

PdQ

the Zanfabulous Zorcerer of ZO

A FAIRYTALE ROLE-PLAYING GAME



by Chad Underkoffler
ATOMIC SOCK MONKEY PRESS



(a PDQ campaign in actual play)

by Chad Underkoffler

PROSE DESCRIPTIVE QUALITIES (PDQ) SYSTEM

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ABOUT THE PDQ SYSTEM

The rules inside this book build upon the Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System, suitably modified for fairytale play (the “Good Parts” version). PDQ Core is available as a free download from the following URLs:

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies/di/pdq-core.pdf>

http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=4175&

<http://e23.sjgames.com/item.html?id=ASM-000>

PDQ has been designed for evocative simplicity, speed, and flexibility. It currently serves as the core game mechanics for *Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption (DI)*; *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the Roleplaying Game (MNPR:RPG)*; *Truth & Justice (T&J)*; and *The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ)*.

Rules and concepts from all Atomic Sock Monkey Press games easily interconnect. For example, if one chooses to, the Soul Point mechanics of *DI* could be used to steal the soul of a ZoZ Princess, and the Powers rules in *T&J* could be used for ideas on how to interpret ZoZ magical Gifts into even more sharply-defined game mechanics.

ABOUT ATOMIC SOCK MONKEY PRESS

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/>

Atomic Sock Monkey Press is dedicated to high-quality, off-kilter, imaginative fun. That means tabletop games of both the “beer & pretzels” and roleplaying game (RPG) varieties. Check out the following webpages on the site for ZoZ resources and downloads:

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/products/zoz.asp>

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies.asp>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Underkoffler is an editor for a telecommunications standards body by day and a freelance game writer by night. He’s been gaming since 1981, to the confusion of his family. His column “Campaign in a Box” appears in Pyramid Online at < <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid> >; he has written material for *Gamma World* (Sword & Sorcery), *GURPS* (Steve Jackson Games), and *Unknown Armies* (Atlas Games); and he is the author and publisher of *Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption*; *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the RPG*; and *Truth & Justice*. Chad currently lives in Alexandria, VA, with his wife Beth and their two black cats.

INTRODUCTION

ONCE UPON A TIME...

PERSONAL REFLECTION

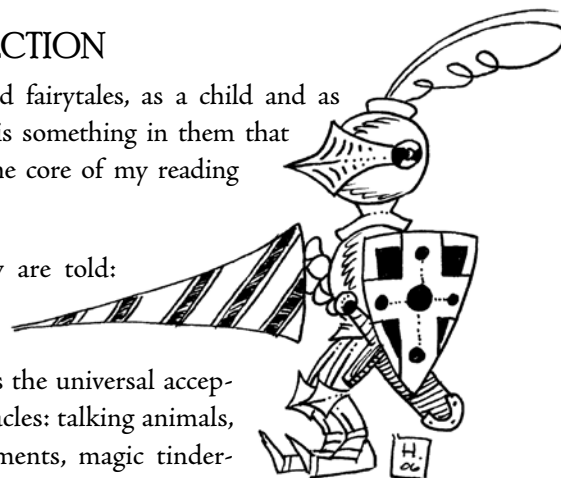
I have always loved fairytales, as a child and as an adult. There is something in them that drives right to the core of my reading enjoyment.

Perhaps it's the way they are told: spare in detail, but evocative enough to spur the imagination. Or maybe it's the universal acceptance of wonders and miracles: talking animals, witches working enchantments, magic tinderboxes, houses made of gingerbread. Then again, it could be the strong and boldly drawn characteristics of the denizens of such tales: noble princesses, lucky third sons, dastardly villains. Or it could be the rush of pure emotions and concepts that really exist in these stories: Revenge, Forgiveness, True Love. Or it might be that fairytales are *fair*: the broken will become strong, the silenced will laugh, the voiceless shall sing, and the wicked will be punished.

It's a heady mix of flavors, one that children find delicious, but most adults can find cloying. For my part, I like strong drink.

In late 2005, after the release of *Truth & Justice*, my players asked me to run a new campaign. Given my writing and work commitments (and those of my players), time was at a premium. I told them that we'd have to use *PDQ* for ease of preparation and speed of play in a "seat of the pants" sort of game. I'd provide a list of campaign concepts. We'd then vote to select one that we were all interested in. My players agreed. We voted, and a fairytale campaign idea came out on top. We began having monthly sessions of *The Zorcerer of Zo*.

It was great. Prep was easy, the characters were vibrant and active, and everyone was having a good time. There was a lot of laughter, snappy dialogue, and great fun that well-matched the genre. This ended up being one of the best



campaigns I've ever run.

One of my players started urging me to publish the campaign. "I'd hate to have the campaign and setting never see the light of day," he said. I wasn't sure that there was enough for an entire book, other than the very short sketch of a setting that I'd sent out as a game prospectus.

But then I recalled Aaron Allston's classic *Champions* supplement, *Strike Force*, which essentially detailed Allston's long-running campaign. I realized I hadn't seen many game books that stepped through an entire campaign from start to finish. Also, I thought of the increasing number of "Actual Play" campaign threads on Internet RPG forums.

Maybe I could produce a slim book providing a description of how our campaign came together: how ideas were incorporated into the game, how adventures were developed, and how characters and plots formed. The book would have information on a setting, yes, but unlike most RPG books, it could have "behind the gamemaster's (GM's) screen" type notes on how I assembled the system and setting elements, how the player characters (PCs) interpreted and altered them, and what the players thought of all this! Suffice to say, this would be a different sort of gaming product.

My players thought this was a great idea.

Thus, this book.

WHAT THIS BOOK CONTAINS

Inside *The Zorcerer of Zo* (ZoZ), you'll find: a discussion on fairytales as a literary and gaming genre; the Zantabulous Land of Zo game setting with NPCs; a complete game system (the "Good Parts" PDQ); notes on how I started, developed, ran, and ended the first ZoZ campaign (and advice on how you can do the same yourself); two "DVD commentary tracks" of textboxes – one from me as the GM and one from my players; and an Appendix full of Bonus Materials.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

If you are interested in using ZoZ to run your own fairytale campaign, read Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

If you are interested in reading about the ZoZ campaign I ran, concentrate on the *Behind the Curtain* and *Player Commentary* textboxes in Chapters 4 and Chapters 6 and 7, plus the Appendix.

THE BEGINNING

ZoZ came from my group voting on short, one-paragraph blurbs of campaigns I was interested in running. A short blurb on a “Faerie Tale Fantasy” campaign came up the winner. I asked some questions of the players, then sat down to write up a sketch of a setting. (This entire process is described in the *Appendix*, p. 160.)

The information in the textbox below is the *entirety* of the campaign design for the initial ZoZ campaign – before the players made up their characters, at least. All additional details in the description of the setting (see *Chapter 2*) or in the NPC descriptions (see *Chapter 4*) were either added during play or (rarely) the writing of this book.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (PROTO ZO)

THE ZANTABULOUS LAND OF ZO!

The magic empire of Zo is composed of five smaller countries:

1. **Zo Proper:** Jade City, ruled by the Zorcerer of Zo. Vaguely pan-Asian; metropole of the Zo Empire, though in practice never exercises his power. Zolandars are known for their keenness of observation and manners. Center of Map. Green.
2. **Azul:** Farmland and forest. Azulites are known for their industriousness and perseverance. East of Map. Blue.
3. **Rosso:** Port cities, trade and fishing. Rossons are known for their adventurous and romantic nature. South of Map. Red.
4. **Giallo:** Plains given to farmland (grain) and herding. Giallons are known for their courage and pragmatism. West of Map. Yellow.
5. **Viola:** Hills and mountains; mining and crafting. Violandars are known for their intellects and inventiveness. Viola has a slightly higher number of magical things – and thus magic-users – hanging around. North of Map. Purple.

Throughout the Zo Empire there are witches, dragons, ogres, talking and

dumb beasts, fairies, lucky third sons, princesses, evil step-mothers, the whole megillah.

NOTABLE NPCs (LOCATION; ATTITUDE)

The Zorcerer of Zo, Emperor and Magician (Zo Proper; Not Known)

The Great Bird (Zo Proper; Nasty)

The Sewer Creeper (Zo Proper; Neutral)

The Grovelin (Zo Proper; Neutral)

The Smiling Soldier (Zo Proper; Nice)

Count Alphonse, Brilliant Aristocrat (Azul; Nasty)

The Blue Hood, Bandit Queen and Renowned Archer (Azul; Nice)

Wickerwalker, Monstrous Construct (Azul; Not Known)

King Glamorgan, Aged Hero (Rosso; Nice)

Hella, the Fire Fairy (Rosso; Nasty)

Captain Mouse (Rosso; Neutral)

The Marquis de Carabas, Feline Aristocrat (Giallo; Nice)

The Roly-Poly Prince, Rolling Thunder (Giallo; Nasty)

Snow Witch, Mistress of Mirrors (Giallo; Neutral)

Princess Paige, Lost in a Good Book (Viola; Nice)

Quellabaum, King of the Winged Monkeys (Viola; Neutral)

Stig, Ogre Overlord (Viola; Nasty)

THE RETURN OF THE WOLF

Shaykosch, the Deathless Wolf, has once again returned from the grave. He and his numerous wicked followers sow discord throughout the Zantabulous Land of Zo. While every few decades a new hero puts the Wolf down eventually the creature rises again amidst the huffing and puffing wind. Beast, sorcerer, and shapeshifter, he stalks the land and wreaks havoc.

The Blue Tailor stopped him once, stitching his shadow to a rock with magic needle and thread, then dropping the rock into Bottomless Chasm. The Wooden Pirate filleted him on the Southern Sea, scattering the Wolf’s guts as chum for the Lightning Sharks. Another time, the Horse Prince trampled him into the muddy fields of Giallo after a long, running battle. Theodora the Witch Girl

matched him spell for spell, and finally triumphed. And there are a dozen other tales of the Wolf's deaths and returns.

Who will stop him this time? And how? Will some brave soul beg the Zorcerer to stretch forth his power? Or would collecting the magical weapons used against Shaykosch in the past be helpful? Who knows?

PLAYER COMMENT ON PROTO-ZO (SCOTT)

Yep, believe it or not folks, this was the extent of Zo as we knew it!

With the five hundred words in this textbox, we were able to build an entire campaign that was fun and well received all-around.

How did we do that?

In Chapter 5, I lay out many of the gamemastering methods I used while running the campaign, but there's one underlying concept that I think is involved with regard to the brief sketch found in the textbox above. The amount of information that everyone has to know regarding the campaign and the world is *just right* – exactly as Goldilocks found all of the Baby Bear's goods (neither too hot nor too cold; neither too hard nor too soft). Providing less detail than is found above leaves everyone all at sea, unsure of what actually fits inside the game. Providing more detail than is in the textbox begins to set more down in stone, eliminating possibilities and requiring stronger continuity and remembering of facts by all involved.

As I mention in *Truth & Justice* when discussing the “Animated” style of superhero gaming, the key phrase developed by Chipp Kidd and Bruce Timm for the various DC Comics animated properties was “Limited detail for maximum motion.” That is, verbal and visual shorthands were used to keep things fast, evocative, and ready for action. In a fairytale, *everything* – setting, characters, plots – is similarly stripped down to the basic concept or archetype: the Woods, the Wolf, the Woodcutter. The elements of the tale themselves are just seeds (powerful ones!). It is the telling of the tale that makes them flower into unique shapes. In an RPG, it is the decisions, actions, and performances of the GM and the players that cause these seeds to grow.

I urge you to take the information within this book, plant your own seeds, and grow your own adventures in the Zantabulous Land of Zo!

CHAPTER 1 FAIRYTALES

FAIRYTALES & FOLKTALES

Fairytales and folktales unite the ordinary and the extraordinary in stories heavy on magic, wonder, and moral lessons. Tailors face giants, enchanted queens dance with human peasants, talking creatures perform domestic duties, witches cast curses and fairies grant blessings.

In his book *The Uses of Enchantment*, child psychologist Bruno

Bettelheim offers a theory: fairytales help children come to grips with their complex emotions. In hearing (and reading and telling) fairytales, they learn lessons about manners and rules and heroism, all wrapped up in a wondrous, thrilling adventure story.

As such, fairytales and folktales have served as fertile ground for many stories, novels, cartoons, movies, and games. They speak to common – possibly timeless – human emotional concerns. Despite being retold again and again until they are cliché and their images instantly familiar, something about fairytales always remains fresh and new, speaking expressively to even long-familiar audiences.

Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.

– G. K. Chesterton

A parent who from his own childhood experience is convinced of the value of fairy tales will have no difficulty in answering his child's questions; but an adult who thinks these tales are only a bunch of lies had better not try telling them; he won't be able to relate them in a way which would enrich the child's life.

– Bruno Bettelheim

FAIRYTALE ELEMENTS

Since fairytales and myths are ubiquitous world-wide, most people already have a decent grasp on how they are put together and

unfold. Here are some quick reminders of common fairytale elements:

- ◆ The world is at once marvelous and ordinary. There are miracles and mysteries and horrors hiding behind every rock, tree, and cupboard door. Life is magical.
- ◆ Talking Animals and Living Toys are people, too.
- ◆ Favors done "for goodness' sake" are repaid greatly; favors done for gain usually backfire; unreturned favors lead to dire consequences. The Golden Rule is an iron law of nature.
- ◆ Privations suffered by the innocent and noble are often repaid generously.
- ◆ Innocents are often protected by their sheer purity – even dangerous beasts and monsters may refuse to harm them.
- ◆ Nobility is not enduringly granted by high social birth. Rather, the personality, words, and actions of individuals display the superiority – the True Nobility – of a person's soul.
- ◆ Exalted or humble beginnings do not matter for True Nobility; by the end of the story, the Truly Noble will be raised up, and the Truly Ignoble will be cast down. Social mobility thus relies on the inherent quality of the person's soul.
- ◆ True Love exists as a palpable, vital force, able to sustain and strengthen the loving soul.
- ◆ The youngest child in a family usually suffers the most, but is also the luckiest.
- ◆ In tests of courage, wit, strength, skill, or courtesy, even the weakest person can find their hidden talents, and the most derided person can find that their so-called weaknesses are actually strengths.
- ◆ Evil tends to stem from envy and jealousy. "Evil" step-relations usually become that way out of jealousy towards "natural" children (believing they are preferred).
- ◆ Adopted children are often heir to great power, sometimes for good and sometimes for evil.

- ◆ Things tend to come in threes (unless you're Russian, in which case sevens and nines are more likely).
- ◆ People get what they deserve in the long run. Justice is usually eye-for-an-eye. Mercy offered to the wicked can inspire a true redemptive change for those who honestly accept it when it is offered. Those who accept mercy dishonestly pay for it, in spades.
- ◆ Good is not always immediately rewarded, bad is not always immediately punished... but infractions of courtesy and manners always have an important effect.
- ◆ There is a Happily Ever After of some sort waiting for all of us.

NOTE - For a detailed academic discussion of fairytale elements, see *Morphology of the Folktale* by Vladimir Propp. While criticized for ignoring the nature of oral storytelling and disregarding aspects that differentiate one story from another, this book has intriguing insights on fairytale characters, functions, and structures.

Two websites contain automated "fairytale generators" based on Proppian morphology, their utility with regard to RPG adventure design is left as an exercise for the reader:

http://www.stonedragonpress.com/wicca_201/vladimir_propp/oral_tradition_00_a.html
http://www.brown.edu/Courses/FR0133/Fairytale_Generator/gen.html

FAIRYTALE SETTINGS

Fairytale settings can generally be boiled down to two types: The Kingdom Entire (where all of the action happens and characters originate from a single fantastic world) and Otherworldly Visitors (where elements, usually a character, enter the fantastic world from a more mundane one – usually our "real" world).

THE KINGDOM ENTIRE

The campaign takes place entirely within the fairytale realm. There is no intrusion from "the real world" or

Although the events which occur in fairy tales are often unusual and most improbable, they are always presented as ordinary, something that could happen to you or me or the person next door when out on a walk in the woods. Even the most remarkable encounters are related in casual, everyday ways in fairy tales.

– Bruno Bettelheim

anything that looks like it. All characters and elements are native to the setting, and operate without reference to the “real world” we see outside our window.

OTHERWORLDLY VISITORS

The campaign takes place mostly within the fairytale realm, but one or more elements come from outside the fantastic setting. Characters or other elements intrude upon it from “the real world” (or someplace just as mundane) or vice-versa. Often this forces a comparison between what is real and what is fantasy, and the positives and negatives of each.

Otherworldly Visitors to a fairytale setting are often marginalized or unhappy children – and are often driven for a desire for adventure. Many see them-



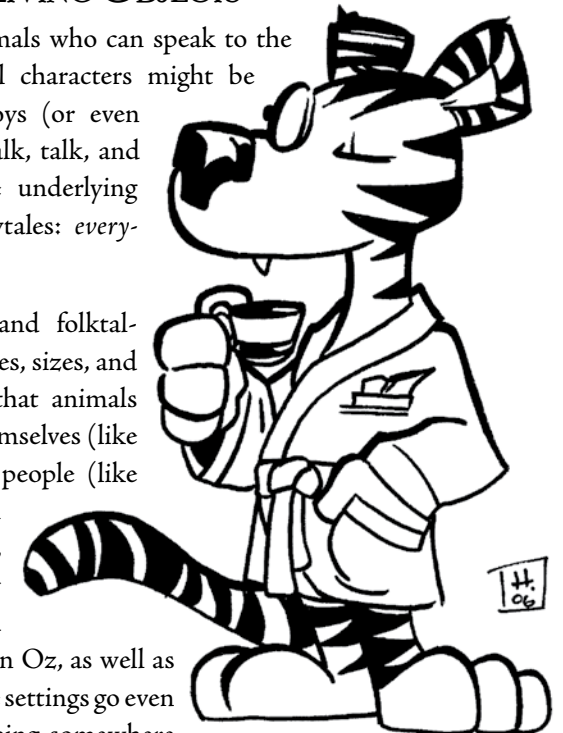
selves as tragically “normal,” perhaps even dull or boring; they yearn for the excitement and wonder of a fairytale.

However, once inside the boundaries of a fairytale, these so-called normal children are found to be anything but. Not only do they discover new and exciting vistas and acquaintances, they discover new powers and abilities within themselves. Further: they discover that the talents and personality traits that they’ve overlooked or derided within themselves are actually potent and useful. Wendy Darling’s courage and caring, Dorothy Gale’s practicality and kindness, Alice Lidell’s curiosity, Peter Pevensie’s leadership and responsibility, and Lucy Pevensie’s faith made them strikingly notable (and often effective) in Neverland, Oz, Wonderland, and Narnia, respectively. “Normal people” aren’t so normal in fairy tales, even when they come from Kensington Gardens or Kansas. Happily Ever Afters (see below) in these settings almost always rely on the differences, similarities, or discoveries found by the comparisons and contrasts of the fairytale world and the real world.

TALKING ANIMALS & LIVING OBJECTS

Many fairytale settings have animals who can speak to the characters; in some settings, all characters might be animals. Other settings have toys (or even furniture or confections) that walk, talk, and jump around. This reflects the underlying animistic outlook of many fairytales: *everything is alive*.

Talking Animals in fairytales and folktale can come in a spectrum of shapes, sizes, and psychologies. In some, it’s just that animals can talk, maybe only amongst themselves (like *Watership Down*) or to human people (like many traditional fairy tales). In others, animals can not only talk, but also have a human mentality and culture, with Kings and Queens and such (most notably in Oz, as well as some traditional fairy tales). Some settings go even further, with Talking Animals being somewhere



between standard beasts of the field and humans, wearing clothes, using tools, participating in both human and animal cultures (like Narnia). Lastly, there are settings that are full of anthropomorphized animals as simulated humans, where the animal characters could easily be replaced with humans with little change in the tale (like the majority of Alice's Wonderland, *The Wind in the Willows*, or *Usagi Yojimbo*).

Talking Animals often possess a blend of human and animal traits, either symbolic or real. Symbolic traits would include lions being courageous, wolves being rapacious, or owls being sagacious. Real traits would include special senses (like a pit viper's heat-sense) or abilities (like a camel being able to go for days without water) that the animal in nature possesses.

Living Toys (and other Living Objects) share many of the above elements of Talking Animals, and usually possess abilities related to their role as toy or item. Sometimes this plays on the item's name (like military skill for a Wooden Soldier, dancing talent for a Ballerina Doll, great speed for a Living Sawhorse, etc.). Living Objects often also incorporate an explicit and fundamental question regarding their own nature: are they truly alive? Are they really people? Does anyone actually want a Charlie-in-a-box?



FAIRYTALE MAGIC

Fairytale magic has a different flavor than that found in most other fantasy settings (and RPGs!). Enchanted items abound, but the reader is rarely told how they are manufactured. Spells range wildly in power level, and aren't constructed to be consistent. Strange things happen; everything is topsy-turvy. Magic almost always "works" – a failure in doing magic doesn't mean it doesn't activate, it means something unintended happens (for example, a flubbed love spell rebounds on the caster, or affects an unintended target).

The first core concern with fairytale magic is that it's a plot element usually used to surmount a presented difficulty. Good fairytale magic is more shield than sword, used in defense (from attack, from hunger, from evil fairytale

magic, from intrigue) to protect the caster. Evil fairytale magic is more sword than shield, used to hack away at or cow an enemy.

The second core concern with fairytale magic is that there is a strong distinction between *being* magic and *doing* magic.



Magical or extraordinary inherent abilities or relationships are straightforward, and often abound – friendship with the birds, amazing charm or beauty, personal flight, great luck, supernatural strength or agility, or even a magical godparent. Many (if not most) fairytale protagonists possess at least one gift. However, doing magic – causing change in the world by mystical means – is often (but not always) reserved for antagonists, and always carries an element of risk (physically or morally).

In this division between doing and being, it may be that there is a conflict between internal and external abilities – for example, natural talent versus learned skill. It's equally likely that this division reflects the need to internalize external learning, to understand it so well that it becomes part of yourself, and no longer a risk to attempt.

(For discussion of using fairytale magic in ZoZ, see Chapter 3, p. 47.)

Fairy tales were not my escape from reality as a child; rather, they were my reality – for mine was a world in which good and evil were not abstract concepts, and like fairy-tale heroines, no magic would save me unless I had the wit and heart and courage to use it wisely.

– Terri Windling

HAPPILY EVER AFTERS

Another component of a fairytale story is the *Happily Ever After*. This is the denouement of the tale, where everything is wrapped up. There are three main types of *Happily Ever After*, which are related to the overall flow of the story:

1. **Tragical:** Typical of early folktales and fairytales, where the protagonist who has violated a social or cultural concept or displays lamentable (and usually willful) ignorance pays for their crime. An example of a Tragical *Happily Ever After* would be early versions of Little Red Riding Hood

where she disobeys her mother's injunction not to use a shortcut through the woods and not talk to strangers, and is eventually eaten by the lying Wolf, who had tricked her into surrendering control of her senses and her person. What makes a Tragical Happily Ever After actually *happy* is that the way that the lesson teaches others not to make the same mistake.

2. **Harsh-But-Fair:** A common ending for fairytales during the heyday of Grimm (and beyond, up until the late 19th Century) a Harsh-But-Fair Happily Ever After succors the protagonist and punishes – usually ruthlessly – the antagonist. An important thing to recall here is that the protagonist is still guilty of some violation or crime which causes their suffering and travails. This is often a lesser infraction, and the protagonist is usually sorry for the error. Continuing our Little Red Riding Hood example, in this version Red is saved from being eaten by the tricky Wolf who is impersonating her Grandmother (simply to draw her close enough to gobble up) by the timely intercession of the Woodcutter (note that the Grandmother remains eaten by the Wolf).

3. **Toothless:** Starting with the Victorians and up through today via a few of the worst of the Disney cartoons (and Disney's lesser imitators), many fairytales' Happily Ever Afters have been rendered utterly without bite: in a word, Toothless. Here, the protagonist is a total innocent who is accidentally pushed (or tricked, or victimized) into some minor infraction of the rules that allows the vicious antagonist to abuse them greatly. Then, at the last moment, through a combination of the character's actions, pluck, and divine providence, they utterly conquer their enemy, with no ill results to themselves and their loved ones, while the antagonist is completely destroyed. In the case of Little Red Riding Hood, it is the Wolf who has been stalking her, specifically, targeting her for consumption – there's often little reason for him to target her other than he's the Big Bad Wolf. He goes through the Grandmother charade for apparently no real reason other than villainous entertainment, manages to eat Little Red, the Woodcutter miraculously appears, slices open the Wolf's belly, and out pop Little Red *and* her Grandmother, none the worse for wear!

Adapting Happily Ever Afters from stories to RPGs can be tricky, and rely completely upon tone. The key is to look at the overall tone and style the campaign has had. If the adventures have been grim, gritty, and hard-won, then it should not end with a Toothless Happily Ever After. A lighthearted

romp through Fairyland should not end with a Tragical Happily Ever After. That being said, Toothless Happily Ever Afters can work particularly well with Fractured Fairytales (see below), especially if the ending is as off-kilter as the rest of the campaign – basically everyone gets the unexpected thing that they didn't know they wanted. Harsh-But-Fair Happily Ever Afters are generally good for any type of campaign.



FAIRYTALE TONE: NICE VS. NEUTRAL VS. NASTY

The *tone* of a fairytale has a strong effect on the types of characters, events, and plot resolution in the tale being told (or played as a campaign). Is the setting a Nice one, with friendly faeries and an assured Happily Ever After? Is it a Nasty one, where nothing is sacred, most characters are selfish, and grim deeds are a-doing? Is it a mixture?

Here follow a few shorthand ways to sum up possible fairytale tones:

- ◆ **Seelie:** A lighthearted campaign; usually Nice (if the campaign were a movie, it'd be rated G or PG). Happily Ever Afters are *de rigueur*, but run the risk of being Toothless.
- ◆ **Unseelie:** A grim (Grimm?) and grittier sort of campaign; usually Nasty (rated PG-13, R, or NC-17). Happily Ever Afters may be Harsh-But-Fair at best, and Tragical at worst.
- ◆ **Fractured Fairytale:** A nonstandard campaign, often self-aware or self-deprecating, sometimes to the point of parody; usually Neutral (variable movie rating). Happily Ever Afters can be of any sort, but are often Harsh-But-Fair-(And-Funny)!

All players should know which style of game in which they'll be playing: it's

often not fun to be a Disney character in a Jay Ward *Fractured Fairytale* or vice-versa.

FAIRYTALE & NURSERY RHYME ADVENTURES

Fairytales – and nursery rhymes – make great inspirations for fairytale RPG adventures and campaigns. Take the basic plot set-up and characters, run some changes, throw in some twists that depend on the tone of your campaign and the nature of your characters, don't overthink, and *voila!* Instant adventure.

Let's take an example: *Rapunzel*. Barren wife asks husband to steal a witch's *rampion* (a plant grown for its leaves and roots, much like a turnip; also called *rapunzel*). Husband gets caught. The witch demands the child that will be born in return for all the rampion the wife has eaten. The child is born, and the witch names her Rapunzel and takes her away. Rapunzel grows up to be a long-haired beauty kept in a doorless tower by the witch; she lets down her impossibly long braids to allow the witch access.

And I think it possible that by confining your child to blameless stories of child life in which nothing alarming ever happens, you would fail to banish the terrors, and would succeed in banishing all that can ennoble them or make them endurable. For, in the fairy tales, side by side with the terrible figures, we find the immemorial comforters and protectors, the radiant ones; and the terrible figures are not merely terrible, but sublime.

– C. S. Lewis

That's enough to start with. Start playing with the ideas behind this simple foundation. Ask questions, like:

- ◆ Did the witch's rampion, eaten by Rapunzel's mother, have any effect on the unborn Rapunzel?
- ◆ Why does the witch need a child?
- ◆ What does the witch teach Rapunzel for twelve years until she locks her in the tower?

- ◆ Why does the witch hide the child away?
- ◆ Why is Rapunzel's hair so long?
- ◆ Why doesn't it hurt when people climb up Rapunzel's braids?

Come up with answers that interest you and that will interest your players. Perhaps the witch was growing the unbelievably delectable rampion as a magic herb, to be used in some sort of enchantment. Maybe a child is another component of the enchantment. Rapunzel, say, is locked up at age twelve to keep her pure and virginal. In which case, the length of her hair is a symbol and sign of the magic purpose that Rapunzel is destined for.

Now, connect the dots. The witch grew the (magical) rampion – purest of all earthly foods – as part of a spell to help her rejuvenate her gnarled and withered old hag's body. The woman who longed for the rampion was a lucky accident – if she had not conceived while eating the mystical herb, the witch would have killed her husband, then jumped the wall and killed her, too. However, there's a baby on the way, one who would be utterly pure, having fed only on the pure rampion since before her birth. The witch claims the child, and raises her for twelve years that are not mentioned in Grimm's tale, teaching her obedience to the witch's will and various and sundry minor magics (probably involving personal beauty, hygiene, and health). The witch then locks her up on her twelfth birthday, to protect Rapunzel's purity until her thirteenth year, when the ritual can be performed... the ritual to transfer the witch's wicked old soul into a new, fresh body.

(Alternately, consider the relationship between the Witch and Rapunzel in Sondheim's *Into the Woods*: the Witch sequesters Rapunzel simply to keep the child safe and protected, because the world is dark and wild, full of princes, yes, but wolves and humans, too.)

Enter the heroic PCs! Can they find the hidden tower in time? Can they find a way in? Can they thwart the longevity plans of a strategic long-term planner like the witch? What does Rapunzel think of all this? Will she resist the heroes' attempts to rescue her? (After all, she was raised by the witch, and this probably has instilled a great deal of faith in the crone's good nature. . .) What if she doesn't want to be freed?

The greatest danger in patterning adventures after well-known and well-beloved folktales is accidentally or intentionally forcing the players to follow

the course of action in the stories. . . unless the players are willing to run with that idea (akin to what Terry Pratchett's Discworld books call *Narrative Causality*: "if a story or legend is told often enough and believed by enough people, it becomes true").

If a GM should cast NPCs in the traditional roles of the story or legend, however, the GM can effectively mix Narrative Causality and player free will. Left to their own devices, the NPCs will play out the original story or rhyme. By getting involved, the PCs can change the outcome (though that might not be easy. Just because a spider has a tuffet doesn't mean Miss Muffet *has* to sit on it, but *boy* does she want to. The PCs will have to talk her out of it, restrain her, take her place or kick over the tuffet to make sure she doesn't sit down....)

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When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty, I read them openly. When I became a man, I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.

— C. S. Lewis

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CHAPTER 2

THE ZANTABULOUS LAND OF ZO

Zo is composed of five smaller countries: Azul in the East, Giallo in the West, Rosso in the South, Viola in the North, and Zo Proper in the middle of the other four. Throughout the Empire of Zo there are witches, dragons, ogres, Talking Animals and dumb beasts, fairies, lucky third sons, princesses, evil step-mothers, noble knights... everything a fairytale setting needs.

*Come faeries, take me out
of this dull world, for I
would ride with you upon
the wind and dance upon the
mountains like a flame.*

– W. B. Yeats

And if that's not enough, beyond the western plains, across (or beneath!) the seas, and even above the very clouds there are plenty of mysterious lands just waiting to be discovered!

TALKING ANIMALS

Unless otherwise noted, Talking Animals in Zo are semi-anthropomorphic – humanoid, bipedal, clothes-wearing and tool-using – yet still possess many animal traits.

If two Talking Animals of different species have children together (say, an Owl and a Pussycat), the children follow the same species as the parent they share gender with. Thus, if a male Owl and female Cat have children together, the boys will be owlets and the girls kittens.

*Our mother was the Pussy-Cat, our father was the Owl,
And so we're partly little beasts and partly little fowl,
The brothers of our family have feathers and they hoot,
While all the sisters dress in fur and have long tails to boot.
We all believe that little mice,
For Food are singularly nice.*

(See Edward Lear, *The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense*; Notes on "The Later History of the Owl and the Pussy-cat," p. 541, as well as *The Muppets' Christmas Carol* and Stan Sakai's comments on paternity in *Usagi Yojimbo*.)

DRAMATIC GEOGRAPHY & TRAVEL

Distances -- and therefore rates of travel -- in Zo are related more to narrative necessity than empirical leagues or miles per hour. (See also the Time, Range, & Speed textbox on p. 32.)

AZUL

The kingdom of Azul is rich in farmland and forest. Indeed, the finest lumber in the Zantabulous Land of Zo comes from Azul's famed *Fogwood*. Rosson ships come into Azulite port cities and load up on lumber, corn, root vegetables, *blueleaf* (a plant whose dried leaves burn with a pleasant scent), *heatwheat* (a nearly inedible grain that makes a tasty beverage when brewed, grown almost exclusively near the *Bottomless Chasm*), and all sorts of fruits and berries to ship around Zo and beyond. Azulites are known for their industriousness and perseverance. The livery of Azul is blue.



Unlike Rosso and Viola, the kingdom of Azul lacks a single official ruler. Due to dynastic manipulations there are two large Counties: *Cobaltia* and *Indigon*. Unfortunately, the heir to Indigon disappeared as a child; some say she was thrown into the *Bottomless Chasm* and is still falling to this day. However, since every seer or witch who has used their arts is *positive* that the Heir yet lives, the two Counties cannot – by Azulite law – be recombined.

Thus, the brilliant *Count Alphonse of Cobaltia* cannot easily become the King of Azul, though he desperately wishes it. Until the Heir returns, the individual villages of Indigon are run by their Mayors, who appeal to the Count as an impartial observer when they run into conflicts. Though it's sometimes

difficult to tell if the Count is *truly* impartial, given the number of his interests and agents sent from *Castle Bluerock* to roam the countryside.

Notable Azulites include *the Blue Hood* (a bandit queen and renowned archer who harries the Count's men from her lair in Fogwood), the *Wickerwalker* (a mysterious and monstrous construct made of reeds and weeds), and the *Stitch-witch* (a nasty middle-aged woman wise in the ways of needle and thread).

GIALLO

Giallo is the breadbasket of the Zo Empire. The grains and (dumb) animal products like meat, leather, cheese, and milk of the patchwork of small nations that comprise this kingdom feed the rest of the Empire. The *Rushing River* divides Giallo from its neighbor Viola. There are only two ways to cross the gap: the *Viola Bridge* and *Brooz Ford*. Far to the west, over the Pancake Plains, there are other mysterious countries that sometimes send trade caravans and receive Giallon ones. The livery of Giallo is yellow.

ElFox



Giallons are known for their courage and pragmatism. Sturdy and stoic, if a little dull and uncultured, they are the backbone of the Imperial citizenry. They are taciturn and straightforward in word and action, and cultivate determined independence. The Giallon sense of justice and fairness is strong.

Even moreso than Azul, Giallo is composed of innumerable small fiefdoms. In theory, there should be a King or Queen to rule over all of the smaller lands, but the royal line died out a hundred years ago. Since the Zorcerer did not appoint a new ruler, the various Princes, Princesses, Dukes, Duchesses, Earls, Marchionesses, Counts, Countesses, Marquises, Marquessas, Lords, and Ladies meet every two years at the *Great Giallo Convention* to thrash out any problems.

Notable Giallons include the *Marquis de Carabas* (an extremely cultured feline aristocrat), the *Roly-Poly Prince* (a hugely fat pocket-tyrant), and the reclusive *Snow Witch* (who frostily holds herself apart from the hustle and bustle to concentrate on deeper issues).

ROSSO

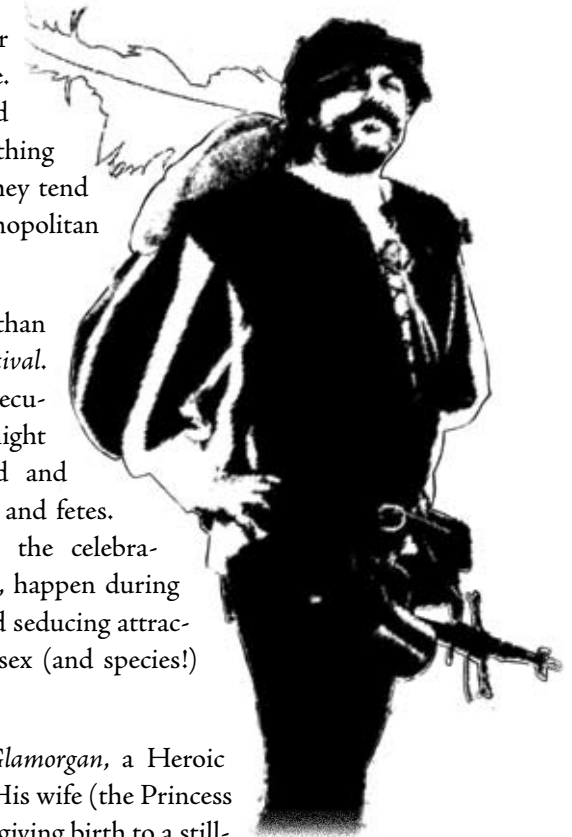
The kingdom of Rosso is the maritime trading capital of the Zo Empire. Ships set sail every day from its port cities for numerous reasons: adventure merchants carrying goods to and from the mysterious lands of Oversea, hardworking fishermen chasing the elusive schools in the Southern Sea, and scurvy pirates seeking unsuspecting targets to waylay. Inland, the farmers of Rosso raise legumes, olives, citrus fruits, spices (including the amazingly hot *firebean*), as well as plants for dye-making. The livery of Rosso is red.

Rossons are known for their adventurous and romantic nature. Passion rules their thoughts and deeds – a Rosson feels everything intensely (and often loudly). They tend to be florid of completion, cosmopolitan in nature, and baroque in style.

Nowhere is this more evident than during the annual *Crimson Festival*. The festival runs for three consecutive nights, lasting from midnight to dawn. Revelers go masked and costumed to hundreds of galas and fetes. A sense of misrule pervades the celebrations – anything can, and does, happen during Festival. Carousing, dueling, and seducing attractive members of the preferred sex (and species!) are par for the course.

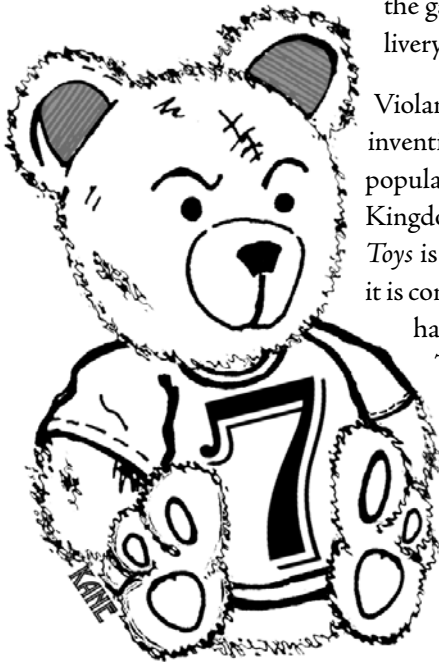
The ruler of Rosso is *King Glamorgan*, a Heroic Prince now run to middle-age. His wife (the Princess Charma) died sixteen years ago giving birth to a still-born child. He currently has no heir, which makes the *Carmine Palace* seem ever larger and emptier than it really is.

Rosso is also home to *Hella*, the Fire Fairy (a nasty sort given to pyromania), *Captain Mouse* (the feared captain of the pirate ship *Rat Trap*), and poor *Princess Morphea* (cursed these past twenty years to sleep until awakened by True Love's Kiss in Castle Slumber).



VIOLA

Viola is a mountainous country, full of hill villages and bountiful valleys. The majority of the mining, crafting, and industry of the Zo Empire happens here. Copper, tin, iron, gold, silver and more are found threaded through the mighty ranges, and the most beautiful and scintillating colors of marble are taken from its quarries. Its apples compare well with Azulite breeds, but the *Violander purplepear* is more flavorful than any competitor. *Violander* goats – Dumb Beasts rather than Talking Animals (the very idea!) -- produce wonderful milk that makes a fine cheese. The *Rushing River* flows out of *Windy Gap* and divides Viola and its neighbor *Giallo*, and there are only two ways to cross the gap: the *Viola Bridge* and *Brooz Ford*. The livery of Viola is purple.



Violanders are known for their intellect and inventiveness; also, Viola has a slightly higher population of magical folk than any other Kingdom of Zo. While the *Island of Forgotten Toys* is off the coast, and technically sovereign, it is considered as essentially part of Viola. This has led to Talking Animals and Living Toys being considered as Viola citizens utterly and completely, without any reservation or prejudice – indeed, Viola is one of the most accepting places in the Empire to live (perhaps even more than the cosmopolitan Jade City in Zo Proper).

Princess Paige is the ruler of Viola; she is not Queen yet because she is only twelve. Given more to her studies of literature, grammar, and witchery, she's adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude about governance, though she does her duty when required to (and when her chamberlains can pry her nose out of the book she's currently reading).

Other notable *Violanders* include the standoffish *Quellabaum* (King of the Winged Monkeys, which live on Razor Peak) and the *Tyrant Stig* (a barbaric ogre overlord).

ZO PROPER

Zo Proper is the metropole of the Zo Empire, and the personal holding of the *Zorcerer of Zo* him-/her-/itself. He/she/it rules from *Jade City*. The fields of Zo Proper are covered in brilliant green flowers called *bottleblooms*, and a more useful plant cannot be found. Bottlebloom flowers can be drained of copious amounts of sweet, effervescent nectar, and then the blossoms can be dried and eaten as candy. The seeds of the plant are nutritious and filling. The stalks can be used directly in weaving, or processed in one way to produce paper and in another to produce cloth. The leaves are a tasty preservative herb, and can also be dried and burned like incense. The hills of Zo Proper support *greenfleece sheep*, Dumb Beasts with exceedingly fine, smooth, silky wool. Strange opaque gems called *fenjades* are often found in its swamplier regions. The livery of Zo Proper is green; Imperial livery is green and gold.

Zolanders are known for their keenness of observation and exquisite manners. They also excel at writing, singing, acting, painting, sculpture, and other artistic pursuits. Indeed, anything requiring attention to detail is fair game for a *Zolander*; they make the finest jewelry, the best clocks, and the most ingenious toys. Fashions are made and broken in Jade City, and nearly every wealthy or powerful individual in the entire Empire has or desires to have a small house there. Many of the movers and shakers of the Empire have attended *Lime University*, located within the Jade City. However, their overwhelming politeness and mannered speech leads many other inhabitants of other Kingdoms to see them as insincere, pretentious, or inscrutable.

Other than the *Zorcerer* (see below), notable *Zolanders* include the *Smiling Soldier* (captain of the Imperial Guard and valiant knight) and *Ilsa Hund* (famed minstrel and gossip-monger).

THE RETURN OF THE WOLF

In a fairytale land, how scary must a bedtime story be to frighten even the doughtiest hero? Invariably, such a story revolves around the Gray Wind, Murder on Four Legs, the Immortal One: *Shaykosch*, the Deathless Wolf.

*F*aerie is a perilous land,
and in it are pitfalls for
the unwary, and dungeons for
the overbold.

– J. R. R. Tolkien



It is said that Shaykosch has once again returned from the grave. He, and his numerous wicked followers, sow discord throughout the Zantabulous Land of Zo. Beast, sorcerer, and shapeshifter, he stalks the land and wreaks havoc, trying to sate his all-consuming hunger.

While every few decades, a new hero puts the Wolf down, eventually the monster rises again in the huffing and puffing wind.

The Blue Tailor stopped him once, stitching his shadow to a rock with magic needle and thread, then dropping the rock into Bottomless Chasm. The Wooden Pirate filleted him on the Southern Sea, scattering the Wolf's guts as chum for the Lightning Sharks. Another time, the Horse Prince trampled him into the muddy fields of Giallo after a long, running battle. Theodora the Witch Girl matched him spell for spell, and finally triumphed. And there are a dozen other tales and deaths and returns.

Who will stop him this time? And how? Will some brave soul beg the Zorcerer to stretch forth his power? Or would collecting the magical weapons used against Shaykosch in the past be helpful? Who knows?

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM

The information in this chapter was expanded and refined either during play or in the writing of this book for publication. For the original setting description handed out to the players, see the Proto Zo textbox on p. viii.

THE ZORCERER!

The Zorcerer of Zo is a mystery. Despite centuries of rule, few have seen the sovereign of the land. No one knows if this being is male or female, or human or Talking Animal. Audiences with the Zorcerer are rare.

While he/she/it rules from Jade City in theory, in practice the Zorcerer rarely exercises power directly. Instead, the Zorcerer works through trusted agents,

like the Smiling Soldier and other Imperial officers and Ministers. When the Zorcerer does issue direct commands to his (her? its?) subjects, they are usually transmitted by Imperial letter, writ on creamy green paper, in dark green ink, impressively sealed and beribboned, and carried by a Dumb Beast courier that glows faint green.

The Zorcerer uses the royal “we” when referring to himself (herself? itself?).

On those few occasions when the Zorcerer is thought to take a direct hand, there is thunder, lightning, fire, winds, great confusion, and a dramatic, huge effect. (It's rumored that there once was a village that refused to follow the Zorcerer's edicts. . . It's better known now as the Bottomless Chasm.)

WHO IS THE ZORCERER?

No one knows. Here are some theories:

Clockwork Man. Some Zolandans believe the Zorcerer is an antique Clockwork Man, who has learned strange new mechanical magics.

Jack. Many people claim that the Zorcerer is really the famous Jack, hero of the Empire. His stories are legend. *That* Jack: Jack Be Nimble, Jack & the Beanstalk, the Jack who went up the Hill with Jill, Jack the Giant-Killer, Jack Spratt who could eat no fat.

No one. A few iconoclasts hold that there is no Zorcerer at all, but is a front used by others – like the Smiling Soldier – to keep the peace between the powerful nobles of the Kingdoms.

Otherworlder. Some wizards and witches hold that the Zorcerer is an Otherworlder come to Zo, using strange Otherworldly magics to work his (her? its?) will and rule the Empire.

Shaykosch. A handful of lunatics believe that Shaykosch, the Deathless Wolf, is really the Zorcerer. He rules with an iron fist to provide himself with a private playground of horror and destruction.

Somebody Innocuous. The Zorcerer is just some person (probably a commoner, possibly a Talking Beast, Living Toy, or Living Confection) that couldn't rule outright because of the nature of their birth, their appearance, or the nature of their existence.

Zolion. Some Zolanders think the Zorcerer is the first savior of Zo, Zolion, now immortal but very aged. Some folks think the Zorcerer is the *ghost* of Zolion, hanging around to make sure all is well! (See also the *Behind the Curtain: Lionism* textbox on p. 148.)

WHAT IS ZORCERY?

No one knows -- and that's probably why everyone is so scared of it! Here are some theories:

Control of the Mindless. Zorcery permits the control and manipulation of anything lacking a human-equivalent mind. This includes rocks, trees, wind, fire, and so on – even Dumb Beasts.

Flimflam. Zorcery is a hoax. It's utter twaddle, perhaps with a bit of bosh mixed in.

Mechanical Enchantments. Zorcery is a fusion of magic and machinery, more powerful than either is separate. It may be that Zorcery is where Living Toys come from.

Nth Degree Wizardry. Zorcery is simply magic-using ability – call it wizardry or sorcery or witchery – so advanced that it needed a new name.

Otherworldly Devices. Zorcery is the knowledge and use of weird Other-worldly devices to perform miraculous deeds like speedy travel (60 miles an hour!), long distance communication (“Watson, come here, I need you”), or learning all the facts about something (enter “log cabin” into the search engine).

True Naming. Zorcery is the creation, influence, alteration, and destruction of things and ideas through use of their secret True Name. Proper use of a True Name may turn a Dumb Beast into a Talking Animal.

The fey wonders of the world only exist while there are those with the sight to see them.

– Charles de Lint

CHAPTER 3 ZORCERER OF ZO RULES

The way to read a fairy tale is to throw yourself in.

– W. H. Auden

his chapter gives a “Good Parts” version of the PDQ rules, so that players can have a basic understanding of how the system works before creating characters (see the textbox below).

The core design concept of PDQ-based games is of prose, descriptive, do-it-yourself, wide-ranging *Qualities* that summarize a range of attributes, advantages, merits, flaws, skills, relationships, or incapacities. Qualities are a measure of story-effectiveness rather than reality simulation, and are intended to be ranked against and compared to one another.

The *PDQ Master Chart* (see below) is the foundation of this scheme. When attempting a task, players roll 2d6, plus the Modifier – or MOD – from the Rank of the ability they are using to determine whether or not they succeed.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (GOOD PARTS VERSION)

Initially in the ZoZ campaign, we started by using the version of PDQ that appears in Truth & Justice. However, as the game continued, we found that we were using less and less of all the bells and whistles – less, even, than those offered in the free PDQ Core Rules PDF on the Atomic Sock Monkey Press website.

Thus, for the purposes of ZoZ, I'm replicating the “good parts” version we used. It is, in itself, a complete game system, a “lite” version of PDQ. Some of the details trimmed from this version of PDQ include such topics like “Armor-like” Qualities in Conflict, Weaknesses in Conflict, Using Different Types of Conflict, Using Qualities Against Multiple Targets, The Key to Understanding Conflict Abstraction, and other bits of Conflict Jazz.

For those players and GMs who want more detailed discussions and additional refinements of the system, please see the PDQ Core Rules download or any one of the various PDQ-based games.

PDQ MASTER CHART

LEVEL	AS QUALITY RANK	MODIFIER TO 2D6 ROLL	AS DIFFICULTY RANK	TARGET NUMBER
Poor	Notably Inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
Average	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
Good	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
Expert	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (Average).	11
Master	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (Good).	13

QUALITIES

Qualities describe a character's noteworthy talents, skills, relationships, resources, and flaws. The player selects a word or phrase to sum up what they want the character to be like or things they are able to do, and the GM will then agree to or veto the Quality. A Quality represents a broad skill, field of knowledge, unique perspective, personality trait, special gift, or social connection.

If a particular Quality is relevant *at all* to an action or topic, the character may apply it when attempting that action or understanding that topic. This is called the *penumbra* (or "shadow") of the Quality. Therefore, a player shouldn't pick Qualities that are too narrow or its penumbra will be too narrow; too broad, and identifying the sorts of things that should fall under the penumbra becomes pointless. Proper word choice is key. The parameters for what's "too broad" or "too narrow" are up to the individual GM.

Consider a character that has the Quality of "Smith." For some ZoZ games, that will be perfectly fine; for others, too broad. The GM might ask the player to refine the Quality, to give a better idea of the sorts of things that will fall under its penumbra. So: "Smith" could become "Armorer," "Blacksmith," or

"Goldsmith." While all would cover the basic concept of metalworking, each individual choice brings different skills under the penumbra – not just the specific field of interest, but also knowledge related to it. For example, the Armorer would have more experience with crafting protective equipment and would have connections among the knights and nobles who use his gear, the Blacksmith would know more about creating and repairing agricultural tools and how to shoe a horse, and the Goldsmith would be better at working with precious metals and estimating the value of jewelry.

Qualities are often drawn from ten general areas:

- ◆ **Personality.** Over-arching traits having to do with questions of "what is this character like?" and "how does the character think about or approach things?" Personality Qualities also remind the player of how he or she plans to play the character.
- ◆ **Heritage.** Abilities or knowledge gained from a character's species or nationality.
- ◆ **Physical.** Having to do with the body, athleticism, or natural talents.
- ◆ **Mental.** Areas of study, intellectual acuity, education.
- ◆ **Social.** Groups the character is a member of or associates with, skills in dealing with people.
- ◆ **Professional.** Knowledge and skills picked up on the job.
- ◆ **Gift.** Inherent, often supernatural, talents that enable the character to perform specific amazing feats (*being* magic; see below, *ZoZ Magic*, p. 47).
- ◆ **Magic-Star Qualities.** Abilities that permit the character to do a wide-range of mystical effects (*doing* magic; see below, *ZoZ Magic*, p. 47).
- ◆ **Sidekicks & Pets.** Some characters have special friends, talented servants, trained riding mounts, or helpful pets. Usually, the PC controls the Sidekick or Pet, but sometimes, the GM can take control.
- ◆ **Special Tools.** While a character is assumed to have access to most normal tools and things related to their other Qualities, some pieces of special equipment – like magic swords, enchanted slippers, a crystal ball, etc. – can be considered a separate Quality. Unlike most Qualities, Special Tools can be taken away from a character (usually only temporarily), lost, or broken.

IMPORTANT NOTE – If a PC wants to be particularly better at some Quality that might normally fall under the penumbra of another Quality (for example, taking “Knight” and “Swordplay” separately), it is perfectly okay to do so, provided that the player realizes that in exchange for the benefit of being able to use both Qualities at the same time (adding the MODs together; see below, *Using Multiple Qualities for Tasks*, p. 35) when they swing a longsword, this character generation choice limits the breadth of what the character can do.

QUALITY EXAMPLES

Personality: Thoughtful, Empathic, Obsessive, Spoilsport, Friendly, Prankster, Perceptive.

Heritage: Talking Animal, Aristocrat, Living Toy, Zolander Citizen, Fairy-blooded, Seventh Son of a Seventh Son.

Physical: Swordplay, Wrasslin’, Handsome, Strong, Dancer, Tough.

Mental: Philosophy, Fine Food and Drink, Heraldry, Strategy, Smart.

Social: Mendicant Friar, Elf-Friend, Conversationalist, Intimidating Guy, Charming, True Love for Princess Gwen.

Professional: Merchant, Smith, Knight, Farmer, Sailor, Bounty Hunter, Woodcutter.

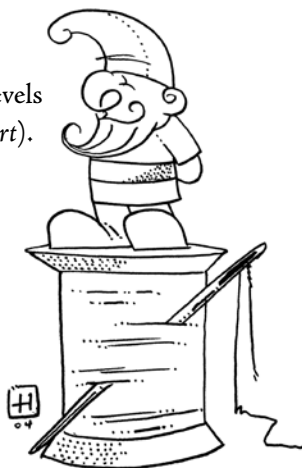
Gift: Speak with Animals, Fly Like a Bird, Witch-smeller, Fireproof.

Special Tools: Flying Broom, Invisibility Cloak, Magic Lamp, Iron Shoes, Singing Sword.

QUALITY RANKS

Qualities have Ranks that indicate increasing levels of proficiency (see also the *PDQ Master Chart*). From lowest to highest, the Ranks are:

- ◆ Poor [-2];
- ◆ Average [0];
- ◆ Good [+2];
- ◆ Expert [+4]; and
- ◆ Master [+6].



The numbers in square brackets following the Rank of the Quality show the Rank’s *Modifier* (or MOD) – how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll for resolving a task (see below).

Characters have some things going for them (*Strengths*), which have positive Modifiers, and at least one thing working against them (*Weakness*), which has a negative Modifier.

IMPORTANT NOTE – At everything else, characters are neither noteworthy nor inept – that is, they’re Average [0]. They can attempt a 2d6 roll for any task, knowledge, or skill that is not specifically secret, technical, or esoteric; magic often counts as secret, technical, or esoteric. That is, while any character can look for the secret door in the library, it’s doubtful they’ll be able to successfully cast a spell from the grimoire found in the hidden nook without at least one magical Quality.

A *Strength* is an inherent positive aspect (benefit, skill, talent, attribute, relationship) of a character. Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the Strength. (Strengths can be any Rank of Average [0] or greater.)

A *Weakness* is an inherent negative aspect of the character, stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, a recurring duty, or some other vulnerability. The Weakness selected tells the GM what flaw or weak point in the character that the player wishes to explore. A word of advice: pick something that will be fun or entertaining to play – and flub at! Furthermore, when a Weakness comes into play, the PC gets a *Hero Point* (see below). Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the Weakness. Weaknesses are always Poor [-2] Rank.

Depending how the Quality is considered when creating the character, any Quality could be either a Strength or a Weakness. For example, suppose a character has “Spoiled Brat” as a Quality. If it’s ranked Average or above, it’s a Strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might have lots of cash or possessions, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has “Spoiled Brat (Poor),” this is a Weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

During character generation (see *Chapter 4*), players choose between several “packages” of Qualities and Ranks. They pick whether to have many Qualities at a low Rank or few Qualities at a high Rank.

EXAMPLE: SAMPLE CHARACTERS AND QUALITIES

Here are two simple characters and their Qualities:

Fred Highman. Good [+2] Bandit, Good [+2] Friendly, Poor [-2] Ugly.

Sir Liam of Azul. Good [+2] Knight, Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Good [+2] True Love for Princess Gwen, Poor [-2] Singer.

Never fear: if after play begins, a particular Quality sees no use and doesn't really add to the characterization of a PC, then the player and the GM can work together change it to something that fits better.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (NO SPECIES-ISM HERE)

Though both PCs in the campaign I ran were basically Talking Animals, neither took it as a Quality, nor did they take Nationality as a formal Quality (just part of their Background – see Chapter 4). As GM, I figured it wasn't important to our campaign, then – and this led to the general "hey, whatever" feel regarding species and nationality within our version of the Zantabulous Land of Zo. Other peoples' Zo games might be different. . .

SPECIAL MOVES!

PCs can develop up to two *Special Moves* for one or two of their Qualities, either at character generation or during play. Special Moves are focused maneuvers – like "Two-handed Strike!" under "Swordsmanship" – or limited fields of interest – "Dragon Lore!" under "Natural Philosopher" – that grant a bonus (see p.) to a narrow set of relevant tasks. They are usually marked with an exclamation point to distinguish them from Qualities.

New Special Moves are gained after play begins by spending *Learning Points* (see below and *Chapter 4, Improvement*, p. 71).

DIFFICULTY RANKS

Difficulty Ranks are like Quality Ranks for things, tasks, and situations, and show how challenging a thing, task, or situation is. A wall that must be climbed, a spell that must be cast, a lock that must be picked, a swaying rope bridge that must be crossed, a trap that must be disarmed, a palace guard that must be sneaked past, a curse that must be broken, and so forth.

The GM looks at the *PDQ Master Chart* (see p. 26), and sets the Difficulty Rank of the task. From lowest to highest, the Ranks are:

- ◆ **Poor** [5];
- ◆ **Average** [7];
- ◆ **Good** [9];
- ◆ **Expert** [11]; and
- ◆ **Master** [13].

The numbers in square brackets following the Difficulty Rank show its *Target Number* (or TN) – the number a character must roll on 2d6 (plus any Modifiers) to succeed or conquer the task.

NOTE - Some GMs may wish to include Difficulty Ranks of *Improbable* [19] and *Impossible* [25+] for really challenging tasks that only the "best of the best" (under optimum conditions) and the magically-gifted have a chance of succeeding at. However, this is purely optional.

Setting Difficulty Ranks follows basic common sense when using the chart: if a task is dead easy, it's probably *Poor* Difficulty; if it's really complicated, it's probably *Expert* Difficulty. GMs will usually figure out many Difficulty Ranks in advance when designing an adventure for players, but the simplicity of the *PDQ Master Chart* makes it easy to determine the complexity of a task that comes up in play.

In short, oddities only strike ordinary people. Oddities do not strike odd people. This is why ordinary people have a much more exciting time; while odd people are always complaining of the dullness of life. This is also why the new novels die so quickly, and why the old fairy tales endure for ever. The old fairy tale makes the hero a normal human boy; it is his adventures that are startling; they startle him because he is normal. But in the modern psychological novel the hero is abnormal; the centre is not central. Hence the fiercest adventures fail to affect him adequately, and the book is monotonous. You can make a story out of a hero among dragons; but not out of a dragon among dragons. The fairy tale discusses what a sane man will do in a mad world. The sober realistic novel of to-day discusses what an essential lunatic will do in a dull world.

– G. K. Chesterton

TIME, RANGE, & SPEED

For most things that come up in a ZoZ game, the following information is sufficient to help GMs set the Difficulty Ranks for various tasks involving Time, Range, and Speed.

TIME

For most purposes, time measurements are as normal: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc. However, the terms used in ZoZ for identifying the passage of “game time” are: Scenes, Turns, actions, and reactions.

Scenes are however long it takes for a distinct action or set of actions (combat, library research, defusing a bomb, a business meeting, traveling across town, etc.) to happen. Scenes can be long or short, and can collapse or extend time as necessary.

A **Turn** means “the set of all characters’ next actions and reactions.” Each character takes an individual **action**: that’s when they make their move, say their piece, throw a punch, etc. Other characters **react** during a character’s action – saying something back or performing a defense, usually – but reactions can only be in response to the actions of the character whose turn it currently is. They cannot initiate moves of their own until their action. The Turn is over when each character’s action and any resulting reactions have been resolved.

How the Scenes and Turns of game time relate to the seconds, minutes, hours, etc., of real time is variable.

RANGE

In ZoZ, ranges are either **Near** (can punch it), **Middling** (can run up and punch it), **Far** (can throw or shoot at it), or **Too Far** (out of range). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Ranges, then Near is equivalent to Average [7], Middling is equivalent to Good [9], and so forth.

SPEED

In ZoZ, speeds are either **Slow** (leisurely walk), **Medium** (normal trot), **Fast** (a hurried trot or lope), or **Lickety-Split** (rapid gallop). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Speeds, then Slow is equivalent to Average [7], Medium is equivalent to Good [9], and so forth.

UPSHIFTS & DOWNSHIFTS

UPSHIFTS

If the player describes his character’s attempt to perform an action in a graphic, flavorful, and amusing way; attempts something *really cool*; or uses certain rules like Hero Points or Special Moves, then the GM can give them an *Upshift* to his roll. An Upshift means that for that particular action, the PC rolls as if their Quality were one Rank higher than it was (essentially giving an additional +2 to their roll). If a PC has a Good [+2] Hagglng Quality and gets an Upshift, this would change his roll when bargaining with a merchant from 2d6+2 to 2d6+4, as if he were Expert [+4] Rank.

NOTE - Each Upshift above Master Rank adds an *extra die* to the character’s roll (i.e., instead of rolling 2d6+6+2, the character rolls 3d6+6 for 1 Upshift, 4d6+6 for 2 Upshifts, and so forth).

DOWNSHIFTS

A *Downshift* means that for the action in question, there has been a sudden and unexpected change in the complexity of the situation. The PC rolls as if his ability were one Rank lower (essentially giving him a -2 to his roll). While *functionally* the same thing as a temporary Weakness (a -2 to a 2d6 plus Modifiers roll), the reasons behind having a Weakness or incurring Downshifts are different.

For example, Joe has a *Weakness* of Poor [-2] Ugly. If he tries to charm the woman sitting on the barstool next to his, he’ll roll 2d6-2. That’s just par for the course, his Weakness affecting that particular situation. However, if Joe’s brother Jim (who is not Ugly) attempts to start up a conversation with the woman immediately after she’s been insulted by her ex-best friend, a Downshift may come into play.

While judicious use of Downshifts to make a task more challenging is perfectly fine, GMs should resist the temptation to *overuse* Downshifts as situational modifiers. ZoZ games tend to run more smoothly if the GM simply sets the Difficulty Rank (and thus, Target Number) of a task appropriately. For example, if the PCs are attempting to climb an Average [7] Difficulty wall and it begins to rain, then a Downshift to relevant abilities makes sense. However,

if it's already raining when they begin their attempt, simply make the wall Good [9] difficulty from the get-go.

NOTE - Abilities Downshifted below Poor Rank mean automatic failure in the use of that ability.

Downshifts are most commonly encountered as a magical effect or part of the Damage system of ZoZ (see below).

SHIFT ACCUMULATION

In ZoZ, all Upshifts, Downshifts, and bonus dice are cumulative – they all add together. A character with three Upshifts (from being cool, giving a flavorful description, and spending Hero Points) and one Downshift ends up with a +4 to their roll ($2+2+2-2=4$).

TASK RESOLUTION

When a character tries to do something, the GM will determine if the task is a *simple situation*, a *complicated situation*, or a *conflict situation*. Let's take each in turn.

SIMPLE SITUATIONS

In *simple situations*, the task is clear-cut, there are no outstanding issues interfering with the attempted action, there is plenty of time to attempt the task, or randomness would bog down the game. In a simple situation, the GM looks at the *PDQ Master Chart* (see p. 26), and determines the Difficulty Rank of the task. Then, the GM compares that Difficulty Rank to the character's most appropriate Quality Rank. If the character's ability is higher than the Difficulty Rank, the character succeeds. Otherwise, the task becomes a *complicated situation* (see p. 35).

EXAMPLES

While investigating an enchanted forest, Sir Liam (see above, p. 30) needs to climb a tree to reach a castle in the branches. He convinces the GM that he should be able to use his Good [+2] Outdoorsman Quality. Liam automatically succeeds in scaling Poor [5] and Average [7] Difficulty trees; for him, these are simple situations. If a tree is Good [9] Difficulty, it becomes a complicated situation.

If Fred Highman (see above, p. 30) wanted to climb a tree, he has no applicable Quality, and so would have to use his "default" Quality Rank of Average [0]. This means he can only automatically succeed in climbing Poor [5] Difficulty trees – all others are complicated situations for him.

USING MULTIPLE QUALITIES FOR TASKS

If the GM agrees that multiple Qualities can be brought to bear on a task (be it simple, complicated, or conflict), then the character simply combines the MODs for all relevant Qualities when rolling.

Furthermore, combining multiple Qualities also works if multiple characters wish to team-up to perform a task. If several characters are joining forces, only one of them needs to roll; usually, that's the character with the highest Initiative, but GMs can determine this as appropriate.

COMPLICATED SITUATIONS

Dice rolls are made in *complicated situations*: where comparisons of Rank are inconclusive, or when randomness is desired. Complicated situations are when Quality and Difficulty Ranks are tied, or when ability Rank is lower than Difficulty Rank. To attempt a complicated situation, the PC rolls two regular six-sided dice (2d6), and adds the Modifier for their ability Rank. To succeed, the PC must match or beat the Target Number of the task's Difficulty Rank.

If the PC fails, they may or may not get hurt or discouraged in the attempt (see below, *Damage*, p. 40), and may or may not be able to try the task again, as the GM dictates. **Failing in a complicated situation automatically grants the character a Learning Point** (see below, p. 46).

EXAMPLES

The tree that Liam needs to climb is, unfortunately, Good [9] Difficulty. Comparing this to Liam's Good [+2] Outdoorsman Quality makes this a complicated situation. Liam rolls 2d6+2 and must match or beat the tree's Target Number of 9. He rolls a 3 and a 5, plus 2, for a total of 10. Liam climbs the tree successfully.

Somewhere else, Fred is trying to climb a Good [9] Difficulty tree himself. Since he doesn't have any applicable Quality, this is definitely a complicated situation for him. Fred rolls 2d6 and must match or beat the tree's Target

Number of 9. He rolls a 3 and a 5, for a total of 8. Fred fails to climb the tree, but the GM decides he didn't fall far enough to get hurt. Fred gets a Learning Point.

When a character's Qualities are set against the Qualities of other characters, this isn't just complicated, it's a *conflict situation* (see below).

CONFLICT SITUATIONS

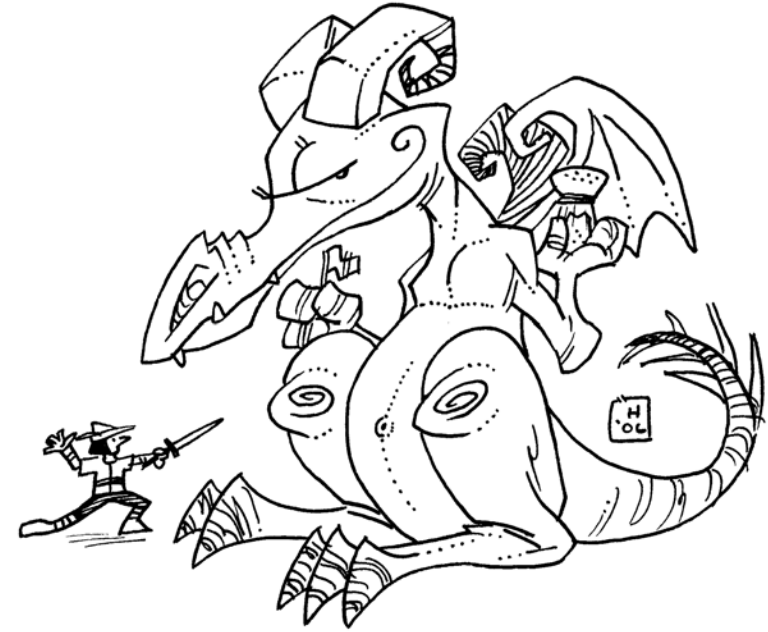
Conflict situations involve active resistance to a character's attempts to perform a task: trying to punch a goblin in the face, out-thinking a chess player, haggling for a camel, casting a spell, running a race, or convincing a guardsman that you *do* belong in the palace courtyard at midnight. Conflict situations in ZoZ include more than just the immediate success or failure of an attempted action; here, conflict includes the back and forth of an active contest, outmaneuvering the competition, and wearing down an opponent's resistance. Examples of conflict situations include combat, seduction, haggling, debating, and so forth. (Note that some gaming groups won't necessarily want to use the conflict situation mechanics to resolve social interactions, and may want to rely on pure roleplaying or a combination of roleplaying and rules instead; but the methodology exists if a group wishes to use it.)

There are several types of conflict situations that can arise, which can be associated with the different sorts of ZoZ abilities. *Physical conflicts* include combat and non-fighting contests of strength or skill. *Mental conflicts* could represent puzzles, analyzing clues, argumentative debate, and battles of wit. *Emotional conflicts* can involve psychological issues internal or external. *Social conflicts* are connected to relationships with other people, groups, and society at large. *Professional conflicts* involve business dealings and corporate skullduggery. *Magical conflicts* involve the use of supernatural powers, skills, or items.

There are two levels of conflict resolution: *basic* and *advanced*. Failing a roll in conflict does **not** earn Learning Points like failing a roll for a complicated situation.

BASIC CONFLICT

In *basic conflict situations* that would be **dull to play out in detail** or need to be resolved quickly (archery contests, picking a lock, playing chess), the char-



acters involved roll. Then they compare the results of their 2d6 plus MOD rolls and the highest successful result wins the entire task. The *loser* of the conflict might take temporary Ranks of damage (see below, *Damage*), which could be physical injury or mental confusion, equal to the difference between the higher roll and the lower roll. If the rolls are tied, each participant takes one Rank of damage. Basic combat damage can affect other tasks happening during the same Scene, carries into the next Scene, or be instantly restored at the GM's option. (Whichever Quality is chosen to "take the hit" in basic conflict can generate a *Story Hook*; see the textbox below for more details.)

BASIC CONFLICT EXAMPLE

Liam and Fred must run a race, which the GM determines will be a basic conflict. Neither has any running or athletic type Qualities, so both are just rolling 2d6.

They roll simultaneously; Liam gets a 4 and a 5 for a total of 9, and Fred gets two 3s for a total of 6.

Liam wins the race; Fred loses the race, and the GM may have him take 3 Failure Ranks (see below) temporarily to represent his being winded from running.

ADVANCED CONFLICT

For *advanced conflict situations* that would be **fun to play out in detail** (combat, chases, witty repartee, poker games), the characters involved *take turns* rolling and comparing their 2d6 plus MOD rolls; this process is described further below. Again, the highest successful result wins, but this time, only the *loser* of the conflict takes damage (see below, *Damage*), unless the roll results are tied, which means each participant takes one Rank of damage. Repeat as many times as necessary to determine overall victory (see below, *Zeroing Out*).

The determination of “what would be dull” and “what would be fun” is, of course, totally up to the individual GM and group, and can change on an *ad hoc* basis.

ADVANCED CONFLICT PROCESS

Advanced conflict situations follow a straightforward process:

1. Who Goes First? (*Initiative*)
2. What Does the Attacker Do? (*Actions*)
3. What Does the Defender Do? (*Reactions*)
4. What Happens? (*Results*)
5. Did That Hurt? (*Damage*)
6. When is It Over? (*Zeroing Out*)
7. I Got Better! (*Recovering from Damage*)

INITIATIVE

Initiative determines who acts first in a conflict. For NPCs, roll 1d6 to determine the order they act in, from high to low. (In case of a tie, NPCs go in reverse alphabetical order.) **Unless they are surprised, PCs always have the initiative (effectively a 7).**

NOTE - If a group wants more randomness in determining initiative, roll 2d6, adding any relevant MODs, and go in high to low order.

ADVANCED CONFLICT EXAMPLE: INITIATIVE

Liam rolls a 4, and Fred rolls a 1. Liam goes first.

ACTIONS

The attacker *must* explain what his attempted action is, and rolls 2d6 for his relevant Quality (or Qualities) and adds the appropriate MOD(s) for Rank. The defender will be doing much the same (see below).

ADVANCED CONFLICT EXAMPLE: ACTIONS

Liam is going to swing his sword at Fred's head. He rolls 3 and 4, +2 (from Knight), for a total of 9.

REACTIONS

The defender *must* explain how he'd try to counter the attacker's action, and rolls 2d6 for his relevant Quality (or Qualities) and adds the appropriate MOD(s) for Rank. A defensive reaction is simply how the defender wishes to *counter* the attacker's action; it is not a free attack. If Fred throws a rock at Liam, the Knight can deflect or grab the rock, but he cannot throw it back at Fred – that has to wait for Liam's next action. If you choose not to decide (i.e., “stand there and hope he misses”), you still have made a choice – and get to roll 2d6 (no modifiers).

ADVANCED CONFLICT EXAMPLE: REACTIONS

Fred is going to parry Liam's sword with his club. He rolls 3 and 2, +2 (from Bandit), for a total of 7.

RESULTS

The attacker and defender's rolls are compared, and the character with the higher total wins.

If the attacker is successful, *damage* (see below) is applied to the defender. If the attacker fails, no damage is done. A tie is just that – nobody wins, nobody loses. . . but both characters muss each other up a little, taking 1 Failure Rank apiece.

ADVANCED CONFLICT EXAMPLE: RESULTS

Liam got a 9 and Fred got a 7; Fred takes damage. (If Liam had rolled a 7 and Fred had rolled a 9, nothing would happen, and it'd be time for Fred to take his action. If both Liam and Fred had rolled a 7, they would have clashed together and each taken a Failure Rank.)

DAMAGE

Damage is the general term for the loss of wherewithal to continue a conflict. During a conflict situation, the participants lose resources, until one or another cannot continue. In ZoZ, this holds true across all types of conflicts (be they physical, mental, social, etc.): all damage is represented by a temporary Downshift applied to the character's listed Qualities. These temporary Downshifts are called either a *Failure Rank* or a *Damage Rank*, depending upon the nature of the conflict. The player selects which of his Qualities takes the damage/Downshift(s), and can spread out the damage across several Qualities at once. Whichever Quality the player decides takes the "first hit" of damage in a conflict generates a *Story Hook* (see textbox).

In mental, social, and some physical conflicts, this loss of capability is usually fleeting, and is represented by Failure Ranks. In mental contests, people get confused or exhaust their arguments. In social conflicts, threats to loved ones can sap the will to fight on, or a person's resistance to seduction can be worn down. In business conflicts, a character's stratagems can be outmaneuvered or their assets can be liquidated, and so on.

In many physical conflicts, the harm is more enduring, and is represented by Damage Ranks. This is most often injuries taken in combat, but also includes *environmental damage* taken by running through fire, falling off a roof, or starting to drown. While most things that do physical injury to a character cause him to accrue Damage Ranks, some physical actions aimed at delaying, tripping, entangling, grappling, pushing, pulling, flipping, throwing, tiring, or confusing an opponent could be seen as Failure Ranks instead.

A character can suffer both Damage Ranks and Failure Ranks in the course of a conflict situation. They are functionally the same thing *during* a conflict, but are regained by the character at different rates *afterward* (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

ADVANCED CONFLICT EXAMPLE: DAMAGE

In the *Results* example above, Liam swung his sword (and got a 9) and Fred tried to parry with his club (and got a 7). Fred therefore takes 2 Damage Ranks. Fred applies both of them to his Good [+2] Friendly Quality, temporarily dropping it to Poor [-2]. (Good [+2] drops to Average [0] for one Rank, and drops again from Average [0] to Poor [-2] for the other.

Fred could have split the two Ranks between Friendly and Bandit, however, and ended up with both of them being at Average [0].)

Fred has generated a Story Hook that involves his Friendly Quality.

STORY HOOKS

Several elements of ZoZ help the players and GM come up with **Story Hooks**: exciting or interesting subplots, complications, and events for their characters to experience.

In conflict situations, whichever ability the player selects to take the first hit of damage generates a Story Hook. (Some GMs may also wish to use the ability that the PC chooses when zeroing out of a conflict as a source of additional Story Hooks.) Under the ZoZ rules, the reason Sir Liam constantly has to ride off to rescue Princess Gwen from dragons, ogres, and enchantments is that he consistently uses his Good [+2] True Love for Princess Gwen to absorb the first Damage Rank he takes in combat.

When the ability is announced, the GM should make a note of what it is, and come up with something interesting related that trait for the next Scene or game session. This "something interesting" can be good, bad, or indifferent, but it should capture the **player's** interest.

A quick and easy way to come up with Story Hooks is to compare the selected Quality to the current events of the adventure, the character's Weakness, the character's Strengths, or the character's Background. One of these pairs will almost always offer inspiration to a new subplot or event for the game.

ADVANCED CONFLICT EXAMPLE: STORY HOOKS

In the *Damage* example in the main text, Fred took his first Damage Rank on his Friendly Quality, and thus generated a Story Hook.

The GM looks at Fred's write-up (see p. 30) and sees Fred's Weakness is Ugly. This Story Hook combo could generate a *Frankenstein*-like subplot, where a blind NPC befriends Fred, unaware that Fred is extremely ugly.

ZEROING OUT

Advanced conflicts take (relatively) more time to resolve than other situations, since characters are taking turns to act and only a defender who loses a roll takes damage. When the ability of characters to use Hero Points to reduce the effects of being hurt is added in, advanced conflicts can extend even longer. Still, characters quickly hit bottom after a handful of turns: they are forced to reduce one of their Qualities below Poor [-2] Rank, leading them to “zero out.” This means they lose the conflict they’re in, or are at least uninvolved with the rest of the Scene.

In ZoZ games, just because a character zeroes out doesn’t mean they die (see textbox, *Out for Blood?*). Zeroing out is often just the prelude to a character being dumped into a villain’s dungeon!

ADVANCED CONFLICT EXAMPLE: ZEROING OUT

Let’s say that Liam hits Fred again for 3 more Damage Ranks. Fred takes two of them on his Bandit Quality, temporarily dropping it from Good [+2] to Poor [-2]. All of his Qualities are now at Poor [-2], and he *still* has to take another Rank of Damage somewhere. He takes it on Bandit and zeroes out.

(If the GM chooses, Fred’s Bandit Quality can be used to generate an additional Story Hook.)

OUT FOR BLOOD?

*For physical conflicts, the default assumption in ZoZ is that characters can **only** be killed once they are unconscious or otherwise helpless. This requires no roll, check, or action, simply a statement on the attacker’s next action that he wishes to kill the victim. Only the most monstrous of villains and grimmest of heroes will opt to do this regularly – many have codes of honor, hidden agendas, or mystical limitations that prevent the killing of a helpless foe.*

RECOVERING FROM DAMAGE

Once a Scene ends, the injured character will begin to recover lost Ranks.

FAILURE RANKS

All Failure Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene, restoring all affected Qualities to their starting Ranks.

DAMAGE RANKS

Only some Damage Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene; players roll 2d6 to determine the number of Ranks their characters get back. Each player selects which Quality Ranks are restored. However, the character will not recover any more Ranks until the end of the *next* Scene, GM tells them to roll again, a Quality comes into play, or the character spends Hero Points to heal (see p. 45).

NOTE - A Strength like “Quick Healer” should allow the character to gain back the standard 2d6 roll, plus their MOD. A Weakness like “Slow Healer” would mean that the character rolls 2d6-2 (the MOD for Poor), with a minimum of zero Ranks regained.

HERO POINTS

Hero Points represent the heroic energy, fortune, indomitable will, and plucky attitude that makes a character larger-than-life. Most people rarely access these hidden reserves within themselves to go beyond their normal boundaries; heroes do so regularly. By spending Hero Points, characters can shift the odds in their favor, get up when a normal person would be down for the count, temporarily surpass their limitations, and persevere through adversity.



GAINING HERO POINTS

Whenever character *acts heroically*, the GM should give them a Hero Point. PCs can also gain Hero Points for having their Weakness come up during play (like if a Rude character needs to talk nicely with the Copper Duke), agreeing to let Something Bad Happen to them in a Scene (like being turned to stone or losing the Esoteric Egg), good roleplaying, giving the GM ideas for new characters or Scenes, and Digging Down Deep (converting Learning Points to Hero Points). Hero Points can be used to alter the odds in the hero’s favor, recover from combat injuries, and add new material to the situation, plot, or setting (see below).

HEROIC ACTIONS

Each of the actions below is worth one or more Hero Points, depending

upon the nature of the situation, its level of danger, and the number of people affected by it:

- ◆ Protect the innocent or weak.
- ◆ Rescue someone.
- ◆ Inspire hope in someone.
- ◆ Reveal an important truth to someone.
- ◆ Bring justice to a situation.
- ◆ Show notable charity, kindness, or mercy towards someone.
- ◆ Act with integrity, loyalty, or modesty.
- ◆ Make a sacrifice for another.
- ◆ Take a significant risk.
- ◆ Display courage under fire.

GMs may award Hero Points immediately after the heroic action, or wait until the end of the current Scene, at their option.

AFFECTED BY WEAKNESS

If a situation comes up that triggers a character's Weakness (say, a character with Poor [-2] Mute being questioned by a Knight), they gain a Hero Point. If the player runs with the situation, and makes either his *attempts to get around the Weakness* and succeed or his *portrayal of how incredibly bad the failure caused by his Weakness is*, then he may be in for some extra Hero Points by way of Good Roleplaying (see below).

SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS

If the GM wants to do Something Bad to a PC for plot purposes (drop them down an oubliette, take away their favorite sword, transform them into a frog, or frame them for eating a gingerbread house), the PC instantly gains 2d6 Hero Points to ease the pain.

GOOD ROLEPLAYING

The GM can reward any player's character if the player adds to the spirit of the game by showing camaraderie with teammates; impresses the GM or other players by doing something cool or fun; helps aid the fairytale feel of the

game; advances the main plot of the adventure; advances another character's subplot; or says something funny that amuses everybody around the table. Each thing that makes the gaming experience more enjoyable can be rewarded with a Hero Point.

USING HERO POINTS

Hero Points can be used as many times as desired, as long as the character has points left to burn. If a character wishes to spend 4 Hero Points for 2 Upshifts to an action, or to regain 4 Failure Ranks, or dictate 4 minor details about a Scene, that's fine. Below are some of the methods in which Hero Points can be used (but feel free to come up with new uses of your own for Hero Points):

Clearing the Fog. Regain 1d6 lost Failure Ranks. *1 Hero Point and one action or reaction.*

Fairy Godmother. When the player is stuck for ideas, or is in an impossible situation, he can call on his Fairy Godmother to help out in some way. *1 Hero Point to get ideas from other players around the table; 2 Hero Points to get ideas from the GM; 4 Hero Points for some form of in-game intervention.*

Favor's Reward. The character *must* have done something nice or kind for an NPC during the course of the campaign; then, by spending Hero Points, he can call in the favor to aid him in the current situation. *1 Hero Point and a Scene to get information only; 2 Hero Points and a Scene to get some other sort of aid; subject to GM veto.*

Heroic Serendipity. "As I fall off of the tower to certain doom in the alligator-filled moat below, I luckily manage to grab onto a gargoyle that's jutting out from the wall. . ." *2 Hero Points per plausible coincidence, or 4 Hero Points per implausible coincidence.*

My Heart is Pure. Gain an Upshift to Rank for next roll. *2 Hero Points per Upshift.*

Second Wind. Regain 1d6 lost Damage Ranks. *2 Hero Points and one Turn per die of recovery.*

Silver Shoes. Spend a Hero Point to ignore damage. *1 Hero Point per Damage or Failure Rank.*

Strength of Ten. After a successful attack, add an Upshift (+2) to Damage only. *1 Hero Point per Upshift.*

Tale-spinning. Dictate a new fact about the situation at hand (“What most people don’t know is that the Silly Wizard falls asleep when he hears flute music!” or “The last time I was in this palace, there was a secret door leading from the kitchens to the library!”). *1 Hero Point per minor detail, 2 Hero Points per significant detail, or 4 Hero Points per major detail; subject to GM veto.*

HERO POINTS VS. UPSHIFTS

Hero Points are gained from what you do. Upshifts are gained by how you do things.

LEARNING POINTS

Learning Points are earned when a character learns something -- usually by failing at a complicated task. Learning Points are used for improving a character’s Qualities, adding Magic-Stars, and learning Special Moves (see Chapter 4, p. 70).

GAINING LEARNING POINTS

The more often a character *fails*, the more he learns – and the more Learning Points he earns. Learning Points are used to help characters improve the Ranks of their Qualities and “buy” Magic-Stars and Special Moves (see Chapter 4, *Improvement*).

Every time a character *fails a complicated situation*, the GM should award them a Learning Point. Furthermore, if the player *learns something during the session* or *figures something out about the nature of the adventure*, the GM should award them a Learning Point.

GMs should inform players of Learning Point awards immediately, though players should wait until the end of the current Scene or session to spend them.

USING LEARNING POINTS

Learning Points can be used in two main ways: *Digging Down Deep* (see below) and for character development (see Chapter 4, *Improvement*).

DIGGING DOWN DEEP

If a character is in Trouble with a capital T and needs more Hero Points *now*, he may “dig down deep” and summon up some heroic energy at the cost of reducing Learning Points. Unfortunately, the trade-in value is not very good – one to one. For example, say a character with 10 Learning Points needs to dig deep for just a little more oomph! He can reduce his Learning Points to 9 and gain a single Hero Point.

VILLAIN POINTS?



*Bad guys’ mojo is called – appropriately – **Villain Points** rather than Hero Points. They gain them for doing naughty things instead of nice ones, but use them in much the same way that heroes do. They are especially prone to use Villain Points for things like impossible escapes, encouraging Something Bad to Happen (see above), summoning more minions, “really” being a magical double when captured, etc.*

Villains should rarely be given Villain Points during an adventure, only after adventures. Partly this is so that GMs aren’t rewarding themselves. They start with a bunch and whittle them down while Heroes are building their own points up; this is one reason the good guys usually win. Any Villain Points earned from foul deeds during a session should be saved for the next adventure the bad guy appears in.

Another way to work Villain Points might be for the players to give the GM Villain Point Awards at the end of a session for particularly dastardly play. Then the GM can apply those points to any of his antagonists in the next session. (However, the players might not have the requisite information to judge whether or not an action was truly dastardly.)

ZoZ MAGIC

In running fairytale magic for ZoZ, a GM should encourage his players to come up with fairytale-like abilities, spells, favors, and items to use in play. If the players are having trouble coming up with ideas, then he should offer ideas freely for them to take and adapt; failing that, he should offer opportunities in play for the PCs to acquire suitable abilities, favors, and items.

There are two main sorts of supernatural ability in ZoZ: *Gifts* and *Magic-Star Qualities*. The difference between the two is essentially that of *being* magic (Gifts) versus *doing* magic (Magic-Star Qualities).



GIFTS

A Gift is a narrow sort of ability that lets you do **one thing** (more-or-less): Speak with Animals, Walk on Air, Breathe Underwater, Prophetic Visions, and so forth.

MAGIC-STAR QUALITIES

A Magic-Star Quality shows a knack with an ability (often one that is fairly common) that reaches into mystical realms and allows you to do **many things**. So, a character with the Brewing* Quality can create magical effects through brewing enchanted ales and beers, Singing* allows the character's vocal stylings to calm the savage beast or make stones and pebbles dance, and Carpentry* permits the character to craft potent objects out of wood.

Any Qualities *directly* relating to the broad use of supernatural powers should be Magic-Star Qualities, otherwise there will be no mystical power or magical penumbra.

For example, while a character can take "Witch" or "Witch*," only the latter choice permits throwing spells, mixing potions, and flying on brooms and things like that. That is, a character with the unstarred version knows mundane witch-lore and practices, but cannot successfully cast spells or brew up magical potions in a cauldron (this could be a simple way to reflect a witch's apprentice not yet come into her powers).

MAGIC IN PLAY

USING GIFTS

Gifts are used just like other Qualities. If its used in a simple situation, a higher Quality Rank than Difficulty Rank means instant success. If it's a complicated situation, compare the 2d6 plus MOD roll result to the GM-determined TN.

If its used in a conflict situation, compare the 2d6 plus MOD roll result with the roll result of the opponent.

A successful roll means the magic works as intended. A failed roll leads to failure in the task, naturally, and grants a Learning Point.

If the target of a spell could resist its effects with his own Qualities (shaking off Hypnotic Charm by virtue of his Iron Willpower, for example), the target either rolls against a Difficulty Rank equal to the caster's Quality Rank (in complicated situations) or adds the relevant MOD to his defense roll (in conflict situations) as appropriate.

Magical effects – like charms, sleep spells, invisibility, etc. – last a Scene or two, usually. If magic creates a physical end product (like a wall of fire, a gallon of lemonade, or a swarm of bees), the GM uses the caster's Rank to determine how much, how strong, how dangerous, how far, etc.). Normally, end products persist; they do not vanish after the spell ends (though they could, at the GM's option).

To *permanently* enchant an item or person with a magical effect, the GM may require the caster to take lingering Downshifts, spend Hero Points or Learning Points, or fulfill in-story requirements (like extra time or special materials) in addition to any *cost* or *catch* (see below) when creating the enchantment. In any case, all long-term fairytale enchantments **must** contain a method for disenchantment (throw this ring in that volcano, have a princess kiss this frog, get dunked in the holy river at midnight, etc.).

USING MAGIC-STAR QUALITIES

If a player wants to use a Magic-Star Quality, the GM **must first evaluate** each attempt at doing magic. If the proposed magic is *meaningful* (moves the game or storyline forward in a reasonable way), it should be permitted to work with no problem, just like other Qualities. If the proposed magic is *gratuitous* (unjustified, unreasonable, unnecessary, overkill, or otherwise out of place in a fairytale), the GM should warn the player that if attempted, such a spell will **certainly** rebound negatively on the caster in some way.

If the magic is meaningful, the player and the GM then work together to come up with a relevant and reasonable *cost*, *catch*, or both for powerful effects (see below, *The Cost of Magic* and *The Catch of Magic*).

Once the cost and/or catch is determined, expended, or codified, the player proceeds (Rank comparison for simple situations, 2d6 plus MOD vs. TN for complicated situations, and caster's 2d6 plus MOD vs. target's 2d6 plus MOD for conflict situations). A successful roll means the magic works as intended, with the same resistance and duration issues as mentioned above for Gifts. A failed roll leads to failure in the task and grants a Learning Point, but the magic *still takes effect*.

To reiterate: **A failed roll with a Magic-Star Quality does not mean the magic fizzles!** Fairytale magic is potent, powerful stuff with a mind of its own. A failure in attempting to use a Magic-Star Quality means that the magic still “works”, though it may take an additional cost, catch (or both) and does something that was **unintended**. Striking the wrong target, hurting instead of healing, lasting longer than expected, magical constructs “slipping the leash” and doing the opposite of what the caster desired, creating too potent of an effect. . . all are fair game. (See also below, *Tonal Effects*, for ideas of how a campaign's tone influences magical misfires.)

THE COST OF MAGIC

A *cost* implies something is consumed by the process of creating magic (the flowers wither and die when the witch makes herself beautiful). Examples of things that can be lost as a *cost* include:

- ◆ *Possessions* (after serving as an Invisibility Cloak, the character's cape crumbles to dust).
- ◆ *Alteration of relationships* (the character can no longer call on the Ant King for help).
- ◆ *Loss of fatigue or health* (systemically represented by Damage Ranks or Failure Ranks, see p. 40).
- ◆ *Loss of luck* (systemically represented by a loss of Hero Points, see p. 43).
- ◆ *Ad hoc plot events* (casting the spell means the character misses the next stagecoach to Jade City).

THE CATCH OF MAGIC

A *catch* means that the magic effect contains within it the method for its own dissolution; some limiting factor **must** be included in the spell which allows it to be broken (“...if the thread is cut by shears of gold, no longer will the land be cold”). In general, the more powerful the magic, the more necessary the catch

is for it to exist. Examples of things that can serve as a *catch* include limitations of:

- ◆ *Time* (the curse lasts a day).
- ◆ *Place* (the toys are only alive within Castle Play).
- ◆ *Action* (the magic sword cannot be used against Talking Animals).
- ◆ *Access* (only a child may carry the Fire Gem without being immolated).
- ◆ *Ad hoc changes in nature or behavior* (cannot open eyes while invisible).

TONAL EFFECTS

Since tone (see *Chapter 1, Fairytale Tone*, p. 9) in a campaign is very much “the way the world works” it has a strong effect on magic and mystical events, coloring how they unfold (especially for magical misfires).

For example, if a powerful Bard sings such that the stones of a castle's wall dance out of his way, will that cause the wall to collapse? Once freed of their masonic interment, can the stones be sung back into place? If he fails, will they steadfastly refuse to return to the wall when ordered to, leaving a clear breach? Are the stones now more inherently magical, having danced?

Each Fairytale Tone has a general gist to the side effects it encourages:

- ◆ *Seelie*: Flower petals, birds, music, sparkling fairy dust. Magic *cannot directly harm* a person (blasting a hole in someone), but can do so *indirectly* (the magical brooms won't stop sweeping!).
- ◆ *Unseelie*: Dissonant sounds, swirling shadows, cold winds. Magic *can and will make things worse*: blood, fire, pain (turning a character's shadow into a self-aware enemy).
- ◆ *Fractured Fairytale*: Strange noises, smells, images. Magic will always opt for the *funniest* side-effect.



One way to look at it is that tone adds side-effects to magic use, to help fit the magic to the world and the world to the magic. Tonal effects are part window-dressing, part perspective, and part lagniappe.

ENCHANTED OBJECTS

Enchanted objects are a popular feature of many fairytales. Indeed, some sorts of characters – like Scarecrows, Living Toys, and Living Confections – are essentially just enchanted items.

The majority of magical items in a fairytale world work like Gifts: they do one thing, and do it well. Seven League Boots, Invisibility Cloaks, Vorpals, Swords, and Flying Carpets are all examples of this sort of object. However, some few items work like Magic-Star Qualities: Grimoires, Djinni Lamps, Wishing Rings, and the like. The classic example is the three wishes granted by a djinni to anyone who frees them from its lamp. Extremely powerful and wide-ranging magical items should have a cost and/or catch just as for Magic-Star Qualities. Examples can include a djinni with an overly literal or legalistic mind, a limited number of uses (per day or forever), a price to be paid before or after the magical effect activates, etc.

Some enchanted objects in fairytales were created for a specific reason or event. When that reason or event is resolved, the object loses its magic (or crumbles to dust, or is freed to go where it will, etc.). The *purpose* of an individual item can be terribly prosaic or of world-shaking importance. In either case, enchanted objects with a purpose often ensure that their users will be drawn to that purpose. If an enchanted item is used to absorb damage and generate a Story Hook, the GM should go back to the object's purpose to determine what comes of the Story Hook. (Example: Take a character that has his father's Seven League Boots. His father had been a Royal Courier for the King of Azul. If, during an adventure, the character uses the Boots to generate a Story Hook, that Hook could relate to contents of the last message that his father carried for last King of Azul, or perhaps the character could be drawn into Count Alphonse's machinations of uniting Azul under his rule.)

TYPES OF ENCHANTED OBJECT

In ZoZ, there are two main types of enchanted objects: those that are *intrinsic* to a character and those that are *extrinsic*.

Intrinsic items appear in the character's write up (as a Quality, Special Tool, or Special Move; see *Chapter 4*, p. 66). These sorts of items can grow in stature and importance alongside their owner (i.e., the PC can use Learning Points

to improve their Rank, so long as they're not a Special Move); they are fundamentally part of the character, and as such also reflect the character's growing skill in using the item more effectively. If lost or stolen, they will generally eventually make their way back to the character. They do not usually have a maximum number of uses, though they might have a maximum number of uses per day. If they have a purpose, it's probably "Help the character get to their Happily Ever After."

Extrinsic items are acquired in the course of an adventure -- either found, stolen, purchased, created, or received as a present. These sorts of items do their thing (permit speedy travel, turn the user invisible, change the wearer into a swan, etc.). They do not usually "get better" at doing that thing over time (though powerful extrinsic items mimicking Magic-Star Qualities *might*). Thus, most extrinsic enchanted objects should be treated as Special Moves and cannot be improved. If lost or stolen, they will *not* come back to the character. They often have a maximum number of total uses, though they may have a maximum number of uses per day instead (or even both) if the item is straightforward and Gift-like. If they have a purpose, it's either something very basic involving daily usage ("help clean the house faster" for a Magic Broom) or something very specific ("overthrow King Glamorgan" for a Magic Spear).

PC CREATION OF ENCHANTED OBJECTS

PCs with relevant magical abilities can *create* enchanted objects by spending Hero Points and Learning Points. During item creation, the PC will set any cost, catch, or purpose for the item (subject to GM veto).

Intrinsic objects are purchased in the same manner as a New Magic-Star Quality for the character (see *Chapter 4*, p. 65). The relevant Story Hook must include the cost, catch, and purpose of the item.

Extrinsic objects are purchased in the same manner as a New Special Move for the character, though the Hero Points spent do not need to be used to Upshift one of the character's Qualities in play (see *Chapter 4*, p. 71). The relevant Story Hook must include the cost, catch, and purpose of the item. *Note that this means the PC will be spending points and effort to create an object they can sell, give away, lose, or have permanently stolen from them.*

This means that making permanent enchanted items for other people is not something that enchanters in ZoZ campaigns do lightly.

Some GMs may permit the use of these creation rules by Fairies, Witches, Wizards, and other mystical sorts to grant birth blessings (or curses!) on infants of interest; such a blessing or curse will be either a Special Move or Quality of the infant so gifted.

(See also Chapter 4, the notes regarding Special Tools as Qualities on p. 64.)



EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Here follows an example of a typical set of Scenes in a ZoZ session, using the characters found in the boxes below: Princess Emma and Derek Dragon.

PRINCESS EMMA

Background: Princess Emma is a human princess from Giallo. Her big sister is the Crown Princess of their city, and is really busy and bossy – always telling Emma to shush. That's why Emma travels around the Zantabulous Land of Zo, visiting her friends and having adventures!

Qualities: Expert [+4] Princess, Good [+2] Friendly, Good [+2] Singing, Good [+2] Special Tool: Singing Sword, Good [+2] Well-Traveled, and Poor [-2] Loud.

Special Move: Good [+2] Horse-jumping!

Hero Points: 5

Learning Points: 1

Miscellany: Emma is somewhat short for her age of ten years; she has brown hair and brown eyes. Princess covers all sorts of things a Princess of Giallo knows: horse-riding, sword-fighting, and which fork to use when eating a fancy salad. She's very Friendly, not at all shy, and people tend to like her – she has lots of friends! She's good at Singing (and often her magical Singing Sword joins in for a duet), she has problems controlling her volume (Loud). Well-Traveled means she's been all over Zo, and is familiar with many highways, byways, and folkways. Her Special Move of Horse-jumping! means she's especially good in getting a horse she's riding to go over obstacles.

DEREK DRAGON

Background: Derek is a mean old lizard that likes to eat aristocrats, but first he likes to scare them awhile: because fear makes the meat taste better (he says).

Qualities: Good [+2] Dragon, Good [+2] Games, and Poor [-2] Greedy.

Special Move: Good [+2] Scary!

Villain Points: 1

Miscellany: Derek is about 15 feet long, covered in dark green scales, with black bat wings and glowing red eyes. Dragon covers all sorts of things: the toughness of his scales, his flaming breath, how fast he can fly, how strong he is, and so on. Games shows that Derek is a skilled player of all sorts of games, from chess to poker to board games (however, he's not into Sports). Greedy means that he's always looking for more treasure to lounge upon or more princes and princesses to eat. His Special Move of Scary! indicates that Derek is really good at puffing out flames, spreading his wings, sharpening his claws, and roaring into the faces of people to make them afraid enough to do what he tells them to.

GM: ONCE UPON A TIME, IN THE ZANTABULOUS LAND OF ZO...

... there was a mighty Princess named Emma, who was great friends with a Turtle Prince from Viola named Walter. Unfortunately, one day while walking through the forest to meet Princess Emma, Prince Walter was captured by a dragon and locked up in a cave!

Luckily, Princess Emma heard of this, and was on the way to help!

EMMA: How do I find the cave where Prince Walter is?

GM: Luckily, the forests in Viola aren't as large as the ones in Azul, and you're pretty familiar with just about everywhere because of that Quality of yours—

EMMA: Well-Traveled. I have it at Good [+2].

GM: Right. Okay, I'd say it's Expert [11] Difficulty for you to find the right forest and the hidden cave within. So, use your Well-Traveled Quality to roll.

EMMA: (rolling) A 1 and a 4, that's 5, plus 2 for Good, 7. That means I failed?

GM: I think that means you find the *right* forest of Viola, but have no idea where the cave is. Oh, and you get a Learning Point.

EMMA: (writes down the Learning Point on her page) Okay. Now what? Can I roll again, since I know that I'm in the right forest?

GM: Can you use any other Qualities alongside Well-Traveled to help you out?

EMMA: (looks at her sheet) I doubt my Singing or my Singing Sword would come in handy. . .

GM: (sotto voce) Maybe.

EMMA: (still looking at her sheet) If I could find someone to talk to, maybe I could use Friendly...

GM: Well, you could talk to that woodcutter over there?

EMMA: What woodcutter?

GM: The woodcutter over there, sitting under a fallen tree, eating his lunch. That might be why you didn't see him at first.

EMMA (catching on): I see. "Halloooo, Mr. Woodcutter?"

GM: The woodcutter looks up and sees you on your horse. He waves at you, cheerily.

EMMA: I wave back, and trot my horse over to him. "Mr. Woodcutter, do you know of any dragon-caves around here?"

GM: He looks a little scared. Go ahead and roll, this time adding the MODs for Well-Traveled and Friendly.

EMMA: What about Princess?

GM: You'd have to let him know you're a Princess, first – how would you do that?

EMMA: I also say, "I'm a Princess looking to rescue my friend from the dragon, that's why I need to find the cave!"

GM: Okay, the woodcutter seems to understand now, the fear in his eyes is

mostly replaced by concern. Roll 2d6, plus the MODs for Well-Traveled, Friendly, and Princess.

EMMA: (rolls) 5 and a 6, plus 2, plus 2, plus 4, or 19. Wow!

GM: Pretty impressive! Yes, the woodcutter knows exactly where the dragon's cave is. "Just go up this gully, following the creek, and take the left fork. It's only an arrow shot further. Thank goodness a princess has come to rid us of this foul beast!"

EMMA: "Has he been troubling this place long?"

GM: "Just the past year. He ate the Countess last fall!"

EMMA: "I hope I can get there before he eats the Turtle Prince! Thank you for your help," I say and ride up the gully.

GM: The woodcutter says "Good luck!" You ride up the gully, taking his directions, and easily find the cave of the dragon."

EMMA: Can I ride my horse in?

GM: The opening looks too small for it.

EMMA: Well, I tie my horse to a branch, draw my Singing Sword, and sneak into the cave.

GM: Doesn't your Singing Sword, uh, sing when you draw it?

EMMA: Yeah.

GM: So you're going to try to sneak while holding a loudly singing magic sword?

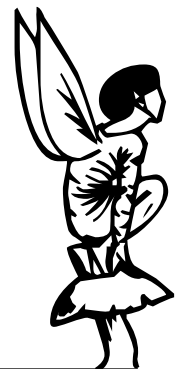
EMMA: Right. Okay, I *don't* draw my sword. I sneak on tippy-toe into the cave.

GM: Roll for sneaking.

EMMA: I don't have a Sneaking Quality.

GM: Just roll 2d6. Oh, minus 2.

EMMA: Why minus 2?



GM: Because you have a Weakness of Loud. It's Poor [-2].

EMMA: Right. Okay, here goes. (rolls) 4 and a 3, minus 2 is 5. That can't be good.

GM: Nope. The Difficulty was Good [9]. As you make your way into the cave, down a tunnel that opens up into a big chamber, you trip over a pile of rusty helmets! They make an awful clatter! There's a gout of flame and some big candles light up. In front of you is a green dragon, stretched out on a golden treasure hoard. He's growling and shouting, "*Who dares* enter the lair of Derek Dragon?"

EMMA: I step forward, draw my sword, and say, "Me! Princess Emma!" The sword is making military march music.

GM: You hear a voice come from over to the side: "Princess Emma!" It's Walter, the Turtle Prince! He's chained to the wall. The dragon then says, "Princess Emma?" and an evil grin spreads across his scaly lips.

I think we're about to enter a conflict situation, a fight. You go first.

EMMA: Okay. I point the Singing Sword at the dragon, and say with all my Princess-y command, "Release him!"

GM: Okay, so that sounds like a social sort of attack to intimidate him, right?

EMMA: Yeah.

GM: Okay. You can use Princess for that. And you get a Hero Point for it.

EMMA: (notes the Hero Point on her sheet) Thanks! Will having my Sword out help? I'm gesturing emphatically with it.

GM: Sure. Add it to your roll.

EMMA: (rolls) 4 and 1, plus 4, plus 2 is 11.

GM: (rolls for Derek) 6 and a 4, plus two for Dragon, is 12. "Your threats do not impress me, Princess Emma. Instead, I think I'll capture you, too... *for dessert!*" It's his turn to attack.

He rears up, spreads his wings, and lets the smoke curl out of his nostrils and his eyes flash red. He's trying to scare you. How will you defend against that?

EMMA: (looks at her list of Qualities) A Princess is brave. That seems best.

GM: Okay, you roll 2d6 plus the MOD for Princess. Derek's rolling 2d6, plus 2 for Dragon, and plus 2 for his Special Move of Scary!

EMMA: (rolls) 1 and 2 is 3, plus 4 for 7.

GM (rolls) 3 and 2 is 5, plus 2, plus 2 is 9. You take 2 Failure Ranks because you're so scared! What do you take the first one on?

EMMA (looking at her sheet) Well-traveled. I'll take the other on Singing. Now they're both at Average [0] Rank.

GM: Right. And you get a Story Hook on Well-Traveled. (makes a note) Okay, your turn.

EMMA: I'm gonna chop his head off before I get too scared.

GM: Sounds like a plan to me.

EMMA: I leap forward, swinging my Singing Sword in a big circle, shouting "You'll never hurt anyone ever again, foul wyrm!"

GM: Hey, that was cool. Really Princess in shining armor. Have an Upshift.

EMMA: What?

GM: You get a free plus 2 to the roll.

EMMA: Awesome. (rolls) 4 and a 5 is 9, plus 4 for Princess, plus 2 for Singing Sword, plus 2 from the Upshift.17!

GM: (rolls) 2 and a 3, that's 5, plus 2 for Dragon, total 7. The Derek Dragon takes 10 Damage Ranks from your attack! He can drop Games from Good to Average then Poor, that's 2 Ranks. He can drop Dragon from Good to Average to Poor, that's another 2 Ranks. Leaving 6 Ranks – you chop his head right off! It falls into a pile of gold coins and looks up at you. "Ouch!" says the head.

EMMA: It's still alive?

GM: Well sort of. If you put the head back quickly, he'll probably recover. Otherwise, he'll die.

EMMA: Hm. (thinks a bit)

GM: Prince Walter is over against the wall saying “Huzzah!” and the dragon’s head is starting to cry, big tears dribbling out of his glowing red eyes.

EMMA: (makes a decision) I know I’m going to regret this. (sighs) I sheathe my sword, walk over to the dragon’s head, pick it up and ask, “If I put your head back on your neck, do you promise to stop eating people?”

GM: (sniffing and sobbing) “Uh-huh. I prom—prom—promise!”

EMMA: “Cross your heart?”

GM: “And hope to explode in a fiery ball, yes!” You can see that over on the dragon’s body, the foreleg is crossing an X over it’s scaly chest.

EMMA: Okay, then. I put the dragon’s head on top of its neck stump.

GM: The head fuses back to the neck, and the dragon starts kissing your boots in gratitude. “Thank you thank you thank you! I’m a changed dragon. I’ll turn over a new leaf!” and so forth. You recover all of your lost Failure Ranks, and get a new Hero Point!

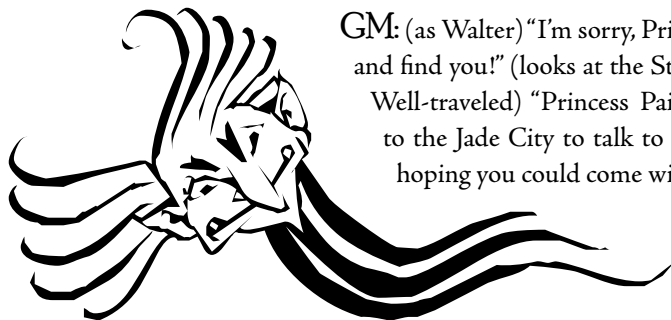
EMMA (starts to note it on her page, then stops) Can I use...uh, Tale-Spinning to make sure he’s telling the truth?

GM: You mean spend that Hero Point you just got?

EMMA: Yeah.

GM: (makes a note, changing Derek’s Background to “mean old lizard that *used* to eat aristocrats”) You got it!

EMMA: Then I free Prince Walter. “Can’t you go two days without getting into trouble?”



GM: (as Walter) “I’m sorry, Princess, but I had to come and find you!” (looks at the Story Hook from Emma’s Well-traveled) “Princess Paige has asked me to go to the Jade City to talk to the Zorcerer, and I was hoping you could come with me. . .”

CHAPTER 4 ZoZ CHARACTERS

The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ) allows you to play fairytale characters that adventure in a fantastic world. These heroes may possess purity of heart, extraordinary gifts, and potent magic in order to perform tremendous deeds. Yet they recognizably remain people, with the potential to do great good, great evil, or both.

When the first baby laughed for the first time, the laugh broke into a thousand pieces, and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies.

— J. M. Barrie

CHARACTER GENERATION: BUILD A HERO

A ZoZ character is made up of several elements:

1. Name.
2. Background (& Nationality).
3. Qualities.
4. Hero Points
5. Learning Points.
6. Miscellany (including appearance, clothing, and habits).
7. Justifying Why the PCs are Together.

You don’t have to decide these elements in any particular order, though each could provide ideas for the others. *Background* can provide a foundation for determining a character’s *Qualities*. *Qualities* could serve as a basis for *Name* and *Miscellany*. *Name* might influence both *Background* and *Qualities*. . . and so forth.

We’ll create two example characters step-by-step in boxed text to illustrate the process. Let’s begin.

NAME

Select a name for your character. Note that a good name can help inspire interesting elements for a character's *Background* or *Qualities* – like personality, heritage and illustrious ancestors, childhood nicknames (and associated traumas), or even other character traits.

Don't neglect using fairy tales (traditional or modern), nursery rhymes, and other nonsense for good ZoZ Names. The works of Edward Lear and Norton Juster (*The Phantom Tollbooth*) are particularly good for wild and evocative names: the Quangle Wangle, the Scroobius Pip, the Akond of Swat, the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo, the Absolutely Abstemious Ass, The Fizzgiggious Fish, the Mathemagician, and Tock the Watchdog.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

"Jack" is, of course, the basic male fairytale name. It implies a young hero, vibrant, with a bit of the ne'er-do-well or trickster about him. "Scarlet" comes from Will Scarlet of Robin Hood's Merry Men – the bandit who remained somewhat foppish, and the only one arrogant enough to wear red when the rest wore green.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

"Mikayla" is a modern American girl's name. It is a feminine form of the male name "Michael," which means "gift from God." This could imply many things about the circumstances of her birth, her position in her family, or her personality. (It's also the name of one of the author's nieces.)



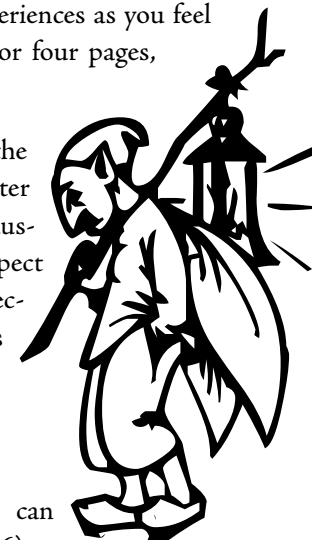
BACKGROUND (& NATIONALITY)

A character's *Background* explains things like what the character has done with his life, where he was born, what his family is like, where he's been, and who he met along the way. What does he do for a living? Does he have more acquaintances than friends and more enemies than both? Does he have any hobbies? What are his hopes, dreams, and fears?

You don't need to condense this part into a single word or phrase like you will with *Qualities*. Spend as many or

as few words on describing the character's experiences as you feel comfortable with. Whether a single sentence or four pages, it's all fine.

Part of *Background* is *Nationality* – which of the five kingdoms of the Zo Empire that the character comes from. Given the different terrains, industries, and habits of each the kingdoms, this aspect of *Background* will probably influence the selection of the character's *Qualities*. It also implies a certain amount of local knowledge, reputation, and status with regard to the character's homeland.



Background Rules. A good *Background* can combine with *Story Hooks* (see *Chapter 2*, p. 16) to help the GM come up with neat things for the character to do and see.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

Jack hails from Rosso (implied from his red-themed Name), and is the son of a merchant trader ruined by his lord's exorbitant taxes. He has set himself against the tyrant as a pirate, pledging to "rob from him who robbed me and mine."

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

Princess Mikayla is an Otherworlder girl who came to Zo through an "elf door" in her house's attic. She comes from a kingdom called "America" where there are only princesses (no kings, queens, or princes), they have weirdly named magic (automobile, television, the Internet), and step-parents are often not evil. (Her Zolander friends doubt the last bit more than the other two!) She is having a great time, but does miss her family – especially her new baby sister!

QUALITIES

To briefly recap: a *Quality* is a word or phrase representing broad skill, talent, characteristic, or field of knowledge. ZoZ characters must choose from among the following packages:

- A. 6 Good [+2] Strengths and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- B. 1 Expert [+4] Strength, 4 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- C. 2 Expert [+4] Strengths, 2 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- D. 3 Expert [+4] Strengths and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- E. 1 Master [+6] Strength, 3 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- F. 1 Master [+6] Strength, 1 Expert [+4] Strength, 1 Good [+2] Strength, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- G. 2 Master [+6] Strengths and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.

If a character wants a Quality that reflects a Sidekick or Pet, then the highest Rank of the Sidekick or Pet's best ability will be the same as the Rank the player uses to add it to his sheet. A Sidekick or Pet also gets an Average [0] Rank Quality and a Weakness. (For example, a Good [+2] Pet: Horse could have Good [+2] Fast, Average [0] Horse, and Poor [-2] Sucker for Sugar Cubes.) The GM is encouraged to help the player in creating the description and capabilities of this sort of Quality to keep everything fair; some GMs may even write-up a "mini-character sheet" for a Sidekick or Pet. The GM can take over playing a Sidekick or Pet *at any time*. Sidekicks and Pets do not earn Hero Points or Learning Points of their own (though players can spend Learning Points or Hero Points on the Sidekick or Pet's behalf).

If a character wants a Quality that reflects a Special Tool, then the Rank of the Special Tool's main ability will be the same as the Rank the Player uses to add it to their sheet. (For example, a Good [+2] Flying Cloak allows flight at Good [+2] Rank – roughly Medium speed; see p. 32). Defining an ability as a Special Tool rather than a regular Quality means that it can be temporarily *taken away* from the character (but the PC is able to regain the Tool with a Scene or two of effort).

If a player wishes his character to have a magical Quality, see below, *Gifts & Magic-Stars*.

Quality Rules. See Chapter 3, p. 25.

NOTE - If the idea of set packages is hard for players to puzzle out, another way to explain the scheme above is to say characters have a total of 12 MOD points to be split up between Strength Qualities (using the established MOD "units" of +2, +4, and +6). Characters must also take a Weakness Quality, which has a -2 MOD. For younger

players, GMs could hand out six poker chips marked with "+2" and allow the player to stack them up or spread them out amongst abilities as they choose.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

Jack goes with package C. He is an Expert [+4] Swordsman and Expert [+4] Pirate. He is also Good [+2] at being Stylish and has Good [+2] Quick Wits. On the downside, he's terribly Overconfident (Poor [-2]).

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

Mikayla goes with package A. She's a Good [+2] Cheerleader and Good [+2] Softball player. She's also a Good [+2] CSI Kid and likes to read (Good [+2] Reading). Since she loves to go camping, she takes Good [+2] Outdoorsy. She wants her stuffed sock monkey to come along with her (Good [+2] Sidekick: Sock Monkey), and won't take no for an answer (Poor [-2] Stubborn.).

GIFTS & MAGIC-STARS

If a player wishes his character to have a Quality that has narrow magical effects, this is a **Gift**. Narrow abilities like Speak to Trees, Witch-smeller, or Water-breathing are Gift Qualities, and are basically treated like other Qualities.

If a player wishes his character to have a Quality that can produce broad magical effects, this is a **Magic-Star Quality**. Characters do not have to take a Magic-Star Quality; only those who wish to work magic through one of their traits should. During character generation, players must *reduce one of their Qualities by one Rank* to generate a "magic star" that can be placed on any Quality (marked on the character sheet with an asterisk), giving it a magical penumbra. A magical penumbra allows the ability to be used in supernatural fashion, to do amazing and powerful things. Nothing precludes a Quality that takes the penalty from being the same Quality that gets the Magic-Star. Qualities reduced in this way *can* be Improved (see below) using earned Learning Points with no ill-effects.

Most characters usually have only one Magic-Star Quality, and their mystical powers are wrapped up in the nature of the underlying Quality – this may limit what they can do supernaturally. For wide-ranging magical abilities, supernatural-based professions like Alchemist*, Witch*, or Wizard* are the best bet; these Qualities *must be taken* as Magic-Star Qualities to have any effective magic powers.

Gifts can be Magic-Star Qualities, too – a good example would be Speak to Fish*, which allows the character to do various fish- or water-related magics due to his innate understanding of the Waterspeech of the Sea King.

Mystical effects done using a Magic-Star Quality require a *cost*, a *catch*, or both.

Magic-Star Quality Rules. See above and *Chapter 3, ZoZ Magic*, p. 47.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

Jack decides that he'd like to do amazing, magical things with his cutlass. He permanently reduces the Rank of Pirate from Expert [+4] to Good [+2] in order to change his mundane Swordsman into Expert [+4] Swordsman. He can now do all sorts of miraculous tricks using his sword – like cut through rock!*

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

Mikayla decides not to take any Gifts or Magic-Star Qualities.

SPECIAL MOVES

Before play begins, PCs can – but don't have to – select one *Special Move* that is a focused maneuver or limited field of interest related to one of their Qualities. They are always **Good [+2] Rank**, and can add that MOD to Qualities in relevant situations (see textbox, *Chapter 3, Using Multiple Qualities for Tasks*, p. 35), but are not downshifted during play. Special Moves are unimprovable, but more of them can be added during play. List them near Qualities on the ZoZ character sheet, and add an exclamation point to show it's a Special Move.

Special Moves Rules. See *Chapter 3*, p. 30. If left unselected at character generation, a character may declare their "free" Special Move at any time during play. A character may purchase an additional Special Move with Learning Points, but characters can only have a maximum of two Special Moves.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

Jack selects "Deflect Arrows!" as his Special Move connected to Swordsman.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

Mikayla selects "Find Clue!" as her Special Move connected to CSI Kid.

HERO POINTS & LEARNING POINTS

List the starting number of Hero Points and Learning Points for the character. For information on what Hero Points and Learning Points are good for, see *Chapter 3*.

Hero Points Rules. Fairytale characters start with 5 Hero Points.

Learning Points Rules. Fairytale characters start with 1 Learning Point.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

Jack has 5 Hero Points and 1 Learning Point.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

Mikayla has 5 Hero Points and 1 Learning Point.

MISCELLANY

Players should feel free to describe the character's physical appearance, even if it's a quick thumbnail like "young Harrison Ford, only as a Talking Dog" or "short, brunette, and burly." Backgrounds can be fleshed out further, names of friends and enemies filled in, detailed character histories uncovered, turn-ons and turn-offs listed, an inventory of possessions made, whatever floats your boat. It's often a good idea to use this section to explain a little about any complicated Qualities or Special Moves of the character.

The character's got everything now that's necessary for you to start playing. . . except for one final piece.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

Jack Scarlet looks like Johnny Depp playing Edmund Blackadder (Blackadder II). He dresses all in deep reds; while common in his homeland of Rosso, the quality of the material, as well as the Oversea style of his clothing, are not. He possesses a much-battered cutlass (named "Falcon") and an undying hatred of evil Lord Royphelaunt.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

Mikayla is a 10 year old, Twenty-First Century girl with strawberry-blond hair, twinkling brown eyes, and a broad smile. Equally comfortable in jeans and sneakers or a fancy dress, she's a tomboy with no fear of being a proper lady.

JUSTIFYING WHY THE PCs ARE TOGETHER

One of the hardest parts of getting a group of PCs to coalesce is *getting them together* in the first place. Another difficulty is *keeping them together* in a way that's not overly contrived on the surface. What would a spoiled prince, a hayseed farm girl, an apprentice wizard, a Living Nutcracker, and a Talking Owl have in common?

All of the players and the GM should work together *during character generation* so that all of the PCs have a connection to at least one (preferably more) of the other PCs. Backstory and Miscellany links are perhaps best for this, but Qualities that can be associated can serve just as well.

WHY ARE JACK SCARLET & PRINCESS MIKAYLA WORKING TOGETHER?

Princess Mikayla broke Jack Scarlet out of a jail in Rosso. They're on the run from King Glamorgan's men, trying to get Jack back to his ship so that he can take Princess Mikayla through the dangerous waters of the Sea of Frost to reach the Isle of Icy Doom, where she's been told there's a doorway home.

And that's about it for generating a ZoZ character. Take a look at how it all gets put together:

EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK SCARLET

Background: Jack hails from Rosso, and is the son of a merchant trader ruined by Lord Royphelaunt's exorbitant taxes. He has set himself against the tyrant as a rebel and bandit, pledging to "rob from him who robbed me and mine."

Qualities: Expert [+4] Swordsman*, Good [+2] Pirate, Good [+2] Quick Wits, Good [+2] Stylish, and Poor [-2] Overconfident.

Special Move: Good [+2] Deflect Arrows!

Hero Points: 5

Learning Points: 1

Miscellany: Jack Scarlet looks like Johnny Depp playing Edmund Blackadder (Blackadder II). He dresses all in deep reds; while common in his homeland of Rosso, the quality of the material, as well as the blood-red half-mask and hooded cloak are a bit rarer. He possesses a much-battered cutlass (named "Falcon"), plenty of arrows, and an undying hatred of evil Lord Royphelaunt.



EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: PRINCESS MIKAYLA

Background: Princess Mikayla is an Otherworlder girl who came to Zo through an "elf door" in her house's attic. She comes from a kingdom called "America" where there are only princesses (no kings, queens, or princes), they have weirdly named magic (automobile, television, the Internet), and step-parents are often

not evil. (Her Zolander friends doubt the last bit more than the other two!) She is having a great time, but does miss her family – especially her new baby sister!

Qualities: Good [+2] Cheerleader, Good [+2] CSI Kid, Good [+2] Outdoorsy, Good [+2] Reading, Good [+2] Sidekick: Sock Monkey, Good [+2] Softball, and Poor [-2] Stubborn.

Special Move: Good [+2] Find Clue!

Hero Points: 5

Learning Points: 1

Miscellany: Mikayla is a 10 year old, Twenty-First Century girl with strawberry-blond hair, twinkling brown eyes, and a broad smile. Equally comfortable in jeans and sneakers or a fancy dress, she's a tomboy with no fear of being a proper lady. Cheerleader is useful for jumping, flipping, and making noise. CSI Kid indicates her interest in TV police shows, mysteries, and "Crime Scene Investigation Camp" -- currently, Mik wishes to be a Forensic Dentist. Outdoorsy comes from going camping and fishing with her (good, not wicked!) step-father. Reading reflects not just her ability to read complicated books, but also to recall things she's read. Sidekick: Sock Monkey is Mik's stuffed animal from home that has become a Living Toy in Zo (see below). Softball is good for running, throwing, catching, and hitting things with a heavy cudgel. Find Clue! is Mikayla's Special Move, allowing her to ferret out any useful clues or hints that might be overlooked in a situation.

SOCK MONKEY, NEWLY AWAKENED LIVING TOY

Qualities: Good [+2] Acrobatics, Average [0] Living Toy, and Poor [-2] Naughty.

ZOZ IMPROVEMENT

Over time, characters gain skill, experience, and even new Qualities, Magic-Stars, and Special Moves. All this is called *Improvement*.

TO INCREASE A QUALITY RANK

Spending 4 Learning Points permits a character to raise one Quality one

Rank, to a maximum of Master [+6]. To raise Good [+2] Housekeeping to Master [+6] Housekeeping would require 8 Learning Points (4 Learning Points to go from Good to Expert and 4 more to go from Expert to Master).

TO PURCHASE A NEW QUALITY

Spending 4 Learning Points and creating a related Story Hook for the GM (GM's veto applies) permits a character to gain one new Quality at Good [+2] Rank. If a character wished to learn Sailing, he would have to spend 4 Learning Points and provide the GM with a relevant seed for a future plot, subplot, or adventure that is tied to Sailing ("hey, maybe I get shanghaied by Captain Mouse...").

TO PURCHASE A NEW MAGIC-STAR

Spending 2 Hero Points and coming up with an acceptable rationale during a relevant Scene in a ZoZ game (as for *Tale-spinning*; see p. 46), then spending 4 Learning Points and creating a related Story Hook for the GM (GM's veto applies to both) permits a character to put a Magic-Star on one of his Qualities. If a character wished to learn how to do magic using his Singing Quality, he would have to spend 2 Hero Points and come up with a reason why the character can now create magical effects in the middle of a relevant Scene of play ("okay, what most people didn't know is that the ship's cook has been teaching me mystic sea shanties while I've been scrubbing dishes"), and then come up with a seed for a future plot, subplot or adventure that involves Singing* ("I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. . . I think they are singing to me!").

TO LEARN A NEW SPECIAL MOVE

After using 2 Hero Points to grant an Upshift to a Quality (as for *My Heart is Pure*; see p. 45) during play, a character can spend 2 Learning Points at the end of the session to make it a Special Move; characters can have a maximum of 2 Special Moves. (A character may drop an old Special Move to make way for a new one.) If a character spends 2 Hero Points to Upshift his Swimming Quality during a session (say, to navigate a submarine cavern), he could spend 2 Learning Points to make "Underwater Swimming" into a Special Move, and would get essentially a free Upshift in situations involving Underwater Swimming.

INHABITANTS OF ZO

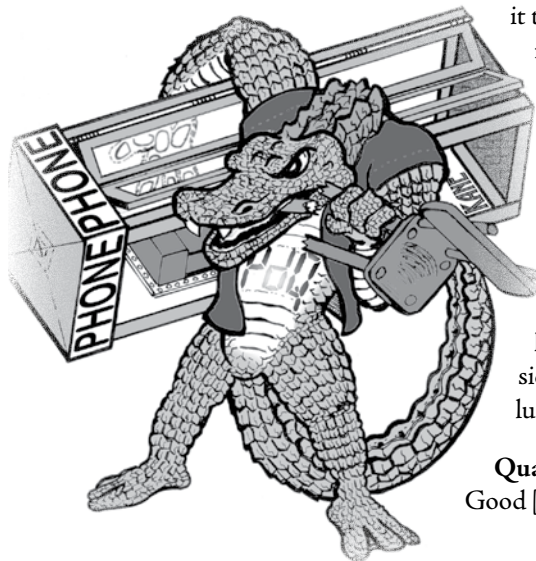
ZoZ PLAYER CHARACTERS (PCs)

Here are the initial write-ups of the two PCs of the ZoZ campaign I ran, with some accompanying commentary. For the post-campaign versions of these characters, see *Chapter 7*, p. 156. Feel free to use either version as NPCs in your own campaigns.

DERIL, TALKING CROCODILE DRIFTER

Background: Deril is the offspring of a certain ticking crocodile with a taste for pirates and an unknown father. In his early days, Deril spent most of his time lurking in the shoals off the Island of Forgotten Toys (near Viola), contentedly munching on old playthings that strayed too close to the water's edge. Unfortunately, as toys became more mechanized, Deril found fewer edible toys from which to choose. The final straw was a bad gastrointestinal experience with what, in the dark, appeared to be a tasty talking teddy bear, but regrettably turned out to be horribly crunchy, radio-controlled Japanese toy robot.

As a result, Deril now has a flashing LED display (much like an alarm clock) in his midsection which may, as he has recently learned, spell out an embarrassing word or symbol during times of stress or strange magics. Fortunately it has not emitted any harmful runes yet. Deril occasionally thinks he probably should do something preventative about it, but is really more embarrassed by it than anything. The effect is intermittent and unpredictable.



Giving up on the Island of Forgotten Toys, Deril wandered in search of greener waters, eventually winding up in Rosso. Recently, Deril is working as a scout/bodyguard for any fishing vessel that cares to hire him. He has also found dock-side wrasslin' matches to be quite lucrative.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Brawling, Good [+2] Perceptive, Good [+2] Later,

Gator (Drifter), Good [+2] You Gonna Eat That?, Good [+2] Ominous Abdomen, Poor [-2] Fractured Knowledge of Other Dimensions.

Special Move: Good [+2] Tail Gator!

Hero Points: 5

Miscellany: Deril is a humanoid crocodile; his hands and feet are webbed. He typically wears a vest and a sash to cover the intermittent and unpredictable flashing light in his belly; also, the pockets *do* come in handy.

Deril may seem a little rough around the edges to the average Zolander, but he generally tries to keep out of trouble and to keep his nose clean. He constantly talks about food or whether something is edible or not. Deril has heard tales of the Wooden Pirate's filleting of the Deathless Wolf in Rosso's waterfront dives, but he thinks it is a bunch of drunken nonsense.

Brawling includes hunting, sneak attacks, *Tail Gator!* (tail attack Special Move), wrasslin', and thick gator skin. *Perceptive* includes slightly hypnotic stare and being situationally aware. *Later*, *Gator (Drifter)* includes being street-/dock-wise, foraging, odd-jobs, and blue-collar manners. *You Gonna Eat That?* includes knowledge of his favorite food (children's toys; wooden boys are a rare treat!), his being constantly hungry, and an iron constitution that allows him to consume nearly anything.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: HOW DERIL CAME ABOUT (SCOTT)

I have gamed with Chad since our college days together (about 15 years ago now) at Penn State, and for some reason, he still indulges my whims to role-play anthropomorphic characters. This is easily the fourth or fifth talking animal character I've played, so maybe it's just a comfortable pair of shoes. Dunno. But in Chad's world, it's always fun!

For this new fairytale campaign, I was unsure about where Chad was drawing the genre-line for acceptable characters. Were myths and folk tales fair game too? I was leaning more towards some sort of folklore character; but as Chad pointed out, often they can be an uninteresting one-trick pony once the character is outside of their source setting.

So in an effort to be somewhat original, I plagiarized myself. Deril was based on an old character in my sketchbook named Clockfrog, who is a time-traveling frog with a two-bell alarm clock growing from its back and an LED clock display on

its belly. Clockfrog, in turn, was probably inspired by the King Solomon's Frog from Black Panther #1 (Jan 1977) by the inimitable Jack Kirby. So I took the idea of a reptile with something mechanical in its belly, iced it with the flavor of the Tick-Tock Crocodile from Peter Pan, and voila! ... a talking lizard to go. You want fries with that?

All right. Here's the greasy, super-sized account of my email exchange with Chad concerning Deril's genesis. Oh, and Deril's name is just some re-arranged letters from "crocodile" that sounded vaguely reptilian to me. Apologies to all you Darrell's, Daryl's, and other brothers out there.

Scott: "Crocodile/Lizard-man. Deril is the offspring of (or related to, don't really care) Tick-Tock the Crocodile (of Peter Pan fame). In his early days, Deril spent most of his time lurking in the shoals off the Island of Forgotten Toys, contentedly munching on old playthings that strayed too close to the water's edge. Unfortunately, as toys became more mechanized, he found fewer edible toys from which to choose."

Chad: "Deril can be the progeny of the Tick-Tock Croc; sure. However, note that Hook and Pan are not exactly the same – they're alternates. [Hook and Pan] may have different names – 'Captain James T. Pike' or 'Pyotr the Fatherless' or something like that – and slightly different stories, mooshed together with other stories. (Like the Blue Hood is a combo of Little Red Riding Hood and Robin Hood.)"

Scott: "The final straw was a bad gastrointestinal experience with what, in the dark, appeared to be a tasty teddy bear, but unfortunately turned out to be horribly crunchy, radio-controlled Japanese toy robot."

Chad: "Okay, this is slightly more of a connection to the 'real world' than I was thinking of, but we can swing with it. Obviously, the Island of Forgotten Toys is one of those nexuses between realities. This helps explain why Deril is a talking, humanoid croc-man when his parent was simply a highly-intelligent crocodile."

Scott: "I was just going to go with, 'hey, it's a fairy tale. Don't think too hard, kid.'"

Chad: "That's very Ozian in many ways. Also, Deril has seen toys from other worlds representing things that do not exist in Zo (trucks, machine guns, robots, computers, etc.). Of course, he doesn't really know what all of them are or do,

but he has his theories... which he may represent as fact. Of course, they're all just magic. When you're coming up with Qualities, consider a 'Fractured Knowledge of Other Dimensions' at a low Rank."

Scott: "I'm willing to go with 'a magical toy with blinking runes which were obscured by grime.'"

Chad: "Nah. Toy robot is fine, because it sets up the Quality I suggested."

Scott: "As a result, Deril now has a flashing LED display (much like an alarm clock) in his midsection which may, as he has recently learned, spell out an embarrassing word or symbol during times of stress or strange magicks. Fortunately it has not emitted any harmful runes yet, but Deril occasionally thinks he probably should do something preventative about it. Giving up on the IoFT, Deril wandered in search of greener waters, eventually winding up in the Empire of Zo. Recently, Deril (or 'Leddy,' a nickname which he hates) is working."

Chad: "Does this effect have any positive benefits? Is it constant? Regular or irregular? Does it reflect Deril's hidden thoughts? Or does it provide Magic 8-ball type oracles? Or all of the above? Maybe it flashes LED-LED-LED whenever he thinks about his tummy or gets hungry or something."

Scott: "I was going to leave it as an amusement for the GM. Had not considered it being an oracular device, but that could be kinda cool."

Chad: "Look at mah belly! It speaks de troof!"

Scott: "Heh. The Tummy of Truth & the Gullet of Visions. I pictured the effect being irregular and involuntary. Deril may wear a sash or vest or something to hide it, too. I'm flexible – whatever's most amusing."

Chad: "A croc-man with a vest is amusing."

Scott: "Cool. I had a B-plan just in case, but I thought Deril had a bit more whimsy."

Chad: "What was it, anyway?"

Scott: "The Cloud Hunter of Zo. Looks like Seraph from The Matrix [Reloaded]. Has basic wind powers, possibly is an Asian zephyr. Maintains the Zorcerer's (or some regal's) cloud zoo." [Had I played this character, I think 'Zo

Zoo' may have become a running gag!]

Chad: "Eminently yinkable. Which I may. . ."

GM COMMENTARY ON ROBOT IN THE BELLY

The addition of a "real world" Japanese toy robot instantly forced a connection between Earth and Zo, which I had been hoping to avoid. However, this led to the development of Otherworld concerns that – in the form of the Enigmatic Emu (see Chapter 6) – became a major part of the ZoZ campaign.

Also, trying to keep a fairytale setting separate from our reality – especially when the two lynchpins of this book, Oz and Narnia, depend on such – was a little silly on my part.

HORACE HOGG, GENTLEMAN ENCHANTER & 4TH LITTLE PIG

Background: Horace Hogg differs from the rest of the ancient and noble Hogg family of Viola in one key respect: unlike the rest of them, interested only in industry, hard work, engineering/construction, and artifice, Horace is interested in a life of leisure and gentlemanly pursuits (fine clothes, sophisticated food and drink, a good book, willing women, and the occasional bit of swordplay). Naturally, he turned to magic as an answer to his needs and has become an accomplished enchanter.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Enchantment*; Expert [+4] Swordplay; Good [+2] Manservant (Sidekick), and Poor [-2] Gentleman.

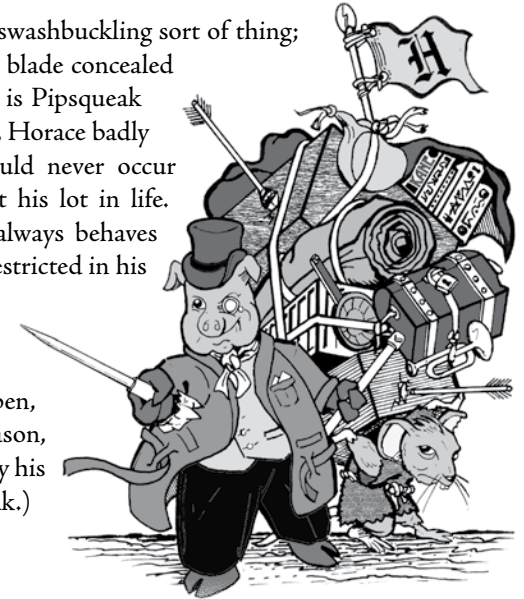
Special Move: Good [+2] Magic Monocle!

Hero Points: 5

Miscellany: Other than the fact that Horace is a four foot tall anthropomorphic pig, he appears to be a typical Victorian "gentleman of leisure" who wears lots of silk and velvet dressing gowns, smoking jackets, waistcoats, ascots, a monocle, etc. He carries a sword-cane (and knows how to use it), because don't all gentlemen sorcerers? He has been ostracized by the rest of the piggies – especially the Brothers Hogg (Horatio, Herman, and Hector). Horace lives on his own estate (Slophaven Manor) and harbors a fierce hatred of wolves, his family's ancient foes.

Enchantment is magic focused on changing one thing to another; *Magic Monocle!* is a Special Move allowing Horace to detect and analyze recent magics in an

area. *Swordplay* is your standard swashbuckling sort of thing; Horace usually uses a rapier-like blade concealed in his walking stick. *Manservant* is Pipsqueak (see below); as you would expect, Horace badly mistreats Pipsqueak, but it would never occur to Pipsqueak to complain about his lot in life. *Gentleman* means that Horace always behaves like a perfect gentleman, and is restricted in his response to things by having to act all gentlemanly 'n stuff. No dirty pool, must help damsels in distress, holding doors open, that sort of thing. (For some reason, Horace doesn't feel he has to apply his manners with regard to Pipsqueak.)



PLAYER COMMENTARY:

HOW HORACE HOGG CAME ABOUT (ANDREW)

Here is the initial character concept I sent to Chad when he solicited us for character concepts:

"I was considering possibly playing a normal human from our world who was originally sucked over to Zo as a child (a la Dorothy), but who is now grown up. He has become extremely independent, the ultimate survivor, opportunistic, cynical, jaded, and has spent maybe fifteen or twenty years wandering around the countryside using nothing but his guile, innate common sense, ruthlessness, and occasional use of a sharp blade in the dark to survive and prosper. I see him similar to a human who grew up in Toontown (or whatever the toon ghetto was in Who Framed Roger Rabbit?) – jaded, cunning, and having little respect for the silliness that surrounds him. Not sure if he would fit in with what you guys are thinking, but he'd be the perfect troubleshooter / 'hired wand' to get things done in a fantasy land."

"I'm not wedded to the character concept by any means. I could just as easily play a mostly reformed 'evil' gnome wizard, or a talking badger warrior-prince, or the Fourth Little Pig that no one wants to talk about. Whatever."

Chad: "Slightly too meta. But elements are good, I think. I like the badger and

the Fourth Little Pig. The gnome next, then the grown-up kid.”

The other player, Scott, also seemed to want me to play the badger. Probably because as soon as we all picked up D&D 3.0, I noticed that the badger – an average member of the species – was ungodly powerful, especially when compared with typical 1st level characters. Badger death-machines then became a running gag with the group for years after.

Here was my reply to Chad’s comments:

“OK, I wasn’t sure if you were going to feature any interaction with people/elements in the ‘real world’ (not the TV show) – it’s a common trope (Oz, Narnia, Fables), but then again you might be going for a straight setting where it’s simply fairytale-like.

On the one hand, I liked the idea of playing a fierce talking badger warrior prince with shining golden plate armor and a bigass sword, but on the other hand, I’m not sure I want to play a more-or-less straight warrior guy. I usually find them a little boring. He’d have to be jazzed up somehow to make him really interesting for me.

“Here’s what I was thinking for the Fourth Little Pig: Unlike the rest of the family who was interested in industry, labor, engineering/construction, and artifice, Horace was interested in a life of leisure and gentlemanly pursuits. Naturally, he turned to magic, became a semi-accomplished enchanter, and went on to be a ‘gentleman of leisure’ who wears lots of silk and velvet dressing gowns, smoking jackets, waistcoats, ascots, a monocle, etc. He carries a sword-cane (and knows how to use it), because don’t all gentlemen sorcerers? He has been ostracized by the rest of the piggies, but he lives on his own estate and still harbors a fierce hatred of wolves. I wasn’t sure of what a good family name for the pigs might be.”

Horace in his final version looks remarkably similar to the initial draft I submitted to Chad. I originally didn’t have “Gentleman” listed, though I mentioned it several times in the character description. I also didn’t have a particular Weakness in mind for him.

Here were Chad’s comments on the initial draft:

Chad: “You may want to consider taking ‘Gentleman’ as a Quality... hey, wait

a minute. Why not take Gentleman as a Weakness? This could mean that he’s restricted in his response to things by having to act all gentlemanly ‘n stuff. No dirty pool, must help damsels in distress, holding doors open, that sort of thing? Otherwise, I’d consider something like Sense of Honor or Terminally Short of Cash.”

Obviously I liked them, because that’s exactly how Horace turned out.

PIPSQUEAK, HORACE HOGG’S MANSERVANT

Background: Nineteen years ago, Horace Hogg put out a notice far and wide that he was hiring a servant. Many other potential servants were interviewed, but none seemed willing to put up with the amount of abuse that Pipsqueak would, so he was hired under a twenty year contract of indentured servitude.

Once per year, Horace gives him a pouch of gold, a sack of salt, and a flask of strong liquor. Pipsqueak disappears for three days with his payment, then returns, ready to serve again for another year. Pipsqueak is not required to discuss his past or what he does with his payment every year.

Qualities: Good [+2] Perfect Servant, Average [0] Endure Any Torment or Indignity, and Poor [-2] Mysterious Past.

Miscellany: Pipsqueak is a thoroughly disreputable looking mouse with a bad limp, one eye, and a Peter Lorre-esque voice who serves Horace as a valet, manservant, cook, butler, aide de camp, etc. Though Horace badly mistreats Pipsqueak, it would never occur to him to complain about his lot in life.

Perfect Servant means that Pipsqueak knows exactly how to behave as a servant and is a highly skilled butler, cook, valet, etc., and will try to protect Horace, even interposing himself between his master and danger. *Endure Any Torment or Indignity* comes from Pipsqueak having had a hard lot in life and regular mistreatment by his master, but he stoically tolerates it all. *Mysterious Past* illustrates that Horace is not sure exactly what Pipsqueak did before he came into Horace’s service, though he has a variety of possible theories (exiled mouse prince; former assassin-cultist of some sort, master wizard who has had his mind wiped clean, a polymorphed dragon, etc.). The truth? Who knows? Pipsqueak does often have mysterious visitors and sometimes disappears for short periods, but he will not discuss the matter.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (DELETED SCENES)



Initially, we used the Sidekick rules from Truth & Justice for Horace's player to stat up Pipsqueak. (The short form of these rules is that the Rank that Sidekick is taken at by a character grants a higher number of Qualities to that character's Sidekick.) However, it became clear during the campaign that the way he was used and played (by both GM and player), that the T&J stats were more detail than was necessary: all Pipsqueak needed to be was someone to fetch things for Horace, someone to either take a hit for or back up Horace in combat, an attractor for mysterious plot threads, and to serve as a target for Horace's invective and abuse. Therefore, Pip's write-up was streamlined to what you see in the main text.

Pipsqueak's original Qualities were:

Qualities: Expert [+4] Endure Any Torment or Indignity; Good [+2] Slavish Loyalty to Master; Good [+2] Perfect Servant, and Poor [-2] Mysterious Past.

Endure Any Torment or Indignity comes from Pipsqueak having had a hard lot in life and regular mistreatment by his master, but he stoically tolerates it all.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS (NPCs)

Usually, NPCs in a ZoZ game can be quickly defined with a just a Name and 1 to 3 Qualities. This is about as far as the GM needs to detail the typical people seen in passing, a PC's Sidekick, or the individual henchmen of a bigger and badder villain. The vast majority of NPCs in a campaign are of this type. A single PC can reliably handle a couple of these NPCs in conflicts at a time. This class of NPC is often called a *Minion* or an *Extra*.

For more significant allies and enemies, the GM should create the NPC just as he would create a PC. Only the most important NPCs per session should be of this category, called a *Rival* or *Supporting Character*. They are usually each a match for a PC one-on-one, but a group of PCs can often handle a single Rival easily enough if they work together.

A major NPC who is more powerful than each PC individually is called a *Boss* or *Antagonist*. There should only be one Boss per session or story arc.

They are created like PCs, but have 4 extra Ranks to put into their Quality packages (see p. 64). For example, take a Boss built with package E: he starts with 1 Master [+6] Strength, 3 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness. Using the 4 extra Ranks that come from being a Boss, he could end up with 2 Master [+6] Strengths (2 Ranks to change a Good to Master), 1 Expert [+4] Strength (1 Rank to change a Good to Expert), 1 Good [+2] Strength, and 1 Average [0] Strength (1 Rank to change Poor to Average). GMs should note, however, that it's often a good idea to keep a Weakness at Poor [-2] for gameplay and characterization purposes.

The most powerful NPCs in the campaign, called *Big Bads* or *Special Guest Stars*, can be handled two ways. The first is just to assign as many Qualities at whatever Rank is necessary to reflect the NPC's abilities, and the second is to just not stat up the NPC at all. There should only be one or two Big Bads *per campaign*. In Zo, only Shaykosch and the Zorcerer of Zo himself are of this level (but see the *Appendix*, p. 182, for a special treat!).

Lastly, NPCs don't get Learning Points.

ZoNPCs

Here is a selection of NPCs to get you started; all appeared in the ZoZ campaign that was the genesis of this book. Many do not follow the character generation rules for PCs, because some are minions, some are monsters, and some are Bosses.

ALPHONSE, COUNT OF COBALTIA

Background: Count Alphonse, ruler of Cobaltia, believes himself the rightful King of Azul. And, from a certain perspective, he just may be. After all, do not his agents and soldiers (hidden and open) protect the people of Azul, be they from his county or that of his missing niece? Has he not watched over the land and shared in its bounty as a ruler should? Are any of the other nobles of Zo doing better? Could they do better than he? Alphonse doubts it.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Aristocrat, Expert [+4] Devious, Expert [+4] Swordsman, Good [+2] Occult Lore, Good [+2] Tactics, Poor [-2] Overconfident, Poor [-2] Power-hungry.

Special Move: Good [+2] Avoid Suspicion!

Villain Points: 5

Miscellany: The Count is a physically imposing figure of a man. Handsome enough, he stands 6' 4" and about 210 pounds. He is bald (shaves his thinning hair), but maintains a neatly trimmed beard. His personal device is a black wolf's head on a blue field. His eyes are the scintillating blue of the Azulite aristocracy. *Occult Lore* reflects his interest and knowledge in magic and enchantment, though he personally lacks any mystical power. *Tactics* shows his genius at military maneuvers and planning. *Avoid Suspicion!* permits him to evade detection of his nasty activities and to pooh-pooh any such news that happens to come to light. See p. 133.

NOTE - Additionally, Count Alphonse has the services of about 110 Azulite Guardsmen, plus those of Cesar and the Stitchwitch (see below).

Inspiration: Bluebeard from *Fables* and Vlad Tepes (the historical Dracula).

THE BLUE HOOD, OUTLAW ARCHER

Background: Raised in the forest by a bandit gang, the orphan known only as the Blue Hood has grown fighting the repressive tyranny that Count Alphonse secretly holds over the Azulite county of Indigon. She suspects her birth may very well be higher than that of a peasant, but has yet to find solid proof that she indeed is the Heir. Until then, she robs from the Count and his cronies to give to the poor. She has an irrational phobia of the Deathless Wolf for some reason.

Qualities: Master [+6] Archer, Good [+2] Bold, Good [+2] Leader, Good [+2] Sneaky, Average [0] Swordsman, Poor [-2] Proud, Poor [-2] Scared of the Deathless Wolf.

Special Move: Good [+2] Piercing Blue Eyes!

Hero Points: 3

Miscellany: The Blue Hood is 5'11" tall, and a 150 pound athletic woman. Though she spends little effort on her appearance (being something of a tomboy from a young age), her habit of being *Bold* – combined with her *Piercing Blue Eyes!* Special Move – can make her exceptionally striking at times. She is *Scared of the Deathless Wolf* – he haunts her nightmares, and rumors of his return often distract her from her goals. The fact that the Count uses the wolf's head as his device angers and worries her – one time, it actually stopped her from running him through with her sword when she had him dead to rights! See p. 144.

NOTE - Additionally, the Blue Hood leads a band of 22 *Happy Bandits* (see below).

Inspiration: Little Red Riding Hood meets Robin Hood.

BLUNDER, TOUGH GUY

Background: Blunder is one of George Pieman's bully-boys. He is Thud's brother.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Tough, Good [+2] Strong, Poor [-2] Clumsy.

Miscellany: Blunder is short, wide, and unafraid to run right through a wall to get at his foes. See p. 87.



CESAR THE SWORDSMAN

Background: Cesar is the deadly henchman of Count Alphonse of Azul. He lives to fight and cause trouble.

Qualities: Master [+6] Swordsman, Good [+2] Cunning, Good [+2] Ranga, Good [+2] Sneaky, Poor [-2] Disreputable, Poor [-2] Loyal to Count Alphonse.

Special Move: Good [+2] Backstab!

Villain Points: 1

Miscellany: 6'1", rangy, scruffy man with craggy features. His green eyes glitter, his lips rarely move. If he speaks, his voice is hoarse. He carries a fine Azulite blade, made by a master smith; unknown to many, the sword bears a Trollkin-slaying charm (Upshift against ogres, trolls, and goblins). See p. 117.

Inspiration: "Blondie" and Angel Eyes from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* meet Aragorn from *The Lord of the Rings*.

GEORGE PIEMAN, NE'ER-DO-WELL

Background: George is the son of King Glamorgan of Rosso's pastry chef, Niall Pieman. The money, power, and privileges of his father's position (significantly higher than when Niall was a humble village baker) have spoiled young George and made him quite the rake. He hangs out at the Rusty Cutlass Tavern in Port Carmine, drinking and gambling with his bully-boys *Thud* and *Blunder*. His childhood sweetheart, Molly Merchant, has no idea he's a bad egg.

Qualities: Good [+2] Charming, Good [+2] Duelist, Good [+2] Gambler, Good [+2] Lucky, Poor [-2] Ambitious, Poor [-2] Heartless.

Villain Points: 2

Miscellany: George is 5'10", brown hair and eyes, quite charming but cruel. He is exceedingly selfish and cares only for himself. He's also a plotter and schemer, always looking for more money, more power, more position – but as a skilled gambler, he knows not to be too greedy or obvious about it. See p. 103.

Inspiration: Georgie Porgie combined with the Jack/Knave of Hearts.

GOBLIN (DAWN)

Background: Dawn Goblins are generally easy-going mountain dwellers; however, when they are finally roused to action, they can be ferocious. They love strength (of mind, of body, of purpose, of magic), and will follow the strongest leaders they can find. Dawn Goblins stand around 4' tall and have a bulky build; their ears are rounded and their skin is yellow-green.

Qualities: Good [+2] Club, Average [0] Ferocious.

GOBLIN (DUSK)

Background: Dusk Goblins are generally callous cave dwellers, with little regard for anyone else – especially other Goblins. They hate weakness of any sort, and will follow any leaders that will promise them the chance to destroy the weak. Dusk Goblins stand around 4' tall and have a slim build; their ears are scalloped, their eyes are a faint luminous red, and their skin is green-gray.

Qualities: Good [+2] Club, Average [0] Ferocious, Average [0] See in Darkness, Poor [-2] Vulnerable to Light.



Special Move: Good [+2] Darkstrong!

Miscellany: *Vulnerable to Light* means that any light source stronger than that of a medium chandelier causes them to take one Damage Rank per Turn; full daylight can transmute a Dusk Goblin into Stone in 1d6 Turns. (If kept in darkness for 1d6 hours, they will revert to flesh.) *Darkstrong!* means that while a Dusk Goblin is within a low-light environment (candlelight or less), they get essentially a free Upshift to all of their abilities.

GUARDSMAN

Background: Here are some basic stats for an average guardsman in service to any of the aristocrats or leaders in Zo.

Qualities: Good [+2] (Weapon), Average [0] Soldier, Poor [-2] Cannot Disobey Orders from Leader.

Miscellany: Guardsmen wear the livery (colors and sigils) of their Leader.

HAPPY BANDIT

Background: Here are some basic stats for an average bandit/rebel who follows the Outlaw Queen known as the Blue Hood (see above).

Qualities: Good [+2] (Weapon, usually Longbow), Good [+2] Woodsman, Poor [-2] Utter Loyalty to the Blue Hood.

Miscellany: Happy Bandits wear blue-green cloaks speckled with gray-brown splotches, to better camouflage themselves in their haunt of Fogwood in Azul.

MURKLEBOG, HUMAN WIZARD

Background: Murklebog got into the magic game for all the *cool stuff*. That doesn't just mean the spiffy magic items, but also the weird knowledge and the awesome spells. He's a skeezy little man who would bop you over the head and steal your Magic Beans, then run away.

Qualities: Master [+6] Wizard*, Good [+2] Staff, Good [+2] Get Away, Average [0] Otherworld Knowledge, Poor [-2] Obsessed with Magic.

Special Move: Good [+2] Runes!

Villain Points: 1

Miscellany: Murklebog is 5'6" and 175 pounds. He has thinning brown hair and brown eyes; his beard is unkempt. He wears blue robes with brilliant golden magic symbols embroidered upon it and favors pointy-toe shoes. *Get Away* means that, while no coward, Murklebog is exceptionally good at skedaddling when the going gets tough. *Otherworld Knowledge* reflects his interest in potential alternate worlds. *Obsessed with Magic* means that he will do anything to understand or acquire more magical things or knowledge. *Runes!* shows that if Murklebog can take the time to use carved, drawn, or painted runic symbols in his magical workings, then he's better at them. See p. 131.

Inspiration: Rincewind from Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series combined with Cugel the Clever from Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* series.

SHAWN GRUFF

Background: Shawn Gruff is a drifter by nature, though he claims to have been born in Giallo. Once an alchemist's apprentice, he has been plying his trade as a "gentleman of leisure" (read: thief) in the villages of Azul. Recently, his brother William Gruff, one of the guards of the Viola Bridge, was killed by Trolls. He has sworn to avenge his brother's death.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Knives, Good [+2] Potions, Good [+2] Thief, Average [0] Magic Horn*, Poor [-2] Threadbare.

Special Move: Good [+2] Escape!

Hero Points: 2

Miscellany: 5'8" billy goat, one blue eye and one green eye, beard. One of his horns is a rune-carved wooden prosthetic – this is his hollow *Magic Horn**, which allows him to quickly mix up a required potion provided he has some form of liquid to fill it up with and transmute. *Escape!* reflects his uncanny ability to wriggle out of bonds or sticky situations. See p. 115.

Inspiration: Hanse Shadowspawn from the *Thieves' World* series plus the Gray Mouser from Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar stories.

STIG, THE OGRE TYRANT

Background: While not too bright, Stig is smart and powerful enough to command the loyalties of lesser trollkin – the ogres, the trolls, the goblins. He desires power and control, and glories in imposing his strength on others. He is a nasty piece of work.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Ogre, Good [+2] Magic Proof, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Tough, Good [+2] Warrior, Poor [-2] Barbarian.

Special Move: Good [+2] Cause Fear!

Villain Points: 1

Miscellany: Stig is 7,500 pounds, has hard brown eyes, and is covered in dark green scales. His device is a giant green fist on a purple field. Ogre includes strong and tough concepts (Stig is an exceptionally mighty ogre). *Magic Proof* is a form of armor against spells and enchantments. *Barbarian* means he is unfamiliar with the trappings and mores of civilization, and just generally unpleasant to be around. *Cause Fear!* means that Stig gets a bonus when trying to use any of his other abilities to scare the pants off of someone. See p. 133.

NOTE - Additionally, Stig commands a warband of 60 monsters, mostly *Dawn* and *Dusk Goblins* (see above) and *Trolls* (see below).

Inspiration: Shrek from *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*, plus the Great Goblin from *The Hobbit*.

THE STITCHWITCH

Background: The Stitchwitch is the last descendant of the famous hero known as the Blue Tailor. Alas, over the course of history, the noble blood has run exceptionally thin. The Stitchwitch is a nasty middle-aged hag who has nothing good to say about most people; after all, they cannot recognize her splendor and power, and must therefore be idiots. She is exceptionally fond of Count Alphonse, since he has always treated her with respect.

Qualities: Master [+6] Needlemagic*, Expert [+4] Flight, Good [+2] Deadly Aim, Poor [-2] Flattery Will Get You Everywhere, Poor [-2] Ugly.

Special Move: Good [+2] Binding!

Villain Points: 4

Miscellany: The Stitchwitch is 5' 8", with long black stringy hair, gray eyes, tan skin, and a surprising collection of warts, wens, blemishes, and scars. Her clothes, however are always of the finest make and at times (when she has sewn a magical mask) she can almost seem cute – for an older, cackling woman. *Needlemagic** allows the Stitchwitch to do spells and enchantments involving needles, thread, sewing, and weaving. Her *Flight* is an inherent ability, though she often uses a broom between her legs as a rudder. *Deadly Aim* means she can knock the eye out of a mouse (Talking or Dumb) at 100 paces. *Flattery Will Get You Everywhere* means that her head is easily turned by praise and attention. *Binding!* means that she's a master of tying knots, be they physical, mental, verbal, social, or magical. See p. 146.

Inspiration: A touch of Baba Yaga from traditional Russian folklore, plus Pinhead from the *Hellraiser* movie series, plus wuxia thread, needle, and scarf kung fu attacks.

THUD, STRONG GUY

Background: Thud is one of George Pieman's bully-boys. He is Blunder's brother.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Strong, Good [+2] Tough, Poor [-2] Dumb.

Miscellany: Thud is big, bald, and not afraid to pick up an applecart and throw it at his foes. See p. 83.

TIMOTHY, THE MARQUIS DE CARABAS

Background: Timothy is a Talking Cat, and hereditary Marquis of Carabas in Giallo. He attended Lime University in Jade City; though this gave him a proper gentlemanly education, it also made him a bit more finicky in matters of taste. He rules Carabas well, with justice and mercy, though he is often laughed at behind closed doors for his “uppity citified ways” by his people.

Qualities: Expert [+4] Fencing, Good [+2] Aristocrat, Good [+2] Tricky, Poor [-2] Vain.

Special Move: Good [+2] Dress to Impress!

Hero Points: 3

Miscellany: Timothy is a 4’ 6” black tuxedo cat, given to fine clothing and accessories. His personal device is a golden boot on a black field. *Dress to Impress!* Is a Special Move allowing him to select the appropriate garb to make the best possible impression in a situation. See p. 109.

NOTE - Additionally, the Marquis has the services of around 20 Giallon Guardsmen (see above).

Inspiration: Puss from “Puss in Boots,” the Marquis of Carabas from Neil Gaiman’s *Never Where*, and Lord Percy combined with Captain Kevin Darling from *Blackadder II* and *IV*, respectively (both played by Tim McInnerny).

TROLL

Background: Trolls inhabit bridges, and extract tolls from those who cross –sometimes money, sometimes blood!

Qualities: Good [+2] Climbing, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Tough, Poor [-2] Greedy.

Special Move: Good [+2] Bridgestrong!

Miscellany: *Bridgestrong!* means that while a Troll is on, under, or within three paces of a bridge, they get essentially a free Upshift to all of their abilities.

SHAYKOSCH

Statless force of nature. See page 21. See also *Appendix*, p. 182.

Inspiration: The traditional Big Bad Wolf of “The Three Little Pigs” and “Little Red Riding Hood”, plus Bigby Wolf from *Fables*, and Koschei the Deathless from Russian folklore.

THE ZORCERER OF ZO

Statless force of nature. See page 22.

Inspiration: The Wizard from *The Wizard of Oz* (film), the Emperor from Fred Saberhagen’s *Book of Swords* series, and Epikt the Ktistec Machine from several RA Lafferty stories and *Arrive at Easterwine*.



If you want your children
to be intelligent, read
them fairy tales. If you want
them to be more intelligent,
read them more fairy tales.

– Albert Einstein



CHAPTER 5

GAMEMASTERING ZOZ



GENERAL GMING PRECEPTS

In running ZoZ, I followed some basic principles and processes:

SPEED

Prep and play were fast and abstract. If something wasn't important to what the PCs were doing (like buying supplies or traveling to the next point of interest), I didn't make notes ahead of time, make random

rolls, or stop play if at all possible – I just said, “It happens.” However, if the players were interested in something, I ran with whatever it was that caught their attention until they were happy and satisfied.

RUNNING NOTES

Instead of exhaustive detailed descriptions, I wrote the adventures, NPC stats, rumors, bits of setting, and the like as quickly-jotted notes and bulleted lists, usually one two-column page's worth. You can see a mildly edited transcription of my handwritten notes for each session in the Appendix.

INSPIRATION

I took a fairytale or nursery rhyme as the starting seed of the early adventures to provide initial plots and characters for the PCs to interact with (see *Chapter 1*, p. 1). Eventually, their own actions in-game fed into the process,

and allowed a deeper, richer integration of classic fairytales with the PCs' own story.

STORY HOOKS

Any Story Hooks (see *Chapter 3*, p. 41) generated in previous sessions were integrated into my notes and rough ideas for the adventure.

CANNED TEXTS

There were certain things I wanted to get across to the players, usually early in each session. The first of these things was always a recap of the previous session, told in a “Once Upon A Time . . .” format. The second was often a speech with information that the players could use to link up with the plots and characters that were running around with them in the world.

NPC PLANS

I tried to figure out the individual storylines of the key NPCs for each session: what they wanted to do, what they were doing, and how they'd react to things that interfered with their goals.

IMPROVISATION

Relying on the feedback of the players on previous sessions, my notes for the adventure, my take on the setting, my understanding of what the NPCs' plans were, and what the players were showing interest in, I made stuff up on the fly constantly (and took notes of the most important bits to remember).

SET SESSION LENGTHS

Each session was scheduled to be between 3 and 4 hours long and take place around once a month. This was partially because we were all gaming on Friday nights after work, and all of our schedules were too busy for weekly play. While I wanted each session to contribute meaningfully to the overall campaign arc, I wanted each individual adventure to focus on one particular thing that could be resolved within that session. My thought was that enhancing the “episodic” or “story-chapter” feel I desired for the campaign would help us keep our thoughts of the gameworld fresh in the long weeks between sessions (it seems

to have worked). Lastly, I wanted to take into account the commute of about an hour that one of the players had back to his apartment from mine – a 5 or 6 hour long session would mean that he'd be driving home at "Oh Dark Thirty" after a long day of work and a long evening of gaming.

FEEDBACK

After every session, I first awarded Learning Points (for *Improvement*, see p. 70) and then asked the players what was Good, what was Bad, and what was Ugly (meaning "confusing") about the session. I tried to do more Good stuff, less Bad stuff, and "pretty up" anything that was Ugly. (If I had to do this again, I'd be awarding Learning Points at the moment they were earned, as I recommend in Chapter 3.)

ROLEPLAYING WITH KIDS

Fairytale games like ZoZ offer great opportunities for playing with young kids – the genre is easily accessible and familiar from TV, movies, cartoons, and bedtime stories. There's plenty of buy-in from the potential players, right up front, and there's nothing better for an RPG.

All of the advice in maintext of this chapter will serve the GM of small children well; however, here follow some specific suggestions for running games involving kids.

CONTENT CHOICES

Know the kids' tolerance for creepy or threatening imagery, as best you can, and do not surpass it. Be scary, sure, but make sure the players feel – or learn to feel – empowered enough to deal with being scared. It's probably good to keep the gore level low for kids younger than third or fourth grade; at that age, you can start incorporating "disgusting" elements, but save the "bloody" ones until sixth grade or junior high.

RUNNING THE RULES

For all preteen kids, consider the following OPTIONAL RULE: if **Quality Rank is equal to Difficulty Rank of a task, this is treated as a simple situation, with the player "winning the tie" instead of being upgraded to a complicated situation and requiring a dice roll.**

That is, under the OPTIONAL RULE, a Good [+2] character can climb a Good [9] wall without the player rolling; only walls of Expert [+4] or Master [+6] Difficulty require a roll.

For preschool and kindergarten kids, consider using only simple and complicated situations. Conflicts become pass/fail complicated situations.

For first graders, feel free to use simple, complicated, and basic conflict situations as written. Advanced conflicts become basic conflicts.

For second and third graders, all the rules as written can be used but the GM may want to use a whole-page character sheet listing a character's qualities in large boxes, and hand out poker chips marked with "+2" (as mentioned in an option for character generation in Chapter 4, p. 64); this way, the kids can visually connect the MOD number for a Quality with a stack of chips (i.e., a Good [+2] Quality is one chip, an Expert [+4] Quality is two chips, etc. Different color chips can be handy: one color of chip can stand for Quality Ranks, another can be Damage Ranks, and a third color could stand for Failure Ranks.

PROPS

Playing with props when gaming with kids is Just a Good idea. Action figures, dolls, stuffed animals -- all are good. (Heck, that's sort of how we ended up with Winnie-the-Pooh....) Take advantage of building blocks and "living room geography" to give the players a good sense of locations and distances. ("If Teddy is here on the coffee table, the castle is over there, sitting on the back of grandpap's chair..."). A Robin Hood cap, wizard's hat, or princess' tiara can go a long way to getting kids into character.

FAILING & LOSS OF INTEREST

Nothing will kill a kid's interest in something like the thing being too hard for him to do. This leads to disinterest at best, and frustration at worst. And dice in RPGs are notorious for having long runs of utter failure in the simplest tasks. While PDQ has been put together to help avoid that sort of thing, here's some suggestions to help young players deal with failure:

Always award Learning Points instantly. Getting something for failing can help take the sting out of the failure a little.

Take a leaf from Socrates. Kids love to learn, though they often don't like it when they're being taught explicitly. Ask questions to get them to think about stuff. Having to think about the answers engages the mind.

Encourage the players to look at what is on their character sheet. Which is the best Quality to use in the situation? Can you combine Qualities? Use Hero Points? Have you earned enough Learning Points to improve the relevant Quality?

What exactly is the problem? Ask the player to explain what's going on, describing the task that they're trying to accomplish. Getting them to imagine the problem may be enough to help them come up with new possible solutions, or may inspire extra details that do so.

Still can't? Maybe it's impossible; look for another way. While perseverance and the attempt to learn should be rewarded, so too should the understanding that sometimes you have to walk away from the problems that are too big for you (and maybe get help...).

More ideas on the sorts of lessons that kids take from fairytales can be found in Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*.

SPECIFIC GMING TECHNIQUES

This section discusses a few ways to put the *Basic GMing Precepts* from above into practice.

ONLY ROLL WHEN YOU HAVE TO

Seriously: if something's not important, *don't roll dice*.

Personally, I think "rolling for everything" is one of the lingering bits of role-playing gaming that stems directly from its tactical simulation wargaming roots. Unfortunately, I – and many gamers I talk to – am not simulating tactical battlefield situations most of the time. Instead, I'm trying to simulate stories and movies.

That being said, there needs to be some randomness involved in play. Otherwise RPGs aren't games, but storytelling. . . not that there's anything wrong with that. Far from it.

Where RPGs depart from stories and movies is that stories and movies are intensely crafted and refined. They follow a script, and when the hero needs to make that one-in-a-million shot, he does. Period. (Unless it's a tragedy.) Really, there's very little randomness there.

RPGs, on the other hand, are *raw* and *fresh* stories that are being made up as we play. We are in the moment of creation, and there's often no opportunity to go back and polish up a situation or event to make the hero cooler or more successful. The roll of the dice can be brutal – in many games, that flubbed roll means your fencing master just stabbed his own foot! – and may break the flow of the story being made, strain credulity, or throw genre assumptions out the window.

The answer to this conundrum is two part: 1) *don't roll much*; and 2) when you roll, *the result should be interesting, in success or failure*.

So if your cunning courtier makes a *faux pas* at court in front of the king (i.e., rolls poorly), it's not that he forgot how low he was supposed to bow. No, there has to be some interesting effect in *how* the failure happens, and something stemming *from* the failure. Perhaps the courtier bowed too low, which has a social implication of mockery – the king is displeased, and traitors at court think the character is secretly on their side. Perhaps he didn't bow low enough, and the king thinks he's uppity, and decides to volunteer him for the suicide mission *du jour*. Maybe a pigeon crashed through the window and distracted everyone from the courtier's perfect bow. In any case, it's not just a failed attempt at a task – it's a failure, accident, mistake, or random occurrence (possibly outside of the character's control) that helps drive the story to the next interesting bit (whatever that turns out to be).

STEPPING THROUGH PDQ

The PDQ system at the heart of ZoZ is built to be fast, fun, and flexible. Also, it's pretty fair at mapping how unlikely it is for highly-skilled characters to mess up easy tasks. If you compare Quality MODs to Difficulty Rank TNs, then you'll see that it's actually impossible for a Master [+6] Quality character to fail a Poor [5] Difficulty Rank task, *even if they have a Downshift*. This is why most simple situations just compare Quality to Difficult Ranks, and run with it.

Now, sometimes, we gamers get an itchy dice-rolling hand. I know it. I've felt it. The knee-jerk response when something happens is to roll. Fine and dandy – if you gotta, you gotta, I can understand that. However, *PDQ* lets you do something to make it quick and easy: complicated rolls. Roll your dice, add your relevant MOD(s), compare to TN, and done. Even things that would normally be considered conflict situations (like KO'ing a guard before entering the wizard's lair) can be abstracted back to a complicated situation if *it's not that important or would totally derail the adventure*. After all, the intended adventure is getting into the wizard's Wiz-Cave and breaking his stuff; to be caught by Joe-Bob Man-at-Arms before you even get inside is not fun.

Roll only if you have to in order to preserve the fun.

IMPROVISING

Improvisation is a vital GMing skill to learn; it makes things go so much smoother when you don't have to look up references for every last thing or make rolls for every bat in the swarm that's attacking the hero. Just make it up, already.

But how to do this in a fair and consistent way? Aye, that's the rub.

KNOW YOUR GENRE

The first thing is that you need to know your genre. You should almost certainly enjoy it. Be familiar with its common features and flows and situations and character types. A good understanding of the genre of a game allows you to dredge up coolness from very sketchy hints and inspirations.



For ZoZ GMs, if you are not familiar with at least some of the books, movies, and games mentioned in *Chapter 1*, then start reading, watching, or playing. Your games will run smoother, and your players will get more enjoyment, if you know what you're talking about.

KNOW YOUR PLAYERS

Be familiar with what sorts of things your players like and what they dislike. Try to include the former and avoid the latter. If you've played with them often enough before, then you'll have an idea what interests them. (Fritz likes Talking Animals, and Otto hates Undead.)

If you haven't played with them enough before, *ask them what they like and dislike in games*. Simple. Just keep what they say in mind while you're prepping and running, and you should be golden. (It's not a bad idea just to ask folks these things anyway, even if you've been gaming together a long time. It'll be a fun conversation, at the very least.)



KNOW YOUR PCs

Pay attention to what the PCs have on their character sheets. This is the representation of how the player wants his character to be; this is how the PC is cool.

Indulge the PC's coolness. Give him opportunities to use his Strengths and suffer from his Weaknesses. Connect some dots between Qualities to find things that are either inside or just outside the interests on their sheets. If the PC is a Good Singer and a Good Dancer, then maybe a chance to tread the boards in a royal masque put on for the Princess's birthday is in his future.

KNOW YOUR NPCs

Keep exactly the same thoughts in mind for your NPCs as was mentioned for PCs immediately above. Remember that they have their own goals, methods, and perspectives. That last bit is the most important: NPCs have limited perspectives – perhaps even more limited than PCs do. They can only operate on the information and ideas that you as GM permit. Make sure they act from their limited understanding and remain in character.

OFFER BOTH OPPORTUNITIES & OBSTACLES

Nothing is more boring than getting absolutely everything with no effort – except maybe never getting *anything* despite insane amounts of effort (and the latter comes with a side order of frustration).

A good GM offers the PCs both *opportunities* (a chance to get or do something good) and *obstacles* (stuff that gets in the way of something the PC wants). Over the life of the campaign, the amount of these two things should be in proportion. Of course, the exact ratio depends on what sort of campaign you're running – if it's a bleak one, there are more obstacles than opportunities; if it's a bright one, there are more opportunities than obstacles. I'd say that for bleaker campaigns, a 25-75 split between opportunities and obstacles is about as far as you should go; for a notably bright campaign, I'd have a 75-25 split.

Personally, I tend to aim for a 50-50 split between the two, but I shift the emphasis. Sometimes, most of the opportunity is up front, then everything goes to hell and it's a lot of obstacles. More often, there are a lot of obstacles up front, and opportunities start piling up as the PCs move into the home stretch. Divvy the split up in the way that feels best to you.

LISTENING MORE THAN SPEAKING

Listen to what your players say, in-character and out-of-character. Whatever they smile over and get excited about, do more of that. Whatever they frown about, sound frustrated about, or get exercised over, do less of that.

This is exactly like asking them what they like or dislike, only you're using passive sonar rather than active.

NEVER SAY NO

If players want to try something, never say “no” outright. Instead, make sure they understand the situation and hint at the ramifications at whatever weird or unexpected idea they have. Sometimes, it's the players misunderstanding something about what's going on. Sometimes it's you, the GM, misunderstanding what they want to actually do.

If the action is just a total violation of the character, genre, tone, history, or

whatever of the game (Han shot first, dammit), then feel free to offer suggestions or alternatives – what we could call the “Maybe, but...” option.

If the players want to stick with what they're saying, without deviation by accepting a “Maybe, but...” then strap yourself in, throw caution to the winds, and hit them with a “Yes, but...” that lets the chips fall where they may. It may very well change the course of the campaign, and that's fine: the players are part of the creative force of the game's story, right alongside you as GM.

You won't be in Kansas anymore, Toto. Go for it.

(However, if a player is just being a blatant ass – like demanding to be able to fly without any relevant ability, tool, or rationale, or whipping a previously undisclosed and way-out-of-genre high-powered handgun out of their pinafore when confronted with Winged Monkeys – feel free to say “no.” Never saying no only applies to people who are playing fair.)

RULE OF THREE

It's a rule of comedy as much as a rule of fairytales. Set a pattern, *continue* the pattern, then *complete* or *break* the pattern. You get a nice little catharsis from it, because our brains seem to be wired up to groove on it automagically.

Small, Medium, and Large. Three Pigs, Three Bears, Three Amigos. Beginning, Middle, and Albuquerque. I love coffee, I love tea, I love the Java Jive and it loves me.

Introduce elements in sets of three, and you'll garner attention, at the very least.

REINTEGRATE DANGLING THREADS

After every session – every other session at the very outside – reintroduce elements related to outstanding, unresolved threads that are still hanging out there in space. What happened after Duke Dimworthy fell off of the merlon and into the moat (because they never found his body)? What does the Queen do when she heard that Sir Dance-a-Lot Peppermint Twisted the Red Dragon into toothpaste and saved the infant Prince? Did Joanie ever tell Chachi she loves him?



While letting some threads dangle for a short time is a good way to make their reintroduction a surprise, digging up a long forgotten leftover bit is a risky thing – most of the time, it blows up into atomic lame right in your face. (For copious examples, look at continuity-laden comic books with writing teams that change over the years. Say no more.)

YOU'RE MORE THE CRUISE DIRECTOR THAN THE CAPTAIN

As a GM, you have two responsibilities: 1) make sure everyone – including you – is having fun; and 2) making sure the story as you and your group are creating it is going somewhere – *anywhere*. These two things are absolutely listed in order of importance. Remember them. While it's best if the fun and the artistry of the tale walk hand in hand, if push comes to shove fun is more important.

CHAPTER 6 THE FIRST ZOZ CAMPAIGN

This chapter talks about the complete ZoZ campaign I ran for my players in 2005 and 2006. Each section includes some basic prep work I did, the experience of the group's "actual play," individual bits of interest that came up in each session, and additional commentary by me and/or the players. Note that all that existed of the Zantabulous Land of Zo setting when the campaign started is reflected in the *Behind the Curtain: GM (Proto Zo)* textbox in the Introduction and the *Player Input on the Campaign* in the Appendix. (Also, my "running notes" for each session appear in the Appendix.)

With luck, this chapter will give a little insight into how I set-up a gaming session and fill in elements of the setting, how my gaming group(s) play it out, and how I use that play experience to generate the next adventure. This is just my personal style; hopefully, other GMs and players can glean some value from it.

*Georgie Porgie, puddin' and pie,
Kissed the girls and made them cry;
When the boys came out to play,
Georgie Porgie ran away!*

SESSION 1: AUGUST 26, 2005

ONCE UPON A TIME,
IN THE KINGDOM OF ROSSO . . .

Horace Hogg has arrived with his manservant Pipsqueak just in time for the famed Crimson Festival. Also in Port Carmine in time for the carnival is Deril, who has been serving as a caravan guard and has just been paid. They meet on the Street of Flame, and recognize one another – both are Violanders, and they have had dealings in the past.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (BRINGING THE PCs TOGETHER)

Getting a gentleman-wizard and a wrasslin' drifter together was a challenge: why would these two guys hang out? I posed the question to both Andrew and Scott, and we brainstormed about it a bit. The key to the solution came when we realized that they were both Talking Animals. Horace was from Viola, and Deril from "The Island of Forgotten Toys" – a place that Scott made up in his character background. Placing the Island off the coast of Viola (and therefore making it nominally part of Viola), they had proximity of origins. From that, the two of them confabulated a past where Hogg had hired Deril for muscle-work on occasion, and Deril had consulted Hogg cursorily about his Ominous Abdomen. When they met on the Street of Flame as play began, Horace – ever the gentleman – noticed his companion had just gotten into town and offered him sleeping space in his suite at the inn he was staying at. Deril accepted, and was thus present for the discussion with Michael Merchant.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (SPRINKLING SEEDS)

I wanted this first session to test the tone and style of the campaign, but also to insert a couple of adventure seeds in the background to aid that effort and interest the players. However, I didn't want to insert too many because that could overwhelm people with too many choices.

I decided to have the sleeping Princess Morphea of Rosso as one of these fairytale seeds. I figured that the players might try and wake her in one of the adventures – in this, I was wrong. The situation didn't have enough hooks in it for them; they had no reason or means to wake her. (But, I discovered as we played, other characters did have either the reasons or the means to wake her for their goals.) However, the princess who lies in an enchanted sleep was always in the background, and a great reminder that yes, this was a fairytale game.

Another seed planted at this time was the begging sailor, Jack Tar. Initially, this was me being cute: inserting a fully-fleshed out version of the stick figure pirate character from Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the RPG – one-eyed, one-legged, one-handed. However, on the day after I wrote up the Running Notes (see Appendix, p. 160), just an hour before the guys arrived to game, I had an insight: the Wooden Pirate had cut up the Deathless Wolf into chunks in the seas south of Rosso and Theodora the Witch Girl had blasted him apart with spells in another incarnation. Part of the setting prospectus had the concept that

Shaykosch had returned. What if the Great Enemy kept showing up in the background of each adventure, slowly but surely becoming more whole, recovering missing pieces of himself that were scattered during his last rampage? Each adventure would have some clues or events that this is what was happening, and at some point – maybe even the end of the campaign – the Wolf would reveal himself and the PCs would have to figure out what to do.

The last overarching seed had to do with Pipsqueak's undefined and mysterious past. Looking at Andrew's character sheet and the prospectus I'd written up for the game, I noticed that both Pip and Captain Mouse were mice. So, I decided there was a connection between them of some sort. I didn't try to figure out what it was until later.

All three ideas – the ongoing saga of Princess Morphea, the nature of Pipsqueak's Mysterious Past, and the return of the Deathless Wolf, paid great dividends over the course of the campaign.

GM PREP

For Running Notes for this session, see Appendix, p. 164.

NPC PLANS

George Pieman (see p. 83) killed Vonn the tinker and took his magic ring, mostly out of spite and cruelty. At the neighborhood costume ball, he took advantage of Molly's True Love for him. As they kissed, the ring absorbed that power (changing color from clear to deep red), and made George very lucky and very charming – and leaving Molly bereft. Once George guessed what had happened, he decided to try and free Princess Morphea: after all, he had True Love's Kiss sitting right on his finger, and there was money and power in it for him. With his magical luck, he started gambling to raise the money and gear to travel to Castle Slumber.

ACTUAL PLAY

The actual play of Session 1 was interesting. The players were tentative for a few big reasons: the fairytale genre was a new one, there were the typical "so how do we fit these characters together?" sorts of questions, and there was the basic character "shake-down" of getting the voice and manner of their char-

acters right. Upon reflection, I should have been a bit firmer in encouraging the players to make sure their PCs had a good reason to get together (but see *Chapter 4*, p. 68, and the *Player Commentaries* below).

It started off fine, with Horace and Deril meeting inadvertently on a dockside street. The players had decided that the two characters had worked together in the past, and were amiable with one another. And part of Horace's Gentleman Weakness meant that he was unfailingly polite to anyone he interacted with who was not explicitly a servant. Horace invited Deril to lodge with him during the Crimson Festival, since rooms were dear, and Deril agreed.

Deril had seen the guards fishing a tinker's body out of the harbor while loading caravan goods onto a ship bound for Oversea. He recognized the tinker as Vonn, a hedge wizard of moderate skill, who he'd worked with on a caravan guarding job awhile before. As a drifter himself, he decided *not* to approach the guards with this information.

Approached by Jack Tar, Horace ordered Pipsqueak to pay the man some exorbitant sum so that the poor unfortunate could enjoy the Festival. "Drink deep of grog, you poor maimed sailor." At this point, Pipsqueak asked for an evening free during Festival in order to "take care of a few things, as per my contract, master." (I tried to use a Peter Lorre-esque accent for Pip through the game, and this was the cause for much amusement, far out of proportion to its quality.) Horace agreed to give him the first night of Festival off.



Just as the trio was about to return to their rooms, Hector Hogg – one of Horace's estranged brothers – rolled up with a load of oyster and clam shells that he had need for in his stonemasonry business. The piggy brothers engaged in repartee, and Horace came off better in the ensuing exchange with his cutting sarcasm and refined manners. Hector walked off for the north, somewhat bewildered. (Unknown to the players, Jack Tar later dug through the cart to find a gigantic clam that contained a wolf's paw. . . one of his missing parts.)

Pip went off, Deril and Horace costumed themselves with masks and finery, and left to party. They heard King Glamorgan's plea for Heroes to break the enchantment on his niece, the Princess Morphea (cursed to sleep until awakened by True Love's kiss), and chatted about it a bit, but very much in a small

talk sort of way. (It seemed to me that the players were interested in the seed, but unable to justify how their characters would get involved). They decided to hit a tavern for a nightcap before turning in, and chose the Rusty Cutlass because Deril had been there before and knew that it was mildly cheaper, cleaner, safer, and higher-class than any other dive bar in Port Carmine. (It's the place that passes for "hoity-toity" for him, and flush with his earnings, he was going to treat himself.)

At the Rusty Cutlass, they drank and chatted with the local color, when they were surprised to see Pipsqueak walk into the tavern. Ignoring everyone, he carried a small, brown paper-wrapped box into the back of the tavern. Horace, because it was Pip's night off, refused to hail him, and stopped Deril from disturbing his servant. They talked briefly about Pip's contract terms before Pipsqueak was suddenly and loudly abused, both verbally and physically, by Captain Mouse. Pipsqueak did nothing while Mouse cursed him, poured ale over his head, slapped him briskly, and so forth – Pip said nothing, walked over to a Cloaked Stranger™ in the back booth, and handed over his package. The pair of them left by the back way. (Scott received a Hero Point around this time for naming Captain Mouse's ship the *Rat Trap*.)

Deril and Horace used this uproar as an excuse to speak with Captain Mouse. They bought the tiny pirate and his men a round of drinks and started talking. Horace fished a bit for details on the relationship between the mice and the Captain only said, "He's a waste of a good sailing mouse!" and "You can't trust that rodent as far as you could throw him!" – to which Deril replied that he could probably throw Pipsqueak pretty far, which led to general hilarity.

The next day, the pair were visited in their rooms by Michael Merchant, and the Molly Merchant plot began. Michael's daughter Molly had been found dazed and confused on her doorstep after a neighborhood costume ball; other attendees saw her canoodling with someone dressed as the Jack of Hearts. They left together, and now Molly is nearly catatonic with unnatural depression. Michael suspects that George Pieman, a bad sort, was the Knave of Hearts, and begged for Our Heroes' assistance. They decided to aid Merchant and his daughter. They gathered information from Merchant and other sources, and decided that during the evening's festivities, they will search for the man in the Jack of Hearts costume.

Unfortunately, they came up short. They decided to stop in at the Rusty

Cutlass again, and saw Captain Mouse once again carousing (this time, Pip stayed outside with their hired carriage). They hailed and well-met each other. . . and discovered that they had just missed the Jack of Hearts, who indeed was George Pieman! Then they heard about how they missed him last night, where Pieman came in after they left and had the luck of the devil with both cards and women. They also got some background on Pieman's habits and history before last night, and it became clear that the boy had gotten his hands on some sort of magical ace in the hole.

At this point, Captain Mouse indicated the door, "And there's one of George's crew," pointing out Blunder. "His mate can't be long off." And shortly, Thud showed up, and the two bruisers cleared a table in the back of the room. "Pieman's coming for sure, he'll probably be here within the hour."

Horace and Deril went out to a back alley to "use the jakes" but really to have a brief discussion about how to approach Pieman when he arrives, but nothing is decided. When they came back into the tavern, Pieman was already there at the cleared table, dealing cards to Captain Mouse and other gamblers.

At this point, Horace's Weakness of Gentleman came into play, throwing all their planned stratagems into a cocked hat. Seeing Pieman as an utter cad for his treatment of Molly Merchant, he simply walked up to him and slapped George across the face, demanding satisfaction. (Amusing, since I was going to have a duel between George and an NPC happen later anyway.) Pieman and his cronies followed Horace and Deril into the street, and lacking honor, immediately attacked them from behind.

A general melee ensued, with Horace's fencing and Deril's wrestling easily dispatching Thud and Blunder in a matter of Turns. Pieman fled, trusting in his stolen luck to aid his escape, but Our Heroes gave chase: Deril on foot, and Horace and Pip by carriage. They finally ran Pieman down as he stole a nobleman's horse. Deril tackled the rake off of his ill-gotten steed and pummeled him a bit. Horace deliberately debarked from the carriage, strolled up to Pieman, and held his rapier at the villain's throat. Then, he used his Magic Monocle to examine the enchantment on the ring, saw the luck- and love-stealing spells on it, and crushed the gem (and Pieman's hand, for that matter) under his weighty foot (trotter?).

The ring shattered, the enchantment released, and Molly's Love flew back to

her on red wings that glowed in the festival night. Horace determined that the ring was intended to be used to free Princess Morpheia, and was unsure if the ploy would have worked. Pieman was handed over to the guard for his crimes. Michael Merchant provided a large honorarium (to Pipsqueak, since Horace is a Gentleman and doesn't handle money unless absolutely necessary). Deril and Horace decided to travel together for the nonce, since Horace felt he required the services of a bodyguard on his return trip north to Slophaven Manor.

FOR NEXT SESSION

STORY HOOKS

Horace selected "Manservant" for his first Damage Rank, thus next session Pipsqueak should be of importance. Deril selected "Perception" as his, so he should notice something or be oblivious to something.



DANGLING PLOT LINES

Waking Princess Morpheia. Captain Mouse's history or connection to Pipsqueak.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 1 COMMENTS (ANDREW)

ON GETTING TOGETHER

Personally, I didn't think there was much of a problem here; Horace and Deril got along very well and rapidly plunged into their role as wandering adventurers and trouble-shooters. There was no real dissonance on "why are the PCs together and doing the things they're doing?" that I've experienced in some other campaigns.

ON PRINCESS MORPHEA

I'd say Chad has an accurate assessment in the main text; we really did want to help awaken Princess Morpheia, and throughout the next several sessions we brainstormed a few possibilities, but we got involved in other subplots and just never had the opportunity to try any of our ideas out.

ON STORY HOOKS

Applying the first Damage Rank to Pipsqueak turned out to be a common theme during the campaign: whenever Horace took damage, I always applied it first to the Manservant Quality. That eventually had some repercussions. . .

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 1 COMMENTS (SCOTT)

ON GETTING TOGETHER

Per our previous campaigns, we've found that sometimes it is helpful to take a session to hash out why the characters are together and would continue to adventure together. If a PC must have a "big secret," then have the other players take a break, or have the GM and player step into the next room to resolve the details.

ON STARTING SESSIONS

I also thought it was very cool that each session began with Chad saying, "Once upon a time in the Land of Zo..."

ON PRINCESS MORPHEA

This seemed a little too large-scale to tackle right up front, and True Love between the Princess and either of our characters seemed pretty unlikely, even for a fairy tale. Although, in retrospect, if we had pursued this, I should have claimed I was just a really big frog.

ON STORY HOOKS

Like Andrew, I would usually apply Damage Ranks to my Ominous Abdomen Quality first, since was the least relative to combat.



*T*rip, trap, trip, trap, trip, trap, went his hooves as he crossed the troll's bridge.

Who's that tripping over my bridge?" roared the troll.

"I am Small Billy Goat Gruff, and I'm going up to the hillside to make myself fat," said Small Billy Goat Gruff in a tiny voice.

"I'm going to eat you for breakfast!" growled the troll.

"Oh, no! Please don't eat me! I'm too tiny and wouldn't be but a morsel for you," said Small Billy Goat Gruff. "Wait a bit till Medium Billy Goat Gruff comes. He's much bigger than I."

SESSION 2: NOVEMBER 11, 2005

once upon a time, in the kingdom of giallo . . .

*h*aving received an urgent letter from his old school chum Timothy – the Marquis de Carabas – Horace Hogg, Deril, and Pipsqueak travel the Cinnamon Road northwest from the coast of Rosso to the great plains of Giallo.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (CULTIVATION)

Note that Ivan Prince has one less missing part than Jack Tar did; this is because he recovered one of his paws from Hector Hogg's cart. I continued the pattern when Shawn Gruff entered the picture.

It was a small detail to follow, but it just seemed to fit.

GM PREP

For Running Notes for this session, see *Appendix*, p. 166.

NPC PLANS

Blanca has been charged by Snow Witch to find kind and helpful heroes and report back to the Witch. *Ivan Prince* is the current form of the Deathless Wolf (he was Jack Tar last session), and is going around collecting his pieces and parts to regain full power. *Ilsa Hund* wants money or position enough

to stay in Jade City. *Timothy* wishes to protect his Marquisate of Carabas, his Kingdom of Giallo, and his Empire of Zo, in roughly that order. *Cesar* is searching for something or someone in Giallo (he probably works for Count Alphonse of Azul). *Herman* wants to find out what broke his barn, get it fixed, and get through the experience spending as little time with his brother Horace as possible. The *trolls* want blood, gold, and a bridge to swing under (Stig promised it to them).

ACTUAL PLAY

The players really dug the “Once Upon a Time...” recap and leapt onto the mentioned Marquis’ letter (“I have a problem insoluble. Perhaps your special talents can help me unravel it, old friend.”) quickly as an inroad to adventure after a bit of some in-character chat. They set off for Giallo, as it is on the way back to Viola from Rosso. On the way, they met an old woman gathering sticks at the side of the road.

Meeting Blanca was an excellent first Scene for the session. Through the “help the weak, get a favor” set piece, the fairytale flavor started by the recap really locked in. Horace’s Story Hook related to Pipsqueak came in here, as Pip pleaded with his master to help the poor old woman – it is always wise to aid the weak. Each of the PCs (plus Pipsqueak) got an enchanted white rose as a mark of Snow Witch’s favor. (Once Blanca was out of sight, Deril ate his white rose, which shocked the GM – consuming a highly magical flower would have to have some sort of effect.)

Meeting Ivan Prince at a roadside inn was interesting to the PCs – they seemed to suspect something wasn’t kosher with his story about a Windy Gap Dragon, but with all of the rumors about goblins and trolls and whatnot coming into Giallo from Viola, it was possible that a new dragon *had* shown up. Still, they – and, frankly, many of the Giallon peasants – didn’t clock that there was no such place as a Far West Holding in Giallo (blown rolls). When they realized he’d skipped out early, their suspicions were confirmed, but they couldn’t track him.

For a time (all the time Deril’s rose-supercharged tummy was in close proximity to Ivan Prince), his Ominous Abdomen malfunctioned (“what does €ΔΩ mean?”) and gave him a stomachache – this was an effect related to Shaykosch’s shapeshifting ability and disguise spells. Horace ordered

Pipsqueak to whip up a batch of his Sovereign Stomach Remedy for Deril, which he did. I had Andrew roll on Pip’s behalf (just on general purposes), and the roll was high. Deril’s tummy pain went away lickety-split!

The next day, they continued their journey to Carabas Town. On the way, there was a roll of thunder and a flash of light over the next rise in the road. When they crested the hill, they saw it: a man-sized box of metal and glass, just standing in the center of the road.

The Phonebooth (or as Deril and Hogg puzzled out the Otherworld ideograms, “pah-ho-nay” box) was just a bit of weirdness I dropped in that was related to Deril’s Story Hook involving his originally Otherworldly Ominous Abdomen. It was pure mystery, dropped in with no reason or rhyme to it; I decide to let the players give it meaning. They were fascinated by it, and loaded it up on their wagon to take with them. Horace wanted to study the Otherworld magics on it, and Deril thought they could sell it to somebody as a curiosity. (Later it was determined that the Pahonay Box had the same sort of “aura” as Deril’s Ominous Abdomen.)

Later, they arrived at Carabas Town, and thence to Carabas Manor. Horace’s schoolchum banter with Timothy, the Marquis of Carabas, was fun and relatively short. I attempted a sort of Rowan Atkinson voice for the Marquis, and kinda pulled it off. The Marquis’ problem was trolls taking over the Viola Bridge that spanned the Rushing River. Despite all the guardsmen he threw at the trolls, the monsters easily prevailed. Horace and Deril agreed to do what they could to resolve the matter.

When the PCs mentioned Ivan Prince and the Far West Holding, the Marquis informed them there was no such place. They told him that Ivan said he came across Brooz Ford, which the Marquis denied – no one had come through the Ford in the last two weeks due to the guards he’d stationed there. Curious and curiouser!

Our Heroes armed themselves before tackling the trolls. Before they left, they saw Horace’s brother Herman speaking to the Marquis, ranting about someone “blowing up his barn.” The Marquis promised to look into the situation after dealing with the troll incursion. The trio took this opportunity to get into their wagon and ride up to Viola Bridge.

Pipsqueak was given a crossbow and a perch on top of the Pahonay Box in the

wagon, Deril prepared for some wrasslin', and Hogg very gentlemanly informed the trolls that they should vacate the Bridge or pay the consequences.

"We no pay you, you pay us! Stig say you pay! Blood and gold! Blood and gold!" And the battle was joined.

Horace magically tried to keep the trolls from coming off of the bridge, which in hindsight was probably at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive (because they were more powerful on or near the bridge). Deril threw himself into the fray and body-blocked one of the trolls right off! . . . but the troll turned that into an advantage and swung around underneath the span to attack the crocodile from behind. Pipsqueak plunked away with his crossbow, scoring a hit or two. Hogg threw curses to little effect. The fight drug on.

Then, Horace saw magic flickering around one of the trolls as it summoned magical strength while standing on the bridge: the troll then lifted a shattered tollbooth from the opposite end and winged it at Deril (who luckily dodged). The wheels began to turn in the pig's mind.

Deril grabbed one of the trolls and threw it off the bridge -- this time far enough that its Bridgestrength had no effect! The troll fell to its death in the Rushing River far below.

While Deril attempted more throws, Horace spent a few Turns generating a powerful new enchantment: one that would block the trolls from drawing strength from the Bridge. The catch that he decided on was that no one would be able to use magic while standing on Viola Bridge.

Andrew failed Horace's roll. We all considered for a moment, out of game, the ramifications of such a failed spell: remembering that magic *always* does something -- it has to. What we came to was that the result of this failed spell make it so no one could ever again do magic on, over, under, and immediately around the Viola Bridge. Enchantments would fail or be suppressed. Spells would fizzle. Magical creatures would feel uncomfortable. (The bridge also turned bright purple -- permanently!)

Bereft of their mystical might, the trolls fell quickly to Deril and Pip.

Upon their return to the Manor, Marquis Timothy thanked them for their efforts, and asked their aid in defending Carabas from the increasing depredations of the Ogre Tyrant Stig. The ongoing attacks are disturbing because

they are a *lot* more subtle than Stig's usual approach (swarm *en masse*, kill kill kill).

FOR NEXT SESSION

STORY HOOKS

Horace took his hit on Swordplay, and Deril took his on Ominous Abdomen. We need more dueling and prophecy next session!

DANGLING PLOT LINES

Waking Princess Morphea. Research Deril's Ominous Abdomen. Surreptitiously figure out Pipsqueak's secret. Who is the old woman from the road? Research Snow Witch? Who is Ivan Prince? Windy Gap Dragon? "Pahonay Box": where did it come from? Roly-Poly Prince? Defend Carabas vs. Stig. Why is Stig acting smarter? Check out Herman Hogg's Barn.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 2 COMMENTS (ANDREW)

ON MEETING BLANCA ON THE ROAD

I'm certain that Horace and Deril would have ended up helping Blanca, even had Pipsqueak not pleaded on her behalf.

ON IVAN PRINCE

The PCs would have desperately loved to follow up on the mysterious Ivan Prince, but once again, the main plot/scheme of helping the Marquis prevented them from having the opportunity to pursue the numerous subplots that kept popping up. This was frustrating in a way, but I think it also lent a certain sense of richness to Zo as a setting -- we always had the feeling that there was a lot more going on behind the scenes than we would ever have time to delve into.

ON VIOLA BRIDGE

Horace was moderately embarrassed by the catch of making the Viola Bridge permanently anti-magical: he knew that the enchanted bridge was an important defensive position for the Marquis that was rendered more or less ineffective in the future.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 2 COMMENTS (SCOTT)

ON FAIRYTALE INSPIRADO

I was a little concerned about the continued use of known fairy tales as a launch pad, since that might have made plot elements predictable. I shouldn't have worried.

ON MISTAKEN IDENTITY

While Horace was chatting up Ivan or somebody, Deril stepped out to the stables to check on Pipsqueak and to get some fresh air to settle his stomach. In the stable, he found Pipsqueak having a drink. He also found an impressive white steed, which Deril assumed to be Ivan's, but in fact may have been Cesar's. Deril immediately assumed it was a Talking Horse, and tried (unsuccessfully due to a badly blown Perception roll) to strike up a conversation. Mr. Ed, the horse wasn't.

ON VIOLA BRIDGE

Actually, we did some reconnaissance from the wooded hillside before plunging into battle. We unsuccessfully kicked around a few ideas about how to get the trolls off of the bridge, so we decided to try brute force. With Horace out of sight to work his magic, Deril went down the hill, and tried to fast-talk the trolls out of the bridge. They weren't taking any lizard-lip, so Deril challenged them to a wrasslin' match for ownership of the bridge. They gladly accepted, since they were not going to honor the one-on-one clause. Unknown to Deril, Horace created an invisible wall on the bridge to limit the trolls' movement. However, the wall was soon discovered after a successful belly-sliding attack by Deril that left one troll bleeding and unconscious.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (INTERMEZZO)

We had a few months break between sessions due to the holidays. The players were a little at sea because they were awash in possible plots at the end of Session #2: I kept throwing out ideas and mysteries to see if one or two of them would stick. Then I could try and shape upcoming adventures to fit what sort of game they wanted.

Early in January, Andrew sent around an email listing all of the Dangling

Plotlines from the last session to help refresh his and Scott's memories. This was a boon, because it really helped set the stage for the next session, and also helped isolate the details for me that the players were most interested in.

I checked my notes, and added one or two points that they had forgotten they wanted to look into.

The players decided that the PCs would stay in Giallo for the time being, both to help the Marquis and the fact that so many of the mysteries had a Giallon connection. During the next session, they'd decide on some of these threads to follow up on.

The Lamb that belonged to the Sheep whose skin the Wolf was wearing began to follow the Wolf in the Sheep's Clothing around. Leading the Lamb to a secluded spot, he made a meal of her.

SESSION 3: JANUARY 20, 2006

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN THE KINGDOM OF GIALLO . . .



ur Heroes, after slaying the Trolls who had taken the Viola Bridge, are resting from their exertions at the manor of the Marquis de Carabas. They find themselves beset by mysteries. . .

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (GENESIS OF SHAWN GRUFF)

Even at the end of the last Session, when the PCs were considering the Marquis de Carabas' request to help defend Giallo from Stig's forces, Andrew and Scott were concerned about taking their characters into a war zone. They felt they weren't combat-capable enough or sneaky enough. I don't think they'd truly linked into the fact that their characters were the Heroes of this fairytale, able to overcome great obstacles.

So I said something offhandedly about maybe the Marquis being able to provide

some help. During the hiatus between Sessions, I considered having a Carabasian man-at-arms or scout accompany them. Then I had the idea for a thief-alchemist type of guy, and the idea really caught me. So I statted him up, intending to make him one of the Marquis' agents. I also planned to play him as being a guy who would offer other options (especially the opposite viewpoint): when the players discussed things, he'd play devil's advocate briefly, no matter what the context, and cut short any going round-and-round in circles or overplanning. Then, when the PCs seemed to be coming into accord on a plan of theirs, he'd cheerfully join in, convinced.

The idea was to give the PCs someone to argue against rather than each other, and to give me, the GM, some in-game influence on expediting and nudging conversations along. Shawn – or as he was called at the time, Liam – was never going to offer completely new ideas, just take contrary stances, and never be the one who decided on a course of action: once the PCs did, he went along and didn't make a stink about it.

Then, Andrew rolled really damned well when researching Shaykosch's recovery of one of his paws from Herman Hogg's barn. So well that a powerful being like the Deathless Wolf couldn't help but notice it. And if he noticed it, he'd do something about it. I had to figure out what to do.

During a break, I came up with the idea that Liam was Shaykosch, not one of the Marquis' scouts. I changed his name to Shawn to keep the "John Something" pattern going, and we were off.

Important things I tried to keep in mind while playing Shaykosch playing Shawn: though as yet incomplete, the Wolf was still Deathless and powerful; however, he had to limit his power when he Shapeshifted (and thus used Shawn's stats, which were roughly equal to the PCs). He was there to watch them, learn their weaknesses and strengths, and – frankly – follow them around looking for chances for mischief or gain.

As I was writing up this chapter, I noticed something else: Shaykosch followed the Rule of Three (see p. 99), sort of, each time he met the PCs. The first two times, they happened across him; for the third time, he purposefully sought them out.

PLAYER'S COMMENT ON "BEING THE HEROES OF THIS FAIRYTALE" (ANDREW)

That's probably true. This change in gaming philosophy differs from most other RPGs and may require some discussion and trial-and-error for many players before they truly get comfortable with the notion.

PLAYER'S COMMENT ON "BEING THE HEROES OF THIS FAIRYTALE" (SCOTT)

I think that's true, but aren't some of the best heroes the reluctant ones?

PLAYER'S COMMENT ON SHAWN AS DEVIL'S ADVOCATE (SCOTT)

I thought this was extremely helpful. Sometimes as players we get so wrapped up in planning we lose sight of the storyline and context. Here the GM has an in-story method with which to nudge the players, rather than railroading them into a course of action.

GM PREP

For Running Notes for this session, see *Appendix*, p. 170.

NPC PLANS

The Marquis wants to stop Stig from invading Giallo. Herman Hogg wants an explanation about why his barn blew up. Cesar wants to speak to Snow Witch (on behalf of both Count Alphonse and Stig). Blanca just wants to get away from Cesar and find Horace and Deril. Shawn Gruff wants to kill trolls in revenge for his brother's death (Shaykosch wants to keep an eye on this pair of nascent Heroes until he gets a feel for their strengths and weaknesses.)

ACTUAL PLAY

The PCs have a nice long discussion with Marquis Timothy about the news and rumors they've heard, and begin laying plans for doing some tricky operations in Viola with the goal of deposing Stig and finding out who was feeding him ideas. Deril hatches (heh) a plan to pass himself off as a baby Windy Gap dragon, with the help of some Rosso Fire Beans to provide the flame-breath. (Scott got a Hero Point for coming up with the mystically-spicy Fire Beans at this point, even if the plan did ultimately come to naught.)

Near the end of their war-council, Herman Hogg returned to the Manor, and demanded that the Marquis do something about the destruction of his barn. Seeing Horace there, Herman immediately tried to blame his brother and his “wizarding ways” for destroying his barn out of spite. The Marquis quickly intervened, and informed Herman that Hector and his friends had just liberated the Viola Bridge from the trolls. With immense manners and sublime nobility, Hector asked his brother if he could assist with the barn conundrum. The Hogs, Pipsqueak, and Deril rode out to Hoggsfield to see the debris.

The barn looked like it had been blown apart from the inside.

In doing a little magical research, Horace cast a powerful spell and got a really high roll result – I believe he used Hero Points – when examining the pawprint in the center of the wrecked barn. (Shaykosch – on his way to Azul for his last missing body part – *felt* Horace’s spell seeking him; indeed, it nailed his foot to the ground for a good long while, stopping him in his tracks. Intrigued by the powerful porcine prestidigitator and his companions – and their habit of crossing his path – he decided to return immediately and spy on them. After all, his missing piece would be safe where it was; it had been there for decades.) Horace determined that the main support timber had contained a hollow space where something intensely magical had been stored for decades. When drawn from its hiding place (possibly related to the paw-print), it shattered the support, which should have meant that the barn would collapse. Instead, it was blown outwards, as if by a mighty wind. Herman ended up both satisfied and terrified.

On the way back to Carabas Manor, they stopped at the Swan’s Breast Inn for a few nightcaps, and also to see if they could hear any gossip or rumors about Stig or Ivan Prince. They were hailed as heroes and drank for free! They bantered with each other. At one point, Deril’s Ominous Abdomen began flashing ALE! ALE! ALE! and Deril’s tankard slowly refilled magically! Alas, only Horace and Pip noticed this happening, and neither spoke to the oblivious Deril out of manners – they assumed he knew what he was doing.

When they left the tavern a few hours later, Pipsqueak sensed something: the stink of goblins in Carabas Town. . . and they’re close! They heard a cry for help behind the tavern, and ran to the rescue.

They saw the mysterious and taciturn Azulite bravo from the Golden Sheaf

Inn backhanding an old woman, the same one who they had helped with her load of sticks. This assault ticked the players off, and they charged.



(Actually, something happened before that, and requires a brief digression. Andrew took Gentleman as a Weakness for Horace as a great character-related thing. It really worked to my advantage as GM. I don’t think he rolled dice – except perhaps once -- to determine if he could resist his Gentlemanly nature to do something dastardly. The few times I thought it was important, all I had to say was “Is that really something a Gentleman would do/say/act like?” and Andrew would gladly play the extreme gallant. Indeed, most of the time, Andrew did it without *any* sort of prompting. This brings me around to the whole point I’m trying to make here: I believe Andrew, as Horace, actually said, “Unhand that woman! In the name of the Marquis!” when they saw Cesar and Blanca struggling, even before they knew who exactly the man and old woman were. Very cool, and was worth a Hero Point or two.)



Deril wedged a barrel against the inn’s back door, just in case this ruffian had more help inside. This turned out to be a little bit of an impediment later (see below). Then, using the drain pipe, Deril climbed to the roof of the inn and attempted a “death from above!” attack, but only succeeded in knocking out one goblin.

There was a nice little swordfight – Our Heroes had problems laying hands on Cesar, but their foe was slashing at them with great success. The two of them together could eventually take Cesar down, but only after a long fight. That’s when Andrew used a Hero Point to do a tricky fencing maneuver: he disarmed Cesar. (I think he figured that getting rid of a master swordsman’s sword is a great way to even the scales.) Clang! goes the bravo’s blade. Then Deril got in a good hit. Cesar whistled for his goblin troop to cover his getaway, and ran like hell.

The weakened Heroes took on the six Dusk Goblins, and are doing fairly well, but Cesar was still getting away. Horace cast a spell on his sword that made metal shine bright as day – the *catch* being that this melts the metal into slag. The sudden shine of magical sunlight turned two of goblins into stone (some of them, piecemeal, like just an arm or a foot gone stone). The pig burned his hands on the hot



hilt. “No matter,” he said, “that ruffian has obligingly left his,” and picked up Cesar’s sword –immediately detecting a powerful enchantment on it. Deril then picked up a stone goblin head as a souvenir.

At this point, Shawn Gruff entered the story, helping dispatch the last two goblins with thrown knives. The barrel that Deril wedged into the door was a little bit of an obstacle for Shawn’s aim. He was essentially throwing blind, with just his arm sticking out from the door, limiting his targets. He talked of his brother’s death at the hands of the bridge trolls, and thanked Deril and Horace (and Pip!) profusely.



The old woman, Blanca, offered up more white roses as tokens of favor, and told the group that she was under orders to find them. A cordial invitation was tendered and accepted. For, you see, Blanca was to bring the PCs (plus Shawn and Pip) to an audience with her mistress: Snow Witch.

FOR NEXT SESSION

STORY HOOKS

Horace took his first damage on Manservant, and Deril took his on Later, Gator (Drifter).

DANGLING PLOT LINES

Waking Princess Morpheia. Research Deril’s Ominous Abdomen. Surreptitiously figure out Pipsqueak’s secret. Who is Ivan Prince? Defend Carabas vs. Stig. Why is Stig acting smarter? Cesar’s Sword.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 3 COMMENTS (ANDREW)

ON HAVING “GENTLEMAN AS A WEAKNESS”

As Chad says above, I never rolled dice to determine if Horace would resist his Gentlemanly nature. Nope, not once. I like Horace a lot, and just can’t picture him trying to do anything nasty, no matter what the situation, so I never tried.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 3 COMMENTS (SCOTT)

ON THE BARN COLLAPSE

This scene was a little frustrating for me, because as a player I immediately felt this explosion was due to the Deathless Wolf bursting from a knot in the barn’s lumber. However my character, Deril, thought most of the Wolf stories were nonsense, so I couldn’t figure out a way to share or act on my guess.

ON THE “FLASHING ALE! ALE! ALE!”

I’m not sure I the player noticed this.

One day the wicked queen asked her mirror:

Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who is the fairest one of all?

It answered:

You are fair, my queen; ‘tis true.
But Snow White is more fair than you.

SESSION 4: APRIL 28, 2006

once upon a time,
in the kingdom of giallo . . .

Our Heroes, having decided to take the fight to the Ogre Tyrant Stig, have begun planning sorties into the Kingdom of Viola. However, before they can put these plans into effect, they find themselves defending an old woman from an Azulite bravo and some of Stig’s goblins within Carabas Town itself!

And—they’ve made a new friend. . .



BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (THE CURSE)

I actually had no set ideas how Princess Morphea's curse could be broken at this time. If the PCs came up with something that sounded good, I was prepared to run with it. Maybe it wouldn't work as planned, but if it failed I resolved that the attempt would have to lead them to a better solution.

For the last session, when I was wrapping up loose plot threads, I came up with the solution that the NPC Count Alphonse used in Session #6. In retrospect, there are several others that didn't occur to me at the time, like having King Glamorgan disinherit Morphea (no longer a princess); getting through the Briar Wall somehow, grabbing the sleeper, and taking her to the Purple Bridge (that the PCs essentially created); or have Shaykosch himself turn out to be her True Love.

PLAYER'S COMMENT ON BREAKING MORPHEA'S CURSE (ANDREW)

I believe the solution we PCs were planning on trying (if they ever had the chance) would be to use her uncle, King Glamorgan, as her True Love. We rejected the idea that one's True Love had to be romantic in nature; couldn't a close relative truly love someone? They were considering asking the king if he'd be willing to accompany them on a journey to free the princess if they ever made it back to Rosso.

PLAYER'S COMMENT ON BREAKING MORPHEA'S CURSE (SCOTT)

I thought this was a pretty cool idea, and I don't think I would have ever come up with something like this.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (SNOW WITCH)

Snow Witch is essentially a grown up Snow White, who turned to magic upon the death of her Prince Charming. She spent decades studying the powers of the wicked queen's Magic Mirror. Initially, she had more of an "ice and snow" vibe, but I became enamored of the idea of Snow White using the Magic Mirror's powers for good.

GM PREP

For Running Notes for this session, see *Appendix*, p. 172.

NPC PLANS

Snow Witch desires someone to break the foul enchantment she's laid on Princess Morphea. *Blanca* wishes only to serve Snow Witch in all things. *Pipsqueak* is eagerly awaiting the ending of his curse (if someone takes him up on his offer). *The Marquis* wants to topple Stig. *Shawn* wants to defeat Stig (*Shaykosch* wants to keep an eye on this pair of nascent Heroes until he gets a feel for their strengths and weaknesses.)

ACTUAL PLAY

The PCs, Pip, Shawn, and Blanca repair to a special room in Blanca's Hut, where they spoke to Snow Witch (through a gigantic mirror).

"I am Snow Witch, Mistress of Mirror Magics. You gentlemen have proved yourselves worthy – noble of spirit and deed, no small feat in a fallen world. I have long searched for such as you, to reward and to challenge."

"As a reward for your bravery and virtue, I grant each of you a boon – one boon per white rose you hold. You may ask a question or favor here, now, one at a time and alone, before this magical mirror, where my powers are strongest, or you may in the future cast the rose into any reflective surface, and call my name – but know that my powers then will be much weaker."

"My challenge is this: in my youth, sorrow, and pride, I cursed Princess Morphea of Rosso. For her mockery of my despair upon the death of my Prince, I ensnared her to sleep enchanted until she was awakened by the kiss of True Love. It has been twenty years, and no True Love has appeared. How will she find True Love while she slumbers? I cannot simply undo the spell. This weighs heavy upon my soul – only a Hero (or Heroes!) can untangle this knot."

The characters repaired to the main room of the hut to deliberate. Shawn said that he'd probably hold off on asking his question for some other day. Pip offered to sell his roses to Hogg – and Horace took the mouse up on it. Now the pig held four boons (and Pipsqueak had a surprising amount of gold!).

Deril went into the mirror room first to ask his boon: "How can I get rid of my tummy trouble?" indicating his Ominous Abdomen. "Currently, your stomach is a powerful oracle that can only communicate in sets of 3 Other-

world script letters. When the device finishes growing itself into your body, your hunger and pain and confusion will end, and you will have access to abilities you cannot foresee. The Enigmatic Emu can accelerate this growth.”

Deril came out. Horace asked him what he asked the Witch, and Deril said, “I wanted to know about my tummy trouble” again indicating the Ominous Abdomen. At that moment, it struck me that Shaykosch wouldn’t wait to become complete and whole before asking his question, not with such a similar one being asked.

Horace went in next, and asked two questions:

1. “What can you do to help us overthrow Stig?” and
2. “Tell me about the mystery of Herman Hogg’s barn.”

Snow Witch answered:

1. “I can tell you two things about overthrowing Stig – that something or someone hidden from even me is guiding his steps, and mirror-magics could be useful for spying or travel.” And she taught him a basic mirror communication spell (with the *catch* that the mirror used to send the message would break when finished).”
2. “(ponders for a moment) I will do better: I will show you! Inside your brother’s barn was a barrel of rainwater. With my arts, I can show you what the reflecting surface of the water saw.” The Witch vanishes from the mirror as the fog rises, and slightly distorted scene appears: the inside of the barn on the night in question. A figure walks in, and a shaft of moonlight reveals him as Ivan Prince. However, his features are melting, his nose lengthening into a muzzle, fur sprouting from his skin as he moves out of the light. A shaggy, lupine form stands on hind legs in front of the main support beam as the wind outside begins to rise. There’s a growling laugh, then the wolfish figure stamps the floor with one paw. Lightning arcs out from the paw, races to the beam, slices up it neatly, blows the beam asunder, and a paw flew out, released, to join the ragged stump of one of the figure’s arms or forefeet. Then there is a tremendous thunderclap, louder than anything. The barrel then burst, the reflecting surface of the water splashing away.

Hogg thanked the Witch graciously, and said that he will retain the last two roses for future boons. The Witch told him to throw the rose into a mirror or other reflecting surface to contact her, but warned him again that her

boons will be weaker the farther away he is and the smaller mirror or reflecting surface he uses to reach her.



Then Shawn took his turn. (What happened unseen by the players was that Shawn asked *THE QUESTION ABOUT HIS NATURE* – see textbox, *Appendix*, p. 174 – and got the answer “You must eat the Enigmatic Emu.” However, Snow Witch realized exactly *who* Shawn was at this point, and he instantly knew that she recognized him. Using his Magic Horn, he splashed a binding potion on her magic mirror and image, binding her not to speak or otherwise warn anyone about him. He then additionally threatened her with the deaths of her servant and her pet “Heroes,” promising that if he discovered her interference in his plans, he would assure that the Witch’s curse on Princess Morpheia would stand until Zo slid into the ocean, forever damning her. Cowed, she acquiesced.)

Coming out from the mirror room, Shawn elbowed Deril and told him that the Witch said that he needed to catch and eat the Enigmatic Emu, too! Deril was thankful that the Emu was bigger than a chicken, which he could eat in one gulp. Shawn began to talk about eating a whole goose. And the trencherman one-upmanship debate began.

The group left Blanca’s Hut and returned to the Marquis’s Manor. There, they reported the goblin incursion led by the Azulite bravo they had seen on the road and showed him Cesar’s Sword. The Marquis had his weaponsmith examine it, and it was discovered that the blade bore the hallmark of a notable Azulite swordmaker named Salomun who was known for magical swords. Horace scanned it for magic, and initially came up empty, but his great skill in enchanting led him to believe that he caught anomalous signs. He performed a long, noisy, and amusing ritual (sending Pip to light candles and rings bells and pour liquids) and eventually ascertained that Cesar’s sword was a mighty Ogre-killing Sword, cloaked with massive magical misdirects so as not to let Stig or Stig’s magic-users catch on (the “standard” one Upshift for magical sharpness, two Upshifts vs. Ogres, and a TN13 Difficulty Rank “I’m not a magic sword” enchantment). Why would someone working for Stig have a sword that could easily kill the ogre? Obviously, Cesar wasn’t working for Stig, exactly, but someone else.

Then Our Heroes had a long and in-depth strategy session about their mission in Viola. All of the points listed in the Running Notes were talked about, at length. Finally it was decided that they'd do a reconnaissance, resistance, and sabotage type of mission deep into the heart of Viola, all the while disguised as... a medicine show.

Doctor Deril's Feelgood Medicine Show, to be precise. Purveyors of:

- ◆ *One-Eyed Lizard Oil* ("good for what ails ya!"): A mixture of whiskey, castor oil, and peppermint.
- ◆ *Doctor Deril's Dragon Breath* ("warms the old bones"): Highly flammable potion that would ignite and spread on impact when thrown with enough force.
- ◆ *Doctor Deril's Thunder Lizard Water* ("blows away the winds!"): Highly explosive potion that would go boom when thrown with enough force.
- ◆ *Doctor Deril's Gen-u-wine Crocodile Tears* ("gets the kinks out of your tongue"): Truth potion.

All potions were created by Shawn using his magic horn. The intent was that these munitions could be sold and exchanged right under the noses of Stig's forces.

The players really got into the medicine show idea. Pipsqueak would provide music on his concertina. Shawn would act the part of a stooge, all the while surreptitiously selecting good resistance candidates from the crowd and noting how Stig's forces were deploying themselves. Deril would do a double-turn as a huckster and a challenge wrestler (because of the potency of his nostrums, he'd claim). Horace would do real magic to fake doing stage magic, illusions, and sleight of hand (delicious irony!).

We could have run several sessions, or even a whole story arc, around the medicine show idea.

They packed some provisions and other equipment that would be useful, including a whole lot of small mirrors for distribution. Then they mounted the wagon and traveled off downriver to Brooz Ford (so to avoid the Purple Bridge), crossed over into Viola, and started their mission. Their eventual target was Horace's own Slophaven Manor – where they'd set up a covert headquarters – because Slophaven was conveniently close to where Stig had set up his command center.

Here's where I did something I hadn't ever tried before as a GM.

"OK, you're going to make it to Slophaven," I said, "that's a done deal. But I'd like you guys to tell *me* what three representative stops along the way are like. Do you set up a resistance cell? Do you sabotage something Stig's doing? Is your cover blown? You tell me what you think happens, and I'll help shape it to fit stuff that you don't know is going on yet."

The players *really* dug this idea. It gave them a direct hand in determining how cool they really were, and the types of things they could pull off. And, frankly, it made a good story.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: THE MEDICINE SHOW (ANDREW)

I liked the idea of coming up with more or less what would happen at the villages we passed through, it gave us a chance to "play GM" in a limited way. We didn't have very long to come up with ideas (I don't think we had more than five minutes or so), so it wasn't as complex as it could have been had we had more time to prepare, but it worked well in play.

Oh and one more thing: Scott and I kind of viewed our small band of Heroes as a fairy tale A-Team, traveling about, coming up with bizarrely elaborate schemes, which we enjoyed immensely.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: THE MEDICINE SHOW (SCOTT)

This was a really fun experiment and a surprising one. I was honored by Chad's faith in us to come up with a cool scene on-the-fly and not wreck his world. We had done a very limited version of this before in other campaigns: we could add a plot point post-session, based on points earned during that session's gaming. But we had never done this smack-dab in the middle of a session!

Chad gave us a quick 5-10 minute break to sketch something out and then present it. Then he ran us through the results our little traveling resistance show produced. No dice. No rules-lawyering. Just story.

And, like Andy said, we were totally The A-Team. We even had Pipsqueak play some theme music during a few of our battles. However, I still have moments envisioning Doctor Deril doing a bad "Tony Randall as Dr. Lao" impression at some of our medicine show's stops.

BREEZEDAILE (ANDREW & SCOTT)

Breezedale was a small village near a bridge, not far from Brooz Ford. It had a small garrison of Stig's troops, mostly goblins, lesser ogres, and gnomes. The local squire had been executed a month ago to impose order on the populace. Since this was early on in the mission, Our Heroes used this to work on their covers and practice their show performances and patter. They also did some recon by listening to the gossip of the villagers, and found simmering resentment not yet ready to boil over into resistance activity. They decided to play it safe and come back through Breezedale after they'd set-up at Slophaven. By that time, the people would have had enough.

(I made no changes or alterations whatsoever to this – it is as the players said.)

ON THE ROAD (CHAD)

After closing the show at another little town (where the heroes distributed some Dragon Breath and Thunder Lizard Water potions, handed out few mirrors, and picked up a load of clubs, short swords and other weapons), they set out for their next stop on the way to Slophaven. Suddenly, they heard the flapping and pounding of heavy feet somewhere ahead of them. They took up their weapons and prepared for an ambush, but the sounds died away quickly.

After passing a bend in the road, they saw ahead that a path had been made through the woods to either side, cutting right across the road. A trail of bird's footprints – big ones! – ran right down the middle of the path. As they watched, the trail and path and prints began to melt away. Then socks started falling from the sky like heavy cotton snowflakes.

The Enigmatic Emu had just passed them.

This sent Shawn into a snit, and he complained about his hunger. Then he started gnawing on an old saddle in the back of the wagon.

For his part, Deril didn't seem too disappointed. Instead, he gathered up a whole bunch of socks and threw them into the back of the wagon, claiming that he'd sell them as "Doctor Deril's One-Eyed Lizard Mittens" or somesuch.

(The Emu and the socks were totally a GM insertion, but Deril's response is pure Scott.)

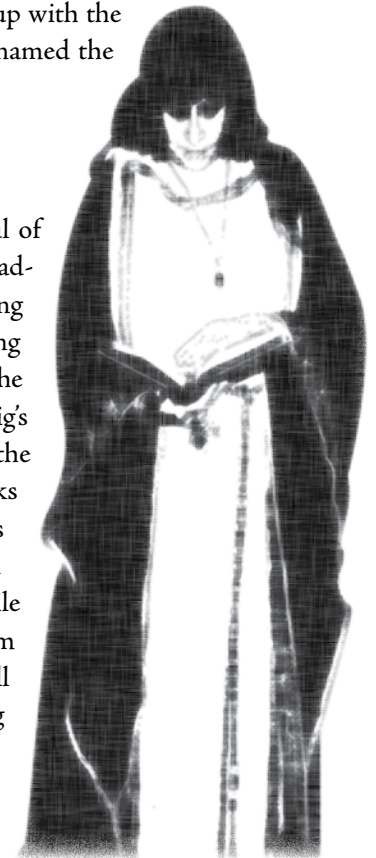
BUGBURG (ANDREW)

In Bugburg, a small hill mining town, Horace recognized Wilhelm Jakob, a human tailor and haberdasher that he'd regularly patronized for cravats, gloves, the occasional Homburg, and so on. Jakob winked at the gentleman pig, and didn't let on that he knew him. After the show, Jakob met with Our Heroes and revealed that he was the leader of a cell of freedom fighters against Stig, and that the resistance had heard of their exploits at the Purple Bridge. Deril handed over substantial amounts of "medicine" and weapons to Jakob, and told him to distribute them to his "friends and neighbors who needed it." Horace also handed over a mirror and told Jakob to keep it with him or watched by someone at all times for the sign.

(Again, this was all the players' idea. They came up with the idea of a commercial contact of Horace's, I just named the NPC and said he was a tailor.)

IRON SHOE INN (SCOTT)

The Iron Shoe Inn sat at a crossroads, a handful of miles from two nearby hamlets. It was a small roadside forge and tavern, run by Vang Lief (a Talking Bear smith) and his family. Because he was repairing the weapons and providing the drink for the hamlets' garrisons without any profit, he hated Stig's Army deeply. He had already been sabotaging the goblins' weapons by introducing flaws and cracks impossible to see with the naked eye. Our Heroes suggested that when they sent the signal through the mirror they gave him, he could dump Crocodile Tears and whiskey into the goblins' ale, and get them completely drunk and utterly truthful. They'd all be fighting amongst themselves in minutes, giving Vang time to rally his downtrodden neighbors in the hamlets against them.



(Once more, it's all the players, except for the location names. We now return to the regular session from these "player-described scenes" with the next location: Slophaven Manor.)

HOME, SLOP HOME

The PCs arrived at Slophaven Manor at midnight – and noticed that someone was home already! Some goblins seem to have taken up residence in Horace's house. Luckily, the wards and guards that Horace had placed on his workshop were unable to be undone by anyone not a magic-user. Horace decided that a pig's home is his castle, and he'd be damned if some stinking goblins would take possession of his castle.

The group watched the house for awhile and discovered that there are about six goblins in the house. They hatched a plan:

- ◆ Horace spent some time enchanting a mirror to release all the sunlight it's seen in previous days all at once; he will use it against the goblins.
- ◆ Pipsqueak will take his crossbow and sit on the roof, covering the backdoor. Not one of them can get away.
- ◆ Shawn will enter through the backdoor and drive anyone trying to get out that way back towards the front hall with thrown knives.
- ◆ Deril will enter through the front door first, ready to scrap.
- ◆ Horace will follow Deril through the front door, with sword and mirror in hand.

They set the plan in motion during the last watch of the night, near dawn, when they believed the goblins would be getting ready for bed. Shawn and Deril were the first to enter from opposite sides of the house, Horace followed Deril in.

Shawn got a goblin through the eye with one of his knives. Deril picked up a goblin and threw him into another goblin. Horace activated the mirror while Our Heroes covered their eyes on his signal, and a pulse of light swept through the room. The mirror shattered in Horace's hand.

Two goblins turned to stone, but a third did not, being a Dawn Goblin and immune to sunlight. Pip leapt down the chimney, popped up in the fireplace covered in soot, and shot the goblin in the back of the head.

All fall down.

It was quiet as Our Heroes cased the sadly-abused ancestral home of the Hogg clan. Pipsqueak cried out, "Master! Come see!" And Horace, followed by Deril and Shawn, found Pip at the foot of the steps to the second floor, next to the doorway to Horace's magical study. They stood, mouths agape. What happened here? The guards and wards were gone, the doors were wide open, and the magical gear had all been taken!

There was a soft noise from the top of the stairs – a figure! A sparkle of magic, and the human wizard (Murklebog) in the pajamas threw a sleep spell at the lot of them. Horace had only the briefest of seconds to hide some sort of magical gizmo (a magical key) from his jacket into a secret pocket on his tunic before slumber crashed over him like a wave. . .

This was a *Something Bad Happens* (see p. 44), and everyone got Hero Points for it; I wanted to end the session on a cliffhanger. However, Andrew spent two of Horace's Hero Points immediately to do some *Tale-spinning* (see p. 46) with regard to the hiding of the magical key for next session.

FOR NEXT SESSION

STORY HOOKS

Horace took no damage (Damage Ranks or Failure Ranks) at all this session, so no specific Story Hooks. Deril took a hit or two on Ominous Abdomen.

DANGLING PLOT LINES

Waking Princess Morpheia. Surreptitiously figure out Pipsqueak's secret. Why is Stig acting smarter? Foment revolt against Stig. What the heck is the Enigmatic Emu? What happens next? What will Murklebog do with Our Heroes?

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 4 COMMENTS (SCOTT)

ON BOTH SHAWN & DERIL NEEDING TO EAT THE EMU

Deril was just thrilled to have someone with which to talk about all the things he's eaten. To me, it made perfect sense for a goat to talk like this. I never even suspected the Deathless Wolf's constant hunger as being a factor.

ON DERIL ENTERING SLOPHAVEN MANOR

During the discussion/planning stage, “Horace will follow Deril in” was the whole description of that part of the plan. When Deril actually went for the “shock-and-awe” option and dove through the front window, both Horace and Andrew were amusingly horrified: the character was aghast for several reasons (loud, noisy, still his window), and the player was taken aback too (because he assumed Deril would go in through the door). Silly wizard.

ON CLIFFHANGERS

I always enjoy ending a session on a cliffhanger, and this was a great one!



Now the Soldier sat in the dark, dank prison. The guard came in to remind him that tomorrow he was to be hanged for trifling with the Princess. The Soldier found this news rather disagreeable, but what could he do? – his Tinderbox had been left in his room at the hotel.

SESSION 5: MAY 12, 2006

once upon a time,
in the kingdom of viola...



Our Heroes entered the Ogre Tyrant’s lands in disguise! Posing as a traveling medicine show, they performed reconnaissance, resistance, and sabotage activities, aimed at toppling Stig and discovering what puppetmaster was pulling his strings. In this, they have thus far had some success.

Alas, during an attempt to retake Horace Hogg’s ancestral home of Slophaven, they were felled by foul sorcery!

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (TALKING TO MYSELF)

The biggest problem with this session was a massive infodump: the villain’s monologue (dialogue? trialogue?) involving 3 NPCs at the start of the action. I had tried to give each NPC a distinctive voice or speech pattern, but with so extensive a script, I slipped up a few times. It also took (to me, at least) a long way to work through everything that would be reasonably said by all these characters (both in the situation in-game and to provide contextual exposition to the players out-of-game) at this point.

If I had left more time or opportunities for the PCs to speak in the middle of the Questions section, it wouldn’t have been such a muddle.

However, once that part was done, the session just **flew**, with plenty of high-octane derring-do and bad-assery by the PCs.

PLAYER’S COMMENT ON THE GM TALKING TO HIMSELF (ANDREW)

From a player’s perspective, the narrative took a while, and it’s always awkward when a GM has to present multiple NPCs talking among themselves, but it didn’t detract from the adventure at all.

PLAYER’S COMMENT ON THE GM TALKING TO HIMSELF (SCOTT)

Yeah, I have to agree that this was one of the weakest moments of the game, but I see no good way around it. The info-dump was a necessary evil. Maybe shanghai a few theater friends to do a dramatic reading for the GM?

GM PREP

For Running Notes for this session, see *Appendix*, p. 174.

NPC PLANS

Stig wants to rule Viola, Giallo, and Zo Proper. Cesar wishes to serve his master – Count Alphonse wants him to aid and advise the Ogre according to the Count’s specific plan (whatever it is) and bring the Enigmatic Emu to Azul. Murklebog is in it for the magic stuff: Hogg’s and (especially) Princess Paige’s books, once they actually get into her tower up north. Shawn could leave at any time, but he’s angry that a pathetic human wizard got the magical drop on him, and ogres just piss him off. Pipsqueak is waiting for his letter.

ACTUAL PLAY

(The PCs were being held in the basement of Stig's HQ: the Town Hall of Timpani, the nearest village to Slophaven Manor. They had not yet had a chance to perform their show here and connect with any existing or potential rebels.)

There was darkness and pain. A rough voice said, "Wake them up."

Our Heroes came around to find themselves manacled to a dungeon wall, their arms chained uncomfortably over their heads, with Stig, the wizard Murklebog, and Cesar standing around them. Stig began asking questions: "Who sent you here with an Ogre-slaying Sword? Was it Carabas? The Roly-Poly Prince? Does the Zorcerer himself know of my plans?"

Cesar tried to soothe the Ogre Tyrant: "The Zorcerer of Zo cannot know anything, even if he cared."

Murklebog agreed. "My magic is cloaking us like a fog. None can see what you do, oh Stig."

"What about all that rune *hoo-hah* with the bird?" asked Stig.

Cesar said, "My master requires that entity. That is his payment for arranging your rise to power, Tyrant."

"Your Azulite master, pfft!" (Deril's Ominous Abdomen flashed "ALF") "My Emu Trap has not yet compromised your hidden plans, mighty one. All is well," said Murklebog.

Stig snorted. "Except for these saboteurs and assassins! Who sent you! You'll talk under torture!"

Horace immediately volunteered for torture, being the Gentlemanly thing to do. Before Stig can turn to face the pig, Pipsqueak began to wail fearfully, "Master, please don't let them take meeeee!"

Stig picked Pip over Horace because he looked scrawny, weak, and afraid. (And more fun to torture.) As the Tyrant's party dragged Pip out of the room, the mouse gave Horace a broad wink (after all, he knew he can endure any torment or indignity; see p. 79). Our Heroes were left alone in their cell.

Soon, Pip's screams (a bit overdramatic, but the bad guys couldn't know that) rang out down the hallway.

Before Shawn could offer to pick their locks, Deril had broken free of the wall (but still wore manacles with attached lengths of chain) and Horace had used the magical key he'd hidden on his person last session (see above). Very cool.

They totaled their assets:

- ◆ Shawn had three throwing knives, his Magic Horn (which he could use to make a single potion from the trickle of water in a corner of the cell), and some lockpicks.
- ◆ Deril had two lengths of chain to use as weapons.
- ◆ Horace had a head full of nasty enchantments.

The PCs started making plans to break out and cause some havoc. In the role of Shawn, I offered information on what sorts of things Shawn could do as a skilled thief/knife thrower, and played devil's advocate on the plans they were spinning – see the textbox *Behind the Curtain: GM (Genesis Of Shawn Gruff)*, p. 115. Shawn picked the lock of the cell and did a little sneaky recon, where they discovered they were in the basement of the Timpani Town Hall, the Great Chamber above was full of goblin troopers, and there were two goblins standing guard near the end of the hall, where the torture room apparently was.

The plan they quickly came up with ended up being this:

1. Shawn sneaks up the stairs and jams the door's lock with one of his knives so the goblins can't come downstairs.
2. Shawn comes back down and throws his last two knives at the goblin guards, to wound and attract their attention. The guards will probably charge.
3. When the guards pass Our Heroes' cell, Horace yanks the door open and Deril tackles them as they go by.
4. Then Horace, Deril, and Shawn make for the torture room to free Pip.

The plan went off swimmingly.

Shawn jammed the door, then winged a knife at the pair of goblins. It took one in the throat, enraging him. The goblin started running for Shawn, gurgling



all the way. The second knife actually took the second goblin dead center of the forehead, killing him instantly. (Surprise attacks, with an Expert [+4] Knives Quality, and damned good, honest rolls.)

When the gurgling goblin passed the cell, the trap was sprung, and Deril body-blocked him into the corridor wall, basically leaving just a greenish smear. (Scott rolled so well, actually, that it would have been an automatic incapacitate even if the goblin hadn't already been wounded.)

Horace popped into the hallway and enchanted the floor in front of the torture room with a sticky spell (the cost was time – time used to torture Pipsqueak – and Horace had to make a TN9 Difficulty Rank roll using Gentleman to do it). Shawn retrieved his knives, and was to make a distraction to bring someone out of the room. Deril scuttled up atop the lintel of the doorway, ready to swing down into the room once someone came out.

Shawn shouted, "Down with Stig!"

Murklebog walked out onto the sticky floor. He grimaced, then counter-spelled; he and Horace squared off for a magical duel.

Stig stuck his head out. Deril swung into it, knocking both of them back into the torture chamber. Shawn leapt in afterward, knives flashing – and Cesar drew his sword to engage the goat. A broken and bloody Pipsqueak cheered.

General melee!

Out in the hallway: curses and enchantments flew, knives and swords clashed, whirling chains and spiked clubs smashed! It was glorious.

Cesar had the edge on Shawn, and Deril was having problems hurting Stig. Murklebog and Horace were fairly matched, then a Hero Point expenditure from Horace gave him a massively good hit. Murklebog, choosing discretion as the better part of valor, blew a hole high in the wall behind himself, making an exit to ground level outside. He scrambled up the rubble and took off across Town Square, yelling. Horace leaped the sticky floor to aid his companions.

Just then, a large green pigeon with something in its talons flew in through the hole, down into the basement, and straight into the torture chamber. It

dropped its burden: a letter with a giant green seal, and flew back out. When the letter hit the ground, the seal broke, and a booming voice thundered: "By the decree of His Zantabulousness, the Zorcerer of Zo, your debt is paid. Rise, Captain Roderick Mus!"

Pipsqueak *changed*: from a cowering, bloody mouse to a proud, handsome, upstanding mouse in Imperial livery. He easily burst his bonds and stood free. He said (in the best Ronald Colman voice I could muster) "In the name of the Zorcerer, surrender now or suffer the consequences!"

This boggled Cesar and Stig momentarily, while Our Heroes rolled with the punches. Deril made an incredible Tail Gator! attack (his Special Move) that knocked Stig out into the hall and to his knees. . . right on top of the sticky floor. Cesar fled at this point, clambering up over Stig and the fallen wall into the Town Square.

Shawn threw a knife at the fleeing Cesar, but – strangely – hit the Zorcerer's pigeon instead. (Actually, I blew Shawn's attack roll badly. Badly-badly. Like, I rolled a 2 on 2d6. So, he obviously missed Cesar. I figured it'd be funny if he hit the green pigeon. Only afterward did I ponder whether it was "really" a failure or if it was intentional. After all, the mystical green pigeon that was an agent of the Zorcerer himself and had seen him, Shawn-Shaykosch – it had to be stopped. Of course, I forgot to connect this insight to the players later, so it was just for me. Shawn picked up the pigeon later and ate it, by the way.)

Deril used the kneeling Stig as a step over the sticky floor and a springboard to leap up into the Town Square, in hot pursuit of Murklebog and Cesar. Shawn quickly followed. Some guard goblins tried to get in their way. Emphasis on *tried*; the pair plowed through the goblins easily. (I just made them roll a TN7 Difficulty Rank; both made it easily, and they bowled over goblins like ninepins as they gave chase to their foes.)

Horace made as if to follow Deril, but prepared to enchant himself to weigh many times his own weight. The catch was that he himself would be unable to move



until the spell wore off. He leapt into the air, cast the enchantment, and fell with the force of sixteen tons right on top of Stig's head. If he missed, he was dead. If he struck true, Stig was dead.

Horace struck true, smashing the Ogre Tyrant's head like a rotted melon, and burying himself knee deep in the floor. Pipsqueak – rather, Captain Mus – aided his former master in getting free. As the spell wore off, they clambered up to follow their friends.

Meanwhile, Deril and Shawn chased down their fleeing enemies. They passed the lifeless corpse of Murklebog, prone, with Cesar's ogre-killing sword still quivering in his back. Ahead of them in the distance, Cesar entered a corral of runed wooden timbers – the Woodhenge – where Murklebog had trapped the Enigmatic Emu. He placed a glowing rope around the Emu's neck, and climbed up on its back.

The Emu itself was an oddly bird-shaped liquid, rippling, transparent sort of being. The world seemed to shiver and bend around it, and the distortions grew to include Cesar as he fought to calm the creature. The pair of them attempted to exit the Woodhenge and bounced off.

By this time, Roderick and Horace had reached the scene. Horace used a magical spell to bust a hole in the Woodhenge so that they could run in and grab Cesar and the Emu, but the magic of the runes on the timbers resisted. The roil of magic cause a hole to open up somewhere other than where Horace intended, and blew him off of his feet with the feedback. The Emu ran out through the hole, with Cesar trying to gain control via the halter.

Shawn growled and shouted “No!” and ran exceedingly fast after the Emu. He managed to grab hold around the being's neck with both arms (which shifted and altered from fur to human skin to denim and back) before Cesar clubbed him with a knife hilt and sent him tumbling. All Shawn would say afterward was “I'm ravenously hungry, and I'm going to eat that damned bird.”

Captain Roderick Mus, as the ranking Imperial official in Viola, pulled a mirror out of his pocket and told Horace to send the signal to the resistance that Stig was dead, and it was time to rise up. Then Roderick took command of the local resistance forces and formed them into a citizen's militia to secure Timpani and restore order. (Which he did, relatively quickly.)

A day later, Our Heroes once again assembled in Slophaven to hear Roderick's tale of woe.

RODERICK'S STORY

Roderick Mus was a Captain in the Imperial Navy. Under the direct orders of the Zorcerer, he was to sink the pirate vessel that had looted and destroyed the experimental *skimship* the Zorcerer had designed and built (skim-what? “Sorry, lads, that's classified.”). Specifically, he was to kill the pirate captain as an example to all his kind.

Except the pirate captain ended up being Captain Mouse, his estranged brother. Rather than killing Mouse, Mus clapped him in irons and brought him back to Jade City for trial.

Disobeying a direct order from the Zorcerer, for whatever reason, is treason, and punishable by curse. Strong and proud Roderick Mus was enchanted into the weak and sniveling and *utterly obedient* Pipsqueak until such time as he was able to pay the Imperial treasury the amount of gold that the skimship cost.

When Horace purchased Pipsqueak's white roses, that balanced the scales and then some. He delivered the money to the nearest Imperial courier, and waited for it to get to the Treasury in Jade City. When the debt was paid, the Zorcerer sent one of his flying messengers with the repeal of the enchantment.

Now, Roderick must stay in Viola to hunt down the remnants of Stig's army, free the prisoners, repair defenses, and restore order.

(Horace lost the Manservant Quality and gained a new one at the same Rank for free. Andrew chose to give Horace a Quality called *Arsenal of Enchanted Artifacts*, a whole bunch of one-shot magic toys or items that he might have on his person; rolling vs. GM-determined Difficulty Rank when a particular item is desired. For Roderick's stats, see the *Appendix*, p. 181)

FOR NEXT SESSION

STORY HOOKS

Horace had his attached to Manservant, so Pipsqueak/Roderick would have

to play a part next session. Deril, once again, took a shot to his Ominous Abdomen.

DANGLING PLOT LINES

Waking Princess Morpheia. What the heck is the Enigmatic Emu? Why was Count Alphonse (through Cesar) helping Stig gain control of Viola?

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 5 COMMENTS (ANDREW)

ON MURKLEBOG'S RESILIENCE

I remember that I, at least, was sincerely impressed with Murklebog's resilience and wiliness – I felt like he was really hard to land a solid blow on (this possibly might have been due to poor rolls, I can't remember), and because his magical powers seemed pretty butch.

Stig was impressive as well, I admit, but I think I always felt like we could wear him down if only we hit him enough times (which is what we ended up doing). Murklebog seemed a tougher foe in some ways, because I felt like he was kind of a Houdini-esque escape artist with magical powers.

GM'S COMMENT ON MURKLEBOG'S RESILIENCE

Actually, I think part of that was a combination of Murklebog being used as the instrument of delivering the cliffhanger at the end of Session 4, his Master [+6] Rank in Wizard*, and a number of low rolls on Horace's part alongside average or better rolls on Murklebog's part.

ON THE DISENCHANTMENT OF PIPSQUEAK

I think it's fair to say that the PCs were pretty shocked by this turn of events; I know Horace certainly was.

ON THE ESCAPE OF CESAR ON THE EMU

Horace was presented with a dilemma here. I knew I wanted to prevent Cesar from having control over the Emu. I came up with two possible ways to do this: (1) disrupt the Woodhenge, thereby allowing the Emu to run away and, I figured, eventually buck Cesar off its back; or (2) get the rope halter off the Emu's neck, again, allowing the Emu to get

Cesar off its back. For some unknown reason, I selected the first option, and ended up blowing a hole in the Woodhenge. It would be interesting to wonder what might have happened if I had selected the second course of action.

GM'S COMMENT ON GRABBING THE HALTER INSTEAD

If the Emu had gotten away from Cesar (and, well, everyone else) per Andrew's option two, then I would have made notes for Session 6 to provide a structure for involving: (1) the Count's hunt for the Emu; (2) the disenchantment of Princess Morpheia; and (3) the reveal of Shawn as Shaykosch. If the Emu continued to flee into Azul, the PCs would probably still see the Blue Hood. If the Emu went to anywhere else, the Count probably would have personally headed up a small covert force consisting of Cesar, the Stitchwitch, and some better than average Guardsmen to capture it. (While a full-scale invasion using his forces could be tempting and climatic, doing that would defeat the purpose of grabbing the Emu to hide his plans from the Zorcerer. Still, it could have been worth it if the Emu was a true shield against the Zorcerer's zorcery. . .)

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 5 COMMENTS (SCOTT)

ON THE TORTURE ROOM MELEE

Umm, I am a little bit ashamed to say that at no point during this battle did we make a move to unchain Pipsqueak.

But yeah, I kept making average and low rolls here, and the few good hits I did get in, Stig easily deflected. He was a tough one.

"I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!"

SESSION 6: JUNE 9, 2006

once upon a time,
in the kingdom of viola . . .



ur Heroes defeated the Ogre Tyrant Stig with pluck and aplomb! Hogg's manservant Pipsqueak has had his curse broken, and stands tall as Captain Roderick Mus of Zo's

Imperial Navy. Captain Mus has been charged by the Zorcerer himself to restore order to the war-torn Kingdom.

Meanwhile, Cesar – the villainous servant of Count Alphonse of Azul – has fled East on the back of the Enigmatic Emu! What does the evil Count intend to do with the power of this cosmic fowl?

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (FAIRYTALE ARMIES)

In Session 5 and especially Session 6, I realized something about the size of fairytale armies: you can either go really small or really big.

Most big fantasy books and movies have opted for the latter recently, showing veritable seas of soldiers smashing into one another. Large numbers are epic and apocalyptic.

However, fairytales aren't epic at all – indeed, they're sort of common. That's their strength and power. So I opted to make the armies and warbands of the Zantabulous Land of Zo rather small. I mean, about a hundred guys is a sizable army in this setting. Small armies have some interesting spin-off effects for a campaign: it helps the PCs stand out more, the numbers are imposing but not impossible, and a Hero (whether with normal heroic ability or a Gift like "Has the Strength of Ten Men") is a massive asset in a pitched battle.

Stig took control of Viola with only 50 or 60 followers. The military of Rosso is about 50 Knights and half as many Squires. Count Alphonse's army – comprised of himself, the Stitchwitch, Cesar the Swordsman, and about 110 guardsmen – is a vast and mighty force, which could totally roll over several countries.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (COUNT ALPHONSE'S MASTER PLAN)

1. Destabilize Viola and weaken Giallo using Stig.
2. Use Emu to protect vs. ZoZ's powers.
3. Capture all lands around Castle Slumber (three main towns: Rudyard, Saang, and Rosewood), changing it from Rosso to Azul and making Princess Morphea "of Azul" and breaking her enchantment.
4. Marry Princess Morphea (and become heir to King Glamorgan).
5. "Liberate" (invade) Viola from Stig.

6. Assassinate King Glamorgan.
7. Consolidate rule of Azul, Viola, and Rosso into "the Kingdom of Alphonsia".
8. Capture Giallo using Alphonsian resources.
9. Attack Zo Proper, using united armies and Emu magic against ZoZ.
10. Become the new Emperor of Zo.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (WOLFSLAYER ARROW)

Since this was intended to be the last session of the campaign, I wanted to include at least one explicit method for dealing with the Deathless Wolf. Since the PCs were going to be meeting up with the Blue Hood, a Wolfslayer arrow seemed appropriate. Arrows being made of wood, I decided that it connected to a past hero of Zo who had dispatched the Gray Wind: the Wooden Pirate.

If the PCs had been in another Kingdom, like Giallo, there would have been a different magic item or piece of knowledge to aid them in taking down the Wolf.

GM PREP

For Running Notes for this session, see *Appendix*, p. 176.

NPC PLANS

The Blue Hood wishes to destroy Count Alphonse. The Stitchwitch wishes to protect Count Alphonse. Cesar will guard the Count with his life. Count Alphonse wishes to conquer the world. Princess Morphea never wants to sleep again. Shaykosch wants to recover the Fang and eat the Emu.

ACTUAL PLAY

Roderick Mus met with Our Heroes. "My information shows that Count Alphonse has Azul almost completely under his control. He has been massing Azulite troops along the Violander and Rosson borders.

"There is a band of Azulite rebels fighting him, however. They are led by



the Outlaw Queen known as the Blue Hood. Perhaps if you linked up with the Hood, you could strike at the Count's base in Bluerock. This could delay Alphonse's forces long enough for me to organize the citizen militia of Viola, for King Glamorgan of Rosso to be alerted, and the Zolander Imperial forces brought to buttress both Kingdoms.

"We still do not know why Alphonse wants the Enigmatic Emu – no doubt he's found some ill-use for it. Anything you discover about that would be useful."

Our Heroes, hot on the Emu's trail, crossed the Violander-Azulite border at the hamlet of MacBeth. They easily slipped through the attenuated lines, and saw the burned uniforms, banners, and flags (with Count Alphonse's sigil, but on a *purple* field rather than a blue one). They surmise that the Count was using Stig to oppress the Violanders, after which Cesar would use the Ogreslayer Sword on Stig and the Count's forces would roll across the border, with plenty of "hail the Liberator!" pomp and such. Alphonse would then take control of Viola.

They continued to follow the Emu's trail into Fogwood, and eventually, Slophaven East – Horatio Hogg's mansion. . . which wasn't there anymore. It had been totally demolished. Also, mystical blue threads stretched everywhere, slicing through everything, and long evil needles jutted out of many exposed surfaces. There was a big hole in the foundation, too, where something extremely magical had been unearthed. Shawn seemed extra quiet, a bit distant, and a little shaky, but Our Heroes didn't seem to notice (Deril's Ominous Abdomen flashed "WLF" in response to Shaykosch's ice-cold, silent, throbbing rage.)

The Blue Hood and Horatio Hogg showed up. There was banter and the sharing of information. (The Blue Hood instinctively didn't like Shawn for some reason.) They all decided to join forces to defeat the Count, who claims

to be "the Wolf Reborn." Shawn asked if something Immortal can be "reborn." The Blood Hood said that it didn't matter: if the Count was really Shaykosch, she has a magical arrow made from the left arm of the Wooden Pirate, which she has been assured will harm the Deathless One. Shawn and Deril both snorted dismissively.

But where should their combined force attack first? Castle Slumber and the Count's main forces, or Castle Bluerock and the Enigmatic Emu?

The Blue Hood opted for Castle Slumber; surprisingly, Shawn voted that way, too (he'd rather have the Fang – and his full powers – back before he eats the Emu). Horatio, Deril, and Horace all voted for Castle Bluerock: it felt obvious to Our Heroes that the Count had some use for the Enigmatic Emu, and Horatio wanted revenge on the Stitchwitch. If they could disrupt the Count's plans for the Emu, and *then* ride to Castle Slumber, they would be one up on the crafty Count. The Hood and Shawn were convinced, and they began the assault on Castle Bluerock.

The Blue Hood arranged her 7 archers to where they could do the most damage to the Bluerock garrison if they came out of the keep. She put Horatio in command, since she will be entering with Deril, Horace, and Shawn to free or steal the Emu and take shots at the Stitchwitch. Shawn would take out as many sentries as quietly as possible and she would provide cover fire so that Horace and Deril could cross the castle yard unmolested and see what could be done about the Emu.

Meanwhile, Our Heroes were looking for ways into the castle. Deril asked if there was a secret passage from the moat into the castle, and I replied, that sure there *could* be. . . if they spent 3 Hero Points on *Tale-spinning* (see p. 46). Each of the PCs eagerly kicked in points, and soon, Deril, Shawn, the Blue Hood, and Horace reached a sewer grate that opens inside the castle walls.

Deril bent the bars, and remarkably made little sound doing so. Shawn popped out, and scaled the nearest wall to start sentry-disabling. The Blue Hood leapt up and rolled into a shadow, her bow at the ready. Horace got lifted up and out by Deril, who quickly followed. Deril and Horace started off towards the strange, glowing pen made of blue thread and spindles that contained the Enigmatic Emu.

They made it about halfway before they got spotted by a guardsman that

Shawn hadn't yet gotten to. He shouted an alarm – “Intruders have breached the castle-urrrrk!” – before one of the Hood's arrows took him in the throat. A bell began to ring, and guardsmen started pouring out of the keep and outbuildings. The Happy Bandits, Shawn, and the Blue Hood drew their fire.

Horace reached the Emu Pen and found the gate. Removing a small pair of magical shears (from his new Arsenal of Enchanted Artifacts), he began the delicate work of removing enough of the magical threads to get through safely. However, the Emu was getting upset, and the air around it started crackling with arcane energies.

Just then, the Stitchwitch flew out of the tower keep on her broom, and started casting spells – spraying the area with magic needles, slicing through rock with magical thread, that sort of thing. One of her spells mummified Shawn in gleaming blue thread.

Horace took a moment away from getting into the Pen to cast a spell at the witch's broom to make it heavier (much like he did to himself last session); the catch was that he *also* became heavier, and thus unable to use his magical shears so long as the spell operated. While the effect gave the Stitchwitch pause, it was not enough to send her crashing to earth. Her threads shot through Horace's legs and into the ground. The pig took his wounds stoically.

Meanwhile, the Emu was going crazy, and a glass carafe on a metal base (blender) fell out of its distortion field. Deril leapt over the thready walls of the Pen and grabbed hold of the bird by the neck, trying to control it. The eldritch forces of the Emu pulsed into Deril, but he held on! (“It's full of stars.”)

The Blue Hood shouted for her Happy Bandits to mass their fire on the flying witch; the fusillade managed to distract and wound the Stitchwitch so much that she crashed down and knocked herself out.

Shawn sliced himself free, and ran for the Emu Pen. Horace snipped the last binding and the gate stood wide open. He yelled to Shawn to put the Emu to sleep with a potion so it won't run away. All at a lope, Shawn smoothly removed his Magic Horn, dipped it into a convenient rainbarrel, said the magic words over the fluid, ran through the opening Horace made, came up

to where Deril held the Emu as best he can, and splashed the sleeping potion across the Enigmatic Emu's beak.

The Emu went down with little birdy snores. Meanwhile, Deril felt funny. Extended contact with the Emu had done something to his Ominous Abdomen (Improved it one Rank).

They re-secured the Emu in a runic Woodhenge – like the one from last session, this time built by Horatio and enchanted by Horace – after taking the rainbow collar it wore off of its neck. (Horace put the collar in his pocket, just in case.) The Azulite Guardsmen got clapped in irons, and the Stitchwitch was stripped naked by the Blue Hood and locked in a tower room that contained absolutely no thread, yarn, or weaving – Our Heroes left her a pile of furs for modesty and warmth.

Our Heroes pored over the maps and papers in the Count's study. They discovered some details on the Enigmatic Emu: it is effectively an animate micro-universe running around inside their own. When upset, it exchanges items from inside to outside and vice-versa. The ripples it causes in reality make it difficult for anyone touching the Emu to be magically detected. (The rainbow sash and collar the Stitchwitch made for Count Alphonse are to be used on the Emu, allowing the count to mystically “touch” the bird at all times.) The Emu eventually folds back into an egg-like inanimate form after a few weeks of total calm, and the inter-universal exchanges no longer happen. It hatches and re-eggs every few centuries.

Horace then asked Shawn to check for hidden drawers and safes. The goat thief found a hidey-hole, and a great mass of the Count's secret plans were revealed – see *Behind the Curtain: GM (Count Alphonse's Master Plan)* textbox, p. 142. The Count was up to #3 on his hit parade, and looks to have already freed Princess Morpheia from her curse! They must now ride to Rosso, and stop the wedding! They took horses from the Count's stables and flew south! (During the journey, Horace used mirror-magic to contact Snow Witch, and asked her to peer through the mirrors of Castle Slumber to scout the developing situation.)



BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (LIONISM)

As the PCs were riding to the Chapel of Castle Slumber, Andrew asked who or what the Chapel was to. That is, what is the religious faith of the Zantabulous Land of Zo?

I had plunked in the Chapel as the appropriate place for the wedding, but I honestly hadn't thought about it.

The answer, after only a brief second's reflection, was clear: in a world of Talking Animals, their Savior would also be a Talking Animal. Therefore: Aslan, from CS Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia, was definitely the base.

*However, since Zo is heavily Oz-influenced, and there's another very iconic Lion – a Cowardly one – involved in that work, there **must** be some conflation. I mean, it's obvious, right?*

So, the thumbnail sketch of the faith of Zo is something like this: back in the days when the Wolf was the King of Beasts, there once was a Talking Lion named Zolion. Like all Lions, he was a tremendous coward, for all his fangs, claws, and great strength. After being harried by a pack of Wolves into the wild desert on the edge of Giallo, he lay down on the burning sands to die. There, he had a vision of sublime importance, which kindled the fires of courage in his breast. He returned to Zo, no longer cowed by the wolves, no longer afraid of anything, and began teaching the values of courage, honor, kindness, and justice. He battled against the King Wolf (Shaykosch?) and broke the lupine hold over the lands of Zo. Now King of the Beasts, Zolion ruled justly and well until the day when he, old and gray, stood alone against the returned Wolf when all others had deserted him. Both Kings died in the conflict, but Zolanders of all kingdoms recognize and revere the vision and teachings of the First Emperor of Zo, the Courageous Lion.

Rumor has it that the Zorcerer of Zo is a façade that the immortal Zolion hides behind, always locked in combat with the immortal Shaykosch. But there's no proof – Zolion's body had mysteriously vanished – and no one has the mettle to ask the Zorcerer about this.

Of course, Our Heroes (Deril, Horace, Shawn, the Blue Hood, and some of her Happy Bandits) burst into the chapel – on horseback, no less! – exactly at the moment that the Impressive Clergyman (a Talking Badger) up front

said “If any one here knows why these two should not marry, speak now or forever hold your peace.” Naturally, Horace cried out to stop, that “Count Alphonse is a power-mad despot bent on conquering all of Zo!” (Meanwhile, Snow Witch peeked out of one of the mirrored walls of the Chapel, surreptitiously watching the events proceed.)



This sparked off a general melee. I assumed that the Happy Bandits, Rosson Knights, and Azulite Guardsmen would all balance one another out, only leaving our principal actors: Horace, Deril, Shawn, the Blue Hood, Count Alphonse, and Cesar (acting as the Count's best man, by the way). The Impressive Clergyman and the Princess cowered behind the altar; the unnamed wedding guests tried to escape the Chapel entirely.

Count Alphonse whipped out the Fang and drew his sword, causing the sunlight behind the stained glass windows of the Chapel to dim. The candlelight from the chandeliers high above shone into the mirrors around the walls of the Chapel to combat the gloom. As the Count began to rant about how he was the Wolf Reborn and would rule Zo and no one would stop him, Cesar leapt forward to engage Shawn. Deril made for the Count. Horace pulled out one of his white roses, threw it into a nearby mirror, and summoned Snow Witch.

The winds began to howl. Cesar knocked Shawn off his feet and into a pew, causing them to fall like dominos amidst screaming wedding guests. The Count shot lightning from the Fang, blowing the Blue Hood into a wall and taking her out of the fight. The winds tried to push Deril back down the aisle.

Horace cast a spell that blasted the Count with fire, the cost being that all of the candles in the Chapel were extinguished as their flames darted at the madman. The Count tried to deflect some of them with the Fang, but got a bit singed and blown back against a mirror. Snow Witch's hand came out of the mirror, grabbed the Fang from the Count, and pulled it inside with her. Horace drew his blade and went for the Count.

Deril deflected blows from Cesar, who saw Horace lunging for the Count. Turning aside from Deril, Cesar leapt in front of Horace's sword and took

the blow instead. Deril, following hard behind Cesar, struck the Count hard enough to knock him out. Both Cesar and the Count were eventually defeated. The day was saved!

Or not. Shawn stood up amidst the wreckage of the pews, and said, “Well, as entertaining as all that was, I believe there is some unfinished business to attend to.” He turned to look at Snow Witch inside the mirror. “You have something that belongs to me,” he said, and stamped his foot. Lighting crackled and the floor tiles shattered in a gigantic pawprint pattern. He reached out towards the Witch, and the Fang flew out of her hand, stretching the glassy surface of the mirror. The mirror shattered, the Fang darting into Shawn’s hand, and hundreds of tiny Snow Witches alongside Our Heroes gazed with horror at the scene.

Shawn removed his Magic Horn and cast it aside. He inserted the Fang into the socket, and began to *change*. “I am Jack Tar, Ivan Prince, Shawn Gruff, John Wolf. I am Shaykosch, the Deathless One. And I am once again whole!” As he says each name, he takes on the form of his previous disguises, ending in the form of a gigantic gray Talking Wolf.

The Wolf snarled at his former companions. “Out of my amicable feelings for you during our past association, I will let you live until I have eaten the Enigmatic Emu and conquered my insatiable hunger. Make your peace.” And amidst the screams of terror of the last few wedding guests, Shaykosch turned and gestured. Hurricane winds blew the Chapel doors off their hinges, and the monster started loping down the aisle towards the opening.

Time froze.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (FREEZING TIME)

This was the climax of the campaign. It had to go well for the players and GM to be satisfied with the whole endeavor.

So I froze time right before the Wolf left, at the moment when the characters – if they were in a story – would have acted.

ON FREEZING TIME (SCOTT)

Here, Chad actually froze time to let us consider our options and itemize what we had on hand that would be useful in taking down the Wolf. I thought this was pretty generous.

GM’S COMMENT ON BEING “GENEROUS”

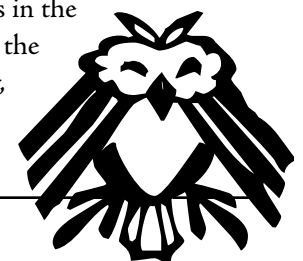
Over the course of the sessions, I had been allowing (probably unconsciously encouraging) a bit more time to think and improvise over the important stuff alongside quickly handling and assuming in passing the boring stuff. The Medicine Show is a great example of that concept, in reflection. Not that I knew I was doing this deliberately in order to lead up to the time freeze, I was just concentrating on what I thought were the most interesting bits of the session.

Then, Horace saw the fletching on the Blue Hood’s wolfslaying arrow. Since she was in no shape to fire it from her bow, he stretched out his hand and enchanted it: “Let this arrow fly as straight and true as my words forevermore!” The *cost* and *catch* was Horace Hogg would never again be able to lie. Not only that, he *must* speak only truth. The arrow pulled from the quiver, hovered in the air, then flashed into the Wolf’s heart from behind. Shaykosch roared and dropped to one knee. He gathered himself to leap out of the Chapel.

Deril ran up to the Wolf and grabbed him by the tail as he was jumping, swinging him around with great strength, right against the wall. Shaykosch smashed deeply *into* the wall, getting half-embedded in the stone from the force of the blow. His body began to flex and morph around the edges, trying to get free, but the magical arrow kept him locked in one shape. He managed to pull free from the wall by brute force (the arrow still stuck through him), and growled at Deril. The lizard and the wolf begin to fight. Deril struck the Deathless One with a mighty blow – his Tail Gator! Special Move (with a substantial expenditure of Hero Points behind it) while Horace prepared the last elements of their trap.

Horace took his last white rose and dropped it into the largest shard of broken mirror, where the face of Snow Witch still watched. He asked for his last boon: “Snow Witch, take Shaykosch into the Mirror Realm!” Given the opening by Horace (and the return of her token), the Witch drew the Wolf through the hundreds of mirror shards on the floor of the Chapel – the force of her magic tearing him into hundreds of small pieces.

“Now the Wolf cannot return until all of the mirrors in the Kingdom of Azul are broken!” she explained when the Deathless One was completely gone. “Unfortunately, mirror-magic will now be fraught with added



dangers, since Shaykosch will lurk in every glass. But it will be a long time before he will ever get free again.”

Everybody cheered.



DERIL & HORACE HOGG'S HAPPILY EVER AFTERS

As the cheers of the wedding guests died away, an old friend stepped forward: Captain Roderick Mus, in full regalia, bearing a heavy book with brass fittings and the ZoZ sigil of the Empire. “Hello friends. Prepare yourselves.” Then he opened the book.

A gout of green and purple fire roared up from the open pages, congealing into a gigantic, fiery human head that gazed deep into the souls of Our Heroes. “We are the great and terrible *Zorcerer of Zo!*”

All in the Chapel fell to their knees.

“Well done, my good and faithful servants. You have saved the Empire and its people from two wolves this day. For that, you must be rewarded. First, your nobility of soul will be reflected in your station. We create each of you as Barons in Our Service. Now rise, and gain the second part of your reward: an Imperial boon.”

DERIL

“Sir Deril, what is your wish?”

“Zorcerer, sir, I want a home, a place that I belong, so that I no longer need to roam aimlessly.”

“We raise you up Sir Deril, to the position of the Imperial Governor of the Island of Forgotten Toys. You are charged with seeing to the health and safety of all Imperial citizens of that island, and working with Captain Mus to peacefully integrate its rule into the Kingdom of Viola. You shall build your home there, to your own design, at the Empire’s expense. We caution you that the Island will only become your home if you put your own blood, sweat, and tears into the building of house, political ties, and friendships. *So mote it be.*”

HORACE HOGG

“Sir Horace Hogg, what is your wish?”

“Most Great and Terrible One, I ask for an Imperial Charter to found an order of scholar-knights, who will right wrongs, protect the weak, and guard against the possible return by the Wolf.”

“Said charter is granted to your terms, with the following additions: the Order of the Mirror shall also guard the Empire against all Otherworldly incursions, the Order will study the influence of the imprisoned Shaykosch on mirror-magics, and the Order will enter into the Mirror Realm to combat the Deathless One there, if the need arises. *So mote it be!*”

The fiery head nodded once and commanded the surrounding crowd to cheer again for their champions before collapsing in on itself. The flames retreated to the pages of the book Roderick held, then the covers snapped closed and the fittings fastened themselves.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 6 COMMENTS (ANDREW)

ON THE REVEAL OF SHAWN GRUFF AS SHAYKOSCH

To say that the players (and their PCs) were surprised by this turn of events is the understatement of the century.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SESSION 6 COMMENTS (SCOTT)

ON FOGWOOD AND AZUL

In retrospect, I am a little sad we never got to encounter the Wickerwalker.

ON THE BLUE HOOD'S MAGIC ARROW

So the Blue Hood has a magical arrow made from the arm of the Wooden Pirate. OK, plot question: If Shawn heard this, how come he didn't do anything to destroy that arrow and/or the Blue Hood ASAP?

GM'S COMMENT ON SHAWN'S LACK OF RESPONSE

Good question – one I hadn't thought of until now! The idea never came up as I was portraying Shawn – he just brushed the information aside. . . He utterly

discounted the effectiveness of the arrow, and that came from the GM-as-NPC point of view – since I was playing the Blue Hood, Horatio, and Shawn simultaneously, I was focusing on their characterizations rather than long-term planning. There was no calculation about the oversight ahead of time or during the game from the GM-as-Director angle.

That being said, I think that a lot of Shawn/Shaykosch's character traits and history ran in parallel for this: overweening pride; ability to survive almost anything; focused on getting his last body part back first; little opportunity to steal a highly visible artifact from the personal possession of its owner who is also a bandit and inured to thief-ly tricks; something in the nature of the mystic/meta-textual relationship between Hood and Wolf; the fact that once a method is used to "kill" the Wolf, he figures it won't work again, and miscalculated by counting the arrow as the Wooden Pirate; it's easy to dodge an arrow if you're as good as the Wolf is; etc.

In any case, that's kind of what the part of my brain that was keeping track of Shawn was thinking while the other part of my brain conversed with Andrew and Scott as the Blue Hood.

ON THE CASTLE SLUMBER VS. CASTLE BLUEROCK DEBATE

This was a neat moment where the NPCs really played devil's advocate with the PCs' plans.

ON THE REVEAL OF SHAWN GRUFF AS SHAYKOSCH

This was a very cool and dramatic moment. I think my exact reaction was "Holy shit! I didn't see that coming!" And to think we trusted Shawn! That Wolf literally got our goat.

EPILOGUE

Weeks later, two figures on horseback set off west from Castle Bluerock and traveled into Viola.

Deril wore the resplendent uniform of an Imperial Governor and carried the re-egged Enigmatic Emu, which would be safer on the Island of Forgotten Toys than anywhere else. Next to him rode Horace Hogg, in understated finery as ever, but now wearing a silver-gray sash with a curious brooch made

of tiny mirrors artfully fitted into gold: the badge of the Grandmaster of the Order of the Mirror.

At Ironshoe they parted ways: Deril for the northern coast where he could take ship to the Island, and Horace continued west into Giallo, to begin his studies with Snow Witch on the mysteries of mirror-magics (and, perhaps, an even closer relationship...?).

They did not say good-bye, only "good luck." For surely someday something dark and dangerous would make them need to pool their talents together once again to defend the Empire and renew their friendship. But until that unknown day in the future, the two of them would live **happily ever after**.



CHAPTER 7

HAPPILY EVER AFTER(WORD)...

As my gaming group was winding up the campaign detailed in Chapter 6, my players started urging me to publish my notes on the setting and the actual play of the campaign. I was a bit hesitant at first (since I thought the resulting book would be a bit slim), but was eventually and fairly easily brought around to the idea. (Seriously, they didn't have to ask twice.)

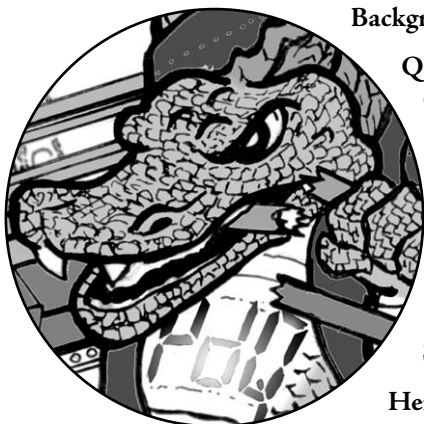
This book, *The Zorcerer of Zo*, is not just a setting and a tweaked set of PDQ rules. It's also a snapshot of how I – in collusion with my players – create RPG campaigns, and a record of the cool things we all did in the crafting of our story-game sessions. When you have experienced a really good, fun, interesting RPG campaign, those are memories that you shouldn't be ashamed to look back on, revisit, and learn from.

POST-CAMPAIGN VERSIONS OF THE ZO PCs

Here are the write-ups for the PCs from our sessions at the close of the campaign. They have grown mighty and powerful. What new dangers will arise in the future to challenge them?

BARON DERIL

IMPERIAL GOVERNOR OF THE ISLAND OF FORGOTTEN TOYS



Background: As per p. 72.

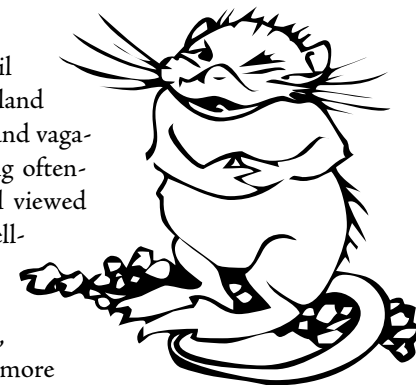
Qualities: Expert [+4] Brawling, Expert [+4] Ominous Abdomen, Good [+2] Imperial Knight (Aristocrat; IoFT Governor); Good [+2] Later, Gator (Drifter), Good [+2] Mirror Magics (Communication only), Good [+2] Perceptive, Good [+2] You Gonna Eat That?, Good [+2] Fractured Knowledge of Other Dimensions.

Special Move: Good [+2] Tail Gator!

Hero Points: 5/5

Miscellany: As per p. 72, plus...

It has been fifteen years, and Governor Deril has settled into a comfortable life on the Island of Forgotten Toys. Deril's days of drifting and vagabondage have served him well in navigating oftentimes tricky aristocratic waters. While still viewed as a bit coarse, the Governor is generally well-liked by his subjects, other Violander nobles, and other diplomats. Some lifestyle adjustments have had to be made, though: Governor Deril now consumes more common foods and only inanimate items, for it simply would not be becoming for an Imperial Governor to be dining on his own subjects.



Deril's *Ominous Abdomen* can still be cryptic at times, due to the proximity to the re-egged Enigmatic Emu and the Nexus of Realities; but he has become much better at interpreting his tummy. Disturbingly, one unsettling message always appears when he passes a mirror: "GRR". Initially for protection, his friend Sir Horace Hogg taught him the rudiments of Mirror Magics. However, Deril soon focused on communicating through the mirrors, so that he could regularly talk with Sir Horace and their allies from their adventures during the last incarnation of the Deathless Wolf.

With Mirror Magic to help the Island to keep in contact, it has gained much closer ties with Viola. Actually, the Island has become something of a tourist destination for the mainlanders (especially cynical citizens of Jade City) and a bartering mecca for curiosity-seekers. This regular source of income keeps the Island on good terms with the new Queen of Viola (the former Princess Paige), but it also attracts the unwanted attention of pirates preying on unsuspecting tourists (including the Dread Captain Mouse).

Recently, there have been strange rumors upon the island of a huge wandering man in a red cloak and shiny black boots. Calling himself "Zo-Rom the Snow Father," he has been repairing defective or injured Living Toys – some hint that he repairs them "too well." He's also asking some pointed questions about morality. Other than social discomfort, Zo-Rom has been civil – if somewhat addled. It is unclear what this man wants, but Governor Deril has been quietly keeping tabs on him.



SIR HORACE HOGG

GENTLEMAN ENCHANTER & GRAND-
MASTER OF THE ORDER OF THE MIRROR

Background: As per p. 76.

Qualities: Master [+6] Enchantment*,
Expert [+4] Swordplay, Good [+2]
Arsenal of Enchanted Artifacts*, Good
[+2] Mirror Magic*, Good [+2] Imperial
Knight (Aristocrat; Grandmaster of the
Order of the Mirror); Good [+2] Adventurer,
Poor [-2] Gentleman, Poor [-2] Cannot Lie

Hero Points: 2/8

Miscellany: As per p. 76, plus...

It has been fifteen years, and Sir Horace Hogg has settled into his role as Grandmaster of the Order of the Mirror. He has expanded Slophaven Manor into the Headquarters and Motherhouse of the Order, with Chapterhouses in each of the lands of Zo. When he is not training new members of the Order (who now number around twenty), Horace travels the lands of Zo, righting wrongs, recruiting new members for the Order, and keeping his eyes – mundane and mystical – peeled for signs the Deathless Wolf may be returning. (Some consider Sir Horace to be a trifle paranoid about the potential, but no one has the audacity to say it to his face.)

Horace and Snow Witch have fallen in love and are now married. While they don't have any children yet, they do plan on having a family some day. Snow Witch is also a staunch ally of the Order, and teaches all its members the rudiments of Mirror Magic (for communications); some few members with magical talent are given more advanced training.

Horace's three brothers have been forced to treat him with more courtesy over the years, though it is, at times, only grudging. The fact that the "black sheep" of their family is now an Imperial Baron and Hero of the Realm *really* sticks in their collective craws.

Because of Horace's sharp attention to the Mirror Realm, he has sensed strange disturbances within it: the reflections of curtains being blown by invisible winds when the real ones hang still, faint howls that come from behind the glass of a mirror owned by a Rosson merchant's wife, and a flickering shadow

that skirts the edges of the Great Glass of the Guild (installed in its own outbuilding of Slophaven Manor). Clearly, these situations require investigation. Horace has been thinking of asking his old friend Deril if he might be up for another grand adventure...

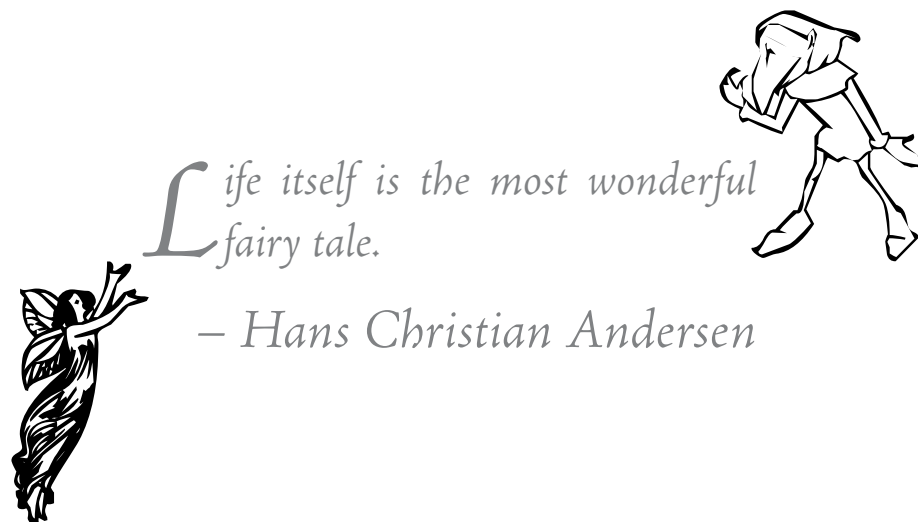
THE ZANTABULOUS LAND OF ZO

And now, the doorway to the Zantabulous Land of Zo is open for GMs and players across the world, allowing them to enter it and read, run, adapt, borrow, and twist. Huge tracts of it are yet unexplored. Perhaps your PCs will haunt the alleyways of the Jade City, avoiding the watchful eye of the Smiling Soldier. Maybe there are other cursed Princesses like Morpheia out there, needing their enchantments broken. It's possible that an eccentric noble has hired them to find the bottom of the Bottomless Chasm. Maybe one of the PCs works for Hella the Fire Fairy of Rosso, or has accidentally become betrothed to Princess Paige, or is the long lost son of the King of the Winged Monkeys.

It's up to you.

There's a whole magic kingdom just sitting here, ready and waiting to be explored.

Go: be **zantabulous**.



*Life itself is the most wonderful
fairy tale.*

– Hans Christian Andersen

APPENDIX

BONUS MATERIAL

PLAYER COMMENTARY:

HOW THE CAMPAIGN GOT STARTED... (ANDREW BYERS)

I have been gaming with Chad and a few other friends in the Washington DC area since 1999, so we know each other's gaming habits, likes, and dislikes pretty well. We hadn't had an ongoing campaign for a while (real life had prevented us from meeting to game regularly for probably a year or two). I suggested to another player – Scott Kane – that we start bugging Chad to start up a new campaign, since our lives had seemingly calmed down enough to allow us to meet maybe once a month or so for a regular game. The time constraints of meeting only once a month naturally lent themselves to a rules-light, fairly episodic campaign.

We approached Chad in July 2005 and he was amenable, so we began negotiating what we would play, as we always do when starting a new campaign.

PLAYER COMMENTARY:

HOW THE CAMPAIGN GOT STARTED... (SCOTT KANE)

Over dinner, Andrew and I had kicked around the idea of a starting a new campaign, but neither of us had any specific ideas to take to Chad, other than that the sessions be fairly episodic and done-in-one. I think we were both getting the itch to roll some dice again, since it had been a while. We were pretty sure we would be using PDQ, because the Truth & Justice playtest had just wrapped up recently, and Chad would be interested in seeing in what ways we would twist PDQ. We just had no idea how the setting should look.

So with those basic points, we pinged Chad, and the Idea Machine started churning...

Oh, and as a post-script, Andrew and I both got really sick from that dinner, and neither of us have eaten at that restaurant since then. I like to think that was the Deathless Wolf's little warning shot across the bow.

ORIGINAL CAMPAIGN PROSPECTUS & PROCESS

The way we as a group selected the *Zorcerer of Zo* as our campaign was by voting between a number of possible campaigns. This process was inspired by a similar method used by game author Bill Stoddard (*GURPS Steampunk*, *GURPS Fantasy*).

We start with the idea that I (Chad) will be the GM and there will be two players (Scott and Andrew). I generated several campaign prospectuses, and sent them out for a vote.

Rate the following game blurbs from 1 to 7 (7 being your top choice, and 1 being your least):

A. *Wired West* ("High Baud Drifter"): *The Matrix* meets *Firefly* meets Spaghetti Western. Old datamining prospectors, cowboys herding data streams, Ghost Nodes, telegraph stations as "hardpoint exits," etc. Cities are "nodes" (Silver Node) connected by rail-lines for fast transit; slower transit across the packet-plains, yadda yadda. Majority if not all of the gaming takes place in the Matrix, with little dealing with the real world directly.

B. *Faerie Tale Fantasy*: (based on the "Sevenpart Soul" CiaB) The Bros. Grimm meet L. Frank Baum and Lewis Carroll in an alley, and they all muss each other up a bit. Side order of Dark Disney and other stuff. *The 10th Kingdom* plus *Fables* plus *Oz Squad*.

C. *Second-String Supers*: Ersatz-Batman goes to space with the ersatz-JLA. The PCs are the remains of the ersatz-Batman Family, left defending ersatz-Gotham City. (*Truth & Justice* setting.)

D. *SuperCorps*: You're a superconsultant. People pay you to achieve the impossible. (*Truth & Justice* setting.)

E. *Fanfare for the Amplified Man*: You're given a magic piece of jewelry that gives you superpowers. As far as you know, the PCs are the only people on Earth with superpowers. Now what? (*Truth & Justice* setting.)

F. *Skullduggery, Inc.*: Superhuman spies fight opposite numbers. SHIELD vs. HYDRA, by way of *Global Frequency*.

G. *Shadows of Fiction* [to use the *Unknown Armies* system]: Quasi-Planetary neo-pulp; exploring the hidden fictional irruptions into reality. While may use UA characters, these will be twisted to fit. May or may not use magick schools or avatars; may twist them; may need to write new ones up.

Here were the overall results:

PROPOSED CAMPAIGN	A	S	C	TOTALS
Wired West (“High Baud Drifter”)	2	3	5	10
Faerie Tale Fantasy	6	6	4	16 tie!
Second-String Supers	4	2	7	13
SuperCorps	1	5	2	8
Fanfare for the Amplified Man	5	4	3	12
Skullduggery, Inc.	3	7	6	16 tie!
Shadows of Fiction	7	1	1	9

PLAYER COMMENTARY: ANDREW’S VOTES

I actually liked all the campaign possibilities (which is unusual for me, I’m pretty picky about what campaigns I participate in). The campaign that became ZoZ was my second favorite choice. I only rated Shadows of Fiction higher because it hit three of my sweet spots: books, the Planetary comic book series, and the Unknown Armies game engine.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: SCOTT’S VOTES

While all of these campaign settings have merit, I felt the best choices for a common ground for gaming were Skullduggery, Inc., Faerie Tale Fantasy, or SuperCorps. These looked to be settings we could have fun with and see how PDQ could be used.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: CHAD’S VOTES

Truth & Justice had just been published, and I was itching to run a super-hero game (Second-String, specifically). However, my playtest group for T&J had already used the SuperCorps setting, and I was mildly uncomfortable with the idea of running a Fanfare... campaign for Scott and Andrew, for various reasons.

That meant that Skullduggery, Inc. and Wired West were my two next closest bids. I voted Shadows of Fiction very low, because I wanted to use a PDQ-based game, and I felt the scope of a fictional irruption game would be far too wide – part of the fun is recognizing common characters, and I’m not sure all three of us read enough of the same stuff for the parallels to really sing.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: VOTE COMMENT (ANDREW)

I think it’s kind of interesting that Faerie Tale Fantasy was no one’s first choice, but was really almost a compromise choice; in hindsight, I think it turned out far better than any of the other possibilities would have.

PLAYER COMMENTARY: VOTE COMMENT (SCOTT)

Yeah, not to doubt Chad’s Chadly powers, but this turned into a really fun and interesting campaign. I’m sorry we had to wrap it up after only six sessions, but I am glad this setting is getting out there for the rest of you folks to enjoy. I certainly hope we’ll get the chance to revisit Zo at some point in the future. See ya on the Cinnamon Road!

PLAYER INPUT ON THE CAMPAIGN

Immediately after we settled on ZoZ as the campaign, I asked the players for input on specific elements they’d like to see included in the campaign. While not guaranteed to see such during the game, this at least gives the GM some cool ideas to play with and lets him know what the players’ expectations are.

Here are Chad’s questions and the player’s answers:

Q: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE?

Andrew: *Fables* [the comic series], I like. *Oz*, I like (including Todd McFarlane’s *Twisted Land of Oz*). Magic, wizards, talking beasties, little folk. Flying monkeys. Evil gnomes.

Scott: I am also intrigued by some of the *Twisted Oz* items Andrew has shown me. I will flip through some of my *Realms of Fantasy* mags to see what else strikes me.

Q: WHAT SORT OF GAME DO YOU WANT TO PLAY?

Andrew: I like the quest elements in 7PS. Maybe some kind of variant? There was a lot of that in the *Oz* books. [I really enjoyed Chad’s original *Pyramid* article and I’ve always enjoyed *Oz*, being a card-carrying member of IWOC, the International Wizard of Oz Club, so this sounded like it would be right up my alley.]

Q: HOW DARK OR LIGHT DO YOU WANT IT TO BE?

Andrew: I’d lean toward the darker side personally, in the original Brothers Grimm sense. [‘Cause I always like dark elements in my RPGs, probably moreso than anyone else in the group.]

Scott: I always enjoy fairytale cross-pollination, a la *One for the Morning Glory* and *Fables*. I think they are just about the right balance between wacky and dark.

Q: HOW WACKY FICTIONAL?

Andrew: Nothing *too* wacky, please. I can only take but so much wackiness.... [I really don't like "humorous" games or games that are bizarre just for the sake of being bizarre and I wanted to head off either possibility.]

Scott: Here's a thought (don't know if it's been done already): The PCs (as fairytale characters) are commissioned via magics by a real world author to "generate" a tale for him. Hilarity and loss of limb ensues.

SESSION RUNNING NOTES

These are my transcribed note pages I scribbled for each session before play. They generally took the form of two columns of notes on one page of legal paper (at most, two pages). The notes have been cleaned up slightly to be readable to anyone who isn't me. (For example, the second bullet under *Immediate Events* for Session 1 was as follows in my notes: "Hector H., orn shell, constr.").

~~~~~

## SESSION 1: AUGUST 26, 2005

### IMMEDIATE EVENTS

- ◆ Dead "tinker" found in harbor (Hedge Wizard Vonn).
- ◆ Hector Hogg (Horace's brother) getting a load of ornamental shells for his construction business.
- ◆ An old sailor – eyepatch, pegleg, hookhand – begging for coins (Jack Tar).
- ◆ Pipsqueak would like a night off during Festival.
- ◆ Festival begins at midnight. Dancing in the streets, masks, finery, misrule, passion, drinking, dueling.

- ◆ *Ominous Abdomen:* LUV. HAT (hate), TNJ (gratuitous GM reference).

## FESTIVAL NIGHT #1

- ◆ King Glamorgan makes announcement: "For twenty years, my niece, Princess Morpheia, has languished under a foul enchantment in Castle Slumber. Anyone who can brave the wall of thorns and the sleeping enchantment to wake the Princess of Rosso with True Love's Kiss will be rewarded greatly with lands, money, title, and the hand of Morpheia."
  - o There are no takers.

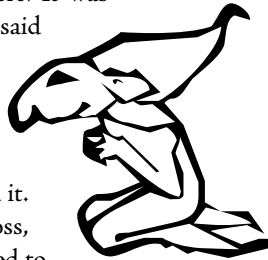
## NEXT DAY

- ◆ Michael Merchant's daughter Molly was enchanted last night, the first night of Festival.
  - o She was at a neighborhood ball.
  - o Left with a man in a Jack of Hearts costume, who wore a spherical diamond ring.
  - o Michael suspects mystery man was *George Pieman* (see p. 83), Molly's childhood sweetheart, and now a rake.
  - o Molly found outside at dawn, crying uncontrollably. Still is. Lethargic or crying, that's it.
- ◆ George Pieman, son of the pastry chef to the King. Money and position of daddy made him spoiled and greedy. Hangs out with cronies *Thud* (see p. 87) and *Blunder* (see p. 83) at the Rusty Cutlass Inn.
- ◆ *The Rusty Cutlass* is a wharf dive bar. PCs will have "just missed" Pieman and Co. The pirate and smuggler Captain Mouse and some of his crew is here, and can give the following information if the PCs don't piss him off:
  - o Pieman came in late last night for gambling, drinking, and carousing.
  - o Pieman is a decent gambler, but last night had the luck of the Wolf himself.
  - o Barmaids and whores love Pieman, but last night they were fighting over him.
  - o Pieman was talking about a trip to the northeast.
  - o (Captain Mouse seems to recognize Pipsqueak. If he notices the PCs noticing this, he will begin to abuse Pip, who will remain unfazable.)





2. (only after #1) I heard Snow Witch is the one who put the Princess to sleep.
3. (only after #2, from Ilsa) Yes. I was there. It was in Zo Proper, at a party. Morphea had said something cutting to the Witch – about her dress, I think – and the Witch cursed her on the spot: putting her to sleep, sending her to her castle instantly, and causing the Briar Wall to grow up around it. I hear the Zorcerer Himself was very cross, and that is why Snow Witch is not allowed to set foot or spell within Zo Proper to this day.
4. My cousin says he saw goblin bandits along the Violander highway.
5. My brother-in-law is a guardsman in Carabas, and he said they have trolls under the Violander Bridge!
6. (only after #4 or #5) I heard Stig's behind all the fuss up north in Viola, trying to take over the country.
7. You weren't here yesterday, but there was a messenger who went to Rosso last week and came back last night looking all dejected.
8. A cartful of seashells on the Rosson highway was overturned a couple days ago by a freak wind.
9. I found a boggart in my barn two days ago. The dogs had been at it. It could have been an owl, I guess.
10. I hear dragons are the children of the Deathless Wolf.
11. I hear Stig is the servant of the Deathless Wolf.
12. I hear Stig is the Deathless Wolf himself!



◆ Ominous Abdomen: \* \* \*

◆ Ivan Prince is long gone, sleepy stable boy says he rode east (really rode northeast).

## EVENT ON THE ROAD #2

◆ A rumble of thunder, a flash of light that flashes up from behind a rise in the road... after clearing the crest, there is a cage of metal and glass, taller than Deril, sitting in the middle of the road. There is a strange clockwork inside, and some strange symbols around the top of the cage. (Phonebooth; TN 11 for Deril to recognize anything about it via Ominous Abdomen: FON).

## ARRIVE AT CARABAS MANOR

- ◆ Timothy welcomes Horace and Company. Cheerful schoolchum banter.
  - The problem mentioned in the letter is that a small family of trolls has taken up residence under Viola Bridge, which spans the Rushing River and connects the highway between Giallo and Viola. Major trade and travel route. (Also, Brooz Ford is a possible crossing, but harder and requires more guards for safety.)
  - Already lost guardsmen in the attack and attempts to recapture.
  - Trolls charging tolls of blood and gold.
  - Timothy attempted to trick them into leaving the Bridge long enough to be vulnerable, but either the trolls are too smart or too dumb to fall for it.
  - The trolls have dug in "like ivy on an oak."
  - Asked Snow Witch for help (ignored), asked the Roly-Poly Prince for help (refused), asked Prince Walter for aid (pressed by Roly-Poly Prince), asked King Glamorgan of Rosso for some knights (refused).
  - Trying to juggle guardsman assignments to protect Brooz Ford, the border with the Roly-Poly Prince, keep a watch on the bridge, guard Carabas Town, etc. Will take more time to reassign, as well as get new guards trained.
  - Desperate straits. Can Hogg and company help?
  - If Ivan Prince sent his regards, Timothy denies knowing any such person.
- ◆ Horace's brother Herman, thatcher and rancher, comes to Marquis Timothy for help. One of his barns exploded last night – possibly by a freak tornado... but the situation is strange ("there's a... mark") and he needs the Marquis to check it out. (He is stiff, polite, and brusque to his brother.)
  - No storm, no other damage.
  - Barn has been blown apart from the center out.
  - Central support beam split down the middle; hollow inside (something inside was dripping with storm magic; aura is slowly leaking away).
  - The wood came from Azul, from a load sent by brother Hector. Good, solid wood.
  - Giant (2' diameter) paw-print/crop circle in center of where the barn used to be (quickly evanescent magic).

## VIOLA BRIDGE AND ITS TROLLS

- ◆ Trolls demand blood, gold, or blood and gold to pass.
- ◆ Any belligerence shown by those who wish to cross the Bridge triggers an immediate attack.
- ◆ Will not voluntarily move more than three paces from Bridge; will fight to death (“our bridge now!”).
- ◆ Under orders from Stig to block all traffic except those who pay the price or show his sign.

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## SESSION 3: JANUARY 20, 2006

- ◆ News & Events:
  - Princess Gian, the Roly-Poly Prince's beloved mother, has died. Funerary customs mean that the Prince will recall his troops to the capital for a state memorial, and will forego raiding his neighbors for a minimum of forty days. (Some say the Princess pushed the Roly-Poly Prince into bellicose conflict with his neighbors; others say she stayed his hand. Famed Zolander bard Ilsa Hund will perform the elegy.
  - A letter comes to the manor from Rosso for. . . Pipsqueak? He reads it and eats it. (TN9 to see the return address as "The Bad Ship Rat-Trap.")
- ◆ Marquis Discussion:
  - Redeployment of Carabasian guardsmen is complete.
  - The Viola Bridge – now being called "the Purple Bridge" by many – has been fortified by the Marquis.
  - Scouts sent by the Marquis into Viola report that Stig's forces are slowly absorbing all of the Violander duchies, counties, and holdings stretching from Razor Peak to Brooz Ford.
  - Carabasian scouts report no dragonsign in Windy Gap.
  - Quellabaum and the Winged Monkeys are not allied with Stig (or anyone else for that matter).
  - The Marquis' clerk verifies that is no Far West Holding in any County in Giallo, nor is there any yeoman or aristocratic family that bears the surname "Prince."
  - Marquis suggests that Deril, Horace, and Pip go behind enemy lines

into Viola and perform high-level operations – forming/linking with a resistance, sabotage, allying with Winged Monkeys or Princess Paige, etc. Carabas will provide materials, supplies, and intelligence.

- o Most important thing is finding out who's pulling Stig's strings – the speedy and orderly conquering of Viola is way far afield of Stig's normal barbaric style.
- ◆ Herman Hogg:
  - o Still pissed about barn; Brother Horatio gave him sturdy Azulite lumber for it!
  - o Blown apart, outward.
  - o Paw-print sigil/cropcircle burned into ground.
  - o Support timber split – had a hollow place inside it.
  - o Stinks of magic.
- ◆ On Way Back to Manor:
  - o Stop at Swan's Breast Tavern in Carabas Town for a few drinks.
  - o Ominous Abdomen: ALE (TN9 to notice that when these letters flash, Deril's mug refills magically!).
  - o Pip Nose-twitch: "Master, I smell goblins in the town!"
- ◆ Behind the Tavern:
  - o Azulite bravo from Golden Sheaf Inn (Cesar) is threatening the old woman from the road (Blanca) with the back of his hand. (TN7 to recognize them in the dimming light; if PCs recognize Blanca, she will specifically call for "the Bearers of the White Rose" to aid her.)
  - o Cesar will defend self.
  - o If fight starts to go against him (loss of 5 or more Damage Ranks), he whistles for Dusk Goblins (3 for each PC) and runs away under their cover.
  - o Goblins fight to the death.
  - o In 1d6+2 Turns, Shawn Gruff shows up to help the PCs. Talking Goat, with one horn of polished wood.
- ◆ Shawn Gruff, Gentleman of "Leisure" (Thief) and Hedgerow Alchemist:
  - o Asks if they are the defenders of the Purple Bridge.
  - o Tells them his brother William was killed by the trolls, and he was on his way to take revenge, when he heard the problem had already been solved.
  - o Offers effusive thanks to Our Heroes.

- ◆ Blanca, Servant of Snow Witch:
  - Offers each of them (including Pip and Shawn) another white rose.
  - “My mistress wishes to speak with the worthy.” (to Shawn) “I’m not sure she wanted to speak to you, but you have also proved yourself worthy. You should come. Come – all of you – now!”
  - Shawn defers to Deril and Horace’s judgment on the matter.

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## SESSION 4: APRIL 28, 2006

### NPC RECAP

- ◆ Blanca: Old woman, servant of Snow Witch. Has given Hogg, Deril, and Pipsqueak two white roses each; Shawn Gruff has only received one. “My mistress wishes to speak with worthy souls, and you are they.”
- ◆ Cesar: The Azulite bravo who was trying to rough up Blanca; summoned the goblins to fight Our Heroes.
- ◆ Shawn Gruff: Azulite “gentleman of leisure” (read: “thief”), with a magic wooden prosthetic horn, a penchant for potions, and a whole lotta knives. “My brother was killed by Stig’s trolls, and I want revenge!”

### BLANCA’S HUT

- ◆ 3 rooms, logs and thatch: Parlor/Bedroom, Kitchen, big fireplace between the two. Separate side room with gigantic (4’ x 6’) mirror. Mirror shows pearly fog; ornate, arcane brass frame.
- ◆ A figure forms within the mirror: Snow Witch. Slim, tall, salt & pepper hair, mid-40s, still beautiful, milk-white skin, rose-red lips, fitted gown of white silk. Soft but clear voice.
- ◆ “I am Snow Witch, Mistress of Mirror Magics. You gentlemen have proved yourselves worthy – noble of spirit and deed, no small feat in a fallen world. I have long searched for such as you, to reward and to challenge.”
- ◆ “As a reward for your bravery and virtue, I grant each of you a boon – one boon per white rose you hold. You may ask a question or favor here, now, one at a time and alone, before this magical mirror, where my powers are strongest, or you may in the future cast the rose into any

reflective surface, and call my name – but know that my powers will be much weaker.”

- ◆ “My challenge is this: in my youth, sorrow, and pride, I cursed Princess Morphea of Rosso. For her mockery of my despair upon the death of my Prince, I ensnared her to sleep enchanted, until she was awakened by the kiss of True Love. It has been twenty years, and no True Love has appeared. How will she find True Love while she slumbers? I cannot simply undo the spell. This weighs heavy upon my soul – only a Hero (or Heroes!) can untangle this knot.”
  - Pipsqueak offers to sell his roses to Hogg for 5 pouches of gold, the equivalent of 5 years’ wages. If Hogg doesn’t take him up on it, Shawn will. (Pipsqueak will send the gold to *THE PLACE*. Near the end of the session, or perhaps the next one, he will receive a letter by magical means, one that bears the stamp of the Imperial Treasury. He will read, giggle, and consume the letter. At a point of need, *THE THING* will happen.)
  - Shawn will hold back his boon until later. (Will ask *THE QUESTION ABOUT HIS NATURE* after *HE RETRIEVES THAT THING*.)

### POSSIBLE SORTIES INTO VIOLA (MARQUIS DE CARABAS’ IDEAS)

- ◆ Ally with Princess Paige or King Quellabaum in Viola, or other rulers.
- ◆ Assassinate Stig.
- ◆ Help form up a Violander Resistance.
- ◆ Lay caches of weapons and supplies for Giallon troops.
- ◆ Petition the Zorcerer of Zo.
- ◆ Recon (what does Stig have where?)
- ◆ Spying (who’s helping Stig?)



## BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM

### (THE PLACE, THE QUESTION, AND THE THINGS)

*Not that I actually believe that my players would look at my game notes if I had to leave the room, I left some of the details in the session notes vague. This was more so I wouldn't accidentally blurt out or telegraph the solutions to some of the mysteries of the campaign. Here's what those cryptic notes mean:*

**The Place:** Pipsqueak is sending gold to the Imperial Treasury as part of his curse. See Session #5 for more details.

**The Question About Shaykosch's Nature:** "How may I end my eternal hunger?"

**Pipsqueak's Thing:** His curse will end, and he shall stand revealed as his true self. See Session #5.

**Shaykosch's Thing To Be Retrieved:** The Fang. See Session #6 for more details.

THE ZORCERER OF ZO • APPENDIX

## SESSION 5: MAY 12, 2006

- ◆ (The PCs are being held in the basement of the Town Hall of Timpani, the nearest village to Slophaven Manor, and the location of Stig's HQ. They had not yet had a chance to perform their show here and connect with any existing or potential rebels.)
- ◆ **Darkness & Pain:**
  - "Wake them up." (Stig)
  - Stig, the wizard Murklebog, and Cesar stand in a dungeon room, looking at Our Heroes who are manacled to the wall, their arms chained uncomfortably over their heads.
- ◆ **Chained to Dungeon Wall:**
  - Deril's are Heavy and Thick, TN11 to break or pick.
  - Horace's are heavily runed to be Antimagical, TN11 to break or pick.
  - Shawn and Pip have normal manacles, TN9 to break or pick.

### ◆ Questions:

- Stig asks: Who sent you here with an Ogre-slaying Sword? Was it Carabas? The Roly-Poly Prince? Does the Zorcerer himself know of my plans?"
- Cesar soothes: "The Zorcerer of Zo cannot know anything, even if he cared."
- Murklebog agrees: "My magic is cloaking us like a fog. None can see what you do, oh Stig."
- Stig: "What about all that rune hoo-hah with the bird?"
- Cesar interjects: "My master requires that entity. That is his payment for arranging your rise to power, Tyrant."
- Murklebog: "My Emu Trap has not yet compromised your hidden plans, mighty one. All is well."
- Stig: "Except for these saboteurs and assassins! Who sent you! You'll talk under torture!"

### ◆ Wait a beat.

- If PCs do nothing, Pipsqueak begins to wail fearfully, "Master, please don't let them take meeeee!"
- If the players try to do something, let it play out, but Stig picks Pip anyway because he looks scrawny, weak, and afraid. (More fun to torture.)
- Give PCs Something Bad Happens points either way.
- Pipsqueak covertly winks at Horace as he's taken away (he has both Perfect Servant and Endure Any Torment or Indignity, after all!).
- The door closes and Stig, Cesar, and Murklebog drag the shrieking mouse down the hall.

### ◆ Wait a beat.

- Shawn calmly lowers his arms, free of the manacles which clink against the wall.
- If the PCs do nothing, he tries to free them.
- ◆ Pip starts screaming in pain (Totally fake screams. Totally. Right?)
- ◆ Now what? (PCs Escape, somehow?)
- ◆ *Ominous Abdomen:* ALF, FAK, EMU.



## SPICING UP THE MIX

- ◆ Goblins to Suit.
- ◆ *Pip's Letter* appears at opportune moment, green seal of the ZoZ: "By the decree of His Zantabulousness, the Zorcerer of Zo, your debt is paid. Rise, Captain Roderick Mus!"
- ◆ *Runic Woodhenge* that Murklebog devised as an Enigmatic Emu Trap and the *Magic Rope* to be used as an Emu Halter.
- ◆ If things go wrong, then Cesar will grab the Emu and ride to Azul.

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## SESSION 6: JUNE 9, 2006

*RODERICK SAYS:*

“My information shows that *Count Alphonse* has Azul almost completely under his control. He has been massing Azulite troops along the Violander and Rosson borders.

“There is a band of Azulite rebels fighting him, however. They are led by the Outlaw Queen known as *the Blue Hood*. Perhaps if you linked up with the Hood, you could strike at the Count’s base in Bluerock. This could delay Alphonsé’s forces long enough for me to organize the citizen militia of Viola, for King Glamorgan of Rosso to be alerted, and the Zolander Imperial forces brought to buttress both Kingdoms.

“We still do not know why Alphonse wants the Enigmatic Emu – no doubt he’s found some ill-use for it. Anything you discover about that would be useful.”

## GUESSTIMATED OUTLINE OF EVENTS

1. *Follow Emu trail due East:* red/silver flowers, surrounded by dark, sticky, sweet residue... and flies (exploded Coke cans).
2. *Cross Azul border, avoiding sentries:* Azul's men wear blue, with a black wolfshead insignia.
  - a. Fewer sentries than expected for "massing."
  - b. Burned command posts/camps everywhere – debris includes

banners and flags ("Alphonse the Liberator!" and black wolfsheads on purple cloth).

3. *Slophaven East*: On way to Castle Bluerock is Slophaven East, the wooden mansion of Hogg's brother Horatio, in the middle of Fogwood.
  - a. Demolished, foundations torn up.
  - b. Blue threads and needles everywhere, focused on the root cellar.
  - c. Blue Hood and Horatio (and a few Happy Bandits); Horatio recognizes his "poncy" brother Horace.
    - i. Slophaven East leveled by Alphonse, his army, and the Stitchwitch.
    - ii. Alphonse dug up something in the root cellar – a fang as long as a man's arm.
    - iii. Alphonse now controls the storms, and is calling himself "The Wolf Reborn." (The Blue Hood Mentions her "wolfslayer" arrow made from the Wooden Pirate's left arm.)
4. *Emu Comin' Thru!*: Cesar and the Emu arrived yesterday.
  - a. Stitchwitch did something with magic threads (rainbow collar for Emu, rainbow sash for Alphonse; now invisible to Zorcerer?).
  - b. Emu held at Castle Bluerock.
  - c. Count and most of his forces moved to the southern border; burning their camps, moving at great speed.
  - d. About one-third of Happy Bandits at Bluerock (7 archers); one-third shadowing the Count's forces (7 archers); one-third with Blue Hood (7 archers plus Horatio), making a quick scouting run along the Violander border.
  - e. Either Castle Bluerock (Emu and Stitchwitch) or Count's forces on Rosso border (making straight for the Castle Slumber of Princess Morpheia).
5. *Decisions*:
  - a. *Shawn*: (1d6) Vote for Castle Slumber on 1-2; for Castle Bluerock on 3-6.
  - b. *Blue Hood*: Castle Slumber.
  - c. *Horatio*: Castle Bluerock.

## CASTLE BLUEROCK

1. Four tower square castle with central keep, surrounded by a moat and a “fence” of blue, glowing threads on spindles (Good [+2] Electric Shock and Good Sticky [TN9]).



2. In castle yard, an Emu corral made of 2 rings of same glowing blue threads on spindles.
  - ◆ About a score (20) of guardsmen around.
  - ◆ Stitchwitch will come out of central keep within 1d6-2 Turns of any alarm given.
  - ◆ Stitchwitch is a wrinkled old hag wearing a brown habit with glowing blue threads woven in it.
  - ◆ Will attack from on high (Flight) with Entangling Threads, Strangling Threads, Shocking Threads, Needle Blasts, Poison Needles, and Explosive Needles. Will use broom as staff in dire circumstances.
3. If victorious, Shawn will try to eat Emu. Assume Emu is Improbable [19] Difficulty Rank to harm, and Shawn needs to harm him 3 times. If successful before stopped, roll 1d6:
  - ◆ 1-2, *Stupefied/Blissed Out*: Is doopey until confronted with Alphonse with Fang.
  - ◆ 3-4, *Manic*: Immediately takes off at top speed to get Fang back; all arrive at Castle Slumber, #6d.
  - ◆ 5-6, *Discombobulates*: Absorbed into himself; will return in future because he's incomplete.
4. If proceeding to Castle Slumber next, go to Castle Slumber, #7.

## CASTLE SLUMBER

1. Count's Command Post: Tents behind palisade of pikes; dug in, in proper military fashion. About 30 guardsmen. Perimeter has a "fence" of blue, glowing threads on spindles [Good Electric Shock and Good Sticky].
2. Rudyard, Saang, and Rosewood captured (30 guardsmen each). Castle Slumber now sits within the borders of Azul, and the enchantment is broken (since it focused on "Princess Morphea of Rosso.")
3. King Glamorgan shows up, with 50 Rosson Knights.
4. Magic briars around Castle Slumber start to wither.
5. Count Alphonse enters Castle Slumber.
  - a. Count Alphonse is tall, bald, black goatee & mustache, well-built. Wears blue tunic with black wolf's head, black pants and boots, sword at waist, wolfskin cloak, rainbow sash, and huge white Fang

- on leather lanyard around neck. (Fang gives 2 Upshifts to "Storm Magic", even if wielder has no magic ability).
  - b. Kisses Morphea; she wakes up. (Or would she have woken up anyway?)
  - c. *Princess Morphea*: Tall, blonde, pale, a bit thin, nasal voice, spoiled brat.
6. Reception of King Glamorgan by Count Alphonse in Castle Slumber.
  - a. "It was the only way..." (Explains geographic stratagem for breaking enchantment.)
  - b. "I will, of course, cede the lands back to Rosso now that the Princess is freed..."
  - c. King Glamorgan says: "No, take it as a wedding gift..." (Count smiles evilly, unnoticed by all but Heroes.)
  - d. King Glamorgan says: "Let us celebrate your nuptials immediately!"
  - e. King Glamorgan says: "And when you are married, you shall be my heir!"
7. *Wedding!*: Wedding ceremony in Castle Slumber chapel as per TV/Movies...
  - a. Starts raining.
  - b. Four guardsmen at door.
  - c. "Celebrate the joining of two people, two families, two Kingdoms..."
  - d. "If anyone knows just cause why these two should not be married, speak now, or forever hold your peace..."
  - e. Complete wedding with the kiss.
8. Count Alphonse says: "I am now rightful heir of Rosso... No need for wife or uncle-in-law."
  - a. Storm breaks. Bigass thunder & lightning.
  - b. Chapel stained glass windows break.
  - c. Alphonse uses Fang to Lightning Blast Glamorgan and Morphea.
9. *What Does Shawn Do?*:
  - a. If Shawn there alone, Shawn takes Fang back ("You have something that belongs to me. ." – footstamp, lightning shockwave, crop circle, throw away Wooden Horn, fit Fang into socket, transform into wolf – "I am Jack Tar, Ivan Prince, Shawn Gruff, John Wolf! I am *Shaykosch*, the Deathless One!")

- i. *If haven't eaten Emu*, runs for Castle Bluerock, leaving Alphonse behind.
- ii. *If have eaten Emu*, kills Alphonse for his temerity in posing as the Wolf Reborn... then turns on/waits for the Heroes.
- b. If Shawn there with Heroes, waits for them to wear down or defeat Alphonse, then does as i. above to retrieve Fang; will kill Alphonse.
  - i. *If haven't eaten Emu*, runs for Castle Bluerock, leaving Heroes behind.
  - ii. *If have eaten Emu*, tries to kill the Heroes.

10. *Some Ways to Stop Shawn*: See below, **Showdown with Shaykosch**.

## SHOWDOWN WITH SHAYKOSCH

- ◆ Deathless Wolf must be killed/destroyed/tricked/trapped by Hero(es) – in this case, Hogg or Deril (or the Blue Hood if *absolutely* necessary at the very, very end).
- ◆ Possibly Useful Items/Tools/Methods:
  - o Deril's Ominous Abdomen.
  - o Deril's Wrasslin'.
  - o Hogg's Enchantments.
  - o Hogg's Swordplay.
  - o The Wooden Horn.
  - o Blue Hood's Wolfslayer Arrow.
  - o Snow Witch's Boons (Trap in Mirror?).
  - o Ogreslayer Sword (?).
  - o Various Medicine Show potions.
  - o Attacking his shadow.
  - o Blowing him into pieces and separating them.
  - o Take him to the Purple Bridge?
  - o Trickery/Gentleman.
  - o Something Else.

## BONUS ZO NPCs

Here are three write-ups for some bonus NPCs. *Quellabaum* had been statted up to be another prisoner of Stig's if necessary, but never saw play. The uncursed Pipsqueak – or *Captain Roderick Mus* – never actually had stats, as he wasn't involved in direct conflict with or alongside the PCs for the rest of

the campaign; the stats below were written for this book. And lastly are the stats for *Shaykosch*, only to be used when confronted by true Heroes at the climax of the tale.

## QUELLABAUM, KING OF THE WINGED MONKEYS

**Background:** Standoffish King of the Winged Monkeys, Quellabaum is busy with his own pursuits. However, he can be convinced to aid those who are polite and sincere when asking for help with a noble cause.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Aristocrat, Expert [+4] Winged Monkey, Good [+2] Smart, Good [+2] Spear, Poor [-2] Aloof.

**Special Move:** Good [+2] Flystrong!

**Hero Points:** 3

**Miscellany:** Quellabaum stands 5' and is built broadly; his hair and feathers are a dark gray (with lighter gray highlights). He likes hats, preferring the green shako of the Imperial Zo Honor Guard as his formal crown (taken in battle!), and a battered black derby as his informal crown. *Flystrong!* means that when Quellabaum is flying, he essentially gets a free Upshift to *all* of his abilities (he's a better King, a better warrior, a smarter monkey, etc.). He's Ben Grimm meets Doiby Dickles.

## CAPTAIN RODERICK MUS, ZO IMPERIAL NAVY

**Background:** Roderick is a Talking Mouse, a born Gentleman, and an Imperial Naval Captain on the basis of merit. He attended Lime University in Jade City; though he was several years behind Horace Hogg and the Marquis de Carabas. He is an excellent leader, combining strength, discipline, and concern for his followers that inspires great loyalty in those who serve under him. He can be a bit haughty, especially with people above his social station.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Fencing, Expert [+4] Imperial Officer, Good [+2] Gentleman, Good [+2] Sailor, Good [+2] Tough, Poor [-2] Proud.

**Special Move:** Good [+2] Persevere!

**Hero Points:** 3

**Miscellany:** Roderick is a 3' 10" white mouse, quite well-favored, dressed in the neat tunic of an Imperial Naval Officer. His personal device is a golden sword over a green coracle. He is Reepicheep by way of Ronald Colman in *The*

*Prisoner of Zenda. Persevere!* is a Special Move allowing Roderick to withstand pain and fatigue for incredibly extended lengths of time.

## SHAYKOSCH, THE DEATHLESS WOLF

**Background:** Stats for the stat-less force of nature known as the Deathless Wolf.

**Qualities:** Master [+6] Immortal, Master [+6] Shapeshifter, Master [+6] Storm-Mage\*, Master [+6] Thief, Master [+6] Warrior, Master [+6] Wolf, and Poor [-2] Always Ravenously Hungry.

**Villain Points:** 1

**Miscellany:** These are the stats used for when a Hero or Heroes is attempting to defeat the Deathless Wolf with anything other than sheer guile. His normal form is a 7' tall, gray-black, green-eyed Talking Wolf; heavily muscled and striped with scars. He likes to play with his food.



The last few pages of this book are handouts that can be duplicated for personal use, including the *Master Chart and Hero Point Reference*, *ZoZ Player Notes*, *ZoZ NPC Records*, and the *ZoZ Character Sheet*.

A full-size character sheet can be found at the Atomic Sock Monkey Press website:

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies.asp#zoz>

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BREAK THINGS

LIKE THIS PRICELESS  
MING VASE

**Jolly Roger**  
LIKES TO  
STEAL THINGS

LIKE THIS PROTOTYPE  
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## GM's PLAYER NOTES

CHARACTER NAME

LEARNING POINTS

HERO POINTS

STORY HOOKS

CHARACTER NAME

LEARNING POINTS

HERO POINTS

STORY HOOKS

CHARACTER NAME

LEARNING POINTS

HERO POINTS

STORY HOOKS

CHARACTER NAME

LEARNING POINTS

HERO POINTS

STORY HOOKS

## REWARD HERO POINTS FOR...

Heroic Actions (1+ HP) • Affected By Weakness (1 HP)

Something Bad Happens (2d6 HP)

Good Play (1+ HP)

## GM's NPC RECORD SHEET

NPC NAME:

DESCRIPTION

| QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| M+6     | M+6     | M+6     | M+6     | M+6     |
| E+4     | E+4     | E+4     | E+4     | E+4     |
| G+2     | G+2     | G+2     | G+2     | G+2     |
| A0      | A0      | A0      | A0      | A0      |
| P-2     | P-2     | P-2     | P-2     | P-2     |

NPC NAME:

DESCRIPTION

| QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| M+6     | M+6     | M+6     | M+6     | M+6     |
| E+4     | E+4     | E+4     | E+4     | E+4     |
| G+2     | G+2     | G+2     | G+2     | G+2     |
| A0      | A0      | A0      | A0      | A0      |
| P-2     | P-2     | P-2     | P-2     | P-2     |

NPC NAME:

DESCRIPTION

| QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY | QUALITY |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| M+6     | M+6     | M+6     | M+6     | M+6     |
| E+4     | E+4     | E+4     | E+4     | E+4     |
| G+2     | G+2     | G+2     | G+2     | G+2     |
| A0      | A0      | A0      | A0      | A0      |
| P-2     | P-2     | P-2     | P-2     | P-2     |

## DIFFICULTIES

DIFFICULTY  
RANK

DESCRIPTION

TN

**Poor**

A trivial task.

5

**Average**

Straightforward task.

7

**Good**

Complex task.

9

**Expert**

Intricate task, hard for an untrained person.

11

**Master**

Extremely difficult task, hard for professionals of the field.

13

**Improbable**

Beyond most masters of the field!

19

**Impossible**

Legendary prowess required!

25



Once upon a time, in the  
ZANTABULOUS LAND OF ZO...

*The Zantabulous*  
**Zorcerer of Zo**  
A FAIRYTALE ROLE-PLAYING GAME

... there was a: \_\_\_\_\_

... from: \_\_\_\_\_

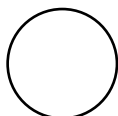
... named: \_\_\_\_\_

...whose many FINE **qualities** included:

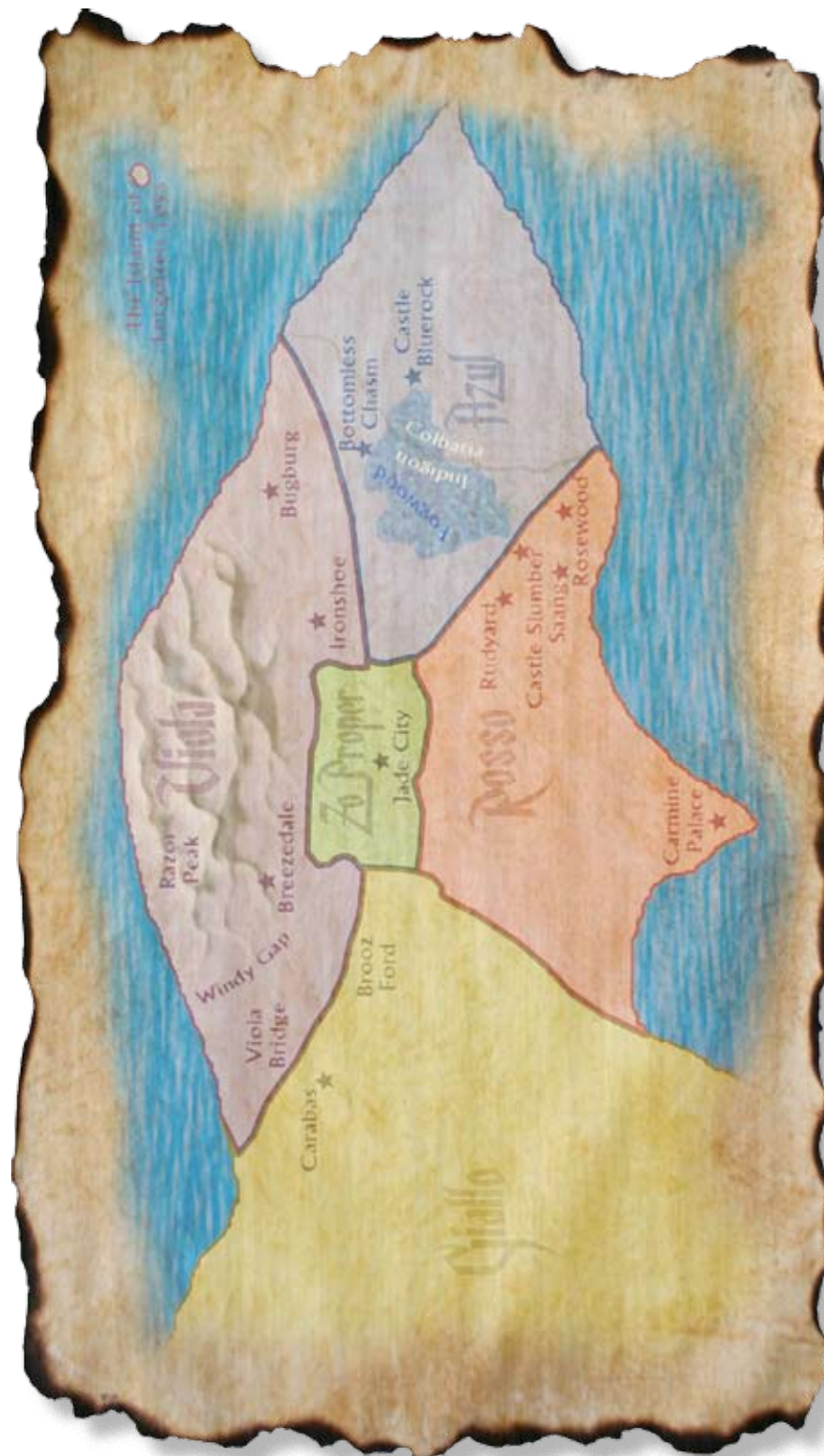
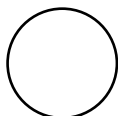
| QUALITIES | *OR! | MASTER [+6]           | EXPERT [+4]           | GOOD [+2]             | AVERAGE [0]           | POOR [-2]             | GONE!                 |
|-----------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| _____     | —    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| _____     | —    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| _____     | —    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| _____     | —    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| _____     | —    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
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| _____     | —    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| _____     | —    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

...as well as a vast **miscellany** of details, like:

hero  
points



learning  
points







nce upon a time, in  
the zantabulous land of zo...



The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ) contains:

- ✧ A discussion on the 'nature' of fairytales.
- ✧ How to adapt fairytales to RPG campaigns.
- ✧ An evocative setting: the *Zantabulous Land of Zo!*
- ✧ The "Good 'Parts" PDQ System!
- ✧ The initial *ZoZ* campaign: how it came to be, how player characters were created, how the game was run, and how the campaign came to an exciting climax (and how you can do this too!).
- ✧ Two "DVD commentary tracks" of textboxes — one from the author/GM and one from the players of the PCs — on the *Actual Play* of the campaign.
- ✧ An appendix stuffed with *Bonus Material*.

*Go ahead: be'zantabulous!*



*The Zorcerer of Zo*  
Atomic Sock Monkey Press  
ASM-030 \$30.00