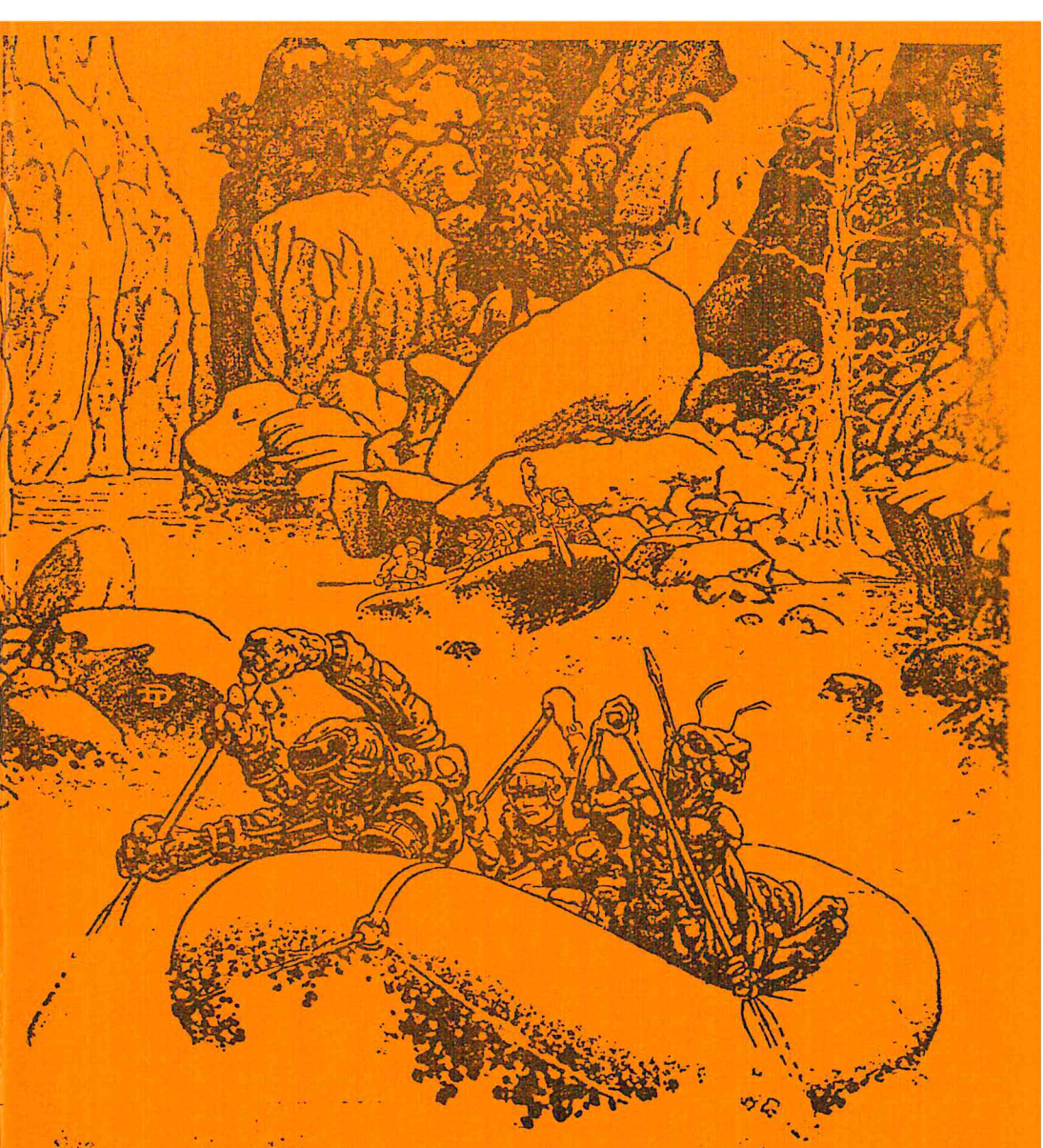


LEVENDE BØGER

Progress Report #1

GAMMEL NYHED!

Rollespil med levende figurer er ikke just nogen nyhed. I skolerne er det kendt som ekstemporalspil eller som situationsspil. Blandt D&D-spillere kendes det både fra Odense og fra Nordsjælland - og så selvfølgelig fra eventuelle englandsrejser med role-playing visits til gamle herresæders underetager.
Over there, altså i USA, har der udviklet sig en trend, der handler om at tilbringe en weekend sammen med en stor mængde andre personager for at gennemspille et scenarie, der kan udspille sig i alle forskellige tidsaldre.
Fra "nettet" har vi modtaget Andrew Looney's hosstående artikel om hans oplevelser i en weekend.

Hans Rancke-Madsen har allerede nu gjort et stort arbejde for at få et tilsvarende arrangement stablet på benene her til lands. Undertegnede og ikke mindst Martin B. Johannesson har været en hel del involveret i projektet, og vi mener, der er realistiske muligheder for at afvikle det i foråret 1990, under forudsætning af, at der findes villige deltagere. Det er desværre ikke nok med velvilje alene, der skal også bruges en del kontanter til dækning af leje af passende lokaliteter (feriekoloni) og bespisning i en lang weekend fra fredag eftermiddag til søndag aften. Vi mener, det er realistisk at regne med kr. 150-170,- pr. deltager. NB! Ægtefæller, uægtefæller, børn og andre familiemedlemmer samt hunde og katte kan medtages (vi regner med at kunne tilbyde hus- og kæledyr GRATIS ophold).
Læs Andy's novelletta og forestil dig at du selv kan opleve et af de eventyr han refererer til - eller i det mindste et tilsvarende. Dersom du har lyst til at prøve, så henvend dig til Hans Rancke-Madsen (se bagsiden).
Bemærk venligst at der til et arrangement af denne type IKKE kun er helte og heltinder, men der skal også være en del intrigante kokke og pager samt andet tyende.
Vi håber dog at kunne begrænse deltagerantallet i vort åbningsscenarie til 100, al den stund at vi ikke har været i stand til at finde på flere intriger, for hver deltager skal jo helst have et formål med at deltage, eller i det mindste et mål.
På gensyn i PROGRESS REPORT 2

Erik

ON WEEKENDS, I'M SOMEBODY ELSE

By Andrew Looney

Today at work, I was chatting with a girl from the office down the hall. She said, "Did you have a good weekend?"

"Yup," I replied enthusiastically.

"What did you do that was fun?" asked my co-worker.

I hesitated. "Um, well..." I stumbled over my words, but I didn't know what to say. I simply could not think of a good answer.

How could I possibly explain to her that I had spent the weekend pretending to be the First Officer of the RMS Titanic, on her doomed maiden voyage? How, in a sentence or two of casual smalltalk, could I sum up the fact that I was but one of a big group of people, all of whom were making believe that we were the passengers and crew of that famous ship, and that the hotel in which we were meeting was actually, in our minds, a huge ocean liner afloat in the icy North Atlantic? It wasn't possible, I decided. It was just a simple, casual question, and I was taking far too long in answering it.

"Oh, just the usual sort of thing," I finally half-lied. She looked at me with a rather odd expression, clearly sensing that I was being less than open.

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It is a Friday evening in August, and a group of about 50 people are beginning to gather at a hotel in Washington D.C. Some have travelled great distances to get here, and all are spending a fair amount of money, all things considered, on the weekend. Most are spending two nights in a very nice hotel, and all have paid ten bucks to sign up for the game. Some people have also shelled out handsomely for such things as costumes and props; yet no one is complaining about the expense.

At 9:00 PM, a door opens, and a waiting crowd surges into one of the larger rooms on the second floor, which the hotel reserves as function space for special group events. This room is the control room, and the mob scene that now unfolds is but the first of many to come in the course of this weekend.

The crowd pushes their way into the room. Against the back wall is a big table, which is covered with objects: boxes, books, papers, a couple of personal computers, a half empty box of donuts, several cans of soda, and some styrofoam coffee cups. More such materials litter the floor under the table, the corners of the room behind the table, and even another, smaller table against the side wall. Behind the big table are three ragged-looking individuals; these are the gamemasters. They have spent the previous six months preparing for this weekend, and the previous couple of weeks have been a living nightmare for them. The amount of work required to present a game like this is incalculably vast, and most of it doesn't seem to get completed until a day or two before the game, if then. Two of the gamemasters were up all night and still working during most of the day; but now that the deadline has arrived, they are ready. There are still a few odds and ends to finish up, still a couple of minor items to prepare, but these can be dealt with as they are required. For it is now the moment of truth. The game is starting.

The gamemasters have an authoritative, yet somehow meek appearance. It is clear from looking at them that they are in charge, that they are in control of the situation. But there is still much concern written across their faces. "Have we forgotten anything important?" they seem to be thinking to themselves. "Is this game really going to work?" But there is no time to dwell on these questions, because the players are here, and it is time for the distribution of the game packets.

The crowd forms a line, and as each person steps up to the table, they give their name. One of the gamemasters consults a list, finds the player's name, checks it off, and tells another gamemaster a different name. This second name is the name of the character that the player is going to become for the duration of the weekend. The second gamemasters flips through a box containing oversized envelopes until he finds one on which is printed the character's name. He pulls out this envelope and hands it to

the player. "This is your game packet," he says, "it contains everything you will need." As each of the players receive their packets, they scurry off to find an isolated part of the hotel in which to examine what they've been given.

A typical game packet contains a great many things. There is a cover sheet, announcing the title of the game, "RMS TITANIC". Next is an introduction sheet welcoming the player to the game and briefly outlining the scenario. A fairly thick, stapled document is identified as set of rules. Several sheets of text are clearly background information, on a variety of topics. These data sheets, often called "Blue sheets", give information specific to various groups of people in the game. Members of Titanic's crew, for example, would have certain sheets explaining ship matters, while first class passengers would have different sheets. Some blue sheets might have information that would pertain to all players, such as information on etiquette of the Edwardian period. The game packet may contain other, more vague sheets of paper, such as maps and diagrams, and lists of names, places, items, or dates. But there's one sheet of paper the packet definitely contains, the last in the stack but the most important of the group: the character sheet.

The character sheet fully describes the character. It tells his background, his opinions and beliefs, and his current situation. It outlines the goals the character has, explaining what he'd like to accomplish and what he'll have to do in order to succeed. It lists the character's assets, both in physical items and money and in skills and special abilities he might possess. It mentions enemies he might have, and gives the names of other characters in the game he might be able to trust. But it is all presented from the character's point of view; just because the character thinks that so-and-so is his friend doesn't mean that, once the game actually starts, so-and-so won't instead try to drop a piano on his head.

At the bottom of the packet are some loose odds and ends. There are several 3x5 cards and a number of slips of colored paper. The index cards represent physical objects; the gamemasters print text onto the cards which describes the item being represented. The slips of colored paper simulate money, drawn up by the gamemasters, xeroxed onto colored paper, and cut to the proper sizes. Lastly, the packet contains a pinback button, which the player will wear to identify him as a player, and also a small notebook, and a pen.

Before very long, many of the players have absorbed from their packets the basic facts they must know in order to get started. Later, they can study their materials in detail, but for now they want to get out and mingle with the other passengers. Many are already wearing costumes, carefully constructed over the days and weeks preceding the game, based on nuggets of information gleaned from a brief hint by the gamemasters as to who would be whom. The players are mingling, in the hallway, and in a function space room adjoining the control room. There's Mrs. Astor, wearing an evening gown and a great deal of jewelry. And there's Mr. Guggenheim, and Mr. and Mrs. Straus. And there's Captain Smith, looking very commanding in his black, double-breasted maritime officer's uniform. Gold braid gleams on his sleeve. "Good evening," he says, greeting several First Class passengers. "Enjoying the voyage?"

* * * * * * *

The scene is not unfamiliar. The scenario is different, as are some of the people, but the way things work is the same. This time the hotel is an ocean liner. Other times it has been a space station, a far-flung planet, a medieval castle, the halls of Asgard, New York City after nuclear bombing, the insides of a human body, and even an ordinary hotel, to name just a few. But whatever the setting, the players still live and breath and create the environment.

The game creates a microcosm, a whole separate reality, which the players enter and expand and continue to create from within. Everything is simulated. The building becomes the world, and the people within the building populate that world. The players become each other's immediate contact with the world, and the gamemasters simulate the world beyond. In "Titanic", players interact with the immediate world, that is, the other passengers on the ship, by moving about the hotel, tracking down other players, and dealing with them directly. Players interact with the outside world by talking to the gamemasters, who simulate that world in a variety of ways. In this game, for example, players who need to communicate with New York City do so by

sending telegrams. The gamemasters then write and deliver reply telegrams "from New York" to the players. In other games, players can call anyone in the outside world right from their hotel telephone. One calls a gamemaster and requests an outside entity, and the gamemaster then becomes that outside entity, whether it's the Cuban Weather Service, Adolf Hitler's social secretary at the Reichschanzlerei, Star Fleet Headquarters back on Earth, or even the sales manager at ACME Products Unlimited. The gamemaster assumes whatever outside person or agency is requested, as long as the character actually has the means required to make such a contact.

Some games have had other gamemaster-created real world intrusions. Many games have had newspapers, full of game-related articles, xeroxed during the game and sold to characters in the game for game money. In some games there have been radio and television news broadcasts staged by the gamemasters. If there are problems, gamemaster-controlled authorities can move in to create order and keep the peace. In one game, after a string of murders during a science-fiction convention, a S.W.A.T. team was called in to take control of the hotel. Of course, the S.W.A.T. team was really just a couple of gamemasters, and the hotel staff and non- involved guests had no idea that they were under martial law. But it's the players who bring the world to life. It is truly amazing to see how well ordinary people can slip into the minds of extraordinary characters. And what characters! In the fifty or so such games that have been run to date, practically every sort of character one could imagine has been played. They're all here: brave heros, evil villains, jilted lovers, slimy politicians, greedy businessmen, vengeful gods, mad scientists, radioactive mutants, scheming leaders, scheming would-be leaders, strange aliens, hard-boiled detectives, asylum escapees, squirming criminals, important diplomats, pirates, ghosts, adventurers, accountants, spies, vampires, corporals and corpuscles, kings and paupers, gods and amoebas and everything else in between. The players all rise to the challenge. Some are better at it than others, but most people really do try to act as the character would act, thinking and responding to situations as they think their character would. But the really amazing thing about these games is not simply these wonderful dramatic performances, but the way players can really and truly have experiences that they, as normal people, might not otherwise have. Greed, envy, hatred, loyalty, fear... and these are all fairly standard. More exotic emotions have been evoked. The tension that diplomats feel when sitting across the conference table from sworn enemies, knowing that unless they can arrange a peace treaty, horrible nuclear destruction will be wrought on both their nations. The glorious feeling of triumph a politician experiences when he is at last elected to the highest office in his government. The gut-wrenching stress a weapons expert feels when attempting to defuse a bomb, knowing that every wire he attempts to disconnect may be the means of his deliverance. The closeness that comes between two old friends who've been through a difficult and challenging ordeal together, even when those friends were complete strangers two days before. The relief an accused criminal feels when he is acquitted of a major crime, such as negligent genocide, after a very close jury count. The elation a scientist experiences when he puts the final piece of the puzzle in place, allowing him to prove his theories, complete his inventions, and, ultimately, save the universe from utter destruction. These are truly special emotions, ones which most people in today's world have no real chance to experience.

Players often find that they surprise even themselves. Far from merely acting like other people, they actually find themselves thinking and experiencing emotions of other people. Yet most players slip into these other characters' mindsets very easily, and only when the game ends do they realize how much they were transformed.

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Some players find the most enjoyment in the "game" portion of these role-playing games. They enjoy solving the puzzles set forth for them by the gamemasters, they haggle and dicker to trade items, they scheme and plan conquests, they spend their weekends filling bank accounts with simulated money and building machines out of conceptual items. Other players find greater enjoyment in the "role-playing" aspect of the games. Like actors studying for a part in a movie or play, they work hard both on and off the stage, trying their best to live the part during the game and expending great amounts of effort on advance preparation. Costuming, for example, has become very common. In the Titanic game, most of the players prepared some sort of costume in advance, and many went to great lengths. Tuxedos were common. Many of the high society women had more than one evening gown, and made frequent costume changes. Other games have seen even more elaborate costuming efforts. When a game was run based on the plays of Shakespeare, everyone turned

out in Elizabethan finery. For a huge, two hundred player sword and sorcery epic, the hotel was filled with people in tunics and gowns and robes and cloaks and even armour. For a game featuring a major United Nations diplomatic reception, a number of players actually rented white tie tuxedos. When called upon to play giant blue lobsters from space, some players fashioned huge pincer claws out of blue foam and wore them over their arms. And when told they would be monsters from another dimension, two players came up with strange alien costumes that featured giant eyeballs mounted on the end of stalks. Each wore one over his arm, and they thus used their arm as if it were their eye. (They wore hoods over their heads throughout the weekend.)

Studying and researching the character beforehand is also very important. In most games, since the players sign up in advance, they will often know who they'll be playing well before the game starts. Thus, in addition to costuming, they can study up on the character. Sometimes there can be no real preparation; other times the player will know very little, for example, to learn to speak with a German accent. But in some games, characters are drawn directly, or at least modeled closely, on characters in history or literature, allowing the player to study for his role. In a historical game like Titanic, one can learn quite a bit about the person he or she will be portraying. In Watergate, a game based on the infamous political scandal, the person playing Richard Nixon was able to spend a lot of time listening to tapes of Nixon speeches, learning to speak and act like the real man. Perhaps the most upscale example of advance character preparation is the group who played the seven castaways of Gilligan's Island. The game scenario included a large number of characters from classic 60's sitcoms. When advertised, seven players got together and formed a power block, signing up as a group and requesting the Gilligan's Island characters. Their performance was astounding. The costumes were flawless, with the Skipper and Gilligan remaining in the traditional blue and red shirts throughout the weekend, and Ginger and Mrs. Howell changing their gowns almost hourly. They also went in big for props, with detail that included coconut drinking cups (made from real coconuts) and the Professor's small, white plastic, portable radio, with a tape player inside cued to play the show's theme music. And the role playing couldn't be beat. The seven players had spent hours watching old re-runs, and could spout typical lines from the shows at will.

But no matter how much advance preparation one does, the game is still a difficult test of ability, cunning, wit, and imagination. And some players don't make it. It is an intense and complex environment, and it is a classic sink-or-swim situation. Some players become completely overwhelmed by the action and disappear from the scene not long after picking up their game packets. Others attempt to play, but somehow never quite fit in. You can see them, mingling with the crowd but somehow not belonging to it, still watching the movie rather than joining in and becoming part of the story.

But most players do swim, in spite of the extreme complexity. And the action does get hard to follow. It can in fact be overwhelming. Sometimes there are so many things going on at once that you forget your own problems and interests through being distracted by those of your fellow players. There can be as many as twenty plotlines, all happening at once, each involving other characters, various game objects, and, the all-important commodity, information. Plots and problems can concern and involve almost any number of other characters, from two or three up to and including every character in the game, depending on the weightiness of the matter. Solutions to the problems may involve gathering up items from many different characters and assembling them in some way, or it may simply require discovering certain important bits of information. But sometimes it can be harder to get information out of player's brains than it is to beg, borrow, buy, or steal objects from their game packets. So it gets hard just to keep track of what's going on, let alone sort through it and come out on top. Imagine the following: you are sitting in a room at the center of a circle formed by seven television sets, ringed around you so that you can only see three or four at once unless you turn your head. Each set is broadcasting something different, say, seven different sitcoms, each of which has two or three subplots going on within its own storyline. Just try keeping track of what's going on. With some of the more complex games, this is not an unreasonable comparison.

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Some players work very hard to prepare for a game in advance, and others have a tough time coping with the complexity of a game once they are swept up and away by the action, but at neither task do the

players work as hard as the gamemasters. On average, it takes between three and six months to write and produce a game, depending on the size and complexity of the game and the number of people on the design team. The amount of work that such a game requires is vast, and it must all be done in the gamemasters' spare time: these games barely break even, much less provide a livelihood for the designers.

Friendships can be both strengthened and strained by such a project. Debates over matters of game design and plans for who does what and when can lead to long and bitter arguments. Crisis follows crisis as the deadline draws near but the pile of work still to be done remains undiminished. Nevertheless, in almost all cases, the characters do all get written, the rules do get finalized, the item cards do get printed, the packets do get stuffed, and the hundreds of other small tasks that must be done do get done.

During the actual event, the gamemasters rarely leave the control room. From their headquarters, they can survey the situation and attempt to keep things moving properly. Situations in the control room vary widely from game to game. In some games there is almost perpetual crisis, the gamemasters working constantly to help the game along and keep it from falling apart. Other games seem almost to run themselves; the players take off running, and very little gamemaster intervention is required. But in most games, the control room environment has a sort of "feast or famine" feel to it; at times, the gamemasters can relax and enjoy the game, having no real problems to deal with, and at other times, the room is filled with a crowd of people, each with a problem they feel demands immediate attention and which is certainly, in their view, more important than anyone else's. A gamemaster must do many things at once in order to keep his game running successfully. His biggest and most important job is to keep his eye on every single player in the game. If a player is having trouble, he must provide hints and suggestions to help that player along. If a player is getting too far ahead and/or too powerful, the gamemaster must create new puzzles and problems for that player, tossing roadblocks in his path. It is a difficult juggling act, but the game should progress at a certain pace, neither climaxing too soon nor being slow at first and hectic later on. This means dealing both with major crises, such as a character being shot in the head with a howitzer, and minor problems, such as a player spending hours trying to locate the character who has a specific item he needs and being unable to find him.

Additionally, the gamemaster must pull all the strings at his command in order to simulate the "real" world. He's usually working constantly. He may be talking on the telephone, "being" the Commander of the Air Force, standing by at Strategic Air Command to receive the President's orders. He may be typing up an article for the newspaper, or pasting up the finished articles, or driving out to the xerox shop to copy it, or even playing the part of a paper boy and selling it to players. He might be wandering through the hotel lobby, spending a few minutes performing a role as a "Non-Player Character", such as a simple merchant peddling trinkets or a shoe shine boy passing on rumors he's heard or even a slavering monster attacking innocent children. Perhaps he must spend a few minutes updating the big board which represents current active trading on the stock market. Or, as in this game, he may be writing up a reply telegram to be delivered to a player who sent a message to New York from the Titanic.

Fortunately, he is not alone in this work. Most games have between two and ten gamemasters, along with any number of extra friends and helpers, who, while neither playing the game nor working as full gamemasters, are on hand to help out where they are needed. They'll be called upon to write up new item cards or search the hotel for a given player or even act Non-Player Character roles. Such persons can also be indispensable to a game in that, while the gamemasters look after the game, the "gamemother" looks after the gamemasters, making sure they eat regular meals and even get a moment or two of rest. They take orders for McDonald's, or call out for pizzas, and they also make sure that the gamemasters take a short break to actually eat the food once it arrives.

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Friday night on the Titanic is fairly uneventful. The passengers and crew mingle, the players get the feel of the game and the situation, but there isn't much real action. But on Saturday morning, things begin heating up. One of the passengers has been murdered, a Mr. George D. Widener, and the Captain must appoint a team to investigate the murder and must also keep the passengers calm. Also on the Captain's mind is the fire in coal bunker number 6, which has been burning since before Titanic shipped out. The Captain meets with his officers first thing in the morning to discuss these matters. The

fire is under control, that is, it is not spreading, but the firemen can't seem to put it out. The Captain issues orders to work harder at putting out the fire, and to make certain that the passengers do not find out about it.

Intrigue is building among the passengers as well. Though rumors of the fire below decks have not spread, everyone knows about the murder. There are several amateur sleuths on hand, who have copies of a diagram showing how the murder took place, and who are trying to dig up clues as to who could be responsible. There is also growing concern that the murderer will strike again, that everyone's life may be in danger. This fear is intensified later in the day, when several passengers discover that their staterooms have been broken into and that their belongings have been rifled and burglarized.

With the clouds of World War I brewing on the horizon, there is also international intrigue afoot. Many of the passengers are actually intelligence agents in disguise, from many different countries. Rumors of secret plans drift through the corridors, plans for a new submarine and for something called an aircraft carrier.

Also there's the matter of the Egyptian artifacts. It seems that collecting antique pieces from ancient Egypt is currently very popular among the upper class. Many of the passengers have small, private collections of such pieces, and there is much bartering, buying, and selling of such items. But it also develops that there is an ancient curse surrounding a group of these artifacts, such that the owner will meet with violent death. The rumor that the unfortunate murder victim was a collector of these antiquities, and also a member of a mysterious group called the Egypt Society, can not be overlooked. A historian and an archaeologist begin gathering together artifacts for study and analysis. They publicly remain very skeptical about the curse, but because of rumors, there is now widespread concern that it could bring disaster down upon the entire ship.

Card games, mainly whist, pinochle, and poker, are going on all the time. Many games involve gambling, and in several there appears to be a bit of cheating going on, though no one dares make any public accusations. At the card tables, a great deal of money, as well as information, seems to change hands.

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None of the various exciting events aboard the Titanic are apparent to the casual observer. There are, of course, other people staying in the hotel, who know little or nothing about live, real-time, real-space role playing games. Some have heard that an event called "RMS Titanic" is taking place; others find out about it by seeing the souvenir game T-shirt, being worn by players who either do not have formal wear or who are taking a short break from the strain of wearing it.

But in looking at the group that is participating in this event, one has a hard time discerning the action. There is a large group of people, hanging around in and near a hotel function room. They stand in small clusters, some chatting sociably, others whispering furtively. Most are wearing clothing that is quite ritzy, although rather old-fashioned, but on the surface this no more unusual than a masquerade ball or a Halloween party. To the casual observer, the various conversations are just idle social chit-chat. (To those on the inside, however, most of the discussions are nervous speculation as to why the Titanic's engines have shut down, a commonly observable fact that the players have been apprised of by the gamemasters.) The casual observer notices a couple of players trading slips of colored paper and 3x5 index cards back and forth. (A small, golden Egyptian statuette of a crocodile is being sold for 450 pounds, a very large sum of money in those days.) At a table in the corner of one of the hotel rooms, the casual observer can see a game of poker going on. (This section of the room has been designated the First Class smoking lounge, and very high stakes are riding on the poker game.) People are clustering out in the hall, and among them is a man in a tuxedo, who is speaking in a loud, outrageous, even satirically-stylized French accent. (This is one of the Hams, a type of player who goes in heavily for the over-acting, intensely role-playing aspect of the games. He is having a fierce political debate with some of the other passengers, which, while adding much to the local color and flavor of the environment, has nothing to do with the actual action of the game.) Further down the hall, and around the corner, the casual observer stumbles upon another cluster of players. He picks up on phrases like "My fighting strength is 12,"

and "The gun adds 7," yet he sees no gun and all seems calm. (But all is not calm, there is in fact violence taking place. Down on 'C' deck, a man has just been shot with a small revolver. The gun, of course, is just another index card, and the ensuing violent struggle is simulated simply by the players comparing a few numbers that identify their comparative strengths.)

So the casual observer wanders on, still a bit puzzled as to what this "Titanic" thing is all about.

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One of the passengers abroad the Titanic on this, her maiden voyage, is Mrs. Hellen Churchill Candee, a widow. She is travelling back to America to care for her son, who was recently injured in an aeroplane accident. She also has a few tasks to accomplish during the voyage.

Mrs. Candee supports herself by writing, making shrewd investments, and working as an intelligence agent for the United States government. While on the Titanic, she has three main goals to accomplish: First, she must contact her superior, Major Archibald Butt; Second, she must investigate the activities of Frau Antionette Flegheim, known to be a spy working for the Germans; and finally, she wishes to sell a couple of Egyptian artifacts to one of the collectors she knows will be travelling aboard the Titanic.

Mrs. Candee has in her possession a fair amount of money, both British and American, in both coin and paper currency. She also has two artifacts from ancient Egypt, and her jewelry box. She is not armed, but she does have a special ability: pickpocketing. On Friday, Mrs. Candee locates Frau Flegheim and introduces herself, hoping to gain her trust on a social level, thus allowing her to stay in Frau Flegheim's company and easily observe her activities. But Frau Flegheim is cold and standoffish, and rejects Mrs. Candee's social overtures. Does Flegheim suspect Mrs. Candee's true intentions?

On Saturday, Mrs. Candee continues trying to figure out what Frau Flegheim is up to, but does not succeed. For whatever reasons, Flegheim avoids Mrs. Candee and gives no clues. In the afternoon, Mrs. Candee finally manages to contact Major Butt, her superior. She reports her poor progress, and Major Butt advises her to treat the matter very carefully, and to give Frau Flegheim plenty of distance.

In the evening, after the Grand Ball, Mrs. Candee becomes aware that interest in Egyptian artifacts is reaching a fever pitch. Suddenly remembering her other goal, she trundles out her two ancient objects and has them appraised by Mrs. Ida Straus, an Egyptologist, and Dr. William E. Minihan, the noted archaeologist. The first is a stone idol of a woman, measuring about twelve inches tall. This is identified by the experts as a figurine of Isis of the type found in tombs at Karnak. They give it a value of 200 pounds. The other, a bronze sculpture of a mule bearing grain, turns out to be a funerary token from a tomb of a priest at Giza, valued at 450 pounds.

Mrs. Straus offers to buy the pieces from Mrs. Candee for the prices estimated by Dr. Minihan, even though they are not the artifacts relating to the much-rumored curse. But Mrs. Candee declines to sell them. Having failed in her investigation of the German spy, Mrs. Candee has been rethinking her goals. She is now becoming very interested in these ancient artifacts, and now no longer wishes to part with her small collection, even though she could sell it at a much higher price than she had initially suspected.

Mrs. Candee becomes very interested in the search for the cursed Egyptian artifacts, and spends some time inquiring of the other passengers as to whether or not they collect such objects. She talks those who do into showing their collections to Dr. Minihan; yet the cursed artifacts are still not uncovered. Later she hears a rumor that a seance is to be held at midnight, and arranges to be part of it. The purpose of the seance is to contact "Bob", a spirit from the Land of the Dead with whom Mrs. Astor is apparently already familiar. It is hoped that Bob will be able to provide the group with answers to a few questions. At the appointed hour, the group gathers and attempts to contact the world beyond. Everyone holds hands and concentrates, and when they successfully contact the spirit, several questions are asked. First, the group wishes to know who murdered Mr. Widener; but the spirit's answer is abstruse and unclear. Second, they wish to know the location of the cursed Egyptian artifacts. Again, the spirit's answer is vague, but seems to hint at Molly Brown. Finally, they ask if the ship is in

any danger, and this time the answer is unpleasantly clear. A ghostly vision appears on deck, a phantom woman in a flowing white gown. "This ship is doomed," she warns. "Turn back!"

While several passengers rush off to find the Captain and attempt to convince him to change the ship's course, Mrs. Candee tries again to locate and report to Major Butt. However, she learns that he has mysteriously disappeared. It is later discovered that he was murdered by Frau Flegheim, and his body thrown overboard.

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A large percentage of the action of a game like this is the interaction between players. The characters have all been thrust into an environment in which they must work with the other characters they meet in order to achieve their goals. Thus, they must contact and deal with practically everyone else in the game. Such dealings can include many things: buying and selling items, trading information, attempting to sway votes, or even simply murdering each other.

But these individual interactions do not by any means comprise all of the action at one of these games. Games also feature events and activities, at which such haggling can take place, but which also add enormously to the fun and atmosphere of the game. In Titanic, for example, both a light lunch and a high tea were served, and, in the evening, a grand ball was held. At the ball, the players danced waltzes and tangos, to music appropriate to the era. (Earlier in the day, dance lessons had been available from the Titanic's staff of dance instructors.)

Other games have featured a wide variety of activities. In a game of international politics, the United Nations held scheduled conferences of ambassadors and delegates, at which agendas were carefully followed and Robert's Rules of Order held sway over the proceedings. At a game set at the Psionic Olympics, players had to compete in events that demonstrated their highly advanced mental powers. In one, the "ESP relay event", psi-athlete characters had to pass complicated messages across long distances, via charades. At the Watergate game, players who attended Martha Mitchell's cocktail party were informed by the gamemasters that Hunter S. Thompson had spiked the punch with LSD. They were told to act accordingly for the half hour that followed. In another game, players were able to challenge each other to duels. The game was set at a conference of intergalactic governments, and dueling was a major sport, with stakes ranging from mere honor, to votes in the conference, to boundary decisions that affected entire planets. Dueling was simulated by any of a long list of brief activities, including such things as arm wrestling, building houses of cards, endurance tests involving ice cubes, luck games such as dice and "rock, scissors, paper", intellectual contests like trivia questions and mental multiplication, and zany battles like limerick writing, blind sketching, and popularity contests. Naturally, the form of the duel was agreed upon by both parties before being fought. In a game involving time travellers, some characters were able to perform magic. But the magic system was based on ritual, and in order to cast spells, the players had to actually perform these rituals, which included such things as chanting incantations, lighting and extinguishing candles, sprinkling enchanted powders, and drinking magic potions. And in one game, a game of spies and assassins, the players had to defuse a bomb.

The bomb was one of the most ingenious forms of simulation yet created. It consisted of a very large sealed envelope, which contained other sealed envelopes, which further contained more sealed envelopes. Each envelope presented a physical description and several options. For example, in order to open the bomb casing, you had to remove six bolts, in the correct sequence. Thus, there were six envelopes. If you decided to loosen bolt number 3, you opened an envelope labeled "loosening bolt #3". Inside was an envelope with a label that read "Bolt number #3 is now halfway out. The bomb is emitting a quiet humming noise. To completely remove this bolt, open this envelope. To put this bolt back in, place this envelope back into the previous envelope." If you proceeded to remove the bolt, you got a message like "Bolt #3 is now out. It cannot be put back in."

Once the casing was removed, the creativity of the bomb's design got even more impressive. There was one point when you had to deal with a taped message and the tape recorder that played it. The message was written on a long strip of paper; you listened to as much of the tape as you dared by gradually pulling the strip out of the envelope, reading the words as they appeared. Another point in the bomb featured a washing machine dial that had to be manipulated in a certain way. There were booby-traps and false alarms and many

tricks and puzzles; and at every point there was a chance that making the wrong decision would cause the bomb to explode.

The defusing of the bomb was an event that took several hours. The clock was ticking, the real-time deadline firmly established, the threat of failure and death keenly felt. The players who worked on the defusing sweated with tension. It was drama indeed.

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"RMS Titanic", while based on historical fact, does not, as it turns out, follow the same course that it did in the history books. Because of engine trouble, the Titanic is forced to slow down during the night, and does not hit an iceberg. But on Sunday morning, explosions rock the hull, and the Titanic starts taking on water. She still sinks on her maiden voyage, but this time it's due to sabotage, by German spies. (We learn later that time travellers, using H.G. Well's famous machine, managed to prevent the iceberg collision only to bring about another form of calamity.)

The final phase of the game is a chaotic climax, in which the gamemasters attempt to recreate the disorderly confusion of a huge ship sinking without enough lifeboats. A system is established whereby part of a room represents the lifeboats. The ship's officers direct the procedures whereby characters are allowed to get into boats and are lowered away. "Women and children only," they are heard to say.

It is a dramatic scene. Mrs. Straus stubbornly refuses to leave her husband behind, even when the last of the boats is filling up. The loud-spoken Frenchman attempts to jump into a lifeboat as it is being lowered away, and is shot dead by the ship's second officer. Several men scramble for a few available seats in one of the collapsible lifeboats, after Mrs. Hellen Candee, the last of the women, has boarded. One of the first class passengers breaks open a bottle of (real) champagne, and the men remaining on board toast their misfortunes as the ship goes down. The Captain and First Officer remain on the bridge until the end.

Once the gamemasters declare that the ship has actually sunk, the session devolves into a question-and-answer period. A count is taken of who died and who survived. The gamemasters explain some things that happened; players stand up and explain others. Unsolved mysteries and unanswered questions are finally resolved by those who know the full story, but who kept their mouths shut during the actual game. Finally, there is a big round of applause for the gamemasters, who made it all happen.

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Was it worth it? It's a question that casual observers frequently ask. Was it worth all the bother of obtaining antique clothing just to act silly for a weekend? Certainly, say the players. These games give the players a chance to do many things they might otherwise miss. A chance to be someone else for a weekend, to escape the drudgeries of real life. A chance to be the actor they always dreamt of being, not quite on stage, but in an event frequently compared to improvisational theater. A chance to look good in front of their peers, not for the type of job they work at or the kind of car they drive, but for the way they can express themselves in a creative undertaking. Of course it was worth it, this time and everytime. They do this five or ten times a year, and they'll be back next time, too, no matter what planet the game is set on, no matter what type of costumes are required, and no matter what sort of role they are given in the ensuing drama. As with real actors, the thrill is in the acting itself. And for the gamemasters, who gave up a regular social life to produce this game, has it been worthwhile for them? Most definitely. They make no money on this, in fact they often lose money, and the specific thanks they get, usually no more than the traditional round of applause and the occasional statement of praise in weeks to come, may not seem so very valuable. But to them, as they exhaustedly load the cars with books and equipment and fill the trash bags with now worthless game materials, the joy they feel, the joy of showing fifty of their friends a really good time and of producing an event of which they can genuinely be proud, that joy cannot be explained to those who've never felt it. It is the heart of the artistic endeavor: creation not for money or profit, but for the love of creativity itself.

February 2, 1989



Hvis du har lyst til at være med i et dansk project, som det omtalte – så henvend dig til:

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