stealth, who replied, "Tiria the money-lender has vanished leaving her business almost unguarded. I was going to do some investigating over there."

"So what do we do?" asked Conan.

"Let's go to bed," suggested Merlin. "It's been pretty quiet around here and we can use the sleep."

The others nodded their agreement, finished their drinks and dragged themselves upstairs towards their room, where assassins were hiding.

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What Are Play By Mail Games?

Peter Fordyce

Play By Mail (PBM) games are games which are played by post, which have written reports describing the turn results and which require written turn submissions. Types of games played include military, sporting, political, economic and role-playing simulations. The hobby grew out of Play By Mail Chess and steadily became more sophisticated.

Australia has over ten PBM businesses which run both self-designed and imported games. This means that the Australian PBM industry is probably the biggest of the various gaming industries in terms of the number of Australian games on the commercial market.

Virtually all commercial games are computer moderated. However, there are various non-commercial hand-moderated games around. *[Including mine! Ed.]* An increasing percentage of games are being played using e-mail. The hobby has its own Internet news group (rec.games.pbm).

I have included a description of the first twelve turns of a game I am presently playing in. The game is called "Keys of Medokh" and is a fantasy game with wargaming and economics as its key features. If anyone is interested in more information concerning PBM gaming, feel free to contact me by phone on (07) 3371 1115.

Keys of Medokh

Peter Fordyce

The following is a summary of the history of the Dwarven tribe Clan Silverrock during the Second Chaos War. The history was written by an unknown adviser to the Clan's warlord, Borin Silverrock.

Translation from Dwarvish was carried out by Peter Fordyce, and this extract describes the first year of the reign of Borin Silverrock.

Year 1, Month 1 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

The first piece of business that the newly installed warlord Borin Silverrock had was a meeting with the tribal elders and his military leaders. Scouts reported a Halfling tribe to the south-west, an Orc tribe to the north-west and a Kobold tribe to the north-east. Both of the tribes to the west were separated from us by a sea and so weren't deemed a threat. The Kobold tribe's warlord was apparently in a coma and so it was decided to expand the tribal homeland to the north-east.

Our tribe had two towns (T1 and T2) and an army set to build another town (T3). There was a fort (F1) set to guard our western approaches. Borin instructed the tribal elders to organise the construction of more towns.

Next, Borin consulted the tribe's priests concerning the future. First they told him of the past and how Medokh, the greatest of the Elder Gods, was cast from the Hall of the Gods by the Chaos Lord Mazdiak of the One Eye. Medokh was placed in Limbo and sealed behind a Great Door which was locked with seven Keys of Power. The first Chaos War then began between the Chaos Lords and the Lesser Gods, followers of Medokh. After five centuries the Chaos Lords abruptly departed to put down a rebellion against their rule elsewhere. That was about 700 years ago. The priests believe that between two and four years from now, Chaos Winter will return to the land, bringing with it the evil minions and the undead hordes of the Chaos Lords. Furthermore, Mazdiak himself will return within seven years, and if the seven Keys of Power have not been found to release Medokh by then, evil will surely win.

Borin then questioned the priests about who he could trust, and then issued the decree that anyone taller or shorter than the Dwarves of Clan Silverrock was evil.

Borin ordered that bids be made for the contracts of several individuals who might be useful to the tribe. Finally, after sending scouting forces to the north and west, Borin and his cousin Balin, who was a siege captain, travelled with the main army towards the Kobolds.
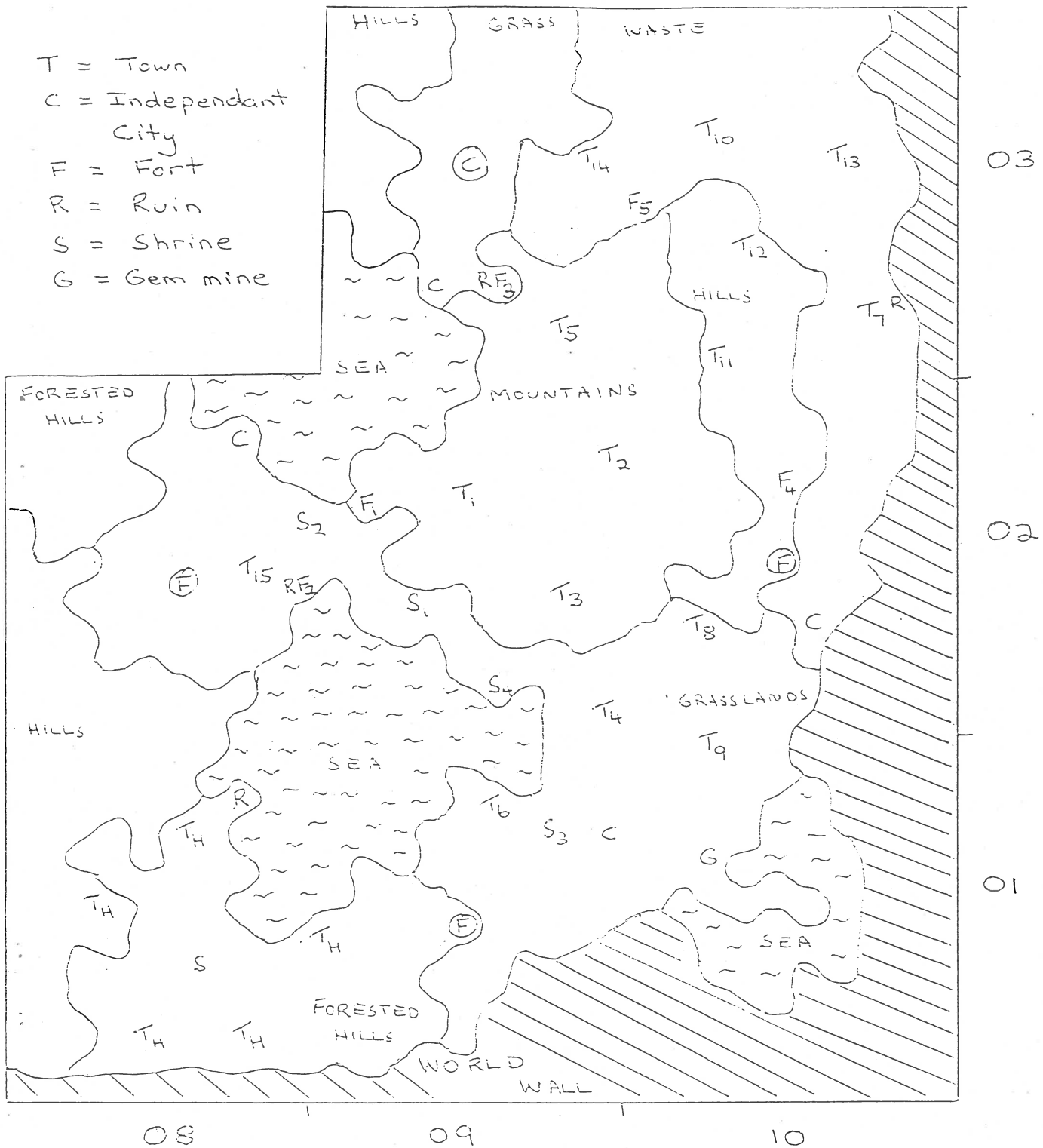
Year 1, Month 2 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

Most of the bids for the individuals' contracts were successful and five more individuals were now working for Clan Silverrock. The army to the south built the new town (T3). The amount of taxes collected was a bit disappointing, but some of the treasury of the former Warlord had been kept so it wasn't too bad.

Nine other tribes turned from monarchies into republics. Borin was heard to say, "There'll be none of that when I'm around!"

The southern scouts found a ruin to the south-west, and the Champion indicated that he wanted to explore it. The southern army was ordered to build a shrine (S1) to the God of the Dwarves. Meanwhile, the northern army found a Centaur city and a ruin. The army was contacted by Centaur mercenaries waiting to be hired, which Borin promptly did. Finally, the army travelling towards the Kobolds ended up outside a Kobold fort.

Borin ordered that more troops be transferred from the Home Guard to various garrison regiments, and mustered an army at the Capital. The northern army, with the newly hired Centaur mercenaries, was ordered to join the army next to the Kobold fort, while more scouts were sent out. Maps were ordered from the Malakai (a powerful race which spans the world and conducts trade) for two new regions.

T = Town
C = Independant City
F = Fort
R = Ruin
S = Shrine
G = Gem mine

HILLS   GRASS   WASTE

C

T_{10}

T_{14}

T_{13}

03

F_5

T_{12}

T_7 R

C   RF_3

HILLS

T_5

T_{11}

SEA

MOUNTAINS

FORESTED HILLS

C

T_2

F_4

S_2

T_1

F

02

F_1 T_{15} RF_3

S_1

T_3

T_8

C

S_4

GRASSLANDS

HILLS

T_4

T_9

R

T_6

S_3 C

T_H

G

T_H

F

SEA

01

S

T_H

FORESTED HILLS

T_H T_H

WORLD

WALL

08   09   10

A Map of The South-East Corner of

The World of Medokh

Borin declared that Clan Silverrock was hostile towards the Dark Warriors of Khar (the Kobolds to the north-east).

Year 1, Month 3 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

The shrine was built and the new maps bought. One of the maps showed the locations of the Dark Warriors of Khar's towns.

Taxes amounted to 4573 crowns (the unit of currency) plus some commodities. Borin was visited by a representative of the Malakai's Guild of Merchants, who offered 4600 crowns to increase iron production. All it would cost the Clan was a favour, to be repaid sometime in the future. Despite some misgivings, Borin accepted the "gift".

An Andaluziak Ranger named Flanx arrived at the capital offering its services. These people are very, very powerful magical beings who demand payment in gemstones. Luckily the former warlord had a stash of diamonds, so Flanx could be hired and paid straightaway. Also, a member of the Clan finished training as a miner and offered his services to the Clan, which were gratefully accepted. [A word of explanation: if you bid for an individual on the open market, the wages for that individual are set at 10% of the amount bid, i.e. recruiting an individual costs 10 months of wages. By offering to work for the Clan as long as he was paid a reasonable wage, the miner saved us 10 months of wages, which is pretty good.]

The Champion and a bunch of individuals travelled with an army to the south-west. Scouts saw two mercenary groups who offered their services, as well as an Halfling army belonging to the tribe to the southwest of us. However, the Champion ignored everything and entered the ruin with his merry band. A scouting group that went even further south found a possible town site and was ordered to build a town.

The forces that were to arrive at the Kobold fort were ordered to lay siege to it this turn.

The elders complained about the Clan's hostility towards the Dark Warriors of Khar. Borin decides to pay people to spread bad rumours about the Dark Warriors to make the Clan dislike these evil short people.

It seems that most of the advisers to the various Warlords come from places called Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. I contacted a Queensland "adviser" whose tribe was near mine and, after negotiations, joined a Queensland alliance. I also organised to trade iron for wood, and sold some iron to the Malakai to cover the Clan's cash shortage.

Year 1, Month 4 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

A surveyor was contracted from the open market at the start of this month, letting us look for gem deposits.

The tribe we traded with was called the High Elves of Ulearean. Because we traded with each other, our tribes liked each other more than they did before [giving commodities or crowns to another tribe does this]. The tribal elders then demanded that the tribe parley with these Elves. Borin thought this was a good idea, and ordered it to be done. The Uleanean also sent us a manuscript of knowledge (MoK) describing their superior wood production techniques.

The southern army built a town (T4), and received orders to travel south-west.

Research was carried out to increase iron production. When Borin heard the results of this research, he made a decision he would later regret. He ordered that the Clan cease research into commodity production, saying that we would find out how the ancients' superior production techniques worked by capturing an ancient city.

Meanwhile, the Champion and his merry band found a lot of loot in the ruin: 14373 crowns worth of valuables and 18 emeralds. However, I think that the group should have been sober, not merry, when they went in, as four of the five individuals who went with the Champion died. Remember, don't drink and fight, or you're a bloody smear. Borin decided to bulk bid for individuals suitable for exploring ruins, "just don't tell them what we want them for!"

The army trying to capture the Dark Warriors' fort refused to do so because of their lack of numbers.

Year 1, Month 5 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

Another town (T5) was built and a fort (F2) constructed to protect the Dwarves at the ruin. Both the Halflings and us tried building towns near T15. The Halflings were slightly faster and took up the room that we wanted.

The production techniques for iron were upgraded and a significant increase in iron production occurred.

Once again the army at the Kobold fort refused to attack. Flanx was now inside the fort and received orders to open the gates.

Year 1, Month 6 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

The southern army constructed yet another town (T6). Because it had been leaving garrisons in the towns it constructed, this army was now rather small.

A Malakai from the Guild of Merchants once again dropped by and offered money to increase iron production, once again in return for a favour to be requested in the future. Cautiously this offer was accepted.

Flanx disposed of the captain of the night watch and shapeshifted into the Kobold's form. In the middle of the night, the gates were opened and the troops besieging the fort rushed in. The overwhelmed garrison decided that they wanted to work for Clan Silverrock and joined our army. Finally, the war started to move!

Year 1, Month 7 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

Because we were now using more of some commodities than we were producing, and our reserves were running low, we had to buy and trade for commodities. Sales of iron were used to prop up the treasury.

The Champion continued to explore the ruin, and found a fair bit of loot. However, another five individuals died. After some calculations, it was found that we were still making a profit, so Borin ordered that the explorations be continued.

A Dwarven assassin (the first of many) offered to work for Clan Silverrock. [Eventually we would wonder about what the former Warlord had in mind with all the assassins and spies he was training.]

An army had moved north this month, and was given orders to build a town, but it found a town (T14) already built at the site. This tribe belonged to

an Halfling tribe from the far north. Borin was starting to think of Halflings as especially evil beings.

Year 1, Month 8 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

Two shrines (S2 and S3) were built, because shrines attract warrior-priests known as the Blood Guard to them. The Blood Guard dedicate their lives to fighting Chaos, and since the Chaos Winter was possibly only two years away, Borin thought that having Blood Guards was a good idea.

The Champion was particularly successful in the ruin this month, finding 20262 crowns, 160 sapphires, manuscripts describing superior techniques of cloth production, and releasing a Battle Master from a locked dungeon! [A Battle Master is the most highly skilled type of field commander.] The Battle Master joined our forces in gratitude for being released. All of this, and only three individuals died!

The surveyor has finally found gems ... right under the capital. There was no way Borin was going to order the demolition of the capital and the construction of a mine on the site!

The army fighting the Dark Warriors of Khar in the north-east captured the Kobold's second town when Flanx opened the gates in the middle of the night again. Some leather and meat production lore was captured as well.

Year 1, Month 9 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

The messengers sent by Borin to the capital arrived too late in the month and virtually nothing was done. Meat which was meant to be bought for the troops didn't get bought, and some of the troops were on short rations. Borin ensured that messengers left earlier in the future.

Year 1, Month 10 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

A lot of crowns were spent this month to enable Clan Silverrock to use the newly acquired technology. Once again, a significant increase in production resulted.

Another town (T8) was built.

Borin was worried that the Clan wasn't pious enough, and ordered that religious ceremonies dedicated to the Dwarven God be performed. The tribe's piety increased nicely, but Borin decided that even more religious ceremonies needed to be performed in the future.

The Champion had another good month, finding (among other things) advanced wood production lore and a Kobold assassin. An apothecary was travelled with the party managed to heal one of the three individuals struck down this month.

Tow regiments of soldiers, protected by mystics, also explored parts of the ruins, finding a small fortune in crowns and gems.

During the uproar over last month's missing messengers, nobody heard Flanx complaining about a lack of wages. We suddenly found that it had left in search of someone willing to pay more. Borin was in an uproar, as his strategies relied on Flanx opening gates. Now he would have to raise a large army if he wanted to capture any more enemy towns.

Year 1, Month 11 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

Since Flanx had left, Borin decided that the Clan's technology needed to be improved, and he ordered that manuscripts on stone and meat production lore be purchased.

The New South Wales alliance exchanged threats with the Queensland alliance. The N.S.W. alliance warned the Queensland alliance that if they didn't stop attacking two tribes whose advisers were members of the N.S.W. alliance, they would declare State of Origin. The Queensland alliance promptly decided to go to a war footing, but didn't tell the enemy alliance.

The surveyor found another gem deposit (at F4). Borin decided to build a mine at this deposit and mine it out as quickly as possible, because there was a possible town site right next to the deposit. [Towns have to be a certain distance apart, and there can be only a certain number of towns in each terrain in each region of the map. A lot of calculations were done this month to determine how to get the greatest number of towns built in the east.]

Flanx turned back up looking for work again and was promptly re-hired, while the army in the east raided the Kobold capital and made of with a lot of crowns and some commodities.

Year 1, Month 12 of the reign of Borin Silverrock

Three towns were built this month (T9, T10, and T11).

, 123 regiments of mercenary Humans and Drow were hired this month, supplementing the 170 regiments the Clan already had. The mercenaries and some Dwarves had moved outside an Halfling town to the south-west of T6 and were preparing to besiege it. A Dwarven army was also outside T15, which was also an Halfling town (the adviser of these Halflings belonged to the N.S.W.alliance).

Assessment of the First Year

At the end of the first year of Borin Silverrock's reign, a review of the tribe was carried out. The Clan had grown from two towns to eleven towns, from one fort to three forts, and from no shrines to three shrines.

The tax base had expanded from 4402 crowns to 13464 crowns, and due to surplus production of iron and stone, we could make an extra 45000 crowns each month. The tribe was self-sufficient in everything except wood and corn, but trade agreements had been set up within the Queensland alliance to supply us with these commodities.

The Clan's technology should have been better, but this wasn't seen to be too much of a problem because we had more towns than the average tribe.

The war against the Dark Warriors of Khar was virtually over (once Flanx reached their capital, it would be ours!).

The tribe was part of an alliance which was about to start a war that would cover a third of the world. (The advisers had gotten around Borin's statement concerning evil races by getting the shorter races to wear platform shoes and the taller races to walk on their knees.) While most of the alliance was still gearing up to a war footing, we were better prepared than the opposition. Also, we had local superiority wherever we were fighting.

Despite many mistakes and misguided strategies, Clan Silverrock was in a fairly good position as it entered the second year of the reign of Borin Silverrock.

Characteristics, Champions, and Changes

Gary Johnson

I am dissatisfied by many things about Champions, even though it is my favourite superheroic role-playing system. One of the aspects of the game (indeed, of many comics!) that I dislike is the way every superhero is a physically exceptional being, stronger, faster, fitter, more attractive than ordinary people. I imagine that this doesn't bother many gamers who use Champions, but I find it somewhat implausible that a mentalist like Solitaire or a private detective like Santiago Villagatos (Jaguar's alter-ego) is as fast as the fastest "normal" human being can be (i.e. they are both Dexterity 20).[1] There seems to be a widespread attitude that superheroes are better than any "normal" human can be. DC Heroes, for instance, states that Batman can lift 700 kg, which is quite a bit more than real people have ever lifted.[2] The Champions rules have a similar attitude. Speaking personally, I would prefer a more realistic approach to the presentation of people who decide to don costumes and strive against crime.

Because most superheroic campaigns take place in a version of our world, there is a great deal of information that we can draw upon to increase the realism of Champions characters. What follows, then, is a discussion of how to take advantage of the "real-world" setting of the Champions game system and create Champions characters with more plausible Characteristics (plausible, that is, for people without superpowers that enhance their abilities). Along the way, I will suggest some rules changes, a new power, and some guidelines role-players can follow if they like the ideas in this article.

The Scale of Primary Characteristics

Let me begin by clarifying some aspects of the game system that are implied, but not clearly stated, in the fourth edition rules. As we all know, the weight characters can lift doubles with every 5 points of Strength.[3] I suggest that all Primary Characteristics should act in the same way, and double in effect with every 5 points: Comeliness 15 is twice as beautiful as Comeliness 10, Constitution 18 is twice as fit as Constitution 13, etc. This may seem like a minor decision, but it has several implications that I'm still grappling with.

Firstly, because skill rolls are based on characteristics, they must therefore double in "power" for every point.[4] It seems strange that a skill roll of 14 or less is twice as good as a 13 or less, even though this must be the case. Even if we argue that only Strength doubles for every five points, Strength Rolls are still calculated using this formula. Integrating doublings of power with the probabilities of the various dice rolls makes my head hurt, but doing this may reveal something meaningful, so let me know if you discover anything.

Secondly, 5 points of Strength cause 1d6 of damage. There seems to be a clear correlation between doublings of power and increases of 1d6,

even if it is unintuitive to think that your attack is twice as good as it used to be because now you roll an extra die. However, there is some evidence that not all attacks increase by 1d6 for each doubling,[5] and there are numerous questions that I haven't yet resolved about the relationship between the power of an attack and the number of dice used.[6]

Finally, assuming that all Primary Characteristics double for every 5 points lets us create a scale for the Characteristics that can't be measured by what they do in "real-world" terms. Strength is the only Primary Characteristic that can be measured easily, if at all (see discussion below). Previously, the relationship between various values in other Characteristics were defined solely in terms of the effects they have on game mechanics: Combat Value, Presence Attacks, Mental Defence, etc. Now, both GMs and players can scale Characteristics according to how much better one value is to another conceptually, and not according to the effects on game mechanics.

Normal Characteristic Maxima

On another matter, anyone who has played heroic (as distinct from superheroic) Champions will be aware of the rules concerning Normal Characteristic Maxima.[7] The name is somewhat misleading, since the NCM are not the ceilings that "normal" people cannot go beyond, but the values beyond which it is very hard for "normal" people to reach. In game mechanics, this effect is achieved by doubling the cost of any Characteristics bought above the NCM. I interpret the "real-world" meaning of this as follows: most people could reach the NCM if they tried very hard. Remember, the NCM for all Primary Characteristics is 20, only four times (!) as good as an ordinary person with a value of 10 in these Characteristics. Looking upon the distribution of values among all people as a bell-curve, the NCM is close to the top of the curve. Thus, values of more than 20 are superhuman, *but still within the potential of "ordinary" human beings.* Only the truly exceptional (i.e. obsessed martial artists, body builders, and superheroes) will exceed the NCM, and they will have to work very hard to do so.

However, it is obvious that there is some point at which Characteristics become impossible for even the most driven "normal" person to reach. Nobody can throw tanks around without super-strength. Nobody can run faster than the speed of sound. At some point, there is a ceiling for "normal" people. I call this ceiling "the peak of human potential", and have ruled that this ceiling is a value of 25 in any Primary Characteristic. This is 5 points (i.e. twice as good) higher than the NCM. My research into lifting weights (see below) dovetailed neatly with my hunch to set "human potential" at 25, so I feel this is quite reasonable.

Normal and Peak Characteristics

Char	Normal Maximum	Peak of Potential
STR	20	25
DEX	20	25
CON	20	25
BODY	20	25
INT	20	25
EGO	20	25
PRE	20	25
COM	20	25
PD	8	10
ED	8	10
SPD	4	6
RED	10	12
END	50	60
STUN	50	60

Strength

The values of most Primary Characteristics cannot be compared easily to real-world qualities. Some Characteristics measure something we cannot quantify (e.g. Ego, Comeliness), while others are too difficult for us to quantify (e.g. Constitution, Intelligence). We can say that someone is more impressive or faster than someone else, but converting those impressions into Characteristic values is nigh-impossible. Strength is the only Characteristic that we can quantify easily, because the Strength Table equates particular Strength values with particular amounts of weight lifted.[8]

How exactly is this weight being lifted, however? I have heard various suggestions in the past, including weight lifted in a bench press and weight held above the head. However, the Throwing Table on the next page contains a valuable clue. If you are lifting a weight that requires your exact STR value to lift, you can throw that weight 0 hexes (i.e. a negligible distance). To me, this sounds like the deadlift (when a weight is lifted from the ground to waist height).

The *Guinness Book of Records* (1992 Edition) tells us that the world deadlift record five years ago was 406 kg for men and 237.5 kg for women.[9] These are roughly Strength 20 and Strength 16. It seems that the NCM for male Strength is roughly right! The difference between the records is caused by the difference in male and female upper body strength. Men have more upper body strength than women: while lower body strength is about the same, women have 1/2 to 2/3 the upper body strength of men of the same size and build. This is a difference of about 1.5 times, or half a doubling of Strength. Please remember that this does not mean that all women are weaker than all men.

At the bottom of the page is a table offering rough guidelines to the amount of Strength a "normal" character should have, based on three determining factors: height and build, exercise, and gender. An "average" woman who does no strength-building exercise will have a Strength of 8, while an "average" man will have a Strength of 10. I stress that these figures are suggestions only, especially the height ranges, which are relatively arbitrary. However, I believe that they model reality reasonably well, and are worth using for that reason.

It is an axiom of weightlifting that the larger you are, the stronger you are. The table below is geared for people of average builds, and set up so that people of average height (around 5'6" for women and 5'11" for men)[10] are in the same band. Large, bulky people may be one step up on the scale, while thin, weedy people may be one step lower.

Another basic principle of weightlifting is that the more strength-building exercise you do, the stronger you become. The table below contains four categories of exercise: none, light, moderate, and heavy. Please note that this is strength-gaining exercise, not fitness training (that affects Constitution). Most people are light exercisers, even if we do some swimming or some weights at the gym. Serious swimmers and athletes engage in moderate exercise, but only serious weightlifters engage in heavy exercise. Many superheroes are obviously heavy exercisers; just look at how they are drawn!

Finally, as pointed out above, men will be stronger than women of an equivalent height and weight, even if they do the same amount and type of strength-building exercise, because men have more upper body strength. In the table, the figure before the slash is that for female characters, and that after the slash for male characters.

Suggested Strength Values according to Size and Exercise

Height Range	None	Light	Moderate	Heavy
5'0" to 5'6"	5/8	8/10	10/13	13/15
5'6" to 6'0" *	8/10	10/13	13/15	15/18
6'0" to 6'6"	10/13	13/15	15/18	18/20
6'6" to 7'0"	13/15	15/18	18/20	20/23
7'0" and over **	15/18	18/20	20/23	23/25

* this is the band for characters of average height
** characters over this height may have at least one Growth

The height ranges overlap because there should be flexibility, especially when characters are on the edge of going up a band. It is a matter for individual players (and their GMs) whether or not a character 5'6" tall should be up in the average band or down in the band for characters over 5'0" tall.

I've left it up to you to determine what weights your characters should be. Please remember that women who engage in moderate or heavy exercise will be lean and muscular, not the voluptuous women you always see in comics. Watch *Gladiators* sometime and see what weights the competitors and Gladiators come in at: that will give you a better idea of what many superheroines should look like.

Let me discuss some characters from the *Handbook of the Marvel Universe* and assign them Strength values. Before we can do that, however, we must derive some method for converting weight bench-pressed (the *Handbook*'s way to measure Strength) to weight deadlifted. Comparing these lifts in the *Guinness Book of Records*,[11] it seems that the maximum bench press for men is about 2/3 the weight of the deadlift, while the women's bench press is only about 1/2 deadlift. This difference is accounted for by the difference in upper body strength, which is not important in the deadlift, but critical in the bench press. Armed with these values, let us now approach the Marvel Universe.

To start with one of my favourites, Captain America:[12] he is 6'2" tall, weighs about 110 kg (240 lbs), and "while not superhuman, he is as strong as a human being can be," capable of bench-pressing 360 kg (800 lbs) with supreme effort . This bench press converts into a deadlift of about 500 kg, which requires a Strength of about 22 to shift. If we work from his description, Cap engages in heavy exercise and has a solid build, which gives someone of his height Strength 23. This dove-tails nicely with the weight he is supposed to be able to shift, even if you might expect someone "as strong as a human being can be" to have Strength 25. Captain America is a big man, but he isn't huge.

Colossus is huge.[13] 6'6" tall in his human form, a hefty 115kg (250 lbs), and engages in "intensive regular exercise". Given that Colossus is in the height category after Cap's, he should have Strength 25.[14]

Turning away from these huge brutes to a smaller hero, Iceman, we find that he is 5'8" tall, weighs 66kg (145 lbs), and engages in "moderate regular exercise".[15] This sounds like moderate strength-building exercise to me, which makes Iceman Strength 15.

Continuing with the X-Men, we come to Storm.[16]: At 5'11", she is tall for a woman, and allegedly weighs 57 kgs (127 lbs).[17] Ignoring the weight listed, she is described as a woman "who engages in intensive regular exercise," which shows how problematic the *Handbook* can be. Storm doesn't seem to do any weights, mostly swimming and a lot of fitness-building exercise. Although the book says intensive, I would rule that this is moderate strength-building exercise, not heavy, which gives Storm Strength 13.

And finally, the Canucklehead, Wolverine.[18] The psychotic midget from Canada is 5'3" tall, weighs 90 kg (much of which is his metal skeleton), and is another one of these "intensive regular exercise" superheroes. All of this gives Wolvie Strength 15.[19]

Pushing

I'm sure some reader out there has come up with one of the problems of using world weight-lifting records to determine characters' Strengths: pushing.

Nothing ruins weightlifting as much as being able to push your Strength by 10 points (a four-fold improvement!). Even ordinary schmucks like you and me can push our Strength up to the level needed to break world records. I can see only one way around this problem, and that is to scrap pushing as it currently exists.

Certainly there should be some way of going beyond your usual limits in the right circumstances: we've all heard about parents who lift cars off their children and people who carry precious but heavy objects out of burning buildings. My suggestion is to unite an aspect of pushing in heroic campaigns (the Ego Roll) with pushing in superheroic campaigns (1 Endurance per 1 point gained). A character can attempt to push any power that costs Endurance, but she must make an Ego Roll at –1/1 point gained from pushing. If the Ego Roll is failed, the character must still spend the Endurance, but she gains no bonus.

This looks reasonable to me: it stops everybody being world weight-lifting champion, and also focuses more attention on the heroic, "last-ditch effort" aspect of pushing. Because superheroic campaigns don't require Ego Rolls to push, it can become something akin to the extra bit of power you can use, rather than the desperate effort to save life as we know it. Using an Ego Roll reaffirms the nature of pushing, of "giving it that little bit extra". This also gives the GM more control over it, because he can give bonuses or penalties to the roll as he sees fit. And anyway, superheroes are just regular heroes in skin-tight costumes and capes, aren't they? Why should they get special rules?

Presence and Presence Attacks

On to another part of the rules I think should be changed. I've never been sure why looking impressive makes it harder for other people to impress you. Surely Ego, which represents strength of will and intestinal fortitude, is the more appropriate characteristic for resisting Presence Attacks. The rules as much as admit this by allowing characters to use either Presence or Ego, whichever is greater, to resist Presence Attacks. I say, go the whole hog and don't use Presence to resist Presence Attacks. After all, you don't use Strength to resist being punched, do you?

Of course, you may want your character to be better at not being impressed than she is at resisting evil mental influences. In this case, why not use Presence Defence? Say it costs 1 character point for 1 point of Presence Defence, with a minimum cost of 5 points, and add it to your Ego when you get Presence Attacked.[20]

Movement Powers

One of the silliest aspects of Champions is the way you can travel greater distances when your reaction time decreases. Because movement is carried out on an action-by-action basis, the higher your Speed, the more times you can move. Thus, characters with Speed 6 can run or swim three times as far as Speed 2 characters, all because they can act every two seconds instead of every six. As Spock would say, "That is not logical, Captain." The easiest solution that I can see to this problem is to work out how far the character should be able to travel in a turn, and divide that distance between her actions. Thus, if a character can move 24" in a turn,

he moves 12" a phase if Speed 2, 6" a phase if Speed 4, and 3" a phase if Speed 8. This seems easy enough to do in theory: it may prove too time-consuming in practice.

What follows are some guidelines for the maximum speeds at which "normal" people can run and swim. Although my data is five years old, there hasn't been a dramatic improvement in these speeds, so they will do. Please remember that these distances are the world records in sprinting, where power and strength count for more than endurance and stamina.

Running: In 1992, the world record for the 100m sprint for men was 9.86 seconds, which is 36 km/hr (10 m/sec). The women's record for the same distance was 10.49 seconds, which is 32.4 km/hr (9 m/sec).[21] That is, fast men (those who do moderate strength-building exercise) run 60"/turn, while fast women (also moderate exercisers) run 54"/turn. Friends who play touch football suggest that an average fit man (who does light strength-building exercise) takes 14 to 15 seconds to sprint 100m, which is 25 km/hr (7 m/sec), and by extrapolating from the difference between fast men and women, we can hazard the guess that the average fit woman takes 16 to 17 sec for 100m, which is 22 km (6 m/sec). Thus, average men run 42"/turn, average women run 36"/turn. Note that both of these speeds are faster than that of the ordinary person in the Champions rules, who can cover only 24"/turn (i.e. 14 km/hr).

Swimming: In 1992, the world freestyle record for 50m was 19.05 seconds for men (equivalent to 9 km/hr or 2.5 m/sec) and 24.98 seconds for women (7.2 km/hr or 2 m/sec).[22] That is, fast men (once again, moderate exercisers) swim 15"/turn, while fast women swim 12"/turn. Assuming that the degree of difference between world record swimmers and ordinary swimmers is similar in proportion to the difference between runners, the average fit man (doing light exercise) will swim at 1.75 m/sec and the average fit woman will swim at 1.4 m/sec. Thus, average men swim 10"/turn, average women swim 8"/turn. This is much closer to the ordinary person in the Champions rules, who also manages 8"/turn.

These maximum speeds are, of course, derived from sprinting speeds, which is undoubtedly non-combat movement. Remember that combat movement is 1/2 non-combat movement. As an observation, I don't see any need to prohibit characters using non-combat movement without first spending a phase moving at combat speeds; all it does in my games is confuse people (including me!) and make it hard to work out who is going to win the 100m sprint. I just ignore it, and so can you.

I hope that other Champions players and GMs find something of use in this article. If you prefer to play less realistic superheroes, or don't like the idea of not being able to push reliably, then perhaps my suggestions aren't for you. If you are interested by what I have written, and apply it in your games, please let me know how it went and what you thought of it. I welcome any feedback or criticisms you care to give.

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[1] *Champions*, 4th edition, pp. C7 & C9.

[2] *DC Heroes*, 3rd edition, p.161.

[3] *Champions*, p.14; see also the Strength Table on p.173.

[4] After all, the Base Skill Roll formula is 9 + (Characteristic/5); see *Champions*, p.16.

[5] *Champions*, p.203: dynamite increases by 2d6 (explosive) per doubling.

[6] For instance, you can haymaker, and increase the number of dice rolled by 50%, but you can't gain this bonus when using ranged attacks. If you use a HKA, you "gain" 1 DC per 5 points of Strength, up to the maximum DC of the weapon. Martial arts add DC to your Strength, but in this case the extra dice represent (I think) skill and aiming, as well as power.

[7] *Champions*, pp.13, 122-123, but see also the Disadvantage *Age*, pp.118-119, which I ignore.

[8] *Champions*, p.173.

[9] *Guinness Book of Records*, 1992 edition, p.678.

[10] These figures have been communicated to me by friends, and may be slightly inaccurate.

[11] *Guinness Book of Records*, 1992 edition, p.678.

[12] *Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, vol.2 no.2 pp.44-45.

[13] *Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, vol.2 no.3 pp.10-11.

[14] My personal quibble is that Colossus isn't depicted exercising in the comics as often as Captain America is, which makes me feel that Colossus should perhaps be a moderate exerciser, and have a Strength of 23. This is just a subjective impression, of course.

[15] *Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, vol.2 no.6 pp.10-11.

[16] *Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, vol.2 no.12 pp.51-52.

[17] One of the most annoying things about the *Handbook* is that is consistently under-estimates how much female characters should weigh. A more reasonable weight would be something around 5-10 kgs heavier.

[18] *Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, vol.2 no.14 pp.62-64.

[19] Which is nowhere near the upper limit of human strength, despite what the inside back cover of *Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, vol.2 no.16 claims.

[20] *Champions II* (1982) p.8 describes Presence Defence, but there you get 2 points for 1 character point. Because I've decided that Presence Defence supplements Ego, which costs twice as much as Presence, I've set the cost of Presence Defence at 1 character point for 1 point. This, incidentally, puts Presence Defence on a par with Mental Defence, which seems consistent.

[21] *Guinness Book of Records*, 1992 edition, p.620.

[22] *Guinness Book of Records*, 1992 edition, p.618.

General Notes, adapted from *Champions II*, ©1982, pp.59-60

Bruce Harlick

The categories given are very broad, and specific people would vary quite a bit from the Characteristics shown. These notes about Characteristics apply to normal people, and superheroes are beyond such petty restrictions. Some notes on each Characteristic:

STR: The STR range for normal people is from about −10 for babies, up to 20 for professional weight lifters. Football players will have a STR of 15 at least, and can have a STR of 18 or 20. A weight lifter might have a STR of 20 or 23, possibly even 25.

DEX: Most people would have a DEX of 8 to 10, since DEX reflects a person's general combat ability. Good physical training (like professional sports or martial arts) would result in a higher DEX, perhaps 11 to 15. Only a very skilled fighter or superb athlete would have a higher DEX, perhaps up to 18. Very skilled Martial Artists could go higher, but they would be in a class with some superheroes at that point.

CON: Athletic training and endurance conditioning would increase a person's CON beyond 10. A marathon runner would probably have a CON of 15 or maybe 18. The major function of CON is resisting stunning, so highly trained fighters would tend to have a higher CON.

BODY: A character's body can reflect will to live, as well as sheer size and mass. A 200 kg person would probably have 18 or 20 BODY. [Why not an extra point of body for every 10 kgs of weight over 100 kg?] A small person with a very strong will to live might have 15 BODY.

INT: INT in Champions is mostly a measure of the character's perception and ability to think quickly. Other types of intelligence (like memory, creativity, knowledge of a science, etc.) are not really represented by INT. Only scientists who are very quick thinkers would have a very high INT, possibly up to 30. Scientists who work slowly and methodically would have average INT, even though they may be Nobel Prize winners.

EGO: This represents a person's strength of will, their mental toughness. It's not unusual for a normal person to have an EGO of 13, and very strong-willed people (leaders of various types, military commanders, etc.) might have an EGO of 15 or 18.

PRE: The vast majority of normal people will have a PRE of 8 or 10. Only those people of great charisma and leadership ability (including some actors) would have a PRE of 15 or 20.

COM: The average person on the street has a 10 COM. This is highly variable, since COM is an amalgam of physical beauty, manner, speech, dress, style, etc. A person's COM can increase although their physical appearance has not changed. A COM of 14 or 16 is not unusual, and very beautiful or handsome will have a COM of 20 (movie stars, for example).

PD: An average person will have at most a PD of 3 or 4, while a prizefighter might have a PD of 8 or 9. People used to fighting (like martial arts students, street toughs, etc.) will have a PD of 5 or 6.

ED: The average ED is lower than the average PD, since people don't make a habit of toughening themselves with flames. A normal person would have a 2 ED, and very healthy people would have an ED of 3 or 4.

SPD: Exceptionally slow-thinking individuals will have a SPD of 1, since they are so flustered by unusual situations like combat or emergencies that they can only think of one thing to do every twelve seconds. A more average SPD is 2, and only good combat training will bring a person's Speed to 3. SPD 4 is about as high as a normal person will go without incredibly intensive training.

REC: Most people have the base REC figured from their STR and CON, though some athletes (especially those with endurance training) would have an extra 1 or 2 points of REC.

END: Most people get by with the END as figured from their CON, but again some athletes would have a higher END due to extensive training.

STUN: Most people would have the normal amount of STUN figured from their STR, CON and BODY. Combat trained people (like police, soldiers, etc.) might have more points of STUN.