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PAGE REFERENCES

Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition* Revised; e.g., p. B144 refers to page 144 of the *Basic Set*. A refers to *Aliens*, AE refers to *Alternate Earths*, AH refers to *Atomic Horror*, BO refers to *Black Ops*, CM refers to *Celtic Myth*, I refers to *Illuminati*, RU refers to *Russia*, STi refers to *Suppressed Transmission: the First Broadcast*, TT refers to *Time Travel*, WT refers to *Warehouse 23*, WWi refers to *Who's Who 1*, WWii refers to *Who's Who 2*, Y to Y2K.

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Introduction

by Kenneth Hite

“Since he has cultivated his soul, already richer than any other man's, he thereby reaches the Unknown, and, even if, insane in the end, he should lose every shred of understanding gained so laboriously, he will have had his Visions! He may perish in his leap into those innumerable, unnameable things, there will follow other terrible workers. They will begin at the horizons where he fell.”

– Arthur Rimbaud,
“The Visionary Letter to Paul Demeny”

Hello, again. Welcome to the Second Broadcast. For those of you who came in late, this is the second collection (April 1999 to March 2000) of my weekly column “Suppressed Transmission” in *Pyramid* magazine, Steve Jackson Games’ online publication of “The Best in Gaming.” Or, technically, “The Best In Gaming Plus Whatever Crazy Hite Is Going On About Now.” Because, although I often discuss gaming (by which, for those of you who came in really late, I don’t mean casino gambling, but roleplaying games) in these columns, they’re not really about “The Best in Gaming,” but “The Best in Weirdness.”

“The folly of mistaking a paradox for a discovery, a metaphor for a proof, a torrent of verbiage for a spring of capital truths, and oneself for an oracle, is inborn in us.”

– Paul Valéry, “Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci”

For me, Weirdness generally winds up in one of four categories: Conspiracy (the CIA shot JFK), Alternate History (what if they missed), Secret History (JFK was shot in a Golden Dawn sacrifice ritual), or Horror (after JFK was shot, the demon situation really got out of hand). Horror is a genre, Alternate History is a mental exercise, Secret History is applied speculative anthropology, and Conspiracy is nonsense. These aren’t hard-and-fast categories, of course; as you’ll see when you read further, any of the four can slop into its neighbors’ realm without warning. And, of course, any of the four can be nonsense.

“The truest account of reading Shakespeare would be not to write a book with a beginning, middle, and end; but to collect notes without trying to make them consistent.”

– Virginia Woolf



But it's fun nonsense, the kind that gamers (especially) seem to enjoy, and (more importantly) the kind I enjoy stringing together into vast, multicolored webs of speculation and phantasy. Think of it as particularly plotless fiction, or as the mental equivalent of slowing down to look at accident victims. Sure, it's embarrassing and unproductive. Just like talking about the Masons and ritual magic and werewolves and the Face on Mars. But it's fun, and (as I reassure my editors) it's all somehow relevant to roleplaying games.



“She herself was a victim of that lust for books which rages in the breast like a demon, and which cannot be stilled save by the frequent and plentiful acquisition of books. This passion is more common, and more powerful, than most people suppose. Book lovers are thought by unbookish people to be gentle and unworldly, and perhaps a few of them are so. But there are others who will lie and scheme and steal to get books as wildly and unconscionably as the dope-taker in pursuit of his drug. They may not want the books to read immediately, or at all; they want them to possess, to range on their shelves, to have at command. They want books as a Turk is thought to want concubines – not to be hastily deflowered, but to be kept at their master’s call, and enjoyed more often in thought than in reality.”

– Robertson Davies, *Tempest-Tost*

And occasionally even useful. Like the material in *Suppressed Transmission: The First Broadcast*, feel free to wrench any of this stuff out of context and bang it around; the odds are that the researcher whose conspiracy theory I lifted for the column did more than a little of that himself. So, follow your own pet theory or interest through the cross-references to see what shiny objects you can dangle from it. Look your favorite suspects up in the Index, and invent your own patterns based on their neighbors in the

essays. I’ve tried to keep this book relatively self-contained, but where I covered a topic in the first volume, I’ve pointed you thataway to avoid going over old material. I added a Glossary to this volume to help get everyone up to speed (and I snuck some bibliographic notes in there, as well as everywhere else in the book). Between those two decisions, I’ve added annotations, explanations, and notes to the essays themselves; there’s more than enough material here to make you the bane of your roleplaying group or cocktail party all by itself.

“As to the extraordinary spectacle of a thing, world, super-construction, that was seen in the sky, in 1816, I have not yet been able to find out more. I think that here our acceptance is relatively sound: that this occurrence was tremendously of more importance than such occurrence as, say, transits of Venus, upon which hundreds of papers have been written – that not another mention have I found, though I have not looked so especially as I shall look for more data – that all but undetailed record of this occurrence was suppressed.”

– Charles Fort,
The Book of the Damned

So look to the skies, or (as in my case) to the books and magazine articles and websites of those who do look to the skies. There indeed shall you see signs and wonders. Signs like “Steep Cliff Here” and wonders you can only visit during posted hours, to be sure. But the creative mind isn’t constrained by sanity, or reason, or fact, or anything; this is High Art through High Weirdness, stepped down and beamed out to all those willing to receive a few Suppressed Transmissions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth Hite is an editor and writer living in Chicago. His unusual pallor, consuming interest in the Templars, deep knowledge of history, and bizarrely-shaped head all have perfectly rational explanations. His wife Sheila, however, knows the Truth.

“Kenneth Hite” is a *nom de plume* used by the authors, co-authors, or editors of quite a bit of work for the *Star Trek Roleplaying Game*, and of such works as *GURPS Alternate Earths*, *The Cainite Heresy*, *Mage: the Sorcerers’ Crusade*, and the horror roleplaying guide *Nightmares of Mine*.

Kenneth Hite is, with the unfortunate breakup of the Clash, now the only band that matters.

Pyramid originally posted “An Alternate-Historical Alphabet” on January 14, 2000. The next essay in publication order is “Templar America,” on p. 31.

An Alternate-Historical Alphabet

“Originally they shaped their letters exactly like all the other Phoenicians, but afterwards, in course of time, they changed by degrees their language, and together with it the form likewise of their characters.”

– Herodotus, *The Histories*, V:60

It’s so fun we’re doing it again; a sequel to “A Conspiratorial Alphabet” and “A Secret-Historical Alphabet,”¹ this time in the sunny skies of Alternate History. As always, the great model for this panoply of clichés, tropes, themes, and elements is Diana Wynn Jones’ *Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, which does much the same thing, at rather greater length, for fantasy. Like its predecessors, this column can serve as a kind of spice rack for the *GURPS Alternate Earths* GM, who will likely notice that the authors of that august tome (and its sequel) used these ingredients with a fine and liberal hand. Players will be glad to have some familiarity in a world where history is sideways, even (or especially) the familiarity of the cliché.²

A is for Anachronism

Changing historical causes and effects also seems to alter technical, social, and scientific causality, resulting in the premature development of later elements (computers, feminism, democracy) and the prolonged use of archaic ones (swords, wealthy nobility, interurban trains). The prevalence of Zeppelins (q.v.) may be a specialized symptom of this effect.

B is for Bomb, The

This horrifying weapon is used with dramatic frequency in Alternate Histories, perhaps because the higher level of Ideology (q.v.) overrides the basic game theory that kept The Bomb mostly a threat in our world. Sometimes the detonation of The Bomb (especially by the Nazis³ (q.v.)) is the Change Point (q.v.) that triggers the Alternate History, and even if The Bomb isn’t used, its invention is often the cherished goal of one or another Empire or Lost Cause (q.v.).



C is for Change Point

The event, person, or place when history turns sideways and becomes Alternate. It is polite to select only one Change Point rather than hogging a whole bunch, unless, of course, you have some really cool effect in mind. There are those who will tell you that multiple Change Points are a sin against Plausibility (q.v.) as well as against politeness, a claim difficult to sustain empirically.

¹ “A Conspiratorial Alphabet” appears in the first volume, on pp. STi119-122. “A Secret-Historical Alphabet” remains uncollected.

² We shouldn’t leave the topic without a mention of Robert Schmunk’s brilliant alternate history bibliography, on line at www.uchronia.net.

³ The current historical consensus, as exemplified by *Heisenberg’s War* by Robert Powers, seems to be that the Nazis were, in fact, rather comfortably far from developing an atomic bomb; Robert K. Wilcox, on the other hand, argues persuasively (if not conclusively) in *Japan’s Secret War* that the Japanese were surprisingly close.

⁴ For more America-discovering excitement, see pp. 31-34.

⁵ But see Peter James and Nick Thorpe’s *Ancient Inventions*, for a blithe survey of the clever things people invented before Our Glorious Selves, without even the benefit of time travelers.

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