

Table of Contents

HERO HIGHWAY

WHEN LAST WE LEFT OUR HEROES...

Keep up with the news from Hero Games. This issue – *Evil Unleashed* and *Champions 25th Anniversary Commemorative Edition*. 2

HEROGLYPHS

See how Steve Long himself answers rules questions. This issue – bat around some new ideas on Missile Deflection. 3

YOU GOTTA HAVE CHARACTER

Dr. Gerald Bull was the Canadian astrophysicist behind the “supergun” project, that can throw a man into space. 5

RESOURCE ROAD

BUILDING A BETTER MYTHOLOGY

Give your campaigns a verisimilitude by meshing the various mythologies available into a unified cosmology. 17

YOU GOTTA HAVE CULTURE: KHASI

The Khasi people of India near Bangladesh live in fear of the serpent demon U Thlen. 23

THE QUICK AND THE KO’ED

Sometimes the safest way to survive a combat is to be elsewhere when the attacks start flying. 26

ADVENTURE AVENUE

THROUGH A MIRROR DARKLY

The real Champions have been replaced by their evil counterparts. Your team of heroes is sent to the rescue. 28

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Building a Better Mythology

by Rodney Ruff

Each society on Earth has its own unique history, shaped by its people and their surroundings. Within that history, however, are stories of its people and their understandings of their surroundings: doers of great deeds, wielders of great power, and the interaction between gods and men. Taken together, these stories compose that society's mythology.

Although mythology is usually thought of as the exclusive domain of past societies, mythologies are built with every new story that is told. John Wayne and Superman hold nearly the same stature in the modern world that Hercules did to the ancient Greeks, while James T. Kirk's command of the starship *Enterprise* is not much different from that of Jason leading the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece.

Mythology provides a means to understand a society's values, as well as a reflection of its development both historically and philosophically. It provides the "back story" for a society until its recorded history is created, and afterward, it provides a psychological history for that society.

Mythology has traditionally been used in role-playing adventures as a source for player character and NPC origins, as well as a source of monsters and other creatures to populate the campaign world. What I propose to do is to show how to tailor a mythology to your campaign world so that the elements of it your player characters encounter fit into that world instead of simply being grafted from whatever modules and supplements you as GM have handy.

Although mythology-building is most likely to be used in creating fantasy adventures, it is appropriate for any setting where stories can be told and a means exists to pass them from one generation to the next and to others within the same generation. Radio and television, in this regard, are basically extensions of the campfire story group and the Greek amphitheater, with the main difference that they reach a much wider audience.

In the course of this article, I will use examples from the mythologies I know, as well as folklore, legend, comic books, and science fiction. I will also blur the lines between mythology and religion in citing my examples; this is not meant as an insult to any religion or practice of religion.

Common Mythic Elements

Although the mythologies of the world differ from one another in many respects, they also have many things in common with one another. Following are some of these common elements.

A CREATION STORY

One of the most basic questions is "Where did I come from?" Answering this question leads to both birth myths such as being delivered by the stork or being found in a cabbage patch as well as world creation stories involving a cosmic egg or a primordial ocean.

The cosmic egg appears in the creation legends of the Aztecs, the Dogon tribe of Mali, the Chinese, and many Pacific tribes. The cosmic egg can be an actual egg or something similar, such as the cosmic coconut of the Mangaian people of the Cook Islands, and may either contain a creator being or be used to form the earth and sky. (In Chinese myth, the eggshell is made into the earth and sky by the hatched Pan Ku, while in Maori myth, Rangi, the sky, and Papa, the earth, are forced apart by their unborn offspring.)

The primordial ocean appears in Hindu, Mesopotamian, and Japanese myth, as well as in some versions of Egyptian creation myth. Often, the primordial ocean is home to some creature, such as a giant serpent or tortoise, which either makes the creation possible in some way or prevents it until slain by another being. (In Japanese myth, however, the creators Inazagi and Inazumi stir up the ocean from outside it to bring forth the first island, from which they create everything else.)

Sometimes, instead of a cosmic egg or primordial ocean, the creation myth revolves around a primordial being or beings. In one Egyptian creation myth, Atum created himself from nothing, as did the Ungambikula of the Australian aborigines. In other myths, the creator existed independent of his creation, such as Viracocha of the Incas.

Some creation myths have aspects of more than one of these origin types. The Chinese creator god Pan Ku was hatched from the cosmic egg and then spent the next 18,000 years chiseling and sculpting the rest of creation. The Greeks believed that a cosmic egg was laid by Nyx (Night) and fell onto the primordial ocean, where it was hatched by the serpent Ophion. From this egg sprang Uranus (the sky) and Gaea (the earth), who sired the Titans, who in turn sired the gods. Likewise, the Norse creation myth begins with a block of ice formed between the cold of Niflheim and the warmth of Muspelheim, from which sprang the giant Ymir and the cow Audhumbla, who then licked free from the ice Buri, who then sired Bor, who then sired Odin, Vili, and Ve, who then created everything else.

SUNNY SIDE UP

The cosmic egg origin myth is similar to the Big Bang theory of the universe, which states that all matter in the universe was originally condensed into an infinitely dense point.

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE

The primordial ocean origin myth also has its parallels in science. The entire surface of Earth was supposedly covered by water prior to the appearance of the supercontinent Pangaea. Also, one of the lost manuscripts from the library of Alexandria was a theory by Anaxamander that all life on Earth evolved from fish.

Note also that the primordial ocean appears prevalent in part because so much of Earth's surface is covered by water. A race that sprang from a planet with more land than ocean would be less likely to have a primordial ocean as part of its creation myth.

The Quick and the KO'ed

by Jason Wedel

In combat there are two types of characters, the quick and the knocked out. Being able to move quickly in combat while still fighting is a distinctive advantage. What follows is a look into maneuvers for characters that are fast and agile, or more specifically maneuvers that allow characters to use their full movement while still fighting.

COMBAT RUNNING (*DARK CHAMPIONS* PG 130)

Combat Running from *Dark Champions* shows us that you can model this ability by buying enough of a movement power to double your normal movement with the limitation of “Only to make Half Moves in combat (-1)”. To expand on this idea a character should be able to take a greater limitation on the movement by decreasing the type of attacks he can use it with. The table below describes a guideline to use, however as with all things, a GM should watch out for possible abuses.

Limitation	Value
Only to Half Move in Combat	-1
Only to Half Move in Combat while making a (Ranged or Melee) Attack	-1¼
Only to Half Move in Combat while making an attack with a Tight group	-1½
Only to Half Move in Combat while making a Single Attack	-2

The main benefit to this system is that the character suffers no negative modifiers for using the ability and pays a reasonable amount of points for it. However it does have a couple of negatives. First the more types of movements the character has the more he has to spend on it. The other problem with it is that only characters who have bought the ability can use it.

COMBAT MANEUVERS

There are a few combat maneuvers that can be used by characters trying to make a full move and still attack; some examples are Move By, Grab By, and Move Through. The two main advantages of these moves are anyone can use them and they can be strung together. However, they also have drawbacks. First, there are a limited number of things you can do with them (Damage and Grab), plus the penalties can be quite severe, especially if you target more than one opponent. Finally, there is no combat maneuver to allow a full movement with a ranged attack, although a nice GM might allow a Move By or Move Through at zero range.

NEW (OPTIONAL) COMBAT MANEUVERS

The following maneuvers will help to give more options to characters wanting to just use Combat Maneuvers.

Running Disarm (-4 OCV, -2 DCV): This maneuver simply combines the rules for a Move By with those of a Disarm. The character can make multiple Running Disarms at a -2 penalty per disarm after the first. As with a move by the character should plot out the movement he plans on taking first. This maneuver can be combined with other movement based maneuvers. The character receives 1 point of STR per inch of velocity for the Disarm.

Running Shot (-2 OCV, -2 DCV): With a Running Shot the character can make a ranged attack while using his full movement, in the same manner as a Move By. Range Modifiers are figured from the point in the movement that the attack is made. The character can make multiple Running Shots at a -2 penalty per additional target, or combined it with any of the other movement based maneuvers. The character gets no additional damage when using a Running Shot. Running Shot can be used with any ranged attack power (such as Entangles, Flashes, etc.). Maneuvers such as Aim or Set cannot be used with Running Shot.

Running Attack (-2 OCV, -2 DCV): With this maneuver a character can use a no range attack that does not include Strength (such as most adjustment powers, and powers that take the no range Limitation) while moving. As with all movement based attacks, you can make multiple attacks with this maneuver at a -2 per additional target and can combine it with other movement based attacks.