RPG REVIEW

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The Far East

Interview with Lee Gold … Reviews of Bushido, GURPS China, Legend of the Five Rings, Jade Dragons, Land of Samurai … Oriental Mystara … D&D Gargantua … D&D and T&T Hengeyokai … Gulliver's Trading Company … GURPS Korea … Ainu Nezumi … The Malay Archipelago

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ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL AND COOPERATIVE NEWS

Editorial

Welcome to the 39th edition of RPG Review, in our tenth year of operations, focusing on "the Far East" as our subject matter. It is curious to think that we now have been going for longer than some of the publications which we cite as influences, but in some respects it is easier to do a "semi-professional" 'zine on the Internet these days than it was to do a professional magazine from the earlier days of the hobby. Certainly our expenses (especially wages and printing) are a lot lower. People can probably tell that the editorial quality isn't quite as good either. In that regard we must must really thank in particular those people who make contributions to this long-lasting journal.

In this regard, we can but stand in awe in at the work of Lee Gold, whose APAzine, Alarums & Excursions, has been running consistently since 1976 and is arguably the single most important cultural artefact of the hobby as a result. Lee of course is the author of gaming products such as Land of the Rising Sun, the first "Far East" roleplaying game, along with GURPS Japan, which makes her a particularly apt interview subject for this issue.

In addition to the aforementioned interview, astoundingly regular contributor Karl Brown makes excellent contributions to the journal, and this exception is no different. His articles in this issue include Gargantua, potent monsters with an East Asian flavour for D&D 5th edition, a co-authored article with Rachel Ghoul for Hengeyokai, a shape-shifting PC

kin, Hengeyokai for Tunnels & Trolls 5.5 edition, and a campaign story for Gulliver's Trading Company. Karl also did the necessary head-hunting to find Francesco Defferrari who from the Threshold magazine has provided us a cross-posted article on Oriental Adventures in the old BECMI D&D setting of Mystara.

My own contributions include a review of several appropriate RPG systems and supplements over the course of our hobby. This includes Bushido (1981), GURPS China (1991), Legend of the Five Rings (1997), Jade Dragons & Hungry Ghosts (2001), and RuneQuest Land of Samurai (2008). In addition I have written two system articles, one on alternative “roll and keep” resolution system (such as used in L5R), along with two campaign articles, one based on the Malay archipelago of the 16th century, and another on the Ainu in Japan from roughly the same period. Another regular contributor Michael Cole, has provided a summary of a GURPS Korea game, albeit on that was mostly set in China.

Overall, I am happy to say that we’ve at least touched upon most of the games and geographical settings of the Far East in this issue. It is perhaps unsurprising that Japan and China feature so prominently, indeed there were several Japanese RPGs and supplements that are not described at all. Some of these have been described in previous issues (e.g., Fox Magic RPG Review Issue 6) as is some setting information (e.g., “Thai Influences in Gamandria”, Issue 26-27). Still, there are gaps; Korea, The Phillipines, Vietnam, and Cambodia is barely touched on, Thailand has next to nothing, Myanmar, Laos, and even Far Eastern Federal District of Russia nothing at all. This oversight is unfortunate as there is hundreds of millions of people in such areas with rich cultural and mythological traditions.

Now of course we recognise that even the term “the Far East” represents the point of view of European explorers and colonists. To the people who live in such places they are certainly not far, nor are they east. Perhaps if one was to use the international date line the region could be called “Early Day” or something like that. I don’t however see that term catching on in the immediate future. Still, if there is any population that’s shown some willingness to step beyond their own cultural boundaries and explore what is different about others and discover how much more is the same - it has been members of the RPG community. In that spirit, this special issue of RPG Review it is hoped can make at least a small contribution.

Lev Lafayette
RPG Review Cooperative

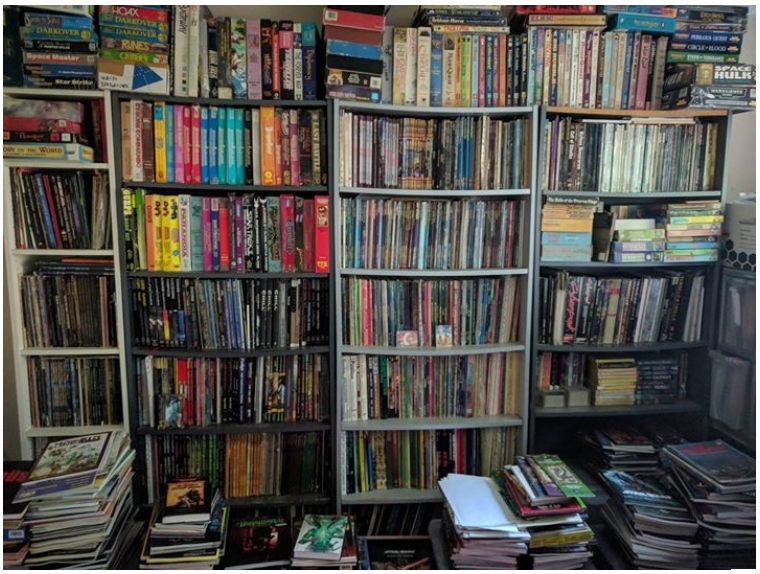
Cooperative News

A fairly normal month for the Cooperative, as we continue with our two main publications, The Tinker's Toolkit for D&D 5th edition by Karl Brown (http://www.dmsguild.com/product/232813/The-Tinkers-Toolkit) and Papers & Paychecks by Lev Lafayette (http://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/227291/Papers--Paychecks). Please note that all proceeds from Papers & Paychecks go to the RPG Review Cooperative.

The Cooperative library has now expanded to over 700 items, with the influx of donations from Paul Smith in particular being worthy of special note. We have continued with our regular movie nights at the Astor Theatre with special recognition of the 50th anniversary screening of 2001: A Space Odyssey. We're also involved in promoting Arcanacon 2019, which was the longest RPG convention in Melbourne, until it was cancelled in 2018. Also, we're promoting a

RuneQuest Down Under Con for November this year.

Most of you will know that the RPG Review store has closed down temporarily, as the site which hosted it (Quicksales) is no longer in operation. This does provide us, of course, the opportunity to do a stock-take and to reorganise the store. We raise a number of questions for those who use this resource for consideration; how do you prefer an online RPG store to be organised? By game system? By publisher? Alphabetically? By year of publication? Where do you prefer related material to go (e.g., computer games, wargames, board games)?



Our inquiring minds seek advice! Because collectively we know more than any of us individually can know.

Letters

Who is that Spider Woman?

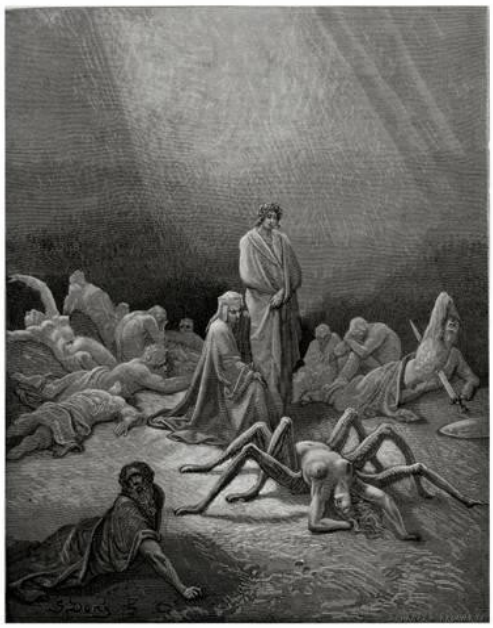
Hey, I seem to remember your half spider-woman mascot being based on something from medieval France- what's her name?

Thomas Verreault

Hi Thomas,

The RPG Review logo of Arachne is from Greek mythology, although the artist Gustave Dore was French from 19th century (c.f., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Dor%C3%A9).

Arachne, who had the temerity to challenge Athena to a weaving contest. The goddess turned her into a spiderwoman (c.f., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arachne). The logo is a study from the Dore's 12 Canto of Dante's Purgatory.



Hope this helps, Lev

Multiverse Magazine

Hi Lev,

Back in the day there was "Multiverse" magazine on which there was a recent rpg.net thread.
https://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?828487-Anyone-remember-the-name-of-an-Australian-RPG-magazine-from-the-80s

The crew who put this together also included Super Squadron author Joe Italiano, who published a letter in RPG Review
http://rpgreview.net/content/super-squadron-rules-updates

I'm interested in this part of Australian gaming history, as this team (Adventure Simulations?) were able to get a RPG magazine into mainstream distribution in Australia (however briefly) and put out a boxed RPG.

What are the chances of an interview and article on this? Do you know any of the key people apart from Joe Italiano? I'd be happy to conduct email interview/s and write up an article if you have contact with some of these guys and could make the introduction.

Also on Aussie gaming history, I'd love to read some interviews or an article about the history of Mind Games.

regards, David

You're right Joseph Italiano was a mainstay in Multiverse, along with editors Toni Teolaa and Robert Mun.

Other regular contributors included Mark Angeli (who also worked on Werewolf: The Wild West, Lordly Domains for Pendragon, and Corum), Greg Ingram (who also did the industry news for the magazine as well as numerous articles), Mark Morrison (who has had many Call of Cthulhu and Stormbringer scenarios and supplements published by Chaosium), and Garth Nix, who has since gone to become a famous author of children's and young adult fiction. Any and all of these people are potential interview subjects.

As for Mind Games, we have a member of the Cooperative who has some contacts in that regard and I'll pass the request on to them.

All the best, Lev



INTERVIEW WITH LEE GOLD

With Lee Gold

Lee Gold has been involved in the RPG hobby since the earliest days as the editor of the APA 'zine "Alarums and Excursions" in June 1975, which continues to this day (http://www.conchord.org/xeno/aande.html) on a monthly basis.

Lee has published multiple RPGs and supplements, including Land of the Rising Sun (1980), Lands of Adventure (1983), GURPS Japan (1988, 1999), Rolemaster/Hero Vikings (1989), and contributed to Vampire: The Masquerade (1992), and Storyteller System: World of Darkness 2 (1996), and the Origin Award-winning, Gamemastering Secrets (2002). In addition to RPG supplements, Lee is an active participant in Filk music from science fiction and fantasy fandom, with a 'zine for that genre, and author of the genre-twisting 'Bloodslut' trilogy.

Welcome to RPG Review, Lee. You've been involved in roleplaying games since close to the origins of the hobby. How did you first become involved?

I first got involved in D&D when our old friends, Hilda & Owen Hannifen, told us there was a wonderful new game. Hilda had made up a dungeon and she ran it for us. So you see our first experience was with a female game master. It was a lot of fun, so we sent in a check for a copy of the rules, and I started making up a dungeon -- and told our local friends that they could start coming over and participating in D&D games that I'd be GMing.

What was it like back then? In particular, how was it for a woman in what was a heavily male-dominated hobby?

The SF-fan experience was largely male when I entered in 1967 -- but it wasn't male-dominated. Have you read Heinlein's THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS? SF fandom of the late 1960s had only a few women, but they were highly charismatic women -- including women like Bjo Trimble -- and they were not dominated by men. I entered LASFS as editor / leader of a sub-group that produced a fanzine: The Third Foundation.

This pattern of female equality also held true for the D&Ding / roleplaying that took place in SF fandom -- and that's where I did my D&Ding / roleplaying, not at hobby stores but at the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society and at science fiction conventions, usually with old friends or with people I'd met through A&E. A&E started through people who already knew one another through APA-L (the amateur press association collated each weeek at the LASFS) or through science fiction fannish connections, including conventions.

You asked me if I had any difficulties as a woman, and I suppose I should tell you about two odd encounters, neither with roleplaying fans but with professional publishers -- and one encounter at an Origins.

I sent copies of A&E to TSR for awhile. After a couple of months I got a phone call. "This is Gary Gygax," said the voice, "and I'd like to speak to Lee Gold."

"I'm Lee Gold," I said. "I gather you got the copies of A&E I sent you."

"You're a woman!" he said.

"That's right," I said, and I told him how much we all loved playing D&D and how grateful we were to him for writing it.

"You're a woman," he said. "I wrote some bad things about women wargamers once."

"You don't need to feel embarrassed," I said. "I haven't read them."

"You're a woman," he said.

We didn't seem to be getting anywhere, so I told him goodbye and hung up.

After I'd written LAND OF THE RISING SUN, I met Scott Bizar at some local convention to sign the contract.

"Do you want to say this game is written by yourself and your husband Barry?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Barry didn't write any bit of it. He did the indexing, and I gave him full credit for that. I wrote all of the game. Just say the game is by Lee Gold."

"Most female writers say they wrote a game with their husbands," said Bizar.

"I don't care what other people do," I said. "Just say the game is by Lee Gold." And so LRS came out as written by Lee Gold.

After LRS came out, I went to an Origins in Deteroit to do a demo of it. Barry came down with a brief but intense fever, so I went off to the convention center with my copy the boed game and my demo notes and dice. That was maybe 10-15 pounds of stuff. There were booths selling souvenirs including women's T-shirts saying "I'm a Wargames Widow."

A teenager came up to me and asked if I was carrying the stuff for my husband. I told him that no, I was carrying it for my demo of the game I'd written because my husband was sick with a fever. He shyly asked if he could help carry them for me -- and I told him he could.

We got to the demo room, and I set up for the game. The teenager asked if I thought my husband would mind if he kissed me on the cheek. "That's the wrong question," I told him.

"What's the right question?" he asked. "The right question," I said, "is would *you* mind?" He asked the right question, and I told him he could kiss me on the cheek. He did, blushed red, and ran off.

I ran a good demo. We all enjoyed it and understood the game rules. I think I knew everyone who'd signed up -- either from SF fan conventions or from A&E. Barry was well in a day or two. He and I went on to play in other enjoyable roleplaying games run by friends that Origins.

"Alarums and Excursions" has been running since 1975 and has a more unusual policy of charging people to contribute, presumably to offset print and postage costs etc.

A&E is an APA, an amateur press association. Please read https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_press_association

Most APAs ask contributors to publish their contributions and send it in to the collator / editor. I allowed that, but (like the Official Collator of APA-L) I was also willing to publish for people who wanted to save money on postage. My "unusual policy" for an APA collator / editor was allowing non-contributors to subscribe. These subscribers would pay fees which let me do something else unusual -- I let contributors get issues of A&E postage free.

Whilst various editorial services are available fee-for-service, it is still quite clearly quite a labour of love. Could you give a summary of its content and publication history for those less familiar?

Umm, no, not quite. A&E is best-classified as semi-pro. It doesn't take advertisements, but it also doesn't lose money.

Publication history: It started when Bruce Pelz decided there were Too Many contributors to APA-L writing Too Much about D&D and asked us to take it elsewhere. So I founded another APA, first issue - June, 1975. In August, 1975 my husband was transferred for four months to Japan, and I put editing & publishing into the hands of old friend Jack Harness, who brought out only three issues in those four months. I came back at the start of December and resumed editing the APA.

It came out a day late in the Spring of 1981 when my husband had a heart attack (and I made him proofread mimeograph stencils in his hospital bed). (It's easier to do this sort of thing when you're printing on a mimeograph in your kitchen). I skipped a month in the Summer of 2006 when I had major surgery, another month in August, 2015 for Worldcon, and I'm skipping August, 2018 again for Worldcon. Aside for that, A&E has always come out.

Your early RPGs (Land of the Rising Sun, 1980 and Lands of Adventure, 1983) were both published by Fantasy Games Unlimited. Can you describe the design process in the two games? The former described itself as a stand-alone variation to the contemporary FGU publication Chivalry & Sorcery, but with additional rules for feudal Japan (and arguably more complex with the additional detail)...

LRS was the only game of its time that had numbered sections so it sections could refer back and forth to one another. Compared to D&D and C&S or RQ, it was a marvel of editing and organization -- and it had an index. It even had a character sheet index that showed where you went in the rules to fill out that line on the character sheet.



... the latter, Lands of Adventure, has been praised for containing a number of great ideas, but lacking in development.

"Lacking in development"? Umm, I'd like someone to explain that to me. It came out with two culture packs: Medieval England and Mythic Greece.

In addition to the two that came in the original box I wrote several others: a 30th century setting (in the Solar Asteroid Belt, with several aliens), a Fairy Tale setting.

In an interview on Grognardia

(http://grognardia.blogspot.com/2009/04/interview-with-lee-gold.html) some time ago you mentioned that you were still running Lands of Adventure. Is this game still running? Is there any possibility of a second edition of the game?

I don't think that there's a market currently for the sort of high math that LoA represented. Yes, I'm still running a monthly game (using VoIP) that has LoA rules loosely underlying it. The game lasts three hours and it takes me 2-3 single-spaced pages to write up what happened because there's so little need for dice rolling and we can just get on with the roleplaying.

FGU also published a second feudal-mythological Japanese roleplaying game, Bushido, at a similar time to LotRS. Do you think that having two competing products from the same company caused problems or did they complement each other?

I'm not going to comment on this sort of thing.

After LotRS and LoA, you went on to write GURPS Japan (1988) which was very well received and had a second edition (1999). The first edition of course was subtitled "Roleplaying in the World of the Shogunate", and was centered on this period, and also started the historical sourcebooks that GURPS would become famous for. How was working for this new game system and game company? How much input did you have in the second edition?

As I hope you know, I didn't write GURPS JAPAN 2nd edition. I think it used some of my material, but I didn't get any royalties from it.

Your next roleplaying supplement was also historical, but on the other side of the world and again with a new company and games systems - Vikings for Rolemaster and the Hero System. What was your background with this particular setting? Which system did you use for actual play?

I have at least four shelf-feet of books (history, myths, sagas) on the Viking period. Lots of background. I've been running a Viking campaign (on and off) since 1988. Before I sent in these rules, I did a Lands of Adventure Vikings Culture Pack just to make sure that I hadn't left anything out.

By the way, you didn't ask me about my campaigns. My first dungeon was NEOCARN. My second dungeon was ALPH, set on the river Coleridge wrote about (with "caverns measureless to man (or Elf or Dwarf)" because I wa bored with people mapping them. This led to the Chaotic City of Nyosa, but I never ran it.

I've also run the Snaefellness Campaign (Norse Vikings) 9th century, interacting with England & Ireland, a nearby Elf Hill that's been seducing nursing women over the centuries to drink their milk, the Norse gods, the Black School (Satanists), Christian missionaries, cats, and other interesting beings using LoA.

Toon, a bunch of Toons who run a TV station in Los Angeles, but who took out time to visit Paranoia's Alpha Complex and who have also dealt with Call of Cthulhu

The Spanish Expedition (alternate world, in which Muslim Spain is ruled by descendants of El Cid who have made contact with the New World several centuries early -- at the time of the peace of Richard I & Saladin -- have sent out a caravan to sell chocolate and tomatoes to the courts of Europe). The PCs were Spaniards, Arabs, a Toltec, etc. using LoA.

Asteroids (an Outer Space campaign, set after the economic & culture collapse of a future civilization when hyperspace no longer functioned). Eventually the PCs figured out what had gone wrong, and got at least their own (PC) hypership able to go out to the stars again, which gave them many new worlds to explore. PCs came from a variety of Asteroid Belt civilizations and included an AI spacecraft who was slightly insane.

You also made some contributions to White Wolf's line of products. Could you tell us more about those contributions?

I wrote a brief essay on Gaki. I think that was it.

Finally, it's been a while since we've seen a Lee Gold-designed game or supplement. Are there any publishing plans for the future? Also, where do you think the hobby is heading?

I don't attempt to predict cats, dogs, or RPGers. I just watch them with wonder and delight.

EAST ASIA RPG REVIEWS

by Lev Lafayette

Bushido (FGU edition, 1981)

Introduction and Physical Product

For many years Bushido was considered the most well-developed Japanese mythology roleplaying game, and with a great deal of justification. The reasons for this are not hard to ascertain. Firstly, it really expressed itself as feudal Japan and showed some good knowledge of the setting. Secondly, it successfully incorporated these cultural mores into the game system. Finally, it had quite a reasonable game system. The publishers, FGU, were always on the edge of the market, landing a few pretty good products, but never a serious challenge to the major companies, although this particular edition did fare much better in the hands of FGU than prior publishers. In addition to the Bushido core boxed set, another four scenarios were published which was a very significant run from FGU.

The core boxed set is physically of middling quality which a stylised samurai on the cover which goes with the subtitle "Role Playing Adventure in Samurai Japan". Inside is a good quality cardstock character sheet and calendar planner, a fold-out cardstock (not heavy enough to be a GM screen) regional hex and terrain map with important tables on the flip-side, a heavier three-panel double-sided summary of major charts and tables (good enough to be a GM screen), and the two core books "The Heroes of Nippon" and "The Land of Nippon". These black saddle-stapled, cardstock covered, texts are around 80 and 48p respectively, with a two-column justified serif font that is densely presented.

There is little attention to user referencing; the page numbers are small without chapter titles, the table of contents brief, and there is no index. The section numbering is logical but unorthodox, and the writing style is detailed, dense, and formal, but also quite poorly organised with partial concepts often imparted piecemeal at various points in the book.

The Heroes of Nippon

The Heroes of Nippon book covers character generation, skills and tasks, equipment, magic etc. Basically it is characters and their activities, as opposed to setting. Characters have five major areas of characteristics; Attributes, Saving Throws, Abilities, Capabilities, and Skills. Attributes are direct measurements, which have a normal human value of 10, but can be trained up to as high as 40. They includes Strength, Deftness, Speed, Wit, and Will. Beginning characters have 60 points to initially distribute between the Attributes. After this distribution scores are modified by profession - profession modifiers (which includes attribute, skill modifiers, equipment etc) are quite unbalanced - the Bushi are by far the most 'gamist' class to select.

Closely related are Saving Throws, which are directly derived from an attribute/3, plus character level against a d20

test. Abilities are calculated from one or more attributes, and include such things as Encumbrance Capacity (2 x Strength in pounds, for no penalty, up to 8 x Strength for over-encumbered)., Damage Bonus (every 5 full points over 15 adds +1 damage) Base Unarmed Combat Damage (2-10 for 1d3, 11-30 for 1d6), 30+ for 1d10), Base Action Phase (Equivalent of initiative, Deftness/2 round down. First action on BAP, secon on BAP/2, third on BAP/3 etc.), Maximum Actions (Speed/10), Base Movement (Speed/3 in yards), Hit Points (If Hit Points (Health + Level) in Lethal damage is exceeded, character dies), Healing Rate Health/5, (with heavy modifiers, applied daily), Freely Improvable Skills (number of skills that can be taken without a learning penalty), Learning Rate (Combined Wit and Will). Perception (Wit Saving Throw), magical Power (Will plus 1d10+level per level in Power), and Zanshin (Governs effectiveness of multiple actions (if any) in Detailed Turn. Level is cross-referenced from Wit+Speed+Deftness).

Capabilities are attributed-derived actions that are derived from two or more Saving Throws, and typically averaged. This includes actions like climbing, but also magical casting. For example; Brawling is the average of Strength, Deftness and Will., Climbing: Deftness/2 and Ninja add their level., Leaping: Speed/2, Ninja add their level to this too, Magic casting is based on (Wit+Will)/5 providing a Base Chance of Success on d20, Swimming: Requires being Unencumbered and nor more than 25% wounds. Average of Strength+Deftness+Health Saving Throw etc.

Finally there are Skills, which are given an initial percentile rating (Raw Base Chance of Success), with starting levels derived from one or more of the character's Attributes, then divided by 5, and with a level bonus according to character class to appropriate skills, to finish with a d20 test value (Base BCS, a recursive acronym). A critical Success or failure: 10% rounded, of adjusted BCS. Given that so much of the game is based around a d20 roll-under check system, it is curious to see how much of the game does not start with this as the means for initial calculation. Plus there is effect numbers, the degree of success or failure on how much a skill test was made or failed by.

This aside, the skills themselves represent quite an impressive range of martial and non-martial skills, differentiated in the game as "Bugei" and "Fine and Practical Arts". There is almost forty skills in the first category, and slightly more (depending on what you count as a skill, such a Ninja, magical, and Ki skills) in the latter category. There are Five Schools of Elemental magic, and Five Schools of Yoga. Ki is a special attribute, gained will skill mastery, levels, high attributes, and meditation and can be used in a focussed or unfoccussed manner to increase BCS, or self-healing; permanent Ki loss if wounds are fatal. The skills are usually given their Japanese name and are typically described in a few paragraphs. There is a great deal of culturally-specific skills here that would not be common in other RPGs; for example the martial skill of Kiserujutsu - using a 3' foot long iron tobacco pipe as a weapon, or of course Cha-no-yu, or Tea Ceremony.

Skills are improved by study and training, with bonuses and hindrances affecting the final improvement to the raw skill rating. Study and Training is derived from Learning Rate + Learning Bonuse)/(2 * Learning Hindrances) which gives number of "Study Turns" per week. Curiously located near the back of the book are rules for character healing and death, and combat. The latter has a complex action-point and phase system for initiative, skill checks for attacks and maneuvers (armour reduces the chance to hit), and a step-based damage score. If Lethal Damage is greater than Hit Points then the character is dead. If Lethal + Subdual damage greater than hit points character is unconscious. Primary

Action phase is first BAP. Zanzhin determines if Primary Actions are allowed on other action phases. Roll modified BCS to hit - Effective Armour Class. Armour class = Armour + defense (level for bushi) + parry options. Magic spells are the final item in the book, differentiated by elemental school and the knowledge level required to use them; duration is often based on the level of the caster.

An important feature in Bushido is the character's place in society. Status is rated like a skill, with birth rank, profession level, and On (honour) all playing a role. Status is used in numerous social interactions ("political meetings, marriage contracts, and legal cases"), with a d20 check being derived, effectively like a reaction roll. On is calculated from Birth Rank, Level and On; Ninja have no On. Bushido is a class, level, and experience point system, with experience gained from martial and magical activities and On. On is achieved through winning contests, battle, duels, flashy swordplay, skill mastery, overcoming threats, heroic duty, research, or engaging in pilgrimage. On is lost through cowardice, faleshood, treason, rashness and disgrace in battle; Ninja do not gain or lose On. Character levels are rated from 0 to 6 and are improved by the character completing tasks associated with their profession (experience) and by their On.

The professions are Bushi (samurai fighter), Budoka (unarmed martial artists), Shugendo (Taoist and elemental wizards), Gakusho (religious priests, Shinto and Buddhist), Yakuza (criminal), and Ninja. Each have the own basic set of abilities and powers associated with the profession, initial skills, attribute modifiers, and hit point bonuses. Character creation form the outset will determine birth rank which determines starting On and money. To further immerse characters in the setting a thorough introduction is given to the lands, several pages on customs and religious beliefs, and the status of women (not great, but not as bad as historical Japan). As can be expected the equipment list, even if it does have a strong martial orientation, reinforces the cultural immersion. The back-cover weapon illustration guide further contributes to this.

The Land of Nippon

The second book is explicitly for gamemasters and is significantly shorter. The major sections are Non-Player Characters, Events, Places, Battles, Downtime, Group Membership, and Advanced Campaigns, In addition there are shorter sections on Treasure, Natural Phenomena, and a short (1 page) sample adventure. The Treasure section basically includes a random generation table stepped according to general rating (from "Niggardly" to "Fabulous") and differentiated types of items of wealth, including magical treasure. The Natural Phenomena is simply a listing of difficulty tasks according to event and sadly, does not differentiate according to where in Nippon such events are most probable. The adventure is extremely simple, but can be used to supplement actual play in the first session after character creation.

A good portion of the Land of Nippon book is the NPCs; this includes human NPCs, with characteristic values according to profession, with plenty of Average Men examples too (e.g., doctors, merchants etc), but also a few beasts (9 bears, dogs, etc), legendary creatures (8, giant spiders, giant lizards), and legendary beings (16, ghosts and goblins) which are provided a full set of characteristics and brief descriptions. In addition to these are the powerful supernatural beings, the minor and major kami nature spirits, and various Buddhist spirits, hungry ghosts, warrior-ghosts and so

forth. There is certainly plenty to work with here, and an investigate GM will be able to make ample use of the different abilities provided by these beings.

The other sections of the book are basically organising the setting, and actions out of the game session. With regards to the former there's plenty of seeds for setting up scenarios in The Nature of Events, such as battle, contests, duels, courier and escort, uprisings and so forth. Supplementing the battle event there's a chapter outlining a high-level battle simulation system which concerns itself primarily with the result of the battle and what happened to the protagonists, which is as much as you need from a character-centered RPG. The actual Places where these occur are high level descriptions and statistics for cities, castles, holy places, hermitages, schools etc. The Downtime section concerns itself with various types of employment, research (especially of the magical variety), marriage (including the NPC Wife profession), and the maintenance of lands and fiefdoms. The Advanced Campaign takes this a step further with some short elaborations on higher temporal power and curiously, the book ends with remarks on changing professions.

Evaluation

Even by contemporary standards Bushido is an impressive game for roleplaying in mythic-Japanese setting - and by way of example, when we switched to this game from Legend of the Five Rings, there was universal approval from around the table on its overall superiority, albeit at a price. The level of detail and immersion is truly impressive in a relatively short publication (around 128 pages total), and even as a sourcebook for other games there is plenty of ideas here.

Where the game suffers is the levels of often unnecessary complexity; the core game system itself is surprisingly simple - usually just d20 roll under target number. The process to get there however is complex, often intricate, and varies a great deal according to what is actually being examined. As a result, it suffers significantly in terms of the workmanship, system, and even the enjoyment of actual play as a result. Worse still however is the organisation of the books, which is not assisted by the layout out the text (little variation in font or font-size), and with a painful lack of indexing - all of which is very typical for the production and editing qualities at FGU. Nevertheless, overall, this is still a very impressive game which stands as a workable classic in its genre.

Style: 1+.2 (layout) .3 (art) .8 (coolness) .2 (readability) .4 (product) = 2.9
Substance: 1+.8 (content) .9 (text) .4 (fun) .3 (workmanship) .4 (system) = 3.8

GURPS China (Steve Jackson Games, 1991)

Introduction and Product

Physically, this a standard GURPS 3rd edition era sourcebook; cardstock cover, 128 pages, two-page index, two-page table of contents, page layout usually consisting of 2/3rds main body text and 1/3rd sidebars. The artwork is not

brilliant in this particular product - it's not bad as such, but the gold oriental dragon on the cover is not exactly exciting and the internal black-and-white drawings are mostly filler, occasionally placed with context. This said, there are numerous maps included throughout the book which is a great help, although the detail on many of them could be improved. The writing style, while formal in content, is accessible and clear, although on jarring aspect - appropriate to the publication date - is the use of Wades-Giles roman characters rather than the now more popular pinyin.

Mention must be made of how pleasing it is to see this book as well; the world roleplaying market has been somewhat obsessive about the Japanese, and whilst not to be too critical (after all, your humble reviewer contributed to this as well), it is nice to see a supplement that makes use of a region that is more populous, has greater cultural diversity and, dare I suggest, a longer and more "interesting" (as much as that is a curse) history.

For what it is worth, some 5000 years of history cannot possibly be encapsulated into a single supplement, right? You would think so, but instead one reads in the introduction: "this book … covers Chinese history from the Ice Age to the present". It's a bold claim and in the attempt to do this, eight chapters are offered: Life in China (18 pages), Characters (22 pages), The Chinese Campaign (8 pages), Annals and Myths (12 pages), Imperial China (19 pages), China and the West (17 pages), the Supernatural (8 pages), Bestiary (8 pages).

Life and Characters

The first chapter is what it says on the lid; an exploration of the cultural norms, aesthetics, and beliefs of the Chinese, which given the scope of the supplement means certain broad brush strokes. By the same token, it is not afraid of pointing out some of the ambiguities in the GURPS system for example by the sidebar noting how the one-dimensional Tech-Level is problematic. The chapter, insofar that it concentrates on traditional culture is still insightful, if not complete, for more contemporary beliefs. Short descriptions and major historical changes are noted for "Everyday Affairs" (food, dress, housing), "Religion" (animism, taoism, Confucianism, moism, legalism), "Government and Justice" (civil service, the examination system, magistrates), "The Family" (the clan, inheritance, marriage), "The Middle Kingdom" (summaries of several regions), with maps of China's mineral resources, population centres, geography, cities and provinces, and "Calendar".

There is a lot of detail here, expressed quite densely, and with insightful sidebars on subjects like proverbs, censors and sentencing, the lands beyond China, and astrology. Nevertheless, it is heavily focused on a medieval-historic China (c1200 CE if one wants to be precise) and doesn't speak here of more problematic aspects, such as the status of women from a societal perspective. One other comment should be made; the author makes many references to "the Middle Kingdom" (Zhonggou), but doesn't explain to less educated readers that this is the Chinese ethnocentric term for that land; it refers to the place ("the central Kingdom") rather than a time ("the middle ages").

The next chapter covers character generation in the GURPS-style with sourcebook modifications. Typical characters are on the standard 100 point level, but with cinematic martial arts campaigns reaching even 400 and 500 points. Around 25 character "types" are provided in summary form from one to three paragraphs each including Adventurers, Bandits,

Martial Artists, Merchants, Monks, Scholars, Wu, etc. Once again it is focussed on traditional Chinese society rather than the modern. It is after this section that there is a brief description of the status of women, noting that "China is a sexist society", "daughters are viewed as nuisances … wives as property", and "Females have an automatic -10 Social Stigma disadvantage in any historical Chinese campaign". This argument is historically quite wrong; the relative freedom women in the Tang dynasty (which would be -10) is very different to the subsequent Song dynasty and others (-15 to -20), and different again to contemporary China following the 1950 marriage act (-5).

Following this is application of GURPS system advantages and disadvantages to a Chinese context, and the addition of new examples. Literacy, for example, will vary in cost according to the time period, and whether it represents local dialect, full literacy, or scholarly-level literacy. New advantages and disadvantages include more supernatural examples such as "Harmony with the Tao", or "Yin/Yang Imbalance". About a dozen skills are also subject to such variation, elaboration, and innovation. "Writing" for example is expanded to include the various historical scripts, and new skills include Kite Flying, Nei Tan (nourishment through breath control), and the very exciting Piloting (manned kite)! A fairly simple sample character is provided (Wang Tzu, an extremely impoverished scholar from the Han dynasty period) before a few pages is spent on wealth, status, and employment, and them names and an equipment. The latter is split between general and combat equipment in roughly equal portions, and includes wondrous (e.g., automatons) and arcane devices (e.g., aerial chariot of the Chi-Kung, Elixir of life etc).

Chinese Campaigns

"The Chinese Campaign" chapter starts with eleven historical settings "interesting times", quickly described in a few sentences each, ranging from the period of "the Yellow Emperor" some 45 centuries ago to contemporary "Red China". Sidebar examples elaborate specific campaigns, such as Marco Polo's journey, an investigative supernatural-alien campaign based on the Dropa Stones, etc. These all have page references to further sections in the book where the few pages are elaborated to a few pages each. This is followed with crossover campaigns, where some thirty existing GURPS publications are described in a few sentences terms of their crossover potential with GURPS China, of course limited by publication date; added to this is but a mere paragraph on inspirational reading. The chapter concludes with several Chinese NPC archetypes (peasant, shopkeeper, soldier, scholar etc) with character statistics, which is always handy for quick characters.

The "Annals and Myths" and "Imperial China" chapters starts with some prehistoric references but without strong referencing to archeological evidence (e.g., "About 25,000 BC, a new human type appeared"). In any case, the science is some 30 years old now and would need some serious updates. It is in these chapters that we see the elaborations of some of the "interesting times" signposted from the previous, specifically Three Kings and Five Emperors(c4700 BCE to c2200 BCE), the period of Hsia, Shang, and Chou (c3000 BCE to c800 BCE), the Warring States (c800 BCE to c200 BCE), followed by the August Emperor (c220 BCE to c200 BCE), the Han empire (c200 BCE to c180 CE, the Three Kingdoms (c180CE to c580 CE), the chaos and Sui period (c580 CE to c620 CE), the T'ang Dynasty (c620 CE to c910 CE), and finally Sung and the Mongol invasion (c910 CE to c1300 CE). The potted history is high level of course concentrating on court actions and military endeavours, but also includes philosophy, historic parables, and numerous interesting events and characters. There is even a short section on Korea. As can be determined, there is an obvious

emphasis on same time periods over others - the August Emperor for example receiving several pages of detail for a period of around twenty years, whereas the earliest Three Kings and Five Emperors section receives a couple of pages to cover 2500 years. To a degree some of this is inevitable, after all, not all times are "interesting" and older times did have less people, but the imbalance does seem a little excessive.

A third chapter in the historical sequence is "China and the West", which is a particularly good separation. This starts with the Mongol Yuan period (c1280 CE to c1400 CE), followed the Ming dynasty (c1400 CE to c1650 CE), the Manchu (c1650CE to c1900), and finally the Time of Troubles and the East is Red (c1900 CE onwards). The overview is similar to the previous chapters insofar that it is high level, concentrates on military activity and governance, but combines this with colourful anecdotes, whether of events, people, or ideas. Sidebars include summaries of the more exotic of these features over the period offering campaign and scenario ideas; the story potential of piracy during the Ming dynasty period, the use of innovative torture techniques, various political and criminal secret societies, the role of opium and bounties paid for captured or killed foreigners. The chapter concludes - as per with the publication of the book with Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and the events of Tiananmen Square.

The final two chapters are on the supernatural and a bestiary. The former refers to the rating of the environment (low-mana by default) and availability of spells from standard GURPS rules which is everything, basically, albeit with cultural-genre restrictions. Sidebars provide an light overview of the elemental and astrological system, however these are not integrated into a magical or supernatural system as such, which is a little surprising to say the least. A handful of new spells are provided, with the Divination spell explained in great detail, taking just under two page of description as "Divinations are the most widespread Chinese spells", covering Feng Shui (geomancy), I Ching, Physiognomy, Ming Sun (astrology), and fish scale divination. A couple of pages is also spent on spirit kingdoms; realms of nature, realms of the dead, and realms of the heavens. It is noted that Chinese mythology has at least 36,000 gods, although surprisingly even the major ones are not described in any detail (there is minor reference in an opening chapter to the requirements of earthly rulers to also follow the rules of Tian to satisfy legitimacy requirements). The bestiary chapter is likewise for magical creatures, with the exception of the Cia Dog. Over 25 creatures are described in this chapter and appropriately ghosts and dragons receive prominence. As many of the creatures are intelligent, they are also provides with typical advantages, disadvantages, and sometimes skills and spells.

Evaluation

As a product, GURPS China is a standard item from the third edition period which is solid enough. Unlike a few of those books the binding and glue is solid and twenty-five years of use has not seen any notable weakness. As a setting China of course has a lot going for it, and one is impressed by the effort that the author has point in to describe the key features of history, albeit there is not as much work in their elaboration of the mythic and early period, and at the other end of the scale, the contemporary period - by any metric the 20th century was a "very interesting time indeed" for China. A similar criticism can also be made of the magic system; whilst the elaboration of divination magic was primarily descriptive, it is disappointing that more challenging examination of Chinese magic was not undertaken. In general however, a truly impressive work, but also seriously needing new editions - both to to revise existing knowledge and to provide further and more specific detail.

Style: 1+.6 (layout) .6 (art) .5 (coolness) .7 (readability) .7 (product) = 4.1
Substance: 1+.8 (content) .9 (text) .6 (fun) .5 (workmanship) .4 (system) = 4.2

Legend of the Five Rings (1st edition, Alderac Entertainment Group, 1997)

The Physical Object

The Alderic Entertainment Group (AEG) has published a solid hardback, well bound and 256 pages in length. The cover art by Matthew Wilson depicting an enraged samurai fighting goblins is quite good, although the internal black and white artwork is often superior in technique albeit less dramatic. There is a small number of gloss pages featuring the various clans, and character development summaries within these clans with full colour artwork of clan members of the two 'schools' (Bushi and Shugenja), along with a latter section detailing standard building layouts and a map of Rogukan, the default story setting.

The text is presented in a standard two-column justified serif font with large sidebars which are often under-utilised pushing the main body of the text into the centre margins in an often almost unreadable manner. Sometimes the white text on the grey/black background of the sidebars is not particularly readable as well. The short fiction pieces are, contrary to many attempts in RPGs, an excellent effort giving a good sense to the gameworld. The table of contents is quite complete, and the index a little short.

The book is broken up into five chapters which emphasise the Rings of the game; The Book of Earth (the setting), The Book of Water (the character), The Book of Fire (the system), the Book of Air (magic) and the Book of Void (gamemaster information). A final part consists of an introductory adventure, probability charts, geography and and the like, including a character sheet. Page 146 is repeated on page 256 but with the additional sidebar information of Counterspells. Chapters are indicated by their ideographs, which does not reduce page-flipping in actual play.

Rokugan: The Setting

Legend of the Five Rings is a roleplaying game with a very strong East Asian flavour. The setting of Rokugan is almost fantasy Japan but is not quite; indeed, it is sufficiently close that it may as well have been. Whilst I personally probably would have preferred this (historical fantasy is far more my taste than fictional fantasy), a very good job has been done in providing an overview of the setting. Effectively two books (Earth and much of Void, first and last) are dedicated to the setting, being the first and last along with parts of the book on magic (Air, the fourth). The Earth book starts off with a somewhat uninspired creation myth, followed by the briefest summary of 1,000 years of history and an equally brief description of the Seven Great Clans (crab, crane, dragon, lion, phoenix, scorpion, unicorn) and the lay of the land.

More effort is put into describing Rogukan's culture, including the mirroring of the Celestial Order within society. Society is a feudal structure with the Emperor at the peak, followed by the Samurai (bushi, the "fighters" and shegenja the "cleric-sorcerers"), and then the Heimin, of half-people (peasants, artisans, merchants). Outside the formal structure of justice are the Hinin, or non-people. These include criminals, entertainers, the eta ("dirty jobs") and ninja, although the latter are not really supposed to exist. The role of women is well elucidated, and whilst the game states that caste not gender determines their place, the subsequent text is written with women as the object rather than subject of their condition, making the setting quite sexist, despite stated intentions. More formally, the stages of life in the samurai's life are stated quite clearly from birth and youth, coming of age, marriage, middle-age, to death and seppuku. A brief example is given to the farmer's life, and no mention at all of other social classes. Good detail is given to the game-world's economy, professions, food, clothing, and dwellings following with a lengthy description of the Bushido code of honour and etiquette and finally, just over two pages on the Emperor's court and the application of justice throughout the realm.

At the other end of the book, the setting is expressed in terms of important people in the game-world, enchanted items, the calendar, the role of ninja (who do not exist), a dozen or so pages of "monsters". This includes the appropriate ghosts, goblins, ogres, oni, the most beloved nezumi and the more questionable zombies and skeletons. Also included in this collection is the penaggolan derived from the Malay archipelago. The various maps are handy and appropriate, although the map of Rogukan itself is quite difficult to read. With an enormous mountain range splitting the Empire in two, it seems almost inevitable that north and south would split. That aside, I grimaced by what seems to be the inclusion of rivers that seem to flow down from mountains, up new ranges, and then down the other side - although I note that this is not the case in the significantly clearer 2001 d20 publication for Rogukan.

The Air book spends some time describing the religious beliefs of the people of Rogukan, "The Religion of the Seven Fortunes" and in particular the belief in reincarnation, the influence of ancestors, the Shintao - the Holy Order and their opposite, Maho - The Black Magic and finally various folk magic. The direct influence of this on the actual game system, like much of the descriptive passages, is very slight.

Samurai: The Characters

Character generation is almost entirely covered in the second part or Book of Water although some parts of development is covered in the Book of Void. It starts with a lengthy character concept of twenty questions, which are not included on the character sheet, have no systematic effect on play and most of which could be elucidated during story development. From this inauspicious beginning, the game moves on to specifying Rings and Traits with most Rings having two Traits, specifically Earth (Stamina and Willpower), Water (Strength and Perception), Fire (Agility and Intelligence), and Air (Reflexes and Awareness - social) with the final Ring, Void which can be used to augment other actions. Traits are rated between 1 and 5, with 2 being average and the default starting value. A player has 25 Character Points, with up to 10 points of Disadvantages (thus, effectively up to 35 points) to distribute to their character with a value of 1 Trait for 8 Character Points (12 for Void), 1 Skill Level for 1 Point, 1 Honour for 3 points, 1 Glory for 5 Points. Both Glory and Honour is rated like a Trait, but with decimal places. Honour 5 is "Strength of a 1000

Ancestors", Honour 0 is "Honourless Dog" whereas Glory is used to for recognition purposes.

Approximately fifty different skills are provided, differentiated into High skills, Bugei skills, Merchant skills, and Low skills. The descriptions are fairly modest and the ordering doesn't help especially if one is unfamiliar with the notion that Athletics(for example) is actually a "Low skill". Almost sixty advantages and disadvantages are described which is perhaps slightly too many given that only a few are likely to be taken given the limits in character generation. The in-game play for many of the disadvantages can be quite strong, and with the game's biases sometimes clearly evident - in a game where there's a maximum of 10 points of disadvantages "Bad Reputation" is worth a mere 2 points, a "Missing Limb" only 3, but "Low Pain Threshold" is valued at 5! On the other hand, kudos are to be given for character generation actually including such social, physical and personality modifiers and often keeping within the game-world's thematic orientation (for example, "True Love" is a 3 point disadvantage).

Characters must choose a clan, one of three families from each clan and either bushi or shugenja for profession. The clan's animal provides a general psychological outlook, and each profession and family invariably provides a 1 bonus to a Trait. Profession also determines available starting skills, techniques (superhuman powers for Bushi) and starting spells (Shugenja). Whilst the professions are reasonably balanced, and an option is given for Ronin characters, it must be emphasised that there is an extreme restriction on PC choices at this point; you must be a Samurai and you must be a warrior or sorcerer. There is no information whatsoever for generating characters of the Heiman or Hinin backgrounds - no "local farmer's lad rises from common foot soldier to become daiymo" or "geisha is most terrifying ninja in entire land" or "wily merchant subtley controls the Empire" or anything like that. Character generation is entirely orientated towards noble-caste characters who fight and caste magic. My players found this to be a particularly annoying restriction on their imaginative capacities and I agree entirely with their assessment.

Character improvement is called 'School Rank' which in turn is based on the character's insight, calculated from their Rings times 10 plus 1 point for every skill and one for every point above 1, which is a confusing way of saying "add up your skill points", but that's the way the rules try to explain it. Experience points are given out every game session with 1 for turning up, 1 for good roleplaying and 1 for progress towards completing common goals. New School Ranks are gained every 25 points so with 2-3 points per session, a new rank should be achieved every 10 game sessions. This provides an extra dice for spell-casting for Shugenja, and an extra Technique gains for the Bushi. In both cases these are significant break points leading to a game that has highly graduated equilibrium.

Skills and Combat Magic

The third book (Fire) explain the task and combat resolution methods. AEG was obviously quite proud of what they came up with for task resolution, going so far to trademark their "Roll and Keep" system. Basically, actions have difficulty target numbers with examples from 5 (mundane), 15 (average), 25 (heroic) to 35 (never been done before). To achieve these target numbers a player rolls a number of d10s equal to their Trait Skill, and "keeps" their Trait value. Any 10's can be rerolled an added to the total. Raises can be declared, essentially making the Difficulty Number higher to achieve a more spectacular result, and sometimes free raises can be given with particularly special rolls.

Circumstances can also be used to modify the Difficulty Number. Contested rolls against other characters have a TN of their opponents Trait times five. Void can be used to raise a Trait by 1 for one roll. When character's work together, only one character gets to use their Trait, with other characters contributing their skill level.

On one level this is an excellent system; it provides a means to simulate the age-old problem in gaming of allowing characters with natural talent to achieve high results, albeit inconsistently, where is low ability but high skill characters are limited in their achievements but always operate at the high end of those limitations. It's a great concept, but certainly needs two further modifications. Firstly, the distinction between "roll" and "keep" needs to be altered for knowledges and relations as the maximum ability for the latter is more dependent on 'skill' rather than 'ability' in the former case, and in the latter the maximum is dependent on the alter's considerations. Secondly, the use of d10s is particularly ill-advised; the human brain is simply just not that quick at scanning the results of 7d10, picking the best 4d10, rerolling the 10s and summing the total. A basic rule of good game design is that a result should be known when the dice hit the table. Finally, a common complaint is that (despite the inclusion of a handy chart on p221), calculating a percentage change for an action is difficult - for example, is a Trait is 3 and a Skill is 3 what is the chance of achieving a target number of 25? (The answer is apparently 54%).

The combat system is familiar initiative, roll to hit, roll for damage approach. Initiative is determined individually on a d10 Reflexes trait with declaration from slowest to fastest, but resolution from fastest to slowest. Combat turns are approximately 5 seconds long, with each character allowed one action (although techniques etc may provide more). Melee actions are typically limited to Normal Attack, Full Attack or Full Defense. A standard attack is against a TN of Reflexes times five, plus a bonus for armour. In other words as per the old Armour Class system, armour doesn't reduce damage, it makes you more difficult to be hit. A Full Attack gives a character an additional two dice to roll, but not keep and reduces their defensive TN to 5. With a Full Defense approach the character drops any offensive action and whilst their defensive TN remains the same, their opponent must drop any dice lower than the Ref Def skill. One player in my game found it particularly useful to build his total defense to 9 (4 Ref 5 Def) and declare Full Defense every time he lost Initiative.

Damage is also based on a roll-and-keep method. The weapon plus the character's strength determines the number of dice rolled, and the weapon determines how many dice are kept. Again this struck us as counter-intuitive, as surely damage is ultimately dependent on the strength applied. Thus damage from a katana (a 3k2 weapon) wielded by a character with above-average strength (3) will be rolled on 6 dice, but with only only 2 of them kept. With hit points determined by Earth Ring times 2 per level, and with the average character having 6 wound levels before being classified as down and 8 before being classified as dead, it can often require four to five katana blows to put a character down. On the other hand, wounds have an constant effect with losses applied to dice rolls; a character who is almost unconscious for example will be losing four dice on each of their rolls.

Mention must also be made of the rather impressive Iajutsu duelling system which allows for assessment, early surrender, and focus along with a fairly hefty blow in response, although still limited by weapon maxima. In addition there is a rather lengthy and interesting battle resolution method, which concentrates on the characters declaration of

position, the achievement of Glory for the character through various heroic opportunities ("pick up the banner", "protect the general" etc), and the risk of wounds or duels.

Magic, GM Notes and Sample Adventure

As previously mentioned the magic chapter is introduced with a description of some fundamental religious beliefs of Rogukan. More directly however, spells are based on the various elements expressed as the Rings, Earth, Fire, Air and Water. In order to cast a spell, a shugenja must read the scroll in which a spell is inscribed, which includes the necessary chants and gestures. This may take a number of Actions. The spell can then be released by reaching the target number of the spell, based on a roll of Ring Rank keeping Ring. Options are available for slower casting (Free Raises) and faster casting (higher target number). Those spells that do damage have a rating and damage is determined by DR Rank.

Every spell also has a Mastery Level. When a character has a Mastery Level equal or greater than a spell (Ring Rank) they may, with the expenditure of 3 experience points, decide to have that spell as an Innate Ability, although it is often just as cost effective to choose a more powerful spell (one player chose Earthquake, at ML 3). A simple alternative would be to have the experience point cost equal to Mastery Level, thus encouraging the accumulation of low-powered spells as innate abilities. Often the basic spells of Sense, Commune and Summon (element) which have a Mastery Level of 1 are chosen early on as Innate Abilities. Over sixty spells are described, with 15 among Earth, 21 for Air, 13 for Fire and 12 for Water. They are provided with descriptive titles which often give little indication of what they actually do (e.g., "The Fury of Osano-Wo").

The final pages include some sensible advice for GMs, including the requisite need for player input, the GM knowing their rules and the advantage of "showing" over "telling" along with some minor notes on narrative development, including parallel plotlines. A section is dedicated to the Ninja, including a sample family and school, which is firmly placed within the GM's section full of plenty of caveats and warnings of the introduction of ninja characters as PCs into the storyline.

Finally, Andrew Heckt contributes with a starting scenario which is a magnificent introduction to the social mores, magic, game system and political maneuverings of the game world, and not without establishing enemies for future plot developments, the possibility of a jolly good test of steel and the meeting of a most exotic shapeshifter. With the addition of numerous sidebar plot tangents, I am not exaggerating by suggesting that this is probably the best section of the entire book.

Final Impressions

Apart from these first edition rules, and some supplements for L5R (not excluding a Ratling 1.5l drinking mug) I have a copy of the Player's Book for 2nd edition and have read through the third edition. From what I have seen rules changes and elaborations in latter editions are far less significant than extra effort to improve the physical presentation of the text; indeed the third edition book is quite gorgeous. The most major rules change in second edition, for example, is the

improvement costs for Traits and Void which are radically reduced (from 8 to 3 and 12 to 6) along with a slight increase in starting character points (25 to 30).

Overall, however our group found the L5R rules to be a bit of goblin, which is not necessarily to condemn it, but to finally recognise what it is, warts and all. The setting is quite impressive and detailed although not entirely to our taste (we prefered the Ashikaga Wars of Succession in the setting of fantasy Japan). Some of the limitations in character generation simply struck us as bizarre and the task resolution system (either for normal skills or combat), whilst certainly being innovative simply wasn't fun - which grew as a constant problem with the game itself; add this to the sudden jumps in power with the achievement of new school ranks and the handfuls of dice as game-stoppers for addition, made us wonder how such problems were not spotted in playtesting during the two years of development which the book claims it went through.

Although marking L5R 1st edition very slightly below average (3.5) on both style and substance, I do wish to emphasise that it is a certainly still game worth reading and playing, especially if one is prepared to take the time to expand the existing character generation system to give a greater range of castes, professions, and skills, play around with the existing game system and rework it into something which gives more acceptable results and is easier to implement in actual play. Fortunately in both these cases it is well within the realms of possibility, as existing templates already provide some ideas and the core mechanic itself is reasonably simple. The fact that this was not in the game as presented however has caused it to receive lower ratings than it should have.

Style: 1 .3 (layout) .6 (art) .5 (coolness) .4 (readability) .6 (product) = 3.4
Substance: 1 .5 (content) .5 (text) .3 (fun) .3 (workmanship) .5 (system) = 3.1

Jade Dragons and Hungry Ghosts (Green Ronin, 2001)

Introduction and Physical Product

This is a short review of a short product which uses the D20 game system which is sufficiently well known that it requires little elaboration. Weighing in at 64 pages, Jade Dragons and Hungry Ghosts is a sourcebook for various supernatural creatures from east Asia, specifically Japan (31), “New” (10), China (8), Malaysia (2), Phillipines (1), Cambodia (1), Burma (1), Thailand (1). The product itself is a simple softback, with a Japanese cover piece. The internal art is of a good standard, often quite detailed, and is contextually appropriate (if not always culturally accurate), with at least one image per creature described. There is, however, a lot of unnecessary white space.

The format of the text is essentially one creature per page, in two-column serif text with larger font quotes throughout. The creatures are arranged in alphabetical order with a final section providing an arrangement by Challenge Rating. There is a table of contents, but no index (which is probably not necessary); page numbers are clearly marked. The writing style is accessible although a little too informal at times, with a layout of statistic block, creature information, and combat behaviour. Only the table of contents notes which mythology, if any, the creature derives from which is

unfortunate, it probably should have been included in the description as well.

Content

The introduction by Dave "Zeb" Cook outlines that in earlier days of the hobby there was far more interest in Japan than the rest of Asia. This has changed, he announces, providing a list of popular Chinese mythic fantasy movies, and argues that this work provides evidence of interests of a much broader scope and depth than previously. I don't think that the numbers really support the claim which show an enormous Nipponcentric bias. Poor Korea, which incidentally does have its mythic-fantasy creatures, is completely left out. For his own part, Zeb Cook's own contribution to the publication is the Chinese Monkey King. Not receiving a description is the older Hanuman, who appears throughout the cultural literature of India and eastwards. For what it is worth the Monkey King is very much based on the television series version and has appropriate statistical values for actual gaming, rather than those attributed in the legend *Journey to the West*.

Now in some cases this is obviously appropriate; mythological claims translated to a practical game system should sometimes be treated as tall stories. In most cases however, association with the mythological capabilities are welcome. Which is why, rather like the unfortunate tradition in many RPGs, the suggested values, behaviour, and capabilities of the creatures in Jade Creatures and Hungry Ghosts are rather poor, to say the least. From the very first creature, the Japanese Awabi, one is struck how completely different this demon is from the historic abalone spirit which the name (and little else) is derived. This is no contrived example either; as one steps through the creatures of the book, time and time again with compared with their mythic equivalents there is little relationship. The weapons, armour, and organisation of the Chinese Clay Soldiers is completely wrong, the Japanese Ikiryo is described as a possessing spirit of those who have just died, which is certainly incorrect - the word itself means a spirit from a person who is still alive (which is doubly hilarious because the book does include Shiryo, which means spirit of the dead). Curiosity must be expressed on how the Tanuki, a racoon-dog, is described as a badger, let alone how the Kitsune is described as *lawful* and *evil*, and their most well-known feature - the quantity of tails equating with experience - is completely left out.

However the are some more accurate examples too. The Malay Pontianak is *correctly* described in reference to early descriptions (the ghost of a stillborn child) but all other cultural references (again, including the word) refer to a ghoulish woman who has died whilst pregnant, and the physical description provided is actually the of the related Indonesian kuntilanak; close enough, right? It is charming to see the Samebito, the shark-men of Japan, even if their first retroactive mythic appearance is the 19th century and there's even their special ability that they can cry blood which transform to rubies, such as in the original story.

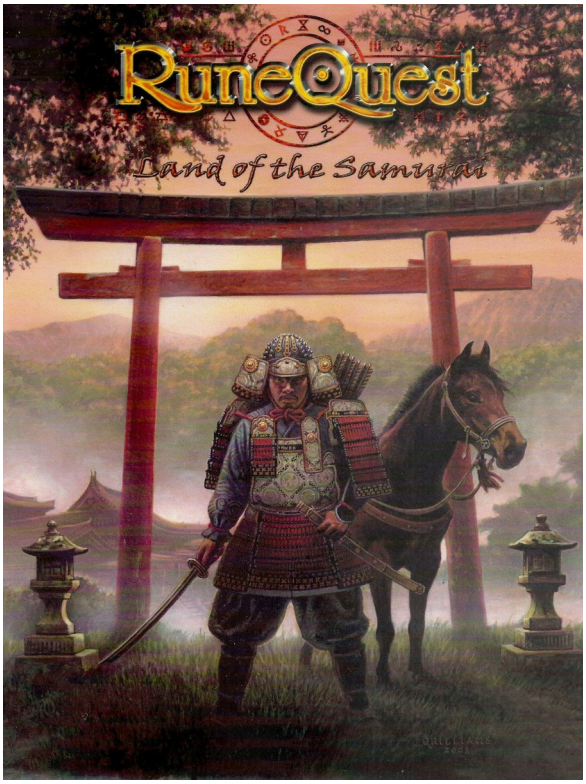
Whilst not necessarily a great book to even begin learning about east Asian mythology, initial caution must also be expressed about its usefulness as a game product. Over half the creatures are assigned a CR of 5 or less, and there's a big gap between CRs 14 and 22. This caveat aside however the authors have made good use of various special abilities and have referenced their effects to the appropriate core rules very well. Likewise there is a good selection form the various types of creatures; about ten examples of undead, and a like number of humanoids, there a few each of dragons,

outsiders, giants, and constructs, a couple of fey and so forth. Overwhelmingly the creatures are of evil alignments, although there is a couple of exceptions.

Evaluation

High hopes for *Jade Dragons and Hungry Ghosts* are somewhat deflated with actual use. If one is either prepared to (a) do their own research on the creatures noted or (b) use them as is but with another name, then there is a lot of good for this product - which curiously, although containing a jade dragon it doesn't have hungry ghosts as such. After all, with almost sixty creatures there are certainly some some innovative and interesting encounters, even if one does strictly consider a number of them more to be of the "new" variety than the allocated titles. The previously maligned Awabi is a case in point - the creature is "somewhat different" to the Japanese mythic-fantasy version, but they're certainly interesting enough as a wave-running sea demon with an icy stare. It's "cool" that there are such creatures, even if the "fun" (enjoyment) of accuracy is not always forthcoming. For those who are seeking a high-standard bestiary with scope across the east Asian region, this is not the product you're looking for.

Style: 1 .4 (layout) .6 (art) .6 (coolness) .4 (readability) .5 (product) = 3.5
Substance: 1 .4 (content) .4 (text) .3 (fun) .5 (workmanship) .5 (system) = 3.1



RuneQuest (Land of the Samurai, Mongoose, 2008)

Introduction and Physical Product

Like its predecessor in Avalon Hill, the Mongoose editions of RuneQuest delved into historical-fantasy supplements. Also like the AH edition one of the most prominent is Japan (the fact that there was also a Viking supplement certainly made many old RQers blink twice). In this case a specific period (Heian, 794CE to 1192CE), which is less well known in gaming products at least than the Sengoku period which everyone (including your reviewer) has taken the opportunity to explore in the past. This makes it quite a pleasant change of temporal setting and the author's introduction makes a good case for gaming in this period (decline of Empire, rise of Buddhism, start of feudalism, status of women etc) even if the occasional anachronism (e.g., ninja) are included.

The softback book has good binding, with a sombre colour

cover of a samurai warrior. The internal grey-scale art is of varied quality, mainly of the filler variety, but is contextual. Page layout has thick margins albeit with a nice style, with clearly marked paged numbers and significantly less clear chapter titles. Text is in a two-column justified serif font with highlighted sections and with generous spacing and subsection headings, although mention must be made of the astoundingly ugly sans-serif font used on the back-cover blurb. The writing style, whilst formal, is also accessible. There is a brief table of contents (with a silly spelling error), a three page glossary, and a two page index. Aside from this an the introduction, there is a chapter that gives an overview of the place for the period, one for life in Japan, one for the land, one for equipment, religion, magic, samurai life, creatures, ki, and a scenario.

Place and Life

The overview of Heian starts with a decidedly mythic slant by including the Shinto creation myth, along with a summary description of the lands. The description of Hokkaido describes the indigenous Ainu as a "Caucasian" people, which is incredibly incorrect - anthropologists were arguing against this at least in the early 1990s, and geneticists indicated it was wrong by 1994. A few sentences later the book makes the remarkable statement that the Ainu have been settling in northern Mutsu, "driving out the Japanese natives". It is all very curious since the indigenous Ainu, at least at this historical stage, probably should be more properly identified as the Emishi people who were more on the receiving end of being driven out.

This aside, the rest of the chapter provides a general overview of the broad geographical locations, followed by a listing of provinces, towns, and cities. The Heian period is described as one of relative peace (given that "Heian" means "peace" in Japanese), albeit dominated by the Fujiwara, Minamoto, and Taira families. During this period Imperial Japan established a degree of meritocracy and even a more equal status for women, before the establishment of the Shogunate. A short history is provided with a paragraph provided every few years for the period, with a more detailed description of the Gempei wars which brought down the imperial government.

The "Life in Japan" chapter provides a simple guide to place and personal names, clan, family, and marriage norms, coming of age, the system of manners (introduction of On as a game-system value), language, governance and law, a section on seppuku (and challenging mechanics to carry it out), standard of living, (including coinage and diet), calendar, zodiac, and time, and weights and measures.

Characters

The curiously named "Land of the Samurai Characters" actually refers to character generation using the RuneQuest rules for the setting. Whilst much of this follows the standard RQ rules, of note is the selection, from a rather vast list, of clans, families, and respective alliances, and the selection of caste (Ryomin upper and Senmin lower) and related professions. The priesthood have their own caste. Eight classes are provided for the two main castes with associated caste and class skills, associated professions, and starting On. Thus a character could be of the Ryonin caste, of the Samurai class, and can select from the Bushi (Warrior), Gaikouikan (Diplomat), Hangan (Magistrate), or Sohei

(Warrior Monk) professions. On is used a reflect a character's standing, and may be used directly as a skill when seeking favour or service or as a indirect bonus to other social skills. Losing On through failure, disloyalty etc, can result in graduated levels of shame, depending on the character's CHA an in extreme cases may require seppuku. 'Courtesy' is moved from an advanced to a basic skill to reflect the centrality of this concept in the setting, and several new skills are added, including Calligraphy, Divination, Iajutsu etc.

The Equipment chapter is quite short, several pages in length, and starts with a lengthy description of armour before getting into the statistical values. There's about 70 "everyday" items described in terms of their title, which is about as much as most of them need. In addition to this there is about a dozen melee weapons and a few ranged weapons which are given about a paragraph each and statistical effects. Despite the quantity of everyday items this is really a war closet chapter, and this is more of a weakness rather than a strength. A more thorough description of some of the more significant and complex everyday items (e.g., a junk) would certainly be useful in actual play.

Religion, Magic, and Warriors

Religious characters in Land of Samurai will follow either the Buddhist faiths, and have a new character value "Purity" representing how close the character is to Enlightenment or how well they have avoided pollution, respectively. Priest characters star with POW+CHA+10 in Purity, and can lose it by not following the precepts of their religion and requiring atonement if the value drops below zero. A description of the faiths follows along with deities, holy days, sects, temples and shrines, and related cult skills. Shinto priests may attempt to call the local kami spirits for favours with their purity and modified according to gifts of food and drink, and the sacrifice of magic points.

The description of Buddhism is one of the more curious encountered, insofar it doesn't mention core concepts such as dukha, samsara, and implies that enlightenment is reached as a counter to ignorance. Incredibly anachronistically, it lists the moral precepts of the juzenkai as a list of rules for Buddhists to follow, almost like the Christian ten commandments. Historically, these were not introduced to Buddhism until the 18th century as part of a reform movement. Whilst there is some leeway as part of a semi-fictional setting ingrained in cultural expectations, to introduce something that is a thousand years out of sync and a minority position is far too much of a stretch.

The magic system undergoes some significant changes, most prominently the removal of runes and the renaming of rune magic to spirit magic, and the introduction of Ki abilities, which strictly isn't a magical ability but one which allows characters to "emulate and channel" Legendary Abilities, which is a much better way of carrying out these superhuman non-magical abilities and a few new Legendary Abilities are added. A substantial number of spells are deemed prohibited by Buddhist and Shinto practitioners and a smaller number are provided in replacement. Shinto magic includes the ability to contact local Kami for assistance which are provided sample statistics and are differentiated into Kami of place, elements, ancestral, and major. Sorcery does exist but the short section on the subject notes that it is outlawed and that everyone treats a sorcery with suspicion and disapproval at best.

Curiously positioned after the chapter on magic, is a short chapter on "The Way of the Warrior" which means samurai,

sohei warrior-monks, and the slightly anachronistic ninja. The samurai section outlines the differences between this class of warrior and the common foot-soldier especially matters of lineage, and gives emphasis to to the combined skill for horse archery and arrow duels. Fun fact (not in the book); it is the overlooked Emishi who were first the most skilled in horse archery with Imperial Japan in this period adopting the tactics after defeats in battle. The section on the sohei essentially points out that faith combined with weapons (yes, weapons; did you expect them to fight unarmed and without armour?) makes a frightening combination. Whilst the ninja section notes that these are typically entire villages established to protect and are led by a sorcerer - albeit with the rather obvious claimed sign of the village lacking Buddhist regalia. A few new skills, equipment, and a profession are offered here that are particular to the ninja .

Creatures and Scenario

About twenty creatures are offered in the (supernatural) creatures of Japan chapter including the usual variety of goblines, demons, ghosts, shapeshifters, kitsune, and dragons. Each is provided around half a page of statistical and descriptive information, although the former typically outweighs the latter. A little more effort in formatting the pages in this section would give greater opportunity for more in-depth textual information. As the chapter doesn't task risks in terms of quantity it manages to portray most of the creatures more or less according to majority view of legend. There are few creatures which are outright wicked, and those that due have their own understandable reasons for such inclinations. The bakemono, the Japanese goblin, have their own twisted and heretical version of Buddhism, for example. Whilst this seems to be a conceit of the publication it makes a nice plot device.

There is a very short chapter for gamemasters which essentially talks about major themes to include in a game; clan conflict, tests of loyalty and so forth, before moving on to the sample adventure - which is always a strongly preferred inclusion in such a book. "Beneath an Opal Moon" in itself is a rather well-developed piece of work involving a quest to the village of a noble's son to find out things have gone very bad indeed. There's a good mix of clan intrigues, supernatural effects, and lots of getting close to the local population. Anything more than this would be giving too much away, but it can said that whilst it is an adventure mostly encapsulated in its own, it is a pretty solid introduction to a rather haunting world.

Evaluation

As a physical product, and an item of design, and as content, Land of Samurai has a lot going for it. There is a couple of glaring errors in each of these components, but they are insufficient to spoil the product overall which offers a solid introduction to the campaign world, some interesting ways of incorporating the game system with the setting and finishes with a solid adventure. It is perhaps not the greatest RPG product of its kind for this setting (indeed, even its predecessor, Land of Ninja, is a very hard product to beat).

Style: 1 .6 (layout) .4 (art) .6 (coolness) .6 (readability) .7 (product) = 3.9
Substance: 1 .7 (content) .7 (text) .6 (fun) .5 (workmanship) .6 (system) = 4.1

ORIENTAL ADVENTURES IN MYSTARA

by Francesco Defferrari (Sturm) and the Threshold magazine Editorial Team

About Mystara and Threshold magazine

Mystara is a campaign setting which had its origin in the Basic, Expert, Companion, Master and Immortal D&D rules published by TSR between 1983 and 1985 as a series of five boxed sets, authored by Frank Mentzer. The setting continued with several supplements, including a famous series of geographic Gazetteers, boxed sets, and articles on Dragon Magazine, as the Voyages of the Princess Ark series by Bruce Heard. It was later converted to AD&D 2nd edition rules, but TSR support for the setting ceased in 1996. Since then the fan community continued to support Mystara, publishing new ideas and creations in the official fan site, the Vaults of Pandius, building through the years an impressive amount of material. Much more recently, in 2013, some members of the community had the idea of creating a fanzine, to better showcase the quality and the quantity of material available for Mystara, almost 20 years after the setting was officially discontinued. Thus Threshold magazine was born, and with 4 issues a year, it has now just reached its 20th issue.

About Oriental Mystara

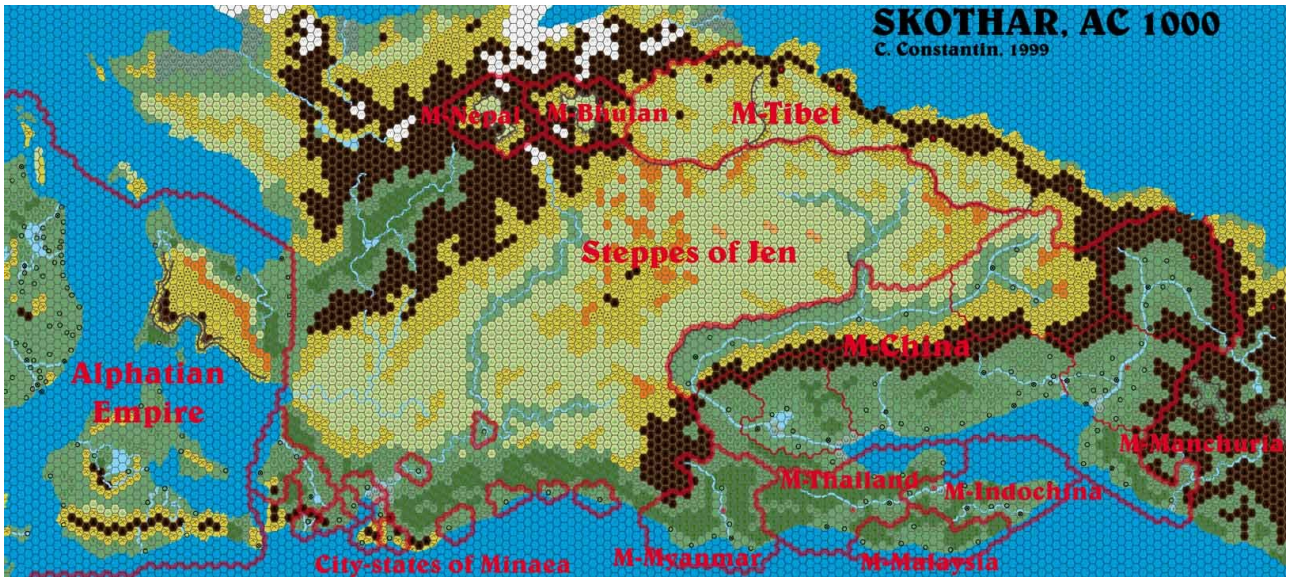
The world of Mystara has three main continents, which were firstly shown in the map done by Frank Mentzer in the D&D Master Set (1985). The eastern continent, Skothar, did not receive much development in canon products, except for a few political borders: the land of Nentsun in the north, the land of Thonia, the land of Jen, the Empire of the Great Khan, the Empire of Tangor, Minaea, Zyxl. A bit more about Skothar was detailed in following supplements, which stated that two important cultures of Mystara, the Tanagoro and the Jennite peoples, came from Skothar. Blackmoor too, the campaign created by D&D co-creator Dave Arneson and detailed in the modules DA1-DA4 (1986-7) was meant to be set in the past of Skothar before the Great Rain of Fire which destroyed that civilization. The presence of the mysterious “Empire of the Great Khan” and the Jennite culture, which was inspired by the real world Central Asia cultures, was enough to prompt fans to start a project, the Mystara Oriental Project, to develop Mystara cultures inspired by the nations and people of real world Asia. The project followed an established tradition of Mystara canon, which in official products often used real world cultures and nations as inspiration and “blueprint” to create fantasy cultures. Another typical characteristic of the Mystara setting is the mish-mash of different cultures which were quite far apart in the real world and are instead neighbours in Mystara. Therefore some Oriental like cultures already appeared in official products. Ethengar, in the middle of the Known World, the initial and most famous region of Mystara, was a culture clearly inspired by the classic Mongol Empire. Ochalea, a land inspired by some aspects of classic China, was a subject territory of the Empire of Thyatis. And Myoshima, a nation of rakasta, a cat-like people, was placed on one of the two moons of Mystara, and inspired by real world Japan. The rest of the moon inhabited by Myoshiman rakasta contained also other Asian inspired nations, inhabited by other rakasta or by the pachydermion, an elephant-like people.
But as the variety and richness of Asian cultures was certainly not exhausted with a few nations, fans placed in Skothar, the mysterious and unknown eastern continent several other Asian inspired cultures.

In Threshold issue #20, the aim of the editor (myself) was to gather and highlight the amount of fan material already developed for Skothar, and add some more. So I have imagined Skothar as a continent inhabited by a variety of human and non-human people, with many different nations. Some of them are the heir of the Jennites, a Mystaran human people which originated several cultures inspired by real world Asian nations. Others are instead inspired by other cultures, as Skothar was inhabited also by Neathar humans, which were inspired by real world Europeans, and Tanagoro humans, which were inspired by real world Africans.

The diversity of human and non human cultures makes the Mystaran continent of Skothar a truly unique place, compared to other "Oriental" settings, with also another interesting twist, which is the heritage of Blackmoor. The ancient empire was in fact destroyed by the abuse of technomagic, an unique blend of magic and technology developed after the crash in its territory of a spaceship belonging to an alien culture. The hunt for technomagic, both from those who consider it precious and want to hold it, and from those who consider it too dangerous and want to destroy it, makes Skothar even more interesting.

Threshold issue #20 gives a bird's view on the eastern continent of Mystara, but fundamentally hopes to be only a starting point for further development of this setting by the active and inventive Mystara community.

You can freely download Threshold issue #20 and any other past issue of Threshold magazine from The Vaults of Pandius: http://pandius.com/thrs_mag.html and anyone is welcomed to participate in the active discussions about Mystara on the dedicated forum at The Piazza: http://www.thepiazza.org.uk/bb/viewforum.php?f=3.



LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS: ROLL AND KEEP MECHANICS

by Lev Lafayette

Over the various editions of Legend of the Five Rings various methods have been implemented for their Roll and Keep mechanics, a resolution mechanic developed by John Wick and also used in 7th Sea. Other games (e.g., Silhouette games; Heavy Gear, Jovian Chronicles, Tribe 8, Core Command, uses a similar method). Whilst there is a degree of intuition in the system, it has both supporters and detractors for the same reason - calculating the chance of success on the fly is difficult to say the least. The essential summary is this; characters use an trait plus relevant skill values as a measure in d10s against a target number, however the number of dice you roll is not the same as the number of dice used in the final calculation. Each '10' that is rolled "explodes" into another die that is added and so forth. Penalties (and "raises") are usually applied to Target Numbers in increments of +5. The general notation is XkY, where X is rolled dice, and Y is kept dice. The following chart was available online up to 2013 but the site in question is now gone. The author, Rimoshi Zajiro, wrote a Perl script to calculate 10,000 die rolls for each cell, including the effects of exploding dice, to generate the average final value to two decimal places.

L5R Averages (10000)		Roll									
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
Keep	**1**	6.16	8.31	9.71	10.73	11.45	12.18	12.74	13.27	13.68	14.19
	2		12.25	15.28	17.45	19.03	20.31	21.35	22.39	23.24	23.94
	3			18.37	21.90	24.59	26.55	28.29	29.64	30.68	31.88
	4				24.42	28.43	31.21	33.69	35.69	37.35	38.82
	5					30.47	34.69	38.12	40.55	42.88	44.89
	6						36.63	40.83	44.49	47.34	49.89
	7							42.80	47.22	50.91	54.10
	8								48.90	53.18	57.10
	9									55.07	59.47
	10										61.08

Thus in the first edition of the game, the standard first edition rules one rolls the sum of trait plus skill, but only keeps the trait values. For example the Horseriding skill and the Agility stat have a value are rolled together as a pool of dice. The total number of dice in Agility are kept to sum against the target number of difficulty; Horseriding 3 plus Agility 2 equals 5 dice rolled, keep the best 2.

In the second edition there was a radical revision of the Roll-and-Keep system. Skills had been perceived as having relatively little value in the first edition, at least compared to traits as one rolled skills and attributed but only kept the

latter. Thus in the second edition only only rolled the skill dice and kept the dice the dice in the related trait. If the skill dice was less than the character's attribute dice they would would roll their skill dice and keep the lot. Thus Horseriding 3 and Agility 2 equals 3 dice rolled, keep the best 2. In the third edition, the rules were returned to the 1st edition approach but with the introduction of specialised skills which would provide an extra rolled dice. This was again tweaked slightly in the 4th edition of the rules, and most recently in the 5th edition of the game by Fantasy Flight which has the addition of various narrative dice, as is their style.

As a heavily-playtested alternative, it is suggested here that existing Roll-And-Keep mechanics have failed to consider a very important aspect of the process, at least to retain a sense of verisimilitude; what is the character trying to do? In asking this question, different mechanics are suggested for activities whether they are physical, mental, or social tasks. If a task is physical (including tasks of pure logic), then the standard method of skill plus trait is rolled, and the trait value is kept. If the task is mental, such as lore checks, the same method of skill plus trait is rolled, but the skill value is kept. If the task is social, that is influence and relationships, skill and trait are rolled, but the number of dice kept is independent of the character - it depends on who they are talking to!

Consider a character's capacity to speak Mandarin. This would be a knowledge skill, with an associated Intelligence trait. Under the standard rules (1st, 3rd, etc) a character who is a relative novice of the language (skill 1) but a high Intelligence (trait 4), and thus end up being superior to someone who is native born (skill 4, trait 2) - a simulated result of roll 5, keep 4 is 28.43 is whereas roll 6, keep 2 is a mere 20.31. Clearly this will not do; being smart doesn't mean you're fluent in Mandarin, but it sure helps work out what they're saying to the best of your knowledge! Instead, if the values are roll skill plus trait, keep skill, the smart character with a moderate amount of knowledge of Mandarin will have roll 5, keep 1; a far more reasonable result of 11.45 - quite respectable, but not as good as someone who has the language as their native tongue..

Finally for social actions. There can be a default norm of 3 dice, for most interactions. People who suffer discrimination due to class, profession, or gender would suffer a penalty. So an Ainu in Japan - using examples directly from our playtesting- would receive a normal 2 keep dice from Japanese who hold those prejudices. Using a character's Etiquette and (Social) Awareness scores determine how many dice they roll, but they only keep the best 2. Roll Etiquette 2 and Awareness 2 for 4 dice, keep the best 2. However if a character is another Ainu, or a liberal-minded person, it would increase to 3 dice kept, if they were a close friend or family it would increase to 4 dice kept, and if they were in love with the individual in question it could go up to 5, 6, or even 7 dice.

Independent of this proposal, there is also the matter of exploding dice and adding dice according to a target number. Both of these aspects of the roll-and-keep method slow the game down dramatically. A simpler method can be taken directly from the folk at White Wolf who also like to roll big handfuls of dice, but rather have a single target number per die, to indicate success or failure on the particular dice. This could easily be adapted to L5R's roll-and-keep method and instead of tracking an exact number and comparing it to a target number, one can still have degrees of success based on the number of successful dice, using a TN of 5 per dice. Given that raises, hindrances etc are invariably in multiples of 5, calculations of modifiers from core rules and existing supplements etc will be astoundingly easy, and in actual play the determination of success or failure is significantly quicker.

TEN THOUSAND ISLANDS: HISTORICAL-FANTASY ON THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

By Lev Lafayette

Thanks are given to the playtesters who participated in the campaign; Erica Hoehn, Dave Cake, Jason Kovacs, Andrew Leitch, Stean Vitasovic, and Jesse Lehrer.

A Factual Overview of the Malay Archipelago to 1525AD

The Malay archipelago is defined by the islands and peninsula where the various people of the malay language family live. For the purposes of this simulation, this includes contemporary peninsula Malaysia, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah Malaysia, nearly all the islands of contemporary Indonesia (Sumatra, some of Borneo, Java, Bali, Lombok, the lesser Sunda Islands, Sulawesi, the Maluku islands) and Timor-Leste. It excludes West Papua, which is inhabited by Papuan people and the regions of inhabited by speakers of Borneo-Philippine languages, and is bordered to the north by Thai and Burmese. The term "Ten Thousand Islands" is merely a narrative abstraction. There's actually somewhere between thirteen and seventeen thousand islands in the Malay archipelago. No one to this day is really quite sure.

The archipelago is the largest in the world, spreading over thousands of kilometers and separating the Asian and Australian landmasses. The largely volcanic geology and tropical climate is home to an enormous variety of flora, fauna and natural effects. In terms of natural effects, there is the multi-coloured crater lakes of Flores, the powerful and trembling volcanic power of Krakatua and Gunung Agung, the tropical rainforests of Borneo, the striking white sands of the Gili islands and the glistening wetlands of central Java. In terms of flora and fauna, the abundance is overwhelming, ranging from the multitudes of monkeys, swampland crocodiles, tigers, buffalos, the Javanese black rhino, the exotic greater bird of paradise and the feared Komodo dragon.

Hominids first arrived to the archipelago some 800,000 years ago, and a particularly interesting species of that genus is Homo Floresiensis, named after the Flores Island wear the remains of the species was first discovered. Floresiensis has been nicknamed "the hobbit" on account of their size; adults were an estimated 1.1m high. The species is estimated to have arrived some 700,000 years ago and archeological remains suggest that they species was alive as early as 12,000 year ago. This would make the diminutive species, of course, co-existent with the significantly larger Komodo dragon. Homo Sapiens first made their appearance some 40,000 years ago from south-east Asia and travelled throughout using land bridges that connected the myriad islands due to the Ice Age. Around 3,000 years ago bronze working spread from southern China. The important bronze casting and bronze drum making centre in Annam and Tonkin in contemporary Vietnam was evidently introduced to the archipelago as drums and their stone casts have been found throughout.

The introduction of wet-field rice cultivation suited the volcanic soil of Java and Bali and the labour-intensity of the work required inter-village cooperation, which led to the development of the earliest kingdoms, around the first century AD. Trade, initially between the villages and neighbouring islands and later with China and India, also began around this time. It is widely believed that through these trade routes, Hinduism was introduced. Early Hindu inscriptions dated from the 3rd century AD have been found as far apart as Sumatra and Sulawesi and early rulers in the archipelago are

often presented as earthly incarnations of Shiva or Vishnu.

By the 5th century there was a large number of small Hindu kingdoms throughout the archipelago of which the Tarumengara kingdom of west Java is worthy of note. In the 7th century AD, the Buddhist Sriwijaya kingdom was established in southern Sumatra, around the region of Palembang and survived for some four hundred years. Controlling the important Melaka Straits and the trade in spices, wood and precious stones, it extended north into Siam (contemporary Thailand) and into West Borneo. It was also was a renowned location for religious and scholarly thought, with up to one thousand monks. Nevertheless, the Sriwijaya was not large or powerful and only had control of the important coastal port towns and their hold over more distant was weak at best. In reality, it is best described as a federation of principalities rather than a Kingdom as such. When the Cholas of southern India attacked in the 12th century the kingdom broke up into its constituent parts. Meanwhile in central Java the rival Buddhist Saliendra and Hindu Sanjaya, or Mataram, kingdoms flourished. Unlike the Sriwijaya, both of this kingdoms had large populations and produced lasting monuments such as the Buddhist wonder of the world, Borobudur and the many Hindu temples of Prambanan. Like the Sriwijaya, both these kingdoms, through a combination of their rivalry and internecine warfare, gradually lost control in Java as a new empire, the Majapahit.

Founded in East Java in 1292 AD, the Hindu Majapahit ("bitter gourd") Empire is often referred to the archipelago's "golden age". Their high point was in the 14 century, when they had at least partial control over Java, Bali, Sumatra, Borneo, Sulawsi, Lombok and Timor and wielded considerable influence in the courts of China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Siam. During this period, the famed historical document, the Nagaraketagama was written. In just over one hundred years however, the empire was challenged by a massive revolt in north Java and was confronted by the arrival of Islam. Greatly weakened, the empire rebased itself in Bali, where it survived for another one hundred years.

Islam first arrived in the archipelago in the 5th century AD as Indian Gurjarat merchants arriving in Aceh brought the message of Mohammed. These were soon followed by traders from Arabia, who founded small settlements along the east coast of Sumatra and the religion spread along the coastline and then inland in Borneo and Java and the important port town of Melaka. Small sultanates appeared in Demak, Cirebon, Jepara and Banten who, at various times, controlled large sections of northern Java. The Banten sultanate was the one which stepped into the power vacuum left by the fall of the Majapahit Empire. This was also the time of the famous Wali Songo, nine holy men, who spread the word of Islam throughout Java.

Following Vasco de Gama's journey around the south African cape in 1498, large numbers of Portuguese ships appeared in the early 1500s. The Portuguese weren't interested in establishing an empire for the sake of the own glory as such, but rather were interested in becoming rich as quickly as possible. The natural resources of the archipelago, and the Spice Islands (Moluccas) in particular (pepper, nutmeg, cloves, ginger, cinnamon), where highly prized and ideal cargo (light, long-lasting, and commanding a high price per weight and volume) . In 1511 the Portuguese, under the command of Alfonso d'Albuquerque took control of the supposedly invincible port of Melaka. The following year Alfonso's assistant, Magellan, would take control of the Spice Islands.

Magellan, however, had a significant dispute with the Portuguese king (he was refused a promotion) and defected to Spain. The Spanish established themselves in the Phillipines in 1521 and have initiated a bloody war over control of the Spice Islands. Despite this European and incursion and the arrival of Christianity, life in the rest of the archipelago continues as normal - with small kingdoms, principalities and sultanates competing over control of the temporal world and the Islam, Hindu, Buddhist and animist faiths competing over the spiritual world.

This is the world of the Malay archipelago of 1525 - European powers have made an arrival and are conducting a bloody war against each other for control of natural resources. Islamic sultanates strive to expand as the ancient Hindu kingdoms struggle to maintain their former glory. Small bands of tenacious Buddhist scholars and monks continue to exist. Traders from India, China, Thailand and the Arabic lands are abound - and so are many pirates. Indigenous animist tribes remain deeply embedded throughout the rugged landscape, ranging from the peaceful and accommodating to headhunters and cannibals (and sometimes both at the same time). And wherever one goes there are stories of magic, spirits, mythical beasts, and great treasures to be found. With ten thousand islands, there's plenty of opportunities to be experienced!

Sample Campaign

A sample campaign based on the above setting was run during 2005 and was inspired by journeys in said location during 2002-2003; many of the scenes were derived from direct experience. The primary game system in use was a heavily-modified version of RuneQuest 3rd edition (along with some GURPS material, especially GURPS Swashbucklers), noting of course that this was prior to the more contemporary flurry of editions. RuneQuest is of course a very adaptable game and the 3rd edition was particularly well-suited with its fantasy-Earth content, even if the latter was set both spatially and temporally, a long way from home.

Arquebus STR 10 DEX 8 Base 25% ENC 9.0(.01) Damage 3d6-2 AP 10 Range 100/700 RoF 1/5MR Price 400

Player characters were a mixture of European and Austronesian; the European characters were Portuguese and Aranese merchants who had escaped a pirate attack, primarily desiring of material wealth and adventure. The initial Austronesian characters included a Malay Hindu scholar and a slightly crazed young animist woman with a rodent animal companion. Incorporating this character generation in RQ was not troublesome, using the Civilised and Barbarian societies for all initial characters, an adopting appropriate GURPS firearms with RuneQuest statistics. Soon afterwards they were joined by a Catonese merchant, and then by a Malay Muslim urchin whose player certainly contributed the comic relief to what was otherwise a fairly serious drama. An argument certainly exists for extending the social categories from Lewis Morgan to include a early Modern society.

The initial setting for the story was the west coast of Java. The narrative was spurred by the threat of external forces to the Malay Hindu community, a curse that had fallen on the village, the disruption by the arrival of foreigners, and an internal conflict the animist had with her family. Seeking mystical advice from the animist and isolate Badui, the party travelled first to south-west Java, where their encounter with this people allowed for an opportunity to repeat the great metaphysical and practical questions presented in Gods of Glorantha.

Led by visions, omens, and an investigation of esoteric texts, the direction of the party was mapped towards the Mahayana Buddhist temple Borobudur and the nearby Hindu Prambanan temple complex. The animist was increasingly losing their grip on reality, confusing dream states with awakened states, and seemed to spend a great deal of time in communication with animals. For the European and Chinese visitors this also meant various collecting exotic and valuable goods. Before this longer journey the party returns to the village community to find a Garuda chick on the isle of Krakatua, consuming soma, and defeating a Naga along the way.



From here the group were able to travel along the south coast of Java, encountering storm along the way and hearing of the story of the queen Nyai Loro Kidul and the Sultan of Yogyakarta, and an encounter with additional animal spirits by the animist. Reaching the Borobudur and Prambanan temple complexes the hypothesis is offered that this was a architectural competition between the respective faiths by the Saliendra (Buddhist) and Sanjaya (Hindu) empires. The final scenes involved members of the party climbing Borobudor and entering into different planes of existence as they deal with the temptations of the world; reaching the summit, the animist is put to the test and stands against the spirit of the mountain Merapi which wrestles and kills her rodent animal companion (yes, you can do this sort of thing in spiritual environments where scale doesn't matter; a mountain can fight a rat on top of a temple).

However because she stands up to the mountain and shows no fear, the animist completes the quest abstracted in the RuneQuest rules for becoming a shaman - going on a spirit journey, defeating The Bad Man etc, and has their perception of the world permanently changed as they can permanently see into the spirit world. The parting message of the Merapi spirit was that there would be a rebellion by the animals of Java against their human oppressors - a seed for the next story.

As life imitates fiction, several months after the campaign there was a massive and destructive explosion at Merapi, further cementing this author's hypothesis that the sudden abandonment of the Borobudor and Prambanan temple complexes was due to a perceived defeat of their religions at the hands of the local animist deity, Merapi. Even after all these years, I have not made effort to explore this hypothesis - but then again, I'm not an historian, archeologist, or anthropologist of early Javanese civilisations.

LEGEND OF THE AINU NEZUMI: HISTORICAL-FANTASY JAPAN

By Lev Lafayette

Background

This is a background for a game in fantasy feudal Japan in the period of the Warring Provinces (c1530). The story uses heavily modified game rules from Legend of the Five Rings, including material from RuneQuest's Land of Ninja and GURPS Japan and AD&D Oriental Adventures. It is planned to run for at least fifteen game sessions. Several years will pass during this time with experience and development between game sessions. There will also be some influence from the Shogun: Total War computer game by Electronic Arts.

The PCs are largely Ainu, who are the highly persecuted indigenous people of Japan; to mix metaphor with fantasy the take the appearance of near-human-sized, sentient rats (the L5R supplement "Way of the Ratling" is also in use). Players are expected to explore both feudal Japanese culture and rat behaviour to gain in-game bonuses to plot development.

Character Generation

Start with concept, name, clan and profession.

Name: Use the list of Japanese character names from RuneQuest's Land of Ninja and will help with honorifics, suffixes and so forth.

Character Concept: The Legend of the Nezumi will require at least one samurai, one ninja-thief (may be a geisha) and at least one spell-caster (Taoist, Shinto or Buddhist). Other characters may include Yamabushi (Buddhist warrior-monks). All Ainu magic users must be Shinto.

Clans (Political): The main human political clans are based on Daimyo, regional rulers; they're actually a bit historically out of sync, but that's of little matter to the story. They are Mori (traditionalist, Buddhist, western highlands, poor), Shimazu (innovative, isolated, island-based), Imagawa (central, subterfuge), Oda (centralist, sprawling, populous), Takeda (wealthy, dispersed, technologically advanced), Hojo (defensive, wealthy, western, shogun), Uesugi (very innovative, sprawling, weak). In addition there are rebel provinces held by ronin. All Ratling PCs belong the Nezumi clan, however there is no central authority beyond each colony. Many dream of a united Nezumi.

Profession

Rings and Traits: There are four elemental Rings each with two associated Traits. Earth (Stamina and Willpower), Water (Strength and Perception), Fire (Agility and Intelligence), and Air (Reflexes and Intelligence). Normal Trait range is between 2 and 5. Void is used a special combination of the Rings for super-human effects ("ki").

The Ainu

"The Ainu lived in this place a hundred thousand years before the Children of the Sun came" is told in one of their Yukar Upopo

Historical Ainu obviously weren't giant rats; they're mostly fair-skinned and arguably "Caucasian" in appearance, with dense hair development. Genetic testing of the Ainu people has shown them to belong mainly to Y-haplogroup D, also found in Tibet and the Andaman Islands. As the Japanese moved north and took control over Ainu lands, the Ainu often gave up without resistance, with some occasional wars in 1457, 1669, and 1789, where the Ainu were defeated. Japanese policies became increasingly aimed at assimilating the Ainu in the Meiji period (late 19th century), outlawing their language and restricting them to farming on government-provided plots and as labour in the Japanese fishing industry.

Traditional Ainu culture was quite different from Japanese culture. Never shaving after a certain age, the men had full beards and moustaches. Men and women alike cut their hair level with the shoulders at the sides of the head. The women tattooed their mouths and forearms with birch soot. Their traditional dress was a robe spun from the inner bark of the elm tree, called attusi or attush. In winter deerskin leggings and sakhalin, boots made from dogskin or salmon, were worn. Both sexes are fond of earrings, which are said to have been made of grapevine in former times, as also are bead necklaces called tamasay.

Traditional Ainu cuisine includes the flesh of bear, fox, wolf, badger, ox or horse, as well as fish, fowl, millet, vegetables, herbs, and roots. Unlike the Japanese meats were always cooked. Chopsticks were used by men and wooden spoons by women. Traditional habitations were reed-thatched huts, the largest 20 ft. (6 m) square, without partitions and having a fireplace in the center. Public meetings would be held in the house of the village head. The only furnishings were rush mats; for bedding they use planks with skins.

The Ainu were animists, believing that everything in nature has a kamuy (spirit or god). There is a hierarchy of the kamuy. The most important is grandmother earth (fire), then kamuy of the mountain (animals), then kamuy of the sea (sea animals), lastly everything else. Ceremonies included libations of rice beer, prayers, and offerings of willow sticks (inau singular, nusa plural). The Ainu people give thanks to the gods before eating and pray to the deity of fire in time of sickness. They believe their spirits are immortal, and that their spirits will be rewarded hereafter by ascending to kamuy mosir (Land of the Gods).

Japan

The four divisions of society refers to the model of Japanese society during the Edo period. The four castes, samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants. Outside of the caste system are the burakumin a range of outcaste communities, mostly eta who worked in occupations relating to death, such as executioners, undertakers or leather workers. "Shinto beliefs equated goodness and godliness with purity and cleanliness, and they further held that impurities could cling to things and persons, making them evil or sinful" (From Japan, A Modern History, 20002).

Severe social stigma was attached to these occupations, influenced by Buddhist prohibitions against killing and Shinto

notions of kegare ("taint"). Other outcast groups included the hinin. The definition of hinin, as well as their social status and typical occupations varied over time, but typically included ex-convicts and vagrants who worked as town guards, street cleaners or entertainers. They are often called kawaramono ("dried-up
riverbed people") based on where they often live.

With the creation of the Domains (han) under the rule of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, all land was confiscated and reissued as fiefdoms to the daimyo. Some 5% of the population were samurai.

Artisans were primarily city-dweller; towns below the castles were divided into four parts, the samurai quarter, the merchant quarter, the artisans quarter, and the hanamachi ("flower town"), where theatres, brothels, okiya (geisha houses), ochaya (tea houses) and gambling dens were located.

The peasants, around 80% to 90% of the population, had to carry the burden of the economy. Taxes were paid in rice, 40% to 50% of the harvest, collected from the village as a community. The villages were given some self-rule under village headman.

Chrysanthemum Throne
The Chrysanthemum Throne is the English term given to the Imperial Throne of Japan. In Japanese it is simply called the Imperial Throne. The Emperor ("heavenly sovereign") acts as a high priest in Shinto through divine origin from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. The current Emperor is Go-Nara-tenno;; his personal name was Tomohito.

Scenarios
Using Legend of the Five Rings as the core game system the first scenario was based on the excellent sample scenario from that product, which allowed players to engage in the skill system in a competitive manner, introduced them to the setting and politics, and provided many opportunities for public success and private subterfuge. The major modification was to the setting which was shifted to 1530CE, with an attempted alliance with the Uesugi clan as initial encouragement. After this scenario various campaign modules from Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Oriental Adventures were used, often with substantial modifications as will be evident.

Chapter One: Imperial Games 1530

In Chapter One three young ratlings (Kumiko Hiraga,Yoshi and Niko) were brought together by Rikyu, an Ainu Nezumi Chieften. A emissary from Clan Uesugi has arrived, a young Daoist Priest known as Katsumi. Clan Uesugi wishes to formalise an alliance with the Ainu and offer protection and friendship. This is considered a great opportunity for the Ainu who have been traditionally treated poorly by all Nihonese. A great Gempuku competition between the young and upcoming Samurai-class members from various daimyo is being held, hosted by Clan Uesugi. It is believed the great Emperor himself will be present. Two of the Ainu Nezumi are samuari class (Kumiko and Yoshi) and thus expected to perform. Niko will attend as Yoshi's consort. Katsumi, also of the Samurai class, will participate as one of the Uesugi.

On the road to Tsuma, where the games will be held (a modest village in Mutsu Province, near Sendai, but famous for it's sword dojo), the PCs save a strange old man (Megumi) from drowning. He offers them his residence in the town for the time of the games. When they arrive there however, they discover his is not present although his neat and clean home is well-provisioned. Niko befriends a neighbouring Ainu but discovers he is is weighed down by numerous possessions which he has stolen from the merchant house.

The first major event is the arrival of the youthful (early thirties) Emperor Go-Nara. Following this is the first day of the games, where Katsumi does well in the Law and Etiquette competition. That evening is a formal dinner, attended by all (even Ainu, as honarary new members of the Uesugi clan). Whilst the PCs catch up on the political maneuverings, they are very surprised when the young and beautiful Ichiro asks to be escorted back to town. Half-way they hear the sounds of a battle and upon investigation they find several bodies of the Mori clan samurai with the Sugai of the Takeda clan bearing a bloody sword. Brought in front of the Emperor, Sugai proclaims that heard the sounds of battle and killed a ninja assassin (a body is found to confirms this). Ichiro foolishly interrupts and questions the Emperor's judgement, whereupon she is cut down.

Morose, the PC engage in the next day of the games, with Kumiko winning the Archery contest, despite discovering beforehand his bow has been deliberately sabotaged. The most exciting being the Hunting of the Tsu Fish eggs, which required great stealth getting past the adult schools. Having successfully obtained the eggs, the PCs were set upon by bandits who defeated the PCs stole the eggs. Niko discovered the unconscious bodies of her friends, and Sugai, surprisingly successfully returned to Tsuma with the fish eggs.

On the third day was the Chrysanthemum championship. Although Yoshi did not win he performed well and at the end of the ceremony, all were invited to attend the Swearing of Fealty to the Emperor (except Niko, of course). This was a great honour for the ratlings to be treated as full people. Afterwards, returning to their residence, Megumi makes an appearance and declares that the PCs are "among the chosen" with a magical, booming voice. With that, he turns into a crane and flies away.

Chapter Two: The Sword of the Daimyo 1531

In Chapter Two the Ainu Nezumi and their Daoist companion are summoned by the the great daimyo Uesugi Tomooki to Edo Castle in Musashi Province. The Daimyo is impressed with their behaviour and how friendship and cooperation has developed between the Uesugi and the Ainu. However, he has a problem that requires some discretion. Over the past few months he has taken a fancy to a young geisha from the hinterlands of Echigo near the ronin-held province of Etchu. She has since gone missing and, at the same time, so has the daimyo's katana. There would be untold shame if he were to officiate at public meetings without said katana. So the ratling as send to the wilderness to find out what has happened.

On their arrival to the region near the border, the PCs encounter the site of battle, and find a survivor, a weak and battered merchant whose goods; a cartload of weapons was been stolen by bandits, whom he suspects were peasants by

their dress, weapons and fighting style. Upon reaching the desolate village of Myudo, a sorrowful tale is expressed as ronin from the Temple of the Mountains will come soon to demand their rent. The village headman confesses that village did indeed relieve the merchant of his cart, but that was only because the last time the ronin took their daughters in lieu of financial or rice compensation.

When the Temple Ronin arrive, they are led by a Dai-Oni, fully nine foot tall with three eyes and a horn protruding from his head. The PCs challenge the Ronin and the demon, but they are defeated, although Kumiko escapes and follows. Eventually the party makes it to another village on the edge of the mountain path. This village is even more desolate that the previous and there's only a handful of inhabitants. Asking after the geisha leads to the discovery that she comes from an Eta village far upstream in the mountains. The village headman confesses great shame that his village has submitted to the rule of the Dai-Oni, but with a rousing speech, he is convinced to make a stand.

Upon travelling to the Eta village the PCs discover that not only is it an Eta village, but also a village of Tengu, strange raven-headed people. Although Niko is captured, through eavesdropping they discover that the Tengu had summoned the demon at the old Temple to drive humans away from the region although his appearances had been rare in recent months. Nevertheless, the ronin's taxes were proving most successful. The geisha was not to be found and according to locals she had been dead for many years, although she was only young when she died.

Niko eventually escapes as Kumiko eventually befriends a Mori Buddhist Warrior-Monk, Sano. Together they find out plans that the Ronin will be marching once again very soon, whilst Niko makes her way towards the Temple of the Mountains. The rest of the PCs formulate plans to defend the village with rock-falls, traps and everything available. Meanwhile Niko successfully finds her way into the Temple, discovers the Daimyo's sword among the Dai-Oni's loot and frees the prisoners. Back at the village the ambush is a resounding success with the Dai-Oni's mounted soldiers poorly suited for the rockfalls, cramped conditions, hail of archery fire and an earthquake summoned by Katsumi. All are killed (some quite brutally by the peasants) or scatter with the Dai-Oni himself in full retreat back to his Temple; however the demon is ambushed and killed by none other than little Niko wielding (most inappropriately) the Daimyo's sword.

Upon return to the village, the PCs help organise land rights for the Tengu so there will be no further encroachments upon their mountains. Whilst life will eventually return to normal, the PCs decide it is probably best to tell the Daimyo that his beloved Geisha died by his own sword, which is sort of true. The sad Daimyo believes that she killed herself because their love could not become public, which is also sort of true. After all, sincerity is more important than truth and noone wants to tell their lord that they've actually been an relationship with a shape-changed demon.

Chapter Three: Night of the Seven Swords: 1532

Following the successes of the Nezumi and their allies, the Uesugi Daiymo Nagao Tamekage invites the strange friends together for another mission. In this case, the monks who control Noto province have invited both the Uesagi and Takeda clans to compete for the entire province! Each side is to send four warriors to an ancient castle off the northern coast and clear out the "ghosts" that allegedly inhabit the castle and return the sacred relics of the Buddhists to their

temple.

The Daiymo considers the possibility of winning the province very important for if Noto falls into the hands of the Uesgi, it is likely that the other adjacent rebel held provices of Etchu, Kaga, and Echizen may join the growing Uesagi lands, or at least enter a more permanent alliance. Kaga especially would be a rich prize with powerful Buddhist monks, archers and defensible land - not to mention that the Daiymo has family connections there.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:NotoPeninsulaIshJpLandsat.jpg

The adventure began at the Temple, where both members of the Uesgi and Takeda clan received the expected information along with a tale on how the Ito lords of the Castle, a previously sound family, went mad taxing the peasants beyond capacity and spending untold monies on military confrontations. Also present at this hearing with the Takeda is Sugai whom the ratlings had an initial run-in with two years prior.

The PCs leave early in the morning to head towards the seaside town which will eventually take them to Ito island. On the way they encounter Sei, nature spirit, who informs them of the need to discover seven swords to unlock the evil that inhabits the island and the problems involved in the crossing. She also informs the PCs that her cousin is trapped on the island and provides them with magical gifts.

The journey to the island is via a ghost bridge which appears only at night. Exiting on the dockyard on the island, one of the earliest encounters with with a grinning skull reaper which was quickly bested by the combined might of Kumiko and Yoshi. The skeleton carried a small katana, which was the first of the clues.

Further journey into the castle were also of the supernatural. Persistant stormclouds hovered above a weather-stained large metal beatle striking it every hour causing it to rotate. Next to an old temple, a ghostly maiden weeped under a willow her tears flowing for the crimes of her family. In the courtyard, cobblestones flew from the very ground itself striking hard against members of the Legendary Party. In the well, there was a talking fish, which Niko befriended; by this stage Niko's intelligence had been significantly eaten as part of a deal with a guardian spirit for a second sword. "It will get better, said the spirit - as I become hungry once again".

A ghostly porter attempted to charge the cost of a soul at the end of the journey to the Keep's entrance. It was severely castigated by the Taoist priest Katsumi, who criticised its lowly attempts at trickery and breach of the law. Ashamed the porter fled. Thus ingress to the castle was gained.

Within the castle appirations of body parts, the spectres of lords beating servants, and ghostly maidens at court were encountered. More serious however was the weapon master of Ito struck Kumiko from behind from behind, felling him in a single blow. Thus ended the life of a brave and strong ratling. Yoshi and the others eventually defeated the weapon master, who disappeared in a puff of smoke, and thus gained the third sword.

Further investigations included confronting giant origami monstrosities that made themselves (and were quickly dealt

with by flash explosives carried by the ever surprising Niko). Further ahead, another weapon's master, this time with great skills of stealth and subterfuge, was also defeated and who also disappeared in puff of smoke. Among his belongings, Niko discovered some more flash bombs, similar to those she already carried.

The final sword was discovered in the hands of an exotic, animated doll, which was skilled in both weapons and magic, and using magnificent windchimes as a flail. Further journeys into the dungeons led to a natural cavern and lake. Noticing at first a tiny junk, the PCs were very surprised to meet a 6" Mori human named Otaku Daji whose sister, a slightly troublesome adventurer who had ended up in here. Daji himself was the result of a nature spirit who had taken his mother's request that after his sister was born that she could have a brother, "even as big as her finger".

Further journeys in the caverns proved dangerous; the Priest Katsumi was struck down whilst fighting goblins by a dishonourable ogre that has turned itself invisible. It was at this location that the cherry blossom nature spirit was rescued. Strange encounters also included a pair of debating heads (acting worse than an old married couple) and the apparitions of secret lovers whose liaisons were outside of their caste. Eventually Otaku Daiko was discovered, and brother and sister were reunited (although after this journey, little brother decided to head home "to work on the family farm"). Through Niko's skills at stealth, the PCs made it past the guardian of the final chamber, a wicked alchemist.

The guardian proved to be the demon Krakatua, an octopus-headed humanoid, with a wakizashi in each tentacle. It was Krakatua who had slowly worked his magic sending the rulers of the Ito clan mad. The battle was long and dangerous, but the noble ratlings and their allies were eventually successful. Within the demon’s lair was the relics so desired by the Buddhist monks.

Working their way back, the PCs were confronted by the Takeda forces at the Ito township. Initially Otaku wanted to duel Sugai for being responsible for the death of Ichiro, but Sugai prevailed saying that too many had fallen that day. The Takeda were honourable and would not steal the prize that had been rightfully earned.

In the warmth of spring, the Ainu ratlings and their allies are summoned to Nagao Tamekage, Daiymo of the northern Yamanouchi branch of the Uesugi. The Daiymo explains that Uesugi settlements in Ezu [1] have fallen under threats from ghostly apparitions, which is causing a decline in trade and productivity. Such nonsense must be put to an end and as such the noble party is to venture into the homeland of the Ainu and find out what is causing such problems, especially seeming they have prior experience in such matters.

The party exits at an Uesugi port town on the southern coast of Ezu. There are many fine wooden and stone buildings of the Nihonese colonists, whereas to the east are the straw and wood huts of the Ainu. The town itself has significant activity, with Nihonese traders and Ainu workers. The provincial governor lives in a fine stone building in immaculate Nihonese style on top of a hill overlooking the town.

The governor Koshi, is an overweight, effeminate man who has evidently done well out of the trading environment. Speaking only in Nihonese, and through a scribe, he talks of a number of hauntings that have affected the Ezu islands, and the necessity of removing this spirit. It appears, seemingly at random, every few days at one of the colony towns,

sucking the very life out of individuals. The dutiful scribe records everything spoken by the characters and requests that they provide information, on the spot, on how they will defeat the apparition. Otaku Daiko snaps back at the scribe "Perhaps we will use you as bait!"

Investigations of the hauntings are modestly successful. Sano visits a local Buddhist temple, where the chief monk is preparing wards to protect the town; he provides Sano with a scroll of sacred scriptures to Raise the Dead. Niko visits the Ainu village and encounters and elderly chief/shamen, who says that the Nihonese must be thrown out of Ezu, and the visit of the spirit is a sacred guardian of the Ainu. When the Nihonese leave, the spirits will depart.

That night the party is woken by a messenger who declares that the spirit has been spotted on the outskirts of town. When they arrive there, among the animal carcasses, the spot a ghostly apparition in a field. Also present is the governor's scribe. Although they call out to him, the apparition seems to suck the very life out of him and he falls to the ground, dead. Yoshi and Otaku charge in to fight the spirit, as it tries to confront them with its penetrating glare. Averting their eyes, they hack at the apparition are are surprised to see that their blows do indeed damage the ghostly form. Eventually they defeat the spirit which lets out a deafening scream before vanishing. By the scribes body is the scroll of the notes that he took from their meeting with the final line: "Use scribe as bait".

The following day there is great celebrations throughout the town and the party as treated as heroes, for the story spreads that they have defeated the spirit warrior. But as evening dark clouds gather and an unseasonal storm arises, standing at the water's edge, Sano notes that there are not one but two spirit warriors summoning the ocean and the winds, and causing a rain of fish to fall upon the town, in addition to the great destruction of vessels. The following day reports come in that a spirit warrior of alarming similarity to the one defeated the night wrecked havoc in Sapparo, killing many animals.

Somewhat ashamed and confused, the party leaves the following day to head towards Sapparo, where Daiko wishes to return various momentos of the ratling Kumiko. On the way they encounter a talking snake. Initially Niko and Yoshi are particularly terrified, but the snake allays their fears. Speaking with every comment caveated with the remark that the snake spirit is forbidden to give direct warnings, thus everything it says may not be true. The snake spirit explains that there might be a great vampire, a kyonshi, which has imprisoned the Great Mother Spirit in an ancient Taoist temple in the centre of the island and now commands her elements Kamyu to wreak havoc on the lands. The kyonshi is an old Chinese Taoist sorceror who had suffered greatly at the hands of the Nihonese and is now exacting his revenge.

Armed with this new knowledge, the party travels first to Sapparo and then inland across the many mountains of Ezu until reaching a plain covered in sulphuric gases. In the centre of the plain is an ancient two-story Taoist temple. Initial ingress into the Temple is prevented as the four elemental kamyu spirit warriors attack the party seeking to possess their bodies, although shrines dedicated to the Ainu spirit kamuy of the mountain (animals), the ocean (fish) and air (birds) were noted. Aided by Niko's exceptional climbing and lockpicking skills, the group attempts to enter via the second story, which is ultimately successful, just in time to watch the vampire sink into a bath of blood and disappear.

Whilst the room stinks of disembodied corpses, eventually the charater's decide also to enter the bath of blood, which

leads them to be transported to another pocket of land that hangs in a void. There they find a beautiful Ainu woman trapped within a glass cage. As the noble ratlings and friends approach the cage, the vampire-sorceror makes his appearance and attempts to prevent them. In the process the valiant Yoshi is felled by the foul creature, but at the same time Daiko breaks the glass cage, releasing the fire grandmother, who destroys the vampire.

Raising Yoshi from the dead the fire grandmother explains how she was tricked by sorcerous summonings by the Taoist priest in league with rebel ninja in the Velvet Underground who seek to expel the Nihonese from the island who then forced the Kumay into its service. The fire grandmother has no doubt that the sorcerer would have turned against the Ainu when the Nihonese were gone.

Returning to their original Ainu village, Niko visits the shaman again who argues that she has ensured the destruction of her own people and that members of her Ninja school may not look kindly open her actions. When Niko says the vampire would have turned against the Ainu, the shaman argues that would have been a problem they would have dealt with with the time arose. Niko leaves confused, knowing that the Nihonese will strengthen their grip on the island, but still thinking that what they did was necessary - even though it has now brought her additional enemies among her own people.

Additional Scenarios and that Ratty Question

On top these scenarios were played (and, alas, never written up for OA Blood of the Yakuza, OA5 Mad Monkey vs the Dragon's Claw, OA 6 Ronin Challenge, and finally FROA1 Ninja Wars. It was in this final scenario that PCs were ultimately successful and achieved an agreed autonomy for the Ainu people on their island of Ezo, which of course is utterly contrary to historical events.

One question that has been raised is whether it is appropriate to portray the Ainu as humanoid rats, and specifically as Legend of the Five Rings Ratlings. Certainly it would be horribly wrong to use the characteristics of that fantasy species directly referenced to a fantasy Japan; L5R ratlings collectively suffer from amnesia! However in this game and setting, the representation was a reflection of how they were one (different) people (the word "Ainu" means "people" in their own language) and how they were mistreated by the increasingly dominant Nihonese.

In any case among the Ainu mythology there was a place called Entin Kotaii, which translates as "rat village", where the first rats and mice were born from the powers of the great Kami, and where the people worship mice and rats, including the Great Rat, the Deer Rat, the Tree Barker, but chief of them all is the mouse. Offerings to the rats and mice will ensure a successful crop, cats are forbidden to visit and none may speak ill of rats or mice. (c.f., "The Ainu and their folk-lore" by John Batchelor, 1901), p508-509)

Curiously, because reality likes to imitate fiction (and this is not the first time it has happened to me) right at the end of the campaign, the Japanese government finally acknowledged the Ainu as the indigenous people of the land, with a unique culture, language and religion. As the fictional story of the Legend of the Ainu-Nezumi drew to a close, in reality the Ainu were recognised as a people at last (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7437244.stm).

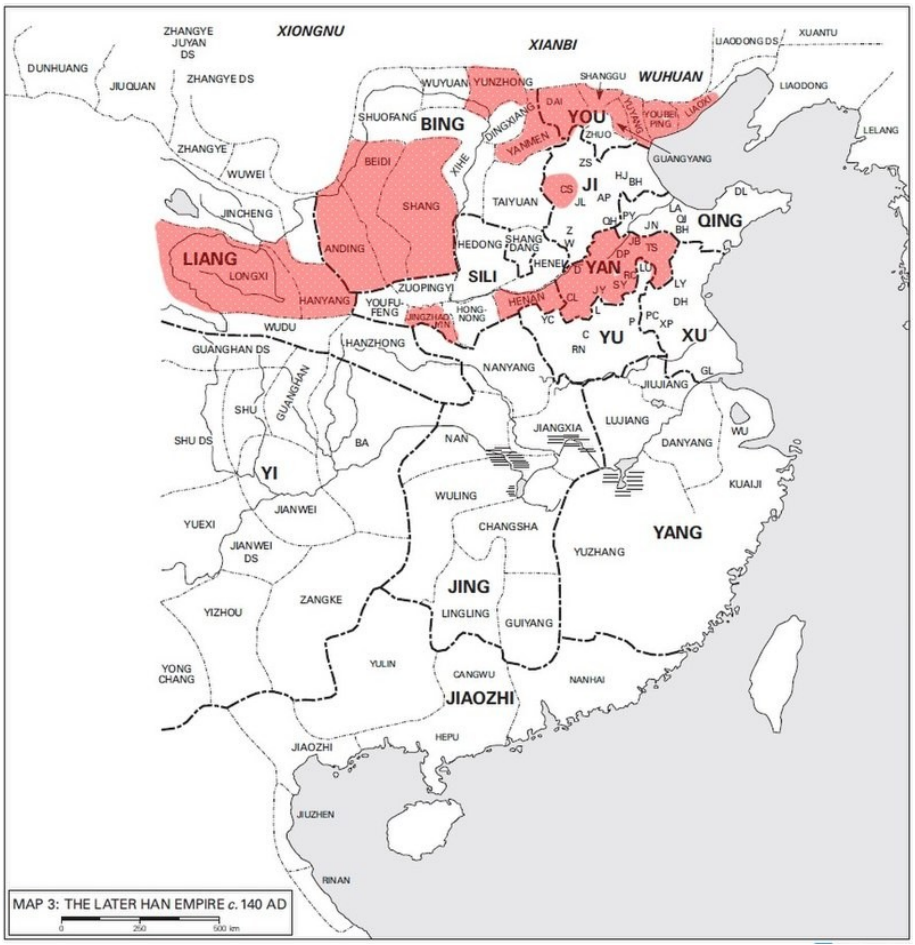
GURPS KOREA

By Michael Cole

The original brief was to create a sandbox-type campaign,that could be played intermittently, effectively as a stop-gap measure should regular campaigns be unable to run for a selected session. As such, it needed to be episodic, where each session could stand alone, but with the ability to extend for a long time, and allow changes to player rosters as seen fit.

As such, I decided to create something along the lines of a stagecoach-style campaign. A western where the party could continue to move along a long distance route with adventures happening at the various stops. After some research, I came up with the idea of using China as the base of operations – this offered more facilities for coming up with adventures asit was more unknown to the players than the western world. It also allowed all the standard tropes of Chinese cinema to be in use.

The original synopsis that I sent out on 2nd December 2011 is below: -



The Long Road Home - China c150 AD

The campaign will be set in China at around 150 AD,and will follow the efforts of a Korean delegation (the PCs) in their adventures in a large, wide and foreign land. Characters will be set on 200pts starting value, in a low to normal mana world, with realistic, low cinematic violence. It will take the form of a "Western Trail Movie"-type adventure, being episodic with an overriding plot. There are plenty of examples of the style,such as Monkey (although much lower magic) through to Rawhide. The game system in use is GURPS 3rd edition, revised.

Background

Note that historical and geographical reality will only be adhered to when it doesn't affect the storyline. I reserve the right to change things to make a better story.

The campaign starts in 142AD, with Emperor Shun of Han on the throne. The largest part of Korea, Goyuryeo, is still under Chinese rule, having been conquered by the Han dynasty in 108AD. The remainder of Korea is divided into three separate kingdoms, of Baekje, Silia and Kaya.

Recently, the father-in-law of the Emperor, and Grand Marshal, Liang Shang, died, and his posts were given to his son, LiangJi. Liang Ji has started to aggressively grab power, and the Three Kingdoms are now under constant attack.

The PCs form a diplomatic mission from the Three Kingdoms, sent to meet the Emperor, to try to resolve this situation as best they can.

Character Archetypes

Due to the structure of the opening, several types of characters are required, with certain restrictions. They are listed here.

Military Contingent

2 to 4 players are required to take the roles of the escorting soldiers.

All soldiers will require certain minimums (ST andHT of 12, various required skills (Hiking or riding, leadership, strategy ortactics, and an appropriate professional skill). The roles are: -

Commanding Officer (1 of - Mandatory)

Must be Korean, Military Rank of 4, and have Two-Handed Sword at 16. Will also be required to take a warhorse as an ally - I can provide the rules or this. Effectively, the guy in charge of the mission.

Sergeants (1 to 3 of, at least 1, preferably 2 to be filled by players)

Must be Korean, Military Rank of 2, and have a primary weapon (generally one of Two Handed Sword, Two-Handed Flail, Spear, Glaive, or Long Bow) at 16.

Will also be required to take an ally group of 5 soldiers - these will be considered to have the same stats as their sergeant but all at 2 levels lower.

Diplomatic Contingent

1 to 3 players can take the roles of the Korean diplomats. Diplomats may be mages, priests or simple diplomats, and should have appropriate status and skills. They can also have ally groups of servants or palanquin bearers, but no armed soldiers. I need at least one for this role.

Other Members

Unarmed Martial Artist - such a character would need to be a servant of one of the diplomats, either a PC or NPC version. Would need appropriate low status and duties.

Guides - Could be merchants or other, and could be Chinese with an appropriate unusual background. Should not have any major combat skills.

Weirdness - Some possibilities are a visiting Roman (yes, rumours were that the Romans did visit the Chinese), Indians, Mongolians or Southern Chinese (considered Primitive Barbarians at this time). Social status will be negative, and they may be difficult to play.

Episodes

Once I had received sufficient acceptance, we then started the first episode. This was the place-holder; I went through some exposition as to how they had travelled to the Chinese capital to meet the Emperor, only to find that he had gone west to arrange a peace treaty including the marriage of his daughter to a Mongolian leader. I then had them escorted, via exposition, into the far west of China, where they found that some great calamity had ensured, the Emperor and his daughter had disappeared and his army destroyed. With all the locals fleeing, the escort also rapidly evaporated, leaving the party alone and in a foreign land. And at this point we started…

Initially, the party went north to find the Emperor, as expected. They then discovered that somewarlock had raised an army of the dead from the Gobi desert and had destroyed the armies of Mongolia and China. I also let them find traces of the fleeing Princess. From here, they went and did the obvious thing, went and rescued the Princess.

At this point, I had guessed that they would then turn eastwards and attempt to get the hell out of Dodge, but instead, was surprised that they turned westward and then southwards. The plotline that followed included: -

- Meeting and making diplomatic overtures to the forces of Northern India
- Heading southwards and taking sides in a three-sided war, and playing sides off against each other.
- And finally taking a balloon ride (just the major characters) into the Himalayas and finding Shangri-la.

It lasted for about two years, with intermittent episodes,and they never did get home

GARGANTUA: MONSTER BUILDS FOR D&D 5E

By Karl David Brown

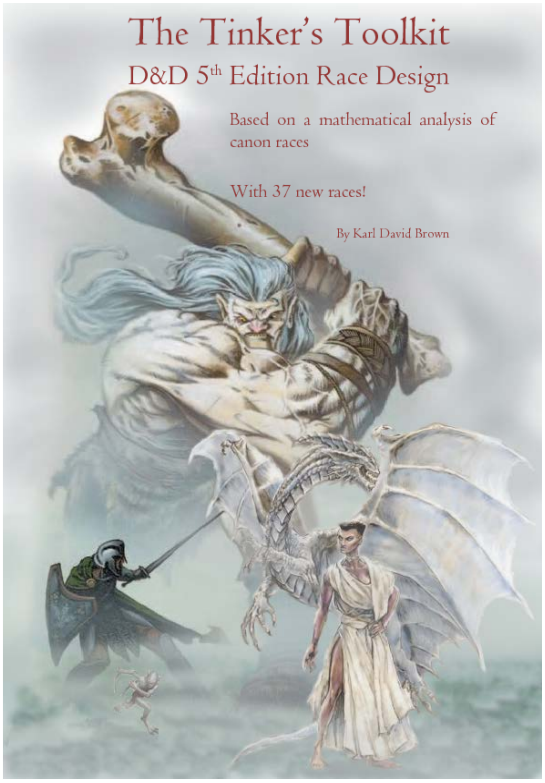
Thanks to members of The Piazza forum for their feedback on these monster builds.

Abbreviations:1e: first edition of AD&D, 2e: second edition of AD&D, 3e third edition of D&D, 5e: 5th edition of D&D, BECMI: the alternate series of D&D rule books (Basic, Expert, Companion, Masters, Immortals).

The need for potent monsters

One criticism of the the Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition is that there are too few monsters able to challenge a high level party, characters of 'tier 4' in that game's jargon. The previous AD&D editions had the benefit of of having been around a lot longer and developed numerous powerful creatures to challenge mighty heroes. A solution is to convert old powerhouse monsters to the new rules but this is a time consuming activity. I have converted the old gargantua monster species to 5e for you.

Capitalising on the popularity of Japanese Kaiju movies the 1e Oriental Adventures book (1985) introduced Gargantua which were thinly disguised rip-offs of Godzilla, Mothra, and friends (a different version of gargantua appeared earlier in the BECMI Companion box (1984)). As well as Oriental Adventures the Gargantua were listed as random encounters to challenge even a party of dragon PCs in the 2e Council of Wryms setting (1994). As well as these two settings gargantua will find a place in over-the-top cinematic games modelled after films like Clash of the Titans. The recent emergence of adaptions to use the 5e rules in modern or future settings like Ultramodern 5 (Dias ex Machina Games) or Hyperlanes (by Scrivened LLC) means that the gargantua can finally terrorise downtown Tokyo.



Humanoid Gargantua

Gargantuan Giant, Chaotic Neutral

90 foot tall brutish giants.

Armour Class 16 (Natural Armour, thick hide)

Hit points 624 (32d20+288)

Speed 50 feet

STR 28 (+9), DEX 8 (-1), CON 28 (+9), INT 6 (-2), WIS 6 (-2), CHA 8 (-1)

Saving Throws. Strength +17, Constitution +17

Senses. Passive perception 8.

Challenge 26 (90 000 xp)

Languages. Humanoid gargantua generally understand and speak some monosyllabic words in both Common and Giant but do not have fully developed language.

Trampling Charge. If the gargantua moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a unarmed attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 25 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the Gargantua can make a trample attack against it as a bonus action.

Regeneration. The gargantua regains 16 hit points at the start of its turn. The gargantua dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points.

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If the gargantua fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack: the gargantua makes two unarmed attacks.

Unarmed. Melee weapon attack +17 to hit, reach 15 feet, one target. Hit: damage 25 (3d10+9) bludgeoning damage.

Trample. Melee weapon attack can only be used against prone targets, +17 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. Hit: 58 (9d10+9) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the gargantua's choice within 120 feet of it and aware of it must succeed on a DC15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the gargantua is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the gargantua's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Legendary Actions

The gargantua a take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The gargantua regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. The gargantua makes one unarmed attack, club or club greatclub attack.

Move. The gargantua moves up to half its speed.

Club Variants. occasionally a humanoid gargantua finds a tree large enough to serve as a club or even a great club.

Club. Melee weapon attack +17 to hit, reach 15 feet, one target. Hit: damage 23 (4d6+9) bludgeoning damage.

Great Club. Melee weapon attack +17 to hit, reach 15 feet, one target. Hit: damage 27 (4d8+9) bludgeoning damage.

Yeti Gargantua

These dreaded creatures are unique to the frozen north of Io's Blood Isles of the Council of Wryms setting. They combine the chilling powers and ferocity of a yeti with the terrifying strength and immensity of a 90 foot tall gargantua.

Gargantuan monstrosity, chaotic evil



Armour Class 18 Natural armour

Hit Points 624 (32d20+288)

Speed 50 Climb 50

STR 28 (+9), DEX 8 (-1), CON 28 (+9), INT 6 (-2), WIS 6 (-2), CHA 8 (-1)

Saving Throws. Strength +17, Constitution +17

Senses. Darkvision 120 feet. Passive perception 8.

Challenge. 28 (120 000)

Languages. Yeti gargantua generally understand and speak some monosyllabic words in Yeti but do not have fully developed language.

Trampling Charge. If the gargantua moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 25 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the Gargantua can make a trample attack against it as a bonus action.

Regeneration. The gargantua regains 16 hit points at the start of its turn. The gargantua dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points.

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If the gargantua fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Fear of Fire. If the gargantua takes fire damage, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn .

Keen Smell. The gargantua has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Snow Camouflage. The gargantua has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in snowy terrain.

Actions

Multiattack. The gargantua can use its Chilling Gaze and makes two claw attacks.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +17 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target . Hit: 23 (4d6 + 9) slashing damage plus 14 (4d6) cold damage.

Chilling Gaze. The yeti targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see the yeti, the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw against this magic or take 73 (12d6) cold damage and then be paralyzed for 1 minute, unless it is immune to cold damage. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, end ing the effect on itself on a success. If the target's saving throw is successful , or if the effect ends on it, the target is immune to this yeti's gaze for 1 hour.

Cold Breath (Recharge 6). The yeti exhales a 30-foot cone of frigid air. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 45 (10d8) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Trample: Melee weapon attack can only be used against prone targets, +17 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. Hit: 58 (9d10+9) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the gargantua’s choice within 120 feet of it and aware of it must succeed on a DC15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the gargantua is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the gargantua's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Legendary Actions

The gargantua can take two legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The gargantua regains spent legendary actions at the

start of its turn.
Attack. The gargantua makes one claw attack.
Move. The gargantua moves up to half its speed.

Reptilian Gargantua

Gargantuan Monstrosity Chaotic neutral
An enormous bipedal lizard easily 200 foot long.
Armour Class. 18 Natural Armour
Hit Points. 697 (34d20+340)
Speed. 40, Swim 30
STR 30 (+10), DEX 8 (-1), CON 28 (+9), INT 6 (-2), WIS 8 (-1), CHA 6 (-2)
Saving Throws. Strength +19, Constitution +18
Senses. Darkvision 120 feet, Passive perception 18
Challenge. 29 (135000 xp).
Languages. Nil
Sweeping Tail. Every time the gargantua moves its full land or swim speed it can also makes a tail sweep as a bonus action.
Trampling Charge: If the gargantua moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature on land and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 25 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the Gargantua can make a trample attack against it as a bonus action.
Regeneration. The gargantua regains 16 hit points at the start of its turn. The gargantua dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points.
Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the gargantua fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.
Actions
Multiattack. The gargantua can make two claw attacks and a bite as an action.
Bite. Melee weapon attack +18 to hit, reach 15 feet, 65 (5d10+10) piercing damage.
Claw. Melee weapon attack +18 to hit, reach 15 feet, 21 (2d10+10) slashing damage.
Tail Sweep. The gargantua's tail sweeps through a 90' cone all creatures within the cone must make a DC27 Dexterity save or suffer 48 (7d10+10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. A successful save avoids all damage.
Trample: Melee weapon attack can only be used against prone targets, +18 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. Hit: 59 (9d10+10) bludgeoning damage.
Legendary Actions.
The gargantua can take one legendary action, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The gargantua regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.
Tail Sweep. The gargantua performs a tail sweep.
Claw. The gargantua makes one claw attack.
Move. The gargantua moves up to half its speed.

Insectoid Gargantua

Gargantuan monstrosity chaotic neutral

A 60 foot long moth.

Armour Class. 14 Natural Armour

Hit Points. 459 hp (27d20+162)

Speed. 15 feet. Fly 90 feet.

STR 26 (+8) DEX 10 (+0) CON 24 (+6) INT 6 (-2) WIS 8 (-1) CHA 4 (-3)

Saving Throws. Strength +15， Constitution +13

Senses. Darkvision 120 feet. Passive Perception 9

Challenge. 21

Languages. Nil

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the gargantua fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. The gargantua regains 16 hit points at the start of its turn. The gargantua dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points.

Screeching Wingbeats. If an insectoid gargantua moves is full flight speed then its wings generate a terribly loud and unnerving screeching sound. All creatures within a 240 foot radius of its final position must make a DC23 constitution save or suffer 3 (1d4) thunder damage, 3 (1d4) psychic damage, and be deafened.

Actions

Windstorm. The beating of the creature's wings creates a strong wind in a 60 foot wide and 240 foot line ahead of the gargantua. Creatures caught in the blast must make a DC23 strength save or be blown back 1d4x10 feet and receive 4 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet they are blown back. Unanchored objects of less than huge size and mass are also blown back and damaged.

Claw: Melee weapon attack +15 to hit, reach 15 feet, one target. Hit: 19 (2d10+8) slashing damage.

Multiattack. The gargantua can make two claw attacks as an action.

Legendary Actions.

The gargantua can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The gargantua regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Claw. The gargantua makes one claw attack.

Move. The gargantua moves up to half its speed.

Fly. The gargantuan moves up to half its flight speed.

HENGEYOKAI: SHAPESHIFTERS FOR D&D 5E

By Rachel Ghoul with Karl David Brown

Original game design by Rachel Ghoul. Further game design by Karl David Brown. Abbreviations: Advanced Dungeons and Dragons 1st edition (AD&D), Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition (D&D), Monster Manual 5th edition (MM), Player's Handbook for D&D 5th edition (PHB).

While Wizards of the Coast have taken measures to be more inclusive in the presentation of the latest edition of D&D particularly in the art, the races presented still draw from the the tropes of Western European fantasy and mythology. In this article we attempt to translate a race from Asian folklore into D&D as a player character race. Hengeyokai are animals that can assume human form. Though 'hengeyokai' is a Japanese term similar creatures appear in the folklore of nearby cultures such as the Chinese Madame White Snake tale, which also includes a shapeshifting river turtle. This article will be of especial interest to those wishing to use materials for Oriental Adventures produced for AD&D with the latest edition.

Hengeyokai

The shapeshifting creatures known as Hengeyokai begin life as ordinary animals that are chosen by gods of nature or primal spirits to act as their emissaries on the material plane. Many different types of hengeyokai exist, each born from a different type of animal. While hengeyokai are found throughout the world, it's rare for a particular hengeyokai to stray too far from their natural habitat. In addition to their natural form, Hengeyokai can assume both a form very similar to a human or other medium-sized humanoid, or a "hybrid form" with animal features on an upright, humanoid body. Despite a superficial resemblance, hengeyokai are not lycanthropes and have little in common with them as a rule.

Hengeyokai usually live on the fringes of humanoid settlements, watching over them from a respectable distance but rarely directly engaging them. Those who become aware of a particularly helpful hengeyokai usually leave them small offerings of food and other supplies in gratitude. Hengeyokai tend to live simply, spending most of their time in animal form, and have little use for material possessions other than their basic necessities. Their personalities retain something of their natural instincts with a tendency to be playful among themselves, somewhat skittish and secretive when it comes to humans and other species, but deeply loyal to those who befriend them. They tend to get along best with those races that, like themselves, live close to nature and work closely with animals, such as wood elves and forest gnomes.

Hengeyokai Traits

Ability Score Increase: Any CR0 Beast can be the animal form of a hengeyokai, pick one. The ability score that is highest in your animal species increases by 2 in your humanoid and hybrid forms. If the animal has a flight speed of 45 feet or more then the ability score increase is instead only +1. Treat the intelligence scores of your animal species as if it were 10 higher than it actually is for the purposes of this trait. Treat the charisma score of the animal species as if it were 8 higher than it actually is for the purposes of this trait. In the event that two or more scores are tied for highest, you may choose which one to increase.

If the animal form provides very few advantages *and* does not fly then your DM might allow +2 or +1 to a second ability score that seems fitting for the species. These species are among the most common Hengeyokai throughout Kara-Tur, a realm far to the east of Faerun.

The ability score(s) increased has been already been determined for some sub-races.

Carp +2 Dexterity and +2 Wisdom

Cat +2 Dexterity or +2 Charisma

Crab +2 Strength and +2 Dexterity

Crane +1 Dexterity

Dog +2 Charisma and +1 Constitution

Duck +1 Charisma

Fox +2 Dexterity or +2 Charisma

Hare +2 Dexterity and +2 Wisdom

Monkey +2 Dexterity and +2 Intelligence

Rat +2 Intelligence and +2 Constitution

Snake +2 Dexterity and +1 Wisdom

Sparrow +1 Dexterity or +1 Charisma

Tanuki +2 Dexterity and +1 Strength

Terrapin +2 Constitution and +2 Wisdom

Age: Hengeyokai mature at about the same rate as humans, reaching adulthood in their late teens. They live slightly longer than do humans, usually around 100 years.

Alignment: Free-spirited, even capricious, and playful, hengeyokai tend to be of chaotic alignment.

Size: In their humanoid or hybrid form Hengeyokai are about the size of humans. In their animal form, Hengeyokai are the normal size for an animal of their species. Hengeyokai have both the humanoid and beast types.

Speed: In humanoid and hybrid form, your base walking speed is 30 feet. In animal form you have whatever speeds are appropriate to your species. If your animal form can fly then you cannot fly if wearing medium or heavy armour.

Shapechanging: Hengeyokai can change their shape among three possible forms. Your natural form is that of a beast of CR 0, but you may assume an anthropomorphic "hybrid" form or a humanoid form that resembles a human with features reminiscent of its animal form. Changing between these forms is an action. You may change shape a number of times per day equal to your level. You regain expended uses when you finish a short or long rest. While you are transformed, the following rules apply:

Regardless of the form you change into, when you transform, you retain your own hit points and Hit Dice. Transforming doesn't break your concentration on a spell you've already cast, however, or prevent you from taking actions that are part of a spell, such as a Call Lightning, that you've already cast. Your human features are always the same unique individual, as are your features in both hybrid and animal forms. You retain the benefit of any features from your class or other sources and can use them if the new form is physically capable of doing so.

You choose whether your equipment falls to the ground in your space, merges into your new form, or is worn by it. Worn equipment functions as normal, but the DM decides whether it is practical for the new form to wear a piece of equipment, based on the creature's shape and size. Your equipment doesn't change size or shape to match the new form, and any equipment that the new form can't wear must either fall to the ground or merge with it. Equipment that merges with the form has no effect until you leave the form.

In animal form, your game statistics are replaced by the statistics of the beast, but you retain your alignment,

personality, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores. You also retain all of your skill and saving throw proficiencies, in addition to gaining those of the creature. If the creature has the same proficiency as you and the bonus in its stat block is higher than yours, use the creature's bonus instead of yours. While in your animal form you can't cast spells, and your ability to speak or take any action that requires hands is limited to the capabilities of your beast form. You may, however, communicate with animals of your species (or closely related ones as defined by the DM for example a hengeyokai dog can talk to other canines). In animal form if you are not carrying any equipment you look like an ordinary animal of your type.

In hybrid form, you have darkvision if your animal form would. If your animal form has the Amphibious, Darkvision, Keen Hearing, Keen Smell, or Keen Sight, traits, your hybrid form does as well. If you animal form is Water Breathing your hybrid form is Amphibious. While in your hybrid form, you may speak normally and cast spells, but you retain the ability to communicate with animals.

Using the guidelines about will usually produce balanced subraces. However, the subraces presented in this article were checked with the reverse engineered version of WOTC's race design system in "The Tinker's Toolkit Race Design" (http://www.dmsguild.com/m/product/232813). Of the 14 subraces here only four had fewer than 11 points or traits, most had the target 12 points. One or more traits were added to these weaker races to raise the total. These are given below.

Carp, including koi, are associated with determination, endurance and dragons in Asian mythology. In any form the carp has advantage on ability checks and saving throws to avoid fatigue. Carp Hengeyokai know the Draconic language but cannot speak it while in animal form.

Hybrid crabs have a natural armour class of 12+Dexterity bonus. If the hybrid crab wears armour or has another source of armour class only the highest armour class is used.

Rats have advantage on saves against poison and traps in all three forms.

Hybrid terrapins have a have a natural armour class of 13+Dexterity bonus. If the hybrid terrapin wears armour or has another source of armour class only the highest armour class is used.

Languages: You can speak, read, and write Common and Sylvan. Additionally, when in hybrid or animal form, you may communicate with animals of your species and closely related species as defined by the DM.

Additional Subraces

Some of the traditional animal forms of hengeyokai have not yet appeared in D&D 5e sources. These are described below. DMs might consider adding these Challenge 0 beasts for use as familiars, druid wildshape options, or ranger companions.

Carp

Tiny beast, unaligned Armor Class: 11 Hit Points: 1 (1d4 - 1) Speed: 0 ft., swim 30ft.

STR: 1 (- 5) DEX: 12 (+1) CON: 8 (-1) INT: 1 (- 5) WIS: 10 (+0) CHA: 2 (-4)

Senses: Passive Perception: 10. Darkvision 30 feet. Languages: - Challenge: 0 (0 XP)

Water Breathing: The carp can breathe only underwater.

Cat

See Appendix D of the PHB.

Crab

See Appendix D of the PHB.

Crane

Medium beast, unaligned Armor Class: 11 Hit Points: 4 (1d8 + 0) Speed: 10ft., fly 50 ft.

STR: 7 (- 2) DEX: 13 (+1) CON: 10 (+0) INT: 2 (- 4) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 4 (-3)

Skills: Perception +3 Senses: Passive Perception: 13 Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

ACTIONS Beak: Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 (1d4-1) piercing damage.

Dog

Small beast, unaligned Armor Class: 12 Hit Points: 5 (1d6 + 2) Speed: 40ft.

STR: 8 (-1) DEX: 11 (+0) CON: 14 (+2) INT: 3 (-4) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 6 (- 2)

Skills: Perception: +3 Senses: Passive Perception: 13 Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell: The dog has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

ACTIONS Bite: Melee Weapon Attack:+ 1 to hit, reach 5 ft. , one target. Hit: 1 (1d4- 1) piercing damage.

Duck

Tiny beast, unaligned Armour Class: 11 Hit Points: 2 (1d4-1) Speed: 10ft. Fly 50ft. Swim 20ft.

STR 3 (-4) DEX 12 (+1) CON 8 (-1) INT 2 (-4) WIS 12 (+1) CHA 6 (-2)

Senses: Passive perception 11 Languages: - Challenge: 0

ACTIONS Peck: Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 bludgeoning damage.

Fox

Tiny beast, unaligned Armor Class: 12 Hit Points: 2 (1d4) Speed: 40ft., climb 30ft.

STR: 3 (-4) DEX: 15 (+2) CON: 10 (+0) INT: 3 (-4) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 7 (-2)

Skills: Perception: +3, Stealth: +4 Senses: Passive Perception: 13 Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell: The fox has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

ACTIONS Bite: Melee Weapon Attack: +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

Hare

Tiny beast, unaligned Armor Class: 13 Hit Points: 1 (1d4- 1) Speed: 40ft.

STR: 3 (-4) DEX: 16 (+3) CON: 8 (-1) INT: 2 (-4) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 3 (-4)

Skills: Perception: +3 Stealth: +5 Senses: Passive Perception: 13 Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

Keen Hearing: The rabbit has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

Standing Leap. The hare's long jump is up to 10 feet and its high jump is up to 5 feet, with or without a running start.

ACTIONS Bite: Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

Monkey

Tiny beast, unaligned Armor Class: 12 Hit Points: 2 (1d4) Speed: 30ft., climb 30ft.

STR: 6 (-2) DEX: 14 (+2) CON: 11 (+0) INT: 6 (-2) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 6 (-2)

Senses: Passive Perception: 11 Skills: Acrobatics +4. Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

ACTIONS Bite: Melee Weapon Attack: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

Primitive Hands: A monkey has better manual dexterity than most animals but its crude hands and Tiny size limit what it can achieve with it. A monkey can use Tiny Simple Bludgeoning weapons such as clubs and maces (PHB49) or thrown objects like rocks all these do 1 bludgeoning damage, as well as Tiny shields. A monkey does not apply their strength modifier to attacks or damage with melee weapons or their dexterity bonus to attacks made with ranged weapons, except objects dropped from above. Dropped objects do a maximum of 1+Dexterity bonus damage. A monkey can remove armour without help but cannot don armour without help. Most delicate tasks, such as writing legibly or picking locks, are beyond a monkey. Slightly broader tasks, such as disabling simple tasks, are possible, but a monkey has disadvantage on Dexterity checks made to perform them. A monkey is fully capable of most other tasks based on manual dexterity, such as picking pockets and opening doorknobs. Since they have poor hands and cannot speak monkeys cannot cast spells.

Rat

See Appendix D of the PHB.

Snake

Treat as Poisonous Snake in the MM. Add climb speed 20 feet. While normally only Challenge 0 animals can be used an exception was made because of the presence of benevolent snake shapeshifters in Chinese folklore and because checking with the Tinker's Toolkit revealed that the snake was actually underpowered.

Sparrow

Tiny beast, unaligned Armor Class: 13 Hit Points: 1 (1d4 - 1) Speed: 10ft., fly 50 ft.

STR: 2 (-4) DEX: 16 (+3) CON: 8 (- 1) INT: 2 (- 4) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 6 (-2)

Skills: Perception: +3 Senses: Passive Perception: 13 Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

Tanuki

Tiny beast, unaligned Armor Class: 13 Hit Points: 1 (1d4- 1) Speed: 40ft.

STR: 3 (-4) DEX: 16 (+3) CON: 8 (-1) INT: 2 (-4) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 3 (-4)

Skills: Perception: +3, Stealth: +5 Senses: Passive Perception: 13 Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell: The tanuki has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

ACTIONS Bite: Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

Terrapin

Tiny beast, unaligned Armor Class: 13 (natural armour) Hit Points: 3 (1d4+1) Speed: 10ft. Swim 30ft.

STR: 3 (-4) DEX: 10 (+0) CON: 12 (+1) INT: 2 (-4) WIS: 12 (+1) CHA: 3 (-4)

Skills: Stealth: +2 Senses: Passive Perception: 11 Languages: - Challenge: 0 (10 XP)

Amphibious: the turtle can survive on land and underwater for extended periods

ACTIONS Bite: Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

TUNNELS & TROLLS 5E BESTIARY HENGEYOKAI

by Karl David Brown

This is yet another article in a series of materials for the classic T&T 5.5 Edition. Previous articles appeared in issues: 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22 & 31. A pirate PC is also described in issue 26-27.

The 7thand Deluxe editions of T&T has different solutions for *some* of the situations covered by the house rules in this series of articles. Though written for edition 5.5, this series of articles is largely compatible with the later editions.

In 5thedition werewolves and other weres are standard race. In previous bestiary articles I have indicated creatures with suitable attributes for use as weres. T&T weres are shapeshifters without the supernatural immunity to non-silvered weapons and infectious bite of movie werewolves. East Asia has legends of shapeshifters that take the forms of small animals. In Japan they are called hengeyokai. The 5thedition T&T were rules are perfect for representing these. Here I have collected together the small animal forms suitable for Hengeyokai use. Some have appeared before in RPG Review and some are new.

If you want to create your own shapeshifters, as a guideline add up all the attribute modifiers (yes negative CHR subtracts) of the animal form (not the animal it is based on, IQ is x1) and if under 13 the kin may be suitable for use as a player character. Intelligent animal forms (such as giant eagles as per Tolkien) may not be chosen by any were PC or NPC.

These creatures could also be used as awakened beasts (issue 15) if that rule is in use. All awakened beasts have IQx1 rather than the value listed.

Dexterity: monsters without hands, tentacles or other manipulators have dexterity of zero. Agility has been subsumed into Luck and reaction time is covered by Speed.

Boar

MR 32 Dice 4 Adds 16
Natural Weapons: Gore with tusks 4d Natural Armour 2 thick coarse hair and hide
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil
ST 36 (x3.5) IQ 4 (x0.5) LK 11 (x1) CON 32 (x3) DEX 0 (x0) CHR -5 (x-0.5).
While animals and not monsters boars can be bad tempered, and have a reputation for this.
SP 14 (x1.5)
Length x1 Weight x1.7

Cat

MR 10:5 Dice 2 Adds 5
Natural Weapons: bite 1d, claw 1d Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil
ST 3 (x1/2) IQ 4 (x ½) LK 32 (x3) CON 5 (x ½) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 10 (x1) SP 20 (x2)

Length x1/3 Weight x1/20

These statistics are for a common domestic cat or one gone feral. Cat weres are rare but not unknown in the West, they are more common in oriental lands where they are known as a kind of *hengeyokai*.

Carp

MR 4 Dice 1 Adds 2

Natural Weapons: Bite *or*tail-slap, either does 1d. Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil

ST 6 (x0.5) IQ 1 (x1/10) LK 26 (x2.5) CON 4 (x1/2) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 1 (x1/10) SP 10 (x1)

Carp are hard to hit and considered lucky in some cultures

Height/Length x2/5 Weight x1/5

The common carp is a very large fresh-water fish that is a suitable prey item for hungry adventurers. Carp *hengeyokai* (oriental 'weres') are often the guardians of rivers. The main advantage of being a shape shifter who becomes a fish is not in combat but the ability to explore underwater with ease.

Dog, Medium

MR 10 Dice 2 Adds 5

Natural Weapons: bite 2d Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil

ST 10 (x1) IQ 4 (x ½) LK 25 (x2.5) CON 10 (x1) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 10 (x1) SP 20 (x2)

Length x 1/3 without tail Weight x 1/3

Dog weres are rare but not unknown in the West, they are more common in Oriental lands.

Duck

MR 2 Dice 1 Adds 1 (-2 in flight and -7 on land).

Natural Weapons: peck 1d, remember minimum after 'adds' is 1pt. Natural Armour 2 feathers

Special Attacks nil. Special Defences nil

ST 1 (x0.1) IQ 2 (x0.2) LK 31 (x3) CON 2 (x0.2) DEX 0 (x0) max 0 CHR 5 (x0.5) SP 20 (x2)

A duck has half LK in the air (15), ¼ this on land (8) and half SP in water, ¼ this on land

Length x1/6 Weight x5/1000

Ducks have the advantage of being able to move through the air, in the water or on land and enjoy natural armour and waterproofing from their feathers. They can also live off the land by eating a variety of foods including pond weed, snails, and worms of all kinds. Some varieties have decorative plumage, such as the mandarin. On the down side ducks are blunt and tasty. Players considering duck *hengeyokai* (oriental 'weres') should weigh up all these pros and cons before committing.

Fox

MR 10 Dice 2 Adds 2

Natural Weapons: bite 1d, claw 1d Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil

ST 4 (x1/2) IQ 4 (x ½) LK 28 (x3) CON 10 (x1) DEX 0 (x0) max 0 CHR 7 (x1) SP 20 (x2)

Rural peasants will react as if CHR is x-1

Length x0.4 Weight x0.11

These rusty red lean canines are the ban of rabbits and poultry farmers. Were-foxes are often said to be cunning rogues but rarely truly evil. Large eared desert foxes and white pelted arctic varieties are smaller than the animal described here. Small dogs would be similar with perhaps IQ3.

Rat

MR 4 Dice 1 Adds 2
Natural Weapons: bite 1d Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil Special Defences nil
ST 2 (x0.25) IQ 3 (x0.5) LK 24 (x2.5) CON 4 (x1/2) DEX 2 (x0.25) CHR 2 (x0.25) SP 15 (x1.5)
Length x0.1 Weight x1.190
Rat shapeshifters have an evil reputation.



Raven

MR 4 Dice 1 Adds 2
Natural Weapons: peck 1d Natural Armour 4 feathers
Special Attacks may use a called shot to attack eyes. Special Defences nil
ST 2 (x0.25) IQ 3 (x0.5) LK 26 (x2.5) CON 4 (x0.5) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 5 (x0.5) SP 20 (x2)
Ravens have half SPD on land
Length x1/4 Weight x1/100

Snake

MR varies Dice varies but see below. Adds varies
Natural Weapons: Poison bite: first 2d+personal adds to represent the physical damage from a bite. If even one point of damage is scored then 3d is rolled for poison damage that is not stopped by armour.
Natural Armour: nil
Special Attacks poison described above Special Defences nil
ST 3 (x025) IQ 1 (x0.1) LK 12 (x1.2) CON 4 (x0.5) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 4 (x0.5) SP 16 (x1.5)
Height x0.5 Weight x1/12

THE FAR EAST: AN EXTRAORDINARY PERSONS CAMPAIGN FOR GULLIVER'S TRADING COMPANY

By Karl David Brown

About Gulliver's Trading Company

Gulliver's Trading Company (GTC) is a roleplaying game of exploration of strange lands in the 18th century. It is based on the classic satirical novel Gulliver's Travels. Material in the core book has been carefully written to help you create a campaign true to the world of the novel.

A beta version of the game can be downloaded for free and comments from playtestering are sought.

https:// rpgreview.net/node/40

Comments can be sent to: Karl@rpgreview.net

There is also map of the world including the nations discovered by Lemuel Gulliver.

https://coronoides.deviantart.com/art/Gulliver-s-Travels-World-Map-294804331

An Entire World to Explore

Swift's novel contains an entire fantasy world. As well as Lilliputians and giants there is a flying island, savants rapt in trances, professors trying to extract sunlight from cucumbers, sorcerers, ghosts, cursed immortals, strange customs, talking horses, and continents awaiting exploration. The setting is a blend of what Europeans knew, or thought they knew, of real nations during the early 18th century, imaginary lands described in the novel and if your referee is creative new strange lands of her own devising.

Though a typical GTC campaign chronicles the adventures of this new English trading company, the world is a big place and campaigns about other inhabitants of the world are possible. The core book contains all the aspects, skills, and equipment needed to play in these foreign lands.

The Far East in the World of Gulliver's Trading Company

To Europeans of the 18th Century the Far East was a distant, alien, and intriguing world. Lemuel Gulliver's travels to the Far East included Tonquin (later Northern Vietnam), Japan, Balnibarbi, Laputa, and Glubbdubdrib. In Lemuel's world these nations are so far away from Europe that there is little reliable information on these nations in Europe. As a result even the nations found in the real world are not as they were in reality, they are as fictional as Laputa.

An Important Note on Nationalities



'I made the Captain a very low bow.'

The description of the various nationalities in the GTC core book are derived from the attitudes of the English in the 18th century further distorted by the lens of Gulliver's Travels 'written' by the fictional misanthrope Lemuel Gulliver. The belief in 'national character' was almost universal in Europe and an accepted part of academic discourse at this time. However, the national traits described in the GTC core book do not accurately reflect the historical reality nor are they supported by evidence. A character struggling against the prejudices inherent in the aspect descriptions is entirely valid. Such a character will earn Fate points whenever these prejudices become an obstacle. It should also be noted that Lemuel reports events without a much bias for Europeans. He recounts how a Japanese pirate treats him with greater mercy and politeness than a fellow European and Christian.

Given the light hearted nature of an extraordinary persons campaign 'national character' can simply be ignored if desired.

An Extraordinary Persons Campaign

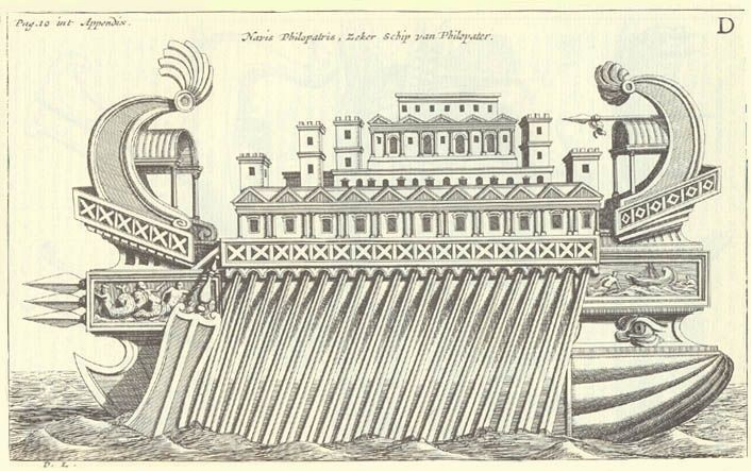
The GTC core book describes several different campaign styles. The Extraordinary Persons style is a variant of the traveller's tales popular in the 18th century. A variant is the 'extraordinary persons' style of play. The tone is lighter than most GTC campaigns and the focus is on the characters who are all extraordinary in some way. This uniqueness causes them to be drawn into adventure and rewarded with fame. The exploits of Lemuel Gulliver during his time in Lilliput come close to this style but Lemuel is soon humbled by his later adventures. This style of play is much like mainstream fantasy and superhero rpgs enjoyed by many gaming groups.

The fantastic and fictionalised nations of the Far East in Lemuel's world provide a suitably surreal backdrop for these 18th century superheroes and the equally bizarre natives of these lands have suitably extraordinary persons among them. Typical characters could include a Necromancer or other sorcerer from Glubdubdrib, a ghost from any period and place in history, an incredibly skilled Samurai, a pearl diver with extraordinary endurance, a noble Thai warrior mounted on a war elephant, or an unbelievably strong Han Chinese. Even a lone 62 foot tall Brobdingragian who somehow crossed the strait between his continent of giants and China could be present.

Adventure Précis

Here are a few adventure hooks which can be fleshed out to create adventures for a Far East campaign.

The Giant Ship. An important shipment of treasure is attacked between Balnibarbi and Japan. The lone survivor reports seeing a gigantic ship in the fog. The survivor claims he was tossed overboard when the great ship rammed the Japanese vessel. In reality he is a coward who jumped overboard at the sight of the monstrous ship. Superstitious people will suspect the mythical Brobdingragians have finally figured out how to get past the rocks and stormy seas that trap them in Brobdingrag. As the characters investigate they discover the ship is a 400 foot long trireme filled with strange foreigners. The ship is in fact the massive warship of of Ptolemy IV from Egypt in 210BC brought back by a rogue Necromancer of Glubdubdrib. Even if the characters destroy the ship the next time a treasure ship crosses the sea the giant ship miraculously re-appears to attack. The Necromancer summons the warship in secret to rob treasure ships identified by her spy in Japan. The characters must figure out who the rogue sorcerer is and stop her.



Weida de Shan Ren. The Chinese Qianlong Emperor is demanding that Tonquin once again sends tribute and ceases trade with the English. If the Emperor's demands are not met he threatens to unleash the Wieda de Shan Ren, the Great Mountain Person. Unless a PC is a Brobdingragian only the most superstitious would believe the Imperial Army now has a 60 foot tall mythical Brobdingragian, most people expect a very tall and strong Han Chinese but of course they are wrong. An unfortunate giant fisherman was swept from the treacherous rocks of his homeland and miraculously survived the crossing of the strait by clinging to a giant log. If the Trinh Lords of Tonquin acquiesces to the Emperor's demands eventually English warships will arrive and blast the nation's ports to splinters. A dilemma that only extraordinary persons can solve, quite probably through extraordinary violence.

Next Issue of RPG REVIEW

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RuneQuest Special and 10th Anniversary of RPG Review!

