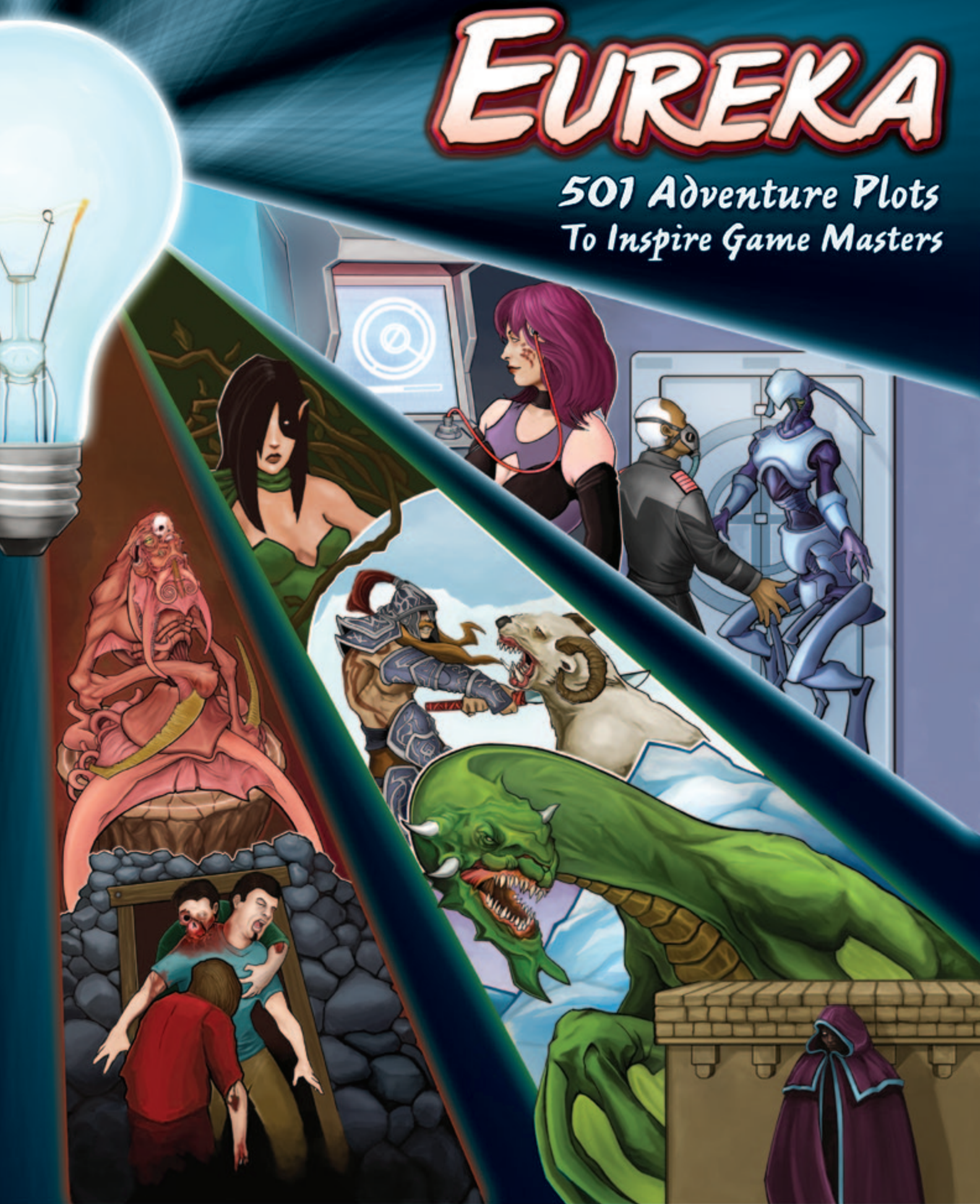


EUREKA

*501 Adventure Plots
To Inspire Game Masters*



By the Authors of GnomeStew.com ~ With a Foreword by Monte Cook



EUREKA

*501 Adventure Plots
To Inspire Game Masters*

Eureka—From the Greek *heurēka*, loosely:
“I have found it!”



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GNOME STEW

gnomestew.com

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In memory of E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson

DEDICATIONS

John—For my mom, who let me buy the 2nd Ed. AD&D books and read them for hours in my room when I was younger, and for my friends who stand by me and make me stronger.

Patrick—To my wife Karen who inspires me to be a better person every day, my daughter Calen who reminds me to be full of wonder, and my son Liam who keeps my wits sharp.

Walt—For my wonderful (and gamer!) wife Helena, and our beautiful children Leianna and Stephen, who have taught me that no fantasy can beat the magic of being a daddy.

Scott—For Dad, who introduced me to roleplaying when I was ten, and for my wife Jennifer, who I plan to play with until we settle into an old gamers' home.

Matthew—To my wife, the best GM ever, and my daughter, whose imagination is limitless, and to the rest of the gnomes for being a positive influence on both my games and my projects list.

Martin—To my patient wife, Alysia (who insists that we'll be retiring to Aruba on *Eureka* money), and my bright-eyed daughter Lark, to my fantastic, imagination-nurturing parents, and to the many friends I've made through gaming.

Kurt—For my non-gaming but patient and understanding wife Christine, and our always-amazing daughter Erin, who enjoys everything she does. And to all the **players** characters I've killed over the years.

Troy—To Paula, who for years kept insisting that I find a hobby; and to Carolyn, our stargazer, Preston, our storyteller, and Jonathan, king of the sandbox, for whom imagination knows no boundaries.

Phil—To my wife Florence, who always helps me find that next idea, my children Dante and Rose, and to Spenser, Sargon and all my other players, for making me strive to be a better GM.

Last but most certainly not least, we'd like to collectively dedicate this book to the readers of Gnome Stew, the best damned community of sexy, brainy, downright inspirational GMs on the web. You rock!

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How to Use This Book

You don't need to read this chapter to enjoy the plots contained within *EUREKA: 501 Adventure Plots to Inspire Game Masters* in your game—we designed this book to be easy to pick up and use without any fuss. But if you'd like to know more about the way *Eureka's* plots are structured, how to turn them into full-fledged adventures, and how you can adapt plots to different genres, this chapter offers a wealth of advice and information.

Finding the Perfect Plot

If you're reading *Eureka* for inspiration and don't need a specific kind of plot to use in your ongoing game, just dive in: Start at the beginning or flip to a random page, and enjoy. Chances are you'll find a plot that sparks your imagination in short order.

If you're looking for an adventure that fits specific criteria, we've provided four tools to help you find the perfect plot:

- **Theme:** Every plot has a theme, and there are 36 themes altogether. You can read about themes later in this chapter, and jump to a specific theme using the table of contents.
- **Primary Genre:** Each plot also falls into one of three primary genres: fantasy, sci-fi, or horror. These "umbrella" genres each get their own chapter in *Eureka*, with 167 plots per chapter. There's an index for genres (p. 295), which covers both primary and sub-genres. Descriptions are provided later in this chapter.
- **Sub-Genres:** Alongside the primary genres are 19 sub-genres like Traditional Fantasy and Space Opera. The index by genre, which starts on p. 295, is a good way to find plots that can be easily adapted to the specific sub-genre you need.
- **Tags:** Tags are short descriptors that call out specific elements within a plot, like *intrigue* for adventures that feature conspiracies and scheming. All 42 tags are described in this chapter, and the tag index (p. 298) will help you locate plots by tag.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout this book:

- **GM:** Game master
- **GMin:** Game mastering
- **NPC:** Non-player character
- **PC:** Player character
- **RPG:** Roleplaying game
- **Sci-fi:** Science fiction

The abbreviation AI for "artificial intelligence" is also used in some sci-fi plots.

TERMINOLOGY AND GENDER

You'll notice that *Eureka* uses the term "GM" throughout. This is because GM is the best-known and most universal term available, and isn't intended to exclude the use of this book with games that favor a different term. Even if your RPG of choice calls the GM something different, the meaning is generally the same: This is the person who runs the game, plays the NPCs, and creates the adventures. The same is true of "adventure," which is the most common term for what happens during a gaming session, and "party," which is used to describe the PCs as a group.

In writing *Eureka*, we also aimed for roughly 50% usage of "he" and 50% usage of "she" (and related terms, like hers and his). Because layout considerations often dictated plot order, you won't find strict alternation from plot to plot, but the overall distribution should be close to 50/50. The only exception is the themes, which are identical to the original titles listed in *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*; we left those alone because we like the quirky qualities of that book, theme titles included.

CHAPTER 1: GMING ADVICE

The first section in this chapter, **Anatomy of a *Eureka* Plot**, explains the common structure underlying the plots in this book and gives you an overview of the tools we've included to make those plots easy to use.

Turning Plots into Adventures offers up a comprehensive look at how to go from adventure plot to full-fledged adventure. From tweaking the setting to expanding scenes and adding game mechanics, this section will have you making the most of *Eureka* in no time at all.

The third section, **Adapting Plots to Your Game**, is all about turning a fantasy plot into a sci-fi adventure, altering horror plots to fit into your fantasy game, twisting sci-fi elements to make them work in your horror campaign, and changing up plot details to suit your story, the PCs, or the game world. You might be surprised at how easy this is, and we'll show you how to do it in this section.

The **Genres** section describes the three primary genres (fantasy, sci-fi, horror) and 19 sub-genres used in *Eureka*. Each plot includes a list of which genres it's easily adaptable to, and those genres are intended to cover just about every RPG out there.

The next section, **Tags**, drills down a bit further. Every *Eureka* plot is identified and categorized by a number of tags that describe elements within that plot, like *epic impact* for a plot that can dramatically change the scope of your game. Descriptions of the various tags are provided here.

Lastly, in the **Themes** section we take a look at the 36 themes that tie *Eureka's* plots together, from "Revolt" to "All Sacrificed for a Passion." There are at least four plots for every theme in each primary genre, and themes form the basis for the overall structure of this book—plus, they're a great way to get inspiration for your game.

Anatomy of a *Eureka* Plot

Because we want this book to be as useful to you, the GM, as possible, we wrote *Eureka's* 501 adventure plots in a specific way. We created a template to use as our starting point, and diverged from it only when doing so produced a better plot. Our design goals were to make this book useful to every game master and to make it as easy to use and versatile as possible.

Eureka is a GM's toolkit for adventure-building, and knowing what goes into each plot will help you decide which tool to use, how to use it, and which plots you want to use it on. Here are the common elements of every plot in this book.

THEME

Thirty-six themes are used throughout *Eureka*, with one theme per plot. Sometimes the theme is front and center, while in other plots it stays in the background. You can use themes to find the perfect plot (for example: One of the PCs has just discovered that her brother is now her bitter rival—an excellent time to check out plots based on the theme "Rivalry of Kinsmen"), as inspiration, or as one more tool for evaluating a plot's suitability for your game. For a complete list of themes, see the **Themes** section of this chapter.

TITLE

Each plot has a unique title, and you can find all 501 plots listed by title in the index that starts on page 302. Every plot also has a unique number, 1-501, for easy reference.

CHAPTERS 2, 3, AND 4: ADVENTURE PLOTS

The meat of *Eureka* is the massive collection of plots contained with the **Fantasy**, **Sci-fi**, and **Horror** chapters—167 per chapter, for a total of 501 plots. If you ran one plot every week, never missing a week, you'd be running *Eureka* adventures for almost 10 years straight—nine years and 33 weeks, to be exact. (Take Christmas and your birthday weekends off, and you've got the full 10 years covered.) We hope that this book will be useful to you for the rest of your GMing career.

CHAPTER 5: INDEXES

Last but not least are *Eureka's* four indexes, which will let you locate plots by genre, tag, author, or title. You can use them to look up plots you've read before or to discover new ones; the latter is a special strength of the tag index, as you can pick a tag and quickly check out all of the plots that feature that tag. The same is true for genres: If you want to find plots that are easy to use in a superhero campaign, for example, the Supers entry in the genre index will get you where you need to go.

THE ADVENTURE PLOT

This section contains a brief dissertation on the wave theory of subliminal travel in highly etheric environments. Just kidding—this is the meat of each plot: the actual plot. It's a big topic, so it's covered in depth in its own section below.

EASILY ADAPTED TO

Every plot in *Eureka* falls into one of three intentionally broad genres—fantasy, sci-fi, or horror—and with minimal work, you can adapt any *Eureka* plot to multiple different genres. Those sub-genres appear in this section of every plot entry, and are indexed at the back of the book (p. 295). With additional elbow grease, you can adapt nearly any *Eureka* plot to just about any genre you like; the ones listed here are just the genres that require the least tweaking. For more about genres, see the **Genres** section of this chapter.

TAGS

Every significant element of an adventure appears here as a tag—essentially, a flag to tell you what to expect from the plot. Tags cover locations (like *planet-based* for sci-fi), goals (like *bearers*, which denotes that the PCs need to get something from point A to point B), play styles (*intrigue*, for plots that feature schemes and conspiracies), and more. You can use tags as a discovery mechanism: Every tag is indexed beginning on page 298, making it easy to find more plots featuring that tag. Tags can also tell you that a particular plot won't be useful to

WHAT MIGHT GO DIFFERENTLY?

Most *Eureka* plots describe a likely progression for the adventure to follow, but that's only one way that things could go. Your players will surprise you by handling things differently, blazing their own trail, or otherwise throwing you curve balls. If you know your group well, you can probably anticipate some of the points in the adventure where these surprises are liable to pop up.

Take some time to consider what your players will do at different points during the adventure, and jot down a few notes about how you can respond and what elements of the plot will need to change depending on how things shake out. There's no perfect system for this, but there is one key principle to keep in mind: It doesn't matter whether the adventure turns out the way you expect it to, it only matters that everyone around the table has a good time.

THE ENDING

The closing of an adventure can be tough to predict in advance. You can usually make a pretty good guess how things will wrap up, though, and there's one key goal to keep in mind: The ending of the adventure is just as important as the opening. When the adventure is over, you want your players to feel a sense of completion and satisfaction. How you bring it to a close plays a large part in that.

Eureka plots almost always include a possible ending (and sometimes more than one, like success and failure), but no amount of prep can account for the actions of your players. If improvisation under pressure isn't your strongest GMing skill, you may want to write some notes about the more likely outcomes for the adventure, accounting for how the campaign will continue in each case.

For example, an adventure centered on finding a powerful artifact has two likely outcomes: the PCs find the object, or they fail to acquire it. If they succeed, then the campaign progresses, but what if they fail? Can you give them another crack at it, or set them back but provide another means to accomplish the same goal? A few notes about both outcomes will help you decide what to do in the heat of the moment, and will also help you deal with other surprises as they come up.

CONSEQUENCES

After the adventure is over, it's important to consider the longer-term ramifications of the outcome on your game world and the campaign as a whole. Just as foreshadowing helps to breathe life into the game's setting, showing the impact of an adventure's outcome in future sessions will make your players feel like the world is a living, changing place, giving them a deeper connection to the campaign.

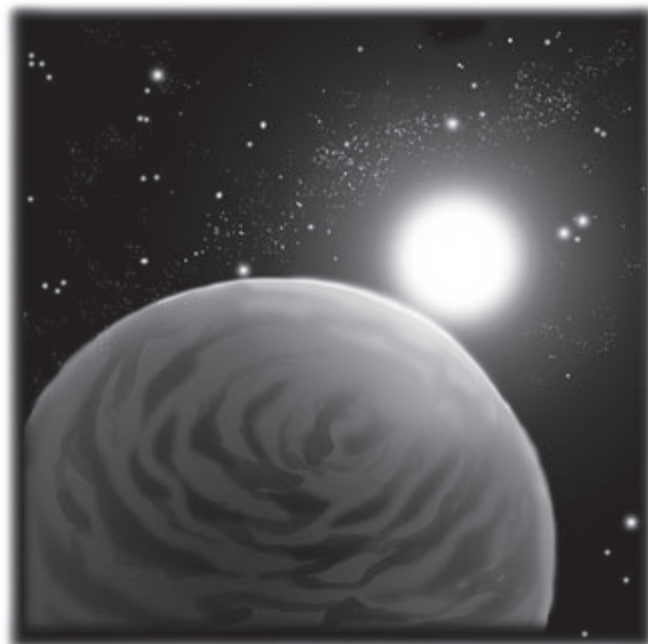
After wrapping up a session, make a few notes about the outcome of the adventure while things are still fresh in your mind: NPCs who died, survived, or now have a different attitude towards the PCs, what changed in the world as a result of the PCs' actions, etc. Then as you develop other adventures (whether from *Eureka* or elsewhere), work those elements in as you go: NPCs who turn up again, news stories that mention the PCs, vengeful former allies who now feel maligned, changes to the local economy, and the like. Your players will greatly appreciate the connection to their past, and it will deepen their commitment to the current adventure.

REUSING PLOTS

Even though *Eureka* provides 501 adventure plots, there's no reason you can't reuse a favorite plot with a new group, in a new game, or even in the same game. If you're reusing the plot with a new group (at a convention, for example), you don't need to worry about anyone recognizing it. Think about things that went right or wrong the first time around, make a change here and there to emphasize the former and avoid the latter, and you're good to go.

Using the same plot more than once with the same gaming group, however, can be trickier. To pull it off, you need to file off the serial numbers in such a way that even if your players notice that the underlying structure is the same, everything else is so much fun that they don't feel cheated. Use the techniques described in the next section of this chapter to re-skin, remake, and replace plot elements as needed, and, just as you would with a new group, adjust the plot to focus on what went well the first time around.

Artist: Laine Garrett



Adapting Plots to Your Game

The adventure plots in *Eureka* are specifically designed to be usable with nearly any RPG, no matter what genre your game of choice might be or what system you prefer. Although we've broken plots down into one of three broad genres (fantasy, sci-fi, and horror), every one of these plots can be adapted to multiple other genres, as well as mined for great ideas to include in your game. *Eureka* is all about inspiration and ease-of-use.

You'll be pleasantly surprised at how easy these plots are to adapt to your game. If they don't fit perfectly, all you need to do is "drift" the plot a little bit (or sometimes, drift it a lot). So what is drifting? It's a gaming term that refers to adapting a game element from one game to another, and while it's most often applied to game mechanics, it also applies to genres and plot elements.

There are many reasons why you might want to apply this technique to *Eureka*'s adventure plots:

- Adapt a plot to a different genre or sub-genre
- Alter a plot to better fit the story you want to run
- Tweak a plot to utilize elements like NPCs and locations that are already found in your campaign
- Fit a plot to the particulars of your favorite game system
- Change a plot to suit the unique elements of your game world
- Use a plot cross-genre to provide a unique play experience

No matter the reason, the important thing to remember is that *every* plot has something to offer for your game. The monster rising from the lake in a horror plot might become the alien in your interstellar sci-fi campaign. The planetary governor from a sci-fi intrigue plot could become the chancellor in your next sword and sorcery session. The dark woods surrounding the castle in a fantasy adventure might be the inspiration for the setting of your modern horror game. Every plot in *Eureka* contains something you can use—all you have to do is find it.

THE GOLDEN RULE FOR ADAPTING PLOTS

If you find a plot you want to use as-is, go for it—no drifting or adaptation is required. But if you read a plot you love that doesn't quite fit into your game, it's time to make a few changes. While we can't tell you how to adapt a plot to your

specific game and campaign, we can give you plenty of advice to point you in the right direction, starting with the golden rule of plot adaptation:

These plots are meant to fit into your game, not the other way around. Change anything you need to change to make them work for you.

Never hesitate to change any element of any plot in *Eureka*. You know best what will work well in your game, so trust your instincts, have fun, and make the most of the wealth of plots in this book.

RE-SKINNING, REMAKING, AND REPLACING PLOT ELEMENTS

When you adapt a plot, you're generally doing one of three things: re-skinning it, remaking it, or replacing plot elements. All three are simple techniques—here's how to handle them.

Re-Skinning

Every plot in *Eureka* is written with a core story in mind. Think of that story as the skeleton and the flesh of the plot. The rest of the plot is the skin—the outer shell. Using this analogy, many of the changes that you'll make when tweaking these plots will fall into the category of re-skinning. Re-skinning is changing the outer shell of a plot to fit a different genre or play style, but leaving the core elements unchanged.

Here are a few examples of re-skinning:

- ♦ Change the orcs in a fantasy plot into brutish aliens living on a frontier world, making the plot usable in a sci-fi game
- ♦ Turn a horror plot's zombies, which were created by a nuclear accident, into zombies that were produced using magic in a fantasy adventure
- ♦ Replace the feuding elves and dwarves in a fantasy plot with rival doomsday cults, and use that plot in your horror game

These kinds of changes are easy to make, and often you'll only need to re-skin one or two elements of a plot in order to make it usable in another genre.

Remaking

Sometimes re-skinning isn't enough, or won't produce exactly the kind of plot you need for your game—that's where remaking comes in. If re-skinning is changing only the outer layer, or trappings, of a plot, remaking is changing some aspects of the plot's core: the skeleton and the flesh.

For example, using a horror plot centered on killer bees swarming around cell phone towers in a sci-fi game is simple, and requires only re-skinning: Change the cell towers into some sort of futuristic communications array, and you're all set. But if you want to use this same plot in a fantasy game, a little remaking is in order.

If you turn the cell towers into magical beacons, that won't address the fact that they need regular maintenance in order to advance the plot—so you might also add a magical power source to each tower, one that needs to be replaced or recharged regularly (something only the PCs can do). But what if you're running a low-magic game? Instead of magical beacons, you could use signal mirror towers staffed by villagers. This in turn might mean that instead of the local lord hiring the PCs to deal with the killer bees (analogous to being hired by the cell phone company in the original plot), it's the villagers who recruit the party.

By the time you're done remaking a plot, it might bear little resemblance to the plot you started with—and that's just fine. You still saved time by starting with a solid, inspirational core concept, and the end result is a perfect fit for your game, your campaign world, and your gaming group.

Replacing

When it comes to adapting a plot for use in a different genre, sometimes re-skinning and remaking elements aren't the way to go. You might be better off replacing a plot element with something that already exists in your game, or with a common element from the new genre. Replacing a plot element with something else is simply a matter of determining the purpose it serves in the original plot and replacing it with an element that suits the same purpose in the new genre.

For instance, if the governor NPC in a horror plot is mainly present to quarantine the town where the PCs wind up, and your fantasy campaign includes powerful merchant guilds, replace the governor with the head of one of the guilds. Or if the point of a starship in a sci-fi plot is to get the party from point A to point B, replace it with an airplane for use in a modern horror game or a sailing ship for a fantasy campaign.

Analogous for plot elements are just as easy to come up with in sub-genres, as well: a star cruiser in a steampunk game becomes an airship or a train, nanites become sprites, a keep in the wilderness turns into a remote space station, a genetic

virus becomes magical plague, or a demigod turns into a powerful AI. All you have to do is make sure that the new element matches the purpose of the old one.

Sometimes the difference between re-skinning a plot element and replacing it is subtle, but it usually boils down to this: If the change also alters something significant about the way the plot unfolds (you can't have space pirates attack an airplane, for example), that's replacing. If the alteration just makes the plot element look different, that's re-skinning.

ADAPTING PLOTS TO OTHER GENRES

Sometimes the elements that you need to re-skin, remake, replace, or otherwise change in order to make a plot fit another genre will be clear upon a first read-through. In other cases, it will require a little digging to root them out. We've included two handy tools with every plot to help you with this: the "Easily adapted to" section, which spells out which genres and sub-genres require the least tweaking, and the "Tags" section, which lists the major elements of the plot.

Using Tags

Tags can help you identify the key ingredients of a plot, and they're especially helpful for drifting. They signal elements that may help you draw a connection between one genre and another. For example, the *artificial life form* tag indicates that a plot prominently features mechanical entities, and also signals that this plot might work well in a fantasy game involving magical constructs, a horror campaign featuring re-animated life, or a sci-fi game about blurring the line between AIs and human beings.

Modern Elements

When drifting plots from one genre to another, it's good to remember that because they're written by modern people, all of the genres utilized in roleplaying games include modern elements. Fantasy settings are based on modern thoughts about medieval worlds, and no matter how realistic to a time period we strive to make a setting, it will still incorporate modern ideas. Sci-fi settings are based on modern ideas extrapolated into their future forms, or a core concept recast in the light of different imagined elements. While we can imagine many ways the world will be different in a sci-fi setting, we include many things exactly as they are now. Horror settings are usually modern worlds with some element made more foreign and threatening to the human psyche, or they isolate us from the comfort and safety of our lives.

Every genre and sub-genre contains modern elements. Some modern elements and concepts will exist in the same ways in different genres, and when drifting plots you can use these elements as flags to pinpoint genre similarities.

Sub-Genres

While the three genres we used to categorize *Eureka*'s plots were selected to cover the widest range of RPGs and campaign settings possible, many sub-genres feature tropes that are closely tied to their settings. Even so, don't rule out a plot just because it seems like your favorite RPG's sub-genre is too restrictive to accommodate that plot. Every sub-genre is based on or derived from a more expansive genre, and they often include elements of other genres. In fact, some sub-genres actually make it easier to drift plots for use in your game.

Because of its technological elements, a steampunk setting might be a better fit for a sci-fi or horror plot than a traditional fantasy setting would be. A sci-fi setting featuring unexplained powers offers ready connecting points for a plot dealing heavily with magic. An adventure plot featuring zombies can work just as well in a post-apocalyptic sci-fi plot as it does in a horror game.

Similarly, many post-apocalyptic tropes work equally well in a fantasy campaign, like isolated enclaves staving off brutal invaders, tribal characters exploring ruined cities, and PCs safeguarding valuable cargo on a journey through dangerous badlands. If you're running a dark fantasy campaign that involves the PCs protecting townsfolk from creatures of the night, many horror plots can be dropped right into your game with little in the way of modifications.

Cross-Genre Re-Skinning

An interesting option for cross-genre plot usage is to re-skin the plot but retain the core elements, which can create a unique experience for your players. For example, because horror plots are often specifically intended to take the main characters out of their comfort zones, using a horror plot in a fantasy or sci-fi game will give your players a different take on the campaign.

Incorporating this experience into other genres can shake up your players in good ways. While they might have more incredible powers, or be able to deal with greater threats, isolating fantasy and sci-fi characters from help, or utilizing a creature that has the upper hand (and may in fact be unstoppable), will provide a different play experience.

Similarly, employing modern elements and organizational structures from a sci-fi game in a basic fantasy setting can provide a sense of intrigue and complexity. Using a fantasy dungeon crawl in a sci-fi campaign based around space traders will shake things up: When the planetary ruler charges the PCs with defeating the legendary beast that's destroying their mining facilities, the game will take on an epic feel.

Even if you only do this sort of cross-genre re-skinning for a session or two, a quick break from your usual play style can be a lot of fun—and has the potential to improve the play experience in all of the games that follow, too.

Genres

The 501 plots in this book are equally divided into three primary or "umbrella" genres: fantasy, sci-fi, and horror. These are intentionally broad categories, and if you stretch them a bit they can cover just about any roleplaying genre.

We further identified 19 sub-genres: 14 that fit inside the big three, and five that stand alone. Each plot in this book can be easily adapted to at least two other genres or sub-genres. With enough work, any plot can be made to work in any sub-genre, but the ones we've identified in the "Easily adapted to" section of each plot are the genres that are a natural fit.

Listed below are all of the genres used in *Eureka*, along with descriptions of each. Because gaming isn't the same as fiction, we've defined genres according to the way they're typically applied to roleplaying games.

Because it's so easy to adapt plots from one genre to another, don't be surprised to see a wide range of sub-genres listed under "Easily adapted to" for most plots. By the same token,

each primary genre chapter includes numerous plots that can easily be used in one of the other two primary genres, so don't limit your search for fantasy plots to the fantasy chapter, for example.

Lastly, if you want to track down plots that can be easily adapted to a particular primary or sub-genre (all plots flagged as Swashbuckling or Post-Apocalyptic, for example), you'll find an index by genre on p. 295.

FANTASY

As a primary genre, fantasy covers a wide range of play styles, core concepts, and settings. Generally speaking, fantasy plots feature supernatural elements in a mythological or idealized medieval setting. They tend to include medieval or archaic weapons and armor, magic and magic items, monsters, and sentient non-human species (dwarves and elves, for example). The four fantasy sub-genres are distinguished mainly by tone.

For Glory, Nothing More

36

One morning, a bright light shines on the horizon as if a new dawn were breaking—only a hundred times brighter. A powerful breeze then sweeps across the entire countryside, blasting open doors and lasting more than a minute. The smell of jasmine lingers and then slowly fades away. A new object is now blazing upon the horizon: what appears to be a star, twinkling on the surface of the world. It's bright enough to see during the day, and it provides a pale blue light all night long, illuminating the darkness yet not interfering with sleep.

What is this new “star?” Is it a hundred miles away, or a thousand? Is it a blessing or a harbinger of doom? Is it magical or divine? Most important of all: Who will be the first to reach it?

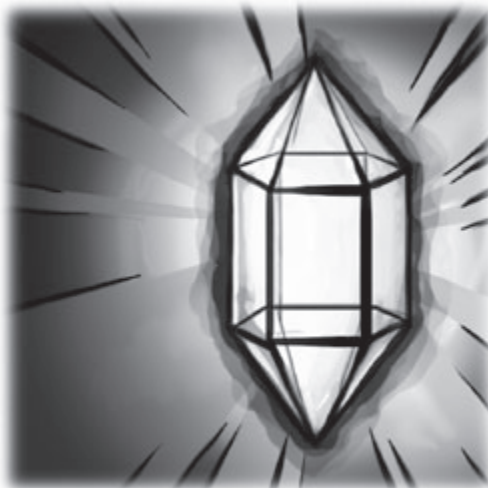
Hooks include being hired as part of an expedition, a dream of the star landing the night before it actually does, preventing a rival from reaching the star first, or plain old fame and glory. On their journey to the star, the PCs should encounter hazards along their way, as well as competition in the form of NPCs who will try to thwart the PCs' advancement. Whether this is malicious or merely friendly opposition

is up to you; a mix of both may work best.

The PCs should also encounter groups that fear the star and want to prevent anyone from reaching it, as they believe it is an object of evil. Of course, there are groups that worship the star as well, and they try to prevent anyone from reaching it because they believe it to be sacred. The fun of this plot is that no group actually knows what the star is, yet they will fight one another for various reasons related to the mysterious light.

The true nature of the light source is completely up to you. Keep the focus on the race to be first at the scene. You can do this by having multiple teams in play and letting the PCs gain the lead on one team only to lose it to another.

Artist: Laine Garrett



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) investigative, isolated area, magic, race, religion, rivalry, travel

Weird Science

37

A scientist is experimenting on monstrous creatures, creating monster repellents and charms to exert control over them. He needs parts from certain creatures to complete his experiments, but his assistants have run off due to the danger involved. He's currently looking for new, braver assistants. The PCs may meet him because one of the party members is a monstrous creature from whom he tries to take a sample, run into him in a bar bemoaning his lack of good help, or find themselves in an unexpected fight with a captured creature that escapes its bonds. Once met, the scientist will try to hire the party to help him capture creatures or acquire certain parts and byproducts.

The experimenter will send the PCs after many different creatures, tagging along and offering humorous advice: “Fourth spleen on the left,” “The weak point is in his pinkie,” or, “Hmm, this beast's sputum tastes like marmalade.” The experimenter always rewards the party well for hunts, but is upset when vital parts or limbs are destroyed. He should be played as an eccentric mad scientist, unaware of the danger he puts others in. Create hunts for creatures that are exotic, or that the group might not usually face in other adventures—you can even run this adventure straight from a book of monsters as

a side quest, dropping in a hunt whenever players are absent or you need a quick adventure.

After sufficient monster hunts, the final confrontation of this adventure arc is combat with a large, terrifying, and unique creature. As the final piece of his project, the experimenter needs it alive and has a sedative that can knock it out. The scientist doses the creature early in the combat, but the dose is too weak. Success will require controlling the situation and protecting the scientist until he can get in another shot. The creature should be capable of multiple attacks and will target the experimenter every round if the PCs don't control the battle well.

Once the creature is defeated, the experimenter offers an extra non-monetary reward to the party, such as fixing an ailment, boosting stats, or providing a formula that grants a monster-based ability.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) alliance, escort mission, monster, race, tactical planning, travel

Orcs in the Dragon's Den

38

A half-orc stumbles into the PCs' camp in the middle of the night, gravely wounded, and begs for their aid. In exchange for healing, he offers them a golden opportunity to destroy what remains of his tribe—including their chieftain, a vicious killer responsible for numerous recent attacks in the area. He explains that the tribe (which has never accepted him, treating him as the lowest of the low because of his mixed blood) just fought a dragon, evicting it from its lair at the price of many, many orcish lives. They took over the lair, but the tribe has been decimated—and their chieftain is seriously injured. If the PCs strike while the orcs are licking their wounds, they can kill the chieftain and claim the dragon's hoard. To convince them of his sincerity, the half-orc produces a handful of dragon scales covered in fresh dragon blood.

The half-orc warns the PCs about their first obstacle—scouts on nearby hilltops and around the mouth of the lair—but is unaware of the other two impediments to reaching the orcish chieftain: a rival dragon who wants the lair for himself, but is too young to claim it alone, and the destabilizing effect the battle with the dragon had on the lair's actual structure.

The first encounter is with the scouts, who must be eliminated before they can sound the alarm. They are spread out, with every scout's location in view of at least two others, and are

adept at their craft. The PCs will need to remove them from the picture quickly, quietly, and without alerting any of their fellows.

Entering the lair complex is the second encounter. While there are few defenders, stealth is still important. Observant PCs may notice that the caverns seem unstable (weakened by blasts of dragon breath), and can take advantage of this to cause a cave-in—provided they don't mind missing out on the treasure.

In the third encounter, the PCs face the chieftain. This battle should be challenging, as the tribe's two war shamans are uninjured and ready for trouble, but not insurmountable. Midway through the battle, the cavern complex will begin to crumble, raising two possibilities: Stranding the orcs inside would eliminate them, but striking a bargain with the chieftain might allow the PCs to acquire some of the treasure in exchange for helping the orcs escape.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) alliance, combat-heavy, monster, stealth, tactical planning

The Cloud Fortress

39

While resting in town at the conclusion of an adventure, the PCs hear a commotion in the town square. When they go to investigate, they see a fortress floating in the sky—a fortress which could only have appeared just moments ago.

Upon entering the fortress, they will find that it's not empty. Rather, it's full of all manner of extra-planar and elemental creatures. They all seem focused on the keep in the center, which they're taking turns attacking. The keep looks battered, and is defended by a force of equally battered humans. The humans spot the PCs, motion for them to come inside, and let them into the keep.

The humans explain to the PCs that this structure is a prison, and that it was anchored in the astral plane until one of the creatures unraveled the ritual magic that was holding it there, setting it adrift. The creatures can't exit the prison because the humans have in place a series of wards holding them within the building. The only way for the creatures to escape is to kill the humans and dispel the wards—setting them loose upon the PCs' world.

The humans are badly wounded, and have lost too many people to both hold the keep and complete the ritual for creating a new astral anchor. The PCs can help by taking over the fortifications of the keep and holding off the attacking creatures.

The creatures will attack in waves, beginning with groups of like creatures and then desperately banding together for a final all-out assault.

The meat of this adventure is the siege of the prison's inner keep. The magical ritual can take as long as you need it to take in order to keep things tense for the PCs, and there should be several waves of attackers before the final wave. Use the myriad abilities of the imprisoned creatures to their advantage, mesmerizing defenders, tunneling under the walls of the keep, flying over the walls, and so forth. Providing a stockpile of supplies and varying the number of defenders available to help the PCs will allow you to easily scale this adventure.

If the ritual is completed, the prison will return to the astral plane, and the PCs will be transported to the outskirts of town—their world safe once again.



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) alliance, combat-heavy, magic, mass combat, monster, siege, tactical planning

Heavy Cargo

221

The PCs are offered a substantial payment to quietly deliver a simple cargo: a heavy, tightly sealed metal box. The tiny company making the offer is unknown to them, and by the time the PCs reply, a group of smugglers has taken the contract.

A day or so later, the PCs find the smugglers' ship adrift with the cargo missing. There are no signs of boarding and no log entries past launch. The entire crew is dead of massive blunt force trauma, and everything aboard the ship is tossed about as if it the ship had been violently searched.

The company shuts down, but another company makes a nearly identical offer that involves transporting a similar box to a completely different location. This series of events will happen a few times (with the occasional involvement of the PCs), and each time the crew is found dead, the cargo is missing, and the ship is trashed.

The real story: A military contractor has developed a gravity bomb and is testing it on smugglers. When a predetermined trigger event occurs (such as switching to zero-g), the bomb goes off, violently disrupting gravity around it. The crew and ship are subjected to incredible stresses, and everyone aboard is tossed around like rag dolls. A sensor ejected in

the explosion monitors the test and then activates a homing beacon. The contractor collects the bomb, surveys the damage, and then tries again with a more powerful device.

The bomb can be forced or cut open, though if care isn't exercised it will go off. Once opened, it can be shut down, and can also be easily tracked back to the contractor through part numbers and software entries.

If the PCs follow a courier instead of taking the delivery themselves, they may be caught in the gravity flux, but it won't be nearly as devastating to them as it is to the ship carrying the bomb.

After uncovering the truth about the contractor's unethical testing methods, the PCs can choose to blackmail the director of the project (whose name appears in the software credits), or expose the project in the media.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) bearers, betrayal, difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, politics, shady, travel, villain

Buzz about the New Cell Tower

222

At a remote cell tower construction site, swarms of bees start attacking the workers. One worker dies and the rest are hospitalized for severe poisoning. It's a common occurrence for workers to disturb bee hives, but company exterminators sent to the site find no evidence of hives or bee colonies. This is actually the second bee attack on this specific project; in the first, the workers ran off and escaped serious injury, then resumed their work the next day. The PCs are recruited by the phone company.

Perplexed by the unusual nature of the bees' biology, a college professor offers the phone company her assistance. The bees she examines have larger-than-average stingers and more potent venom than normally found in this species. The professor also explains the recent phenomenon of "colony collapse disorder," which some attribute to the powerful disturbances cell towers cause to colony structure.

The cell phone company representative then lists the history of recent problems with this project. A property owner who objected to the construction adjacent to his home cut the wires of one tower construction site. Another troublemaker is a local bee keeper who formed picket lines, tried to get the local government to stop the lease, accused the company of "bee genocide," and vowed to use any means possible to stop them.

The property owner and the beekeeper are not the culprits, though both exhibit suspicious behavior when questioned. The owner is sorry for the worker's death, but the bee keeper calls it "nature's justice." If the professor tests the keeper's hive, none of his bees exhibit the mutant qualities of the bees at the tower. Later, a swarm of bees attacks the keeper, sending him to the hospital for severe poisoning. "Not my bees. Not my bees," he says.

Investigating the surrounding area, the PCs encounter mutant bees that are larger than the ones that attacked the workers. Eventually, the investigators come upon a large farmhouse in the middle of its slow transformation into a monstrous hive. At the center of the hive is the true instigator: a human/bee hybrid queen, a mutant who's gathering a super colony with her mutated bee minions.

One possible twist: Mutant bee venom slowly transforms its victims into bee-folk, a transformation that is undergone by the tower workers and the bee keeper who were stung.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) exploration, innocent, investigative, monster, planet-based, sandbox, villain

Obtaining

Keeping the Peace

223

An anthropologist who is covertly studying a primitive world is exposed as an outsider. The native population believes him to be a god and gives him many gifts. The anthropologist is enjoying the attention and the galactic government fears that he may irrevocably contaminate the culture; the scientist argues that it's already been contaminated, so why not make the best of it? The government sends the PCs to retrieve the rogue anthropologist before he makes things worse.

Unfortunately, the PCs' government has a policy of non-intervention and it orders the PCs not to use violence or superior technology against the natives. Instead, they must rely on diplomacy to secure his release—an outcome which the new “god” doesn't want to see come to pass. As the PCs arrive and start negotiations, however, members of another alien race arrive and attempt to secure the anthropologist's release through more violent means. It appears that the anthropologist may have found something of value to them.

What secret is the anthropologist keeping? Is he willing to throw in his lot with the adversarial aliens, or does he beg for aid from the PCs instead? What impact does this secret have on the local population and, if it's valuable, does it belong to them?

If you want to emphasize diplomacy and duels of wits, have the adversarial aliens take a non-violent approach as well, in order to keep peace between space empires. What do they bring to the table to sway the primitives and their god?



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) alliance, innocent, investigative, planet-based, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social

They Just Keep Coming... and Coming... and Coming

224

In the near future, the PCs are part of team investigating and researching new energy sources at an established laboratory. One of the scientists hits a breakthrough in energy storage, a means to contain large amounts of energy in extremely small batteries. For security reasons, the prototype and the scientist's notes are housed in an isolated section of the lab.

Each of the PCs has a few ominous encounters with a creepy man or woman garbed in a black suit and black trench coat who inquires about the team's research. At first, the questions seem only cursory and general—the sort that any stranger might ask: Where do you work? What kind of research do you do? Is the pay good?

On the subsequent visit, the questions become more direct and specific. How did you achieve these results? What did the tests show? Did you find reversing the capacitor polarity increased residual effectiveness? Who is the project leader?

On the third visit, the black-garbed visitors arrive in pairs and, in addition to even more pointed questions start demanding that the PCs arrange for them to have access to the research. The black-garbed pairs alternate between implied threats against resistance and vague promises of rewards for cooperation.

The tension should peak during a workday when an overwhelming number of these black-garbed questioners pierce security and make a beeline for the battery lab. The PCs are faced with a choice: defend the battery's secret with their lives, or flee with the research materials and the prototype.

If they stay and fight, present the PCs with a siege situation until help arrives (or doesn't). If they flee, the story becomes one of an extended chase until the PCs can find someone capable of securing them and their research.

You have a choice in this adventure's resolution. Determine who employs the black-clad interlopers—the government, an oil company, rival researchers, aliens? Revealing that will enable the PCs to find a resolution to the story, even if in the end a rival organization or government sends in the cavalry. Whatever option you choose can become a platform for additional adventures.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) investigative, isolated area, mass combat, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady

Power Gamer

409

Football players at a local high school have been suffering fatal accidents at an alarming rate. One drowned when his truck ran off the road into a creek. A few days later, the quarterback fell off a tractor and plowed himself into a wheat field. The latest was working on his car when it fell off the jacks and crushed him.

A nerdy gamer found a real spell in one of his gaming books, and has been killing off the jocks who pick on him. The gamer needs to be present to perform the spell, which is telekinetic in nature, and he was at the scene of all three accidents. Investigation may turn up his presence at the crimes or his absence from his home and the local gaming store.

The obvious beneficiary of the deaths is the new quarterback, who was home alone and doesn't have much of an alibi. He's scared and defensive, and will aggressively threaten or even attack any investigators.

Then the captain of the cheerleading squad dies in public. The cheerleaders are making a memorial for the football players during a free period, and the captain runs out to get the scissors. A door blows open, drawing everyone's attention. As the

captain runs back with the scissors, she falls as if pushed and lands on the hand holding the scissors. The PCs are present and observe the gamer making weird little hand movements, then quickly walking away.

The PCs know that the three dead football players mercilessly picked on the gamer. They also know that the gamer and a cheerleader were once good friends. They may even know or suspect that he secretly harbors a crush on her. The gamer will deny everything, but will use his spell to get away from the PCs if they get confrontational.

At the captain's funeral, or shortly afterwards if he was chased off, the gamer tries to convince "his girl" to forget about the other cheerleaders. She says no, and he makes a scene. If the PCs don't confront the gamer here, he will go after her as she drives off.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) innocent, investigative, magic, social, villain

The Bleeding Edge

410

Diseases of the autoimmune system are common and often deadly. A doctor has discovered a treatment that first weakens, then strengthens, a patient's immune system in order to cure these types of disease. The doctor's tests with laboratory animals showed promise, and the doctor has just received permission to begin trials on human patients. Hooks for this plot include being a part of the doctor's research team, being a friend or relative of someone participating in the treatment trial, or being a member of the hospital staff.

The first group of trial patients becomes ill after receiving the treatment. The doctor expected this, but soon the symptoms worsen. The patients begin vomiting blood, and an hour or two later they transform into zombies with a craving for flesh. Any creature killed by a zombie immediately rises as another zombie. This is the first encounter of what will become a pandemic, during which the zombies overrun one ward of the hospital.

The next encounter involves an attempt by local police and rescue services to contain the threat and treat the injured. The battle has overflowed from the ward and spread to the entire hospital. Many patients are helpless, and the zombies slaughter them without mercy. During this second wave of the pandemic, any person who kills a zombie in combat has a small chance of becoming infected. This encounter ends with the zombies overrunning the entire hospital and spreading into the city.

The next encounter is a citywide crisis as the zombies spread quickly from the hospital into nearby neighborhoods. During this third wave of the pandemic, the chance of infection after killing a zombie increases. Various buildings are on fire as people attempt to defend themselves with whatever is available. At some point, a large vehicle loses control and hurtles straight towards the PCs. If the PCs escape the accident, the military picks them up and takes them to a quarantine center.

At the quarantine center, the PCs receive treatment for their wounds. The odds of infection if a person kills a zombie in combat also increase again. Keep increasing the chance for infection with each subsequent encounter. Whether there's a cure for the pandemic is up to you; if not, this makes an excellent introduction to a zombie-themed campaign.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) alliance, city, combat-heavy, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, mass combat, monster, relationship hook, sandbox, siege, tactical planning

Principal Penitence

411

The principal of the local boarding school is a bright, starched, and stern young woman, with eyes black as night. Her charges do well academically, but are cowed by her. Students who act up disappear for a few days, but always return docile and calm, and never speak of their time away. Their few quiet confidences sound crazy and are quickly stifled.

Several hooligans kidnap the principal's cat and shave it bald. The PCs could be among them (and this is a fun encounter for them to play out), they could be from a rival clique, or they might simply hear the sound of clippers from within a nearby bathroom. The next day, at a school assembly, the principal announces that she has found her cat, and the glare she gives the hooligans is so fierce that they flee the assembly. They hide out in an abandoned house in town and plan to run away from the school, knowing that they dare not face the principal.

That evening, the principal tracks them down—flanked by strange clockwork men, the stuff of nightmares. Restrained by the automatons' heavy brass hands, the prisoners are returned to the school. The PCs are in a position to observe their arrival, and they watch as the entire group heads into the gymnasium. The principal reads strange words from a sheet of parchment, her voice raspy, and small cracks in the wall flow

together and form a dark tunnel in one of the gym's walls, revealing a shadowy path beyond. The cog men lead the prisoners to strange and starless cells at the end of the pathway.

The PCs must rescue the imprisoned hooligans and then decide what to do about the principal. She stores the parchment in her locked desk drawer; the passage can only be opened in the gymnasium. Beyond the wall, the cog men watch their prisoners tirelessly, but they're devoid of true intelligence or creativity and can be tricked into abandoning their posts. Once rescued, the hooligans won't be safe at the school, and neither will the PCs. The principal knows when the doorway has been opened, and will try to stop them from fleeing the grounds.

If they can convince the school board to dismiss the principal, they'll be safe for a time, but eventually she will re-enter their lives.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (SM) alliance, artificial life form, dungeon crawl, innocent, isolated area, magic, rebellion, relationship hook, stealth, villain

Devil's Feast

412

Recently, several people in a frontier community have been torn apart in what appear to be wild animal attacks. Careful examination of the evidence indicates an intelligent attacker, however, as several victims were found barricaded inside rooms with discharged firearms. Only those participating in the investigation, and one resident who refuses to evacuate, remain.

The killer is neither man nor beast, but an ancient vampire, released when one of the locals started construction on a new well. After spending so long sealed away, she is completely feral, but she's still a deadly predator with the ability to turn into mist and get at victims wherever they hide.

In a freshly dug hole in one house's backyard, the PCs discover a void behind a fractured stone slab. A few hours' work will reveal a cave system connecting to a nearby hilltop burial cairn; it's sealed with rune-carved boulders, and houses the ancient bones of dead native inhabitants of the area. The cave network is littered with the pierced and mummified corpses of bats and other small subterranean animals. In the deepest part of the caves is a nest made of gnawed bones and a stench the PCs recognize from some of the murder scenes.

During a nighttime search with the authorities, noises and flashes of movement are a prelude to an NPC being hauled up into a tree and carried off at great speed. If the PCs manage to

shoot the fleeing creature, they can save the life of the NPC, who can then provide a description of the vampire. Otherwise, they might get a glimpse as it flees, and they'll be able to find the NPC's shredded body on the roof of a shed in the morning.

Several nights later, gunshots are heard from the remaining resident's home. As the PCs enter the house, they hear a smashing window and find the resident, a great bear of a man, drenched in blood and clutching his neck. He shot an intruder, but when he checked the woman's wrist for a pulse, she pounced on him and tore at his neck. He managed to get a grip on her and fling her through the window before she hurt him too badly. Without prompt medical attention, he will become a vampire by the next night.

The vampire can be destroyed by traditional methods, but can also be repelled by the runic markings found on the cairn, which may help defeat or trap her.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (MN) alliance, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, investigative, isolated area, madness, monster, race, sandbox, tactical planning, villain



Artist: Andrew McIntosh

EUREKA

EUREKA contains 501 complete adventure plots usable with almost any roleplaying game.

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