

# Gygax<sup>™</sup> MAGAZINE

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# FROM ALL OF US

Welcome, and thank you. It's 2013, and you just bought a *print* magazine. Print! Wasn't that supposed to disappear, along with land-line telephones, broadcast television, wristwatches, and Twinkies? Not just that, but you bought a magazine. A magazine about games that you don't play on a computer. Things are not looking good for you, my friend – you're living in the past. Rolling dice? Sitting at a table, actually looking at the other players? Painting your own miniatures?

Of course, some of you are thinking, "wait, I'm reading this on my iPad, I didn't buy the print version." Maybe you don't roll dice anymore, since you got a dice-rolling app for your smartphone. You might use online character generators, or carry all your game books on a Kindle. Maybe you don't even play in the same room with your friends since you started using a virtual tabletop to connect with each other online.

However you play games, whichever games you play, *Gygax* magazine wants to help you get the most out of them. We believe that the adventure gaming hobby isn't about what technology you do or don't use – it's about playing games that require imagination, creativity, and strategy. It's about playing with other people, sharing an experience and creating memories. Most of all, it's about the human element. It's about being able to come up with an off-the-wall idea that isn't covered in the rules, and figuring out how to make it work on the fly. It's about rulings for unexpected situations, making up house rules that only your gaming group uses, arguing over whether a cleric can use a spiked mace, the rate of fire for an arquebus, or how many space marines can fit in a landing pod.

The name *Gygax* is our way of letting you know that we care about the history of adventure gaming, and that we believe in its future. Luke and Ernie Gygax literally grew up with the hobby. Their contributions to gaming reach all the way back to the beginning, yet they are keeping things fresh today, playtesting new games, running Gary Con, and of course, helping to create *Gygax* magazine. They are carrying on the family tradition by continuing to look to the future. We will cover games from all eras, including old editions and out-of-print classics, but also the latest offerings that are coming off the presses (or the PDF presses) today. Whatever the genre, however big or small the publisher, if it's a wonderful game that brings people together to use their imaginations, we care about it.

This first issue sees some familiar old names, and some exciting new ones. We've got material that reaches back to some of the earliest role-playing games, and some of the absolutely newest. Virtual tabletops, fantasy miniatures rules for toddlers, complicated mathematical answers to simple questions, even a city in a swamp . . . we've got it all here. If there's one question that's come up more than any other while we were making this magazine, it's been "what are you going to write about?" From here on out, we would like to direct a similar question at our readers. What would you like to read? Drop us a line and let us know. With your help, we want to see tabletop gaming thrive and expand. Let's look for new adventures together.

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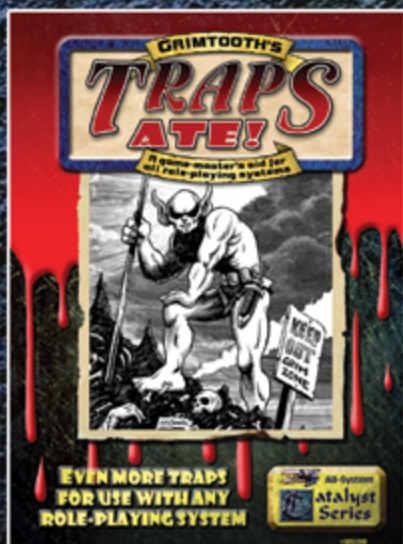
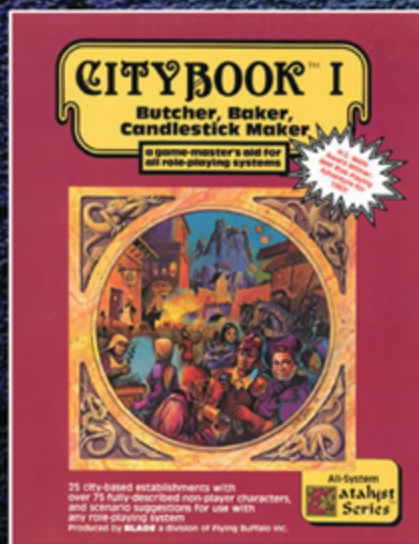
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# The cosmology of role-playing games

by James Carpio

The intent of this article is not to begin a new-age diatribe about how all games are related, nor is it an attempt to tie game mechanics to a common origin. All of the magazine articles and reference books on RPG history from the past three decades agree on one thing: it all started with *Dungeons & Dragons*. While this notion is grounded in truth for the most part, to say all games grow from the *D&D* “Big Bang” discredits the other game designers who, for the most part, created new and different ways to play a role-playing game. In illustrating the relationship between some games, this article is meant to give perspective into how each generation of games influenced design.

So on to the RPG cosmos...

For this exercise let’s break down our gaming cosmos into several different galaxies. As we examine each galaxy we will find that there is a core concept at its center, although games begin to evolve and break away from that concept even as they maintain some of the design goals. Ultimately, like Ouroboros eating his tail, our cosmos comes full circle as we return back to *D&D* (well, its core mechanic anyway) and the *d20 System*’s powerful influence on current game design and publishing.

Lists by their nature must be incomplete, and so ours shall be here. An attempt to include every role-playing game ever created would be impractical, as some games will be too obscure, too hard to classify as RPGs, or even as distinct and separate games. The text of this article includes some of the most notable titles, and the illustration on pages 10 and 11 goes into greater detail still. With that proviso in mind, let’s begin our journey.

## Alpha Prime — *Dungeons & Dragons*

*In the beginning there was *Dungeons & Dragons*...*

While there are many who would argue this fact, commercially *D&D* was it. Gary Gygax’s wood grain boxes, first sold by mail order in

1974 out of his home in Wisconsin, introduced many to the idea of playing make believe at the dining room table with a couple of dice, pencil, paper, and imagination. *D&D* was the Big Bang for our hobby; it was the sun and the center of all creation. It set the standard for role-playing games for years to come. From this simple design all commercial RPGs had attributes for measures of aptitude, hit points to see how much damage the character could take, and dice rolls for resolution (a throwback to the game’s wargaming heritage). The ideas of killing the monster, taking its treasure, and gaining power in the form of class and levels transformed most of the games in this galaxy. Based on this core design other games followed and branched off from the center star:

*Empire of the Petal Throne* (1975)  
*Boot Hill* (1975)  
*Metamorphosis Alpha* (1976)  
*Gamma World* (1978)  
*Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (1977–1979)  
*Top Secret* (1980)  
*Star Frontiers* (1982)

Alpha Prime, however does not belong entirely to the *D&D* (TSR) family of games. Others appeared shortly thereafter, and while branching off from the *D&D* core mechanic became their own entities and moved further away from the core design. Most of these games went in separate directions offering gamers completely new content and styles of play, while some remained faithful to the core concepts of *D&D* and offered additional options.

*Tunnels & Trolls* (FLYING BUFFALO, 1975)  
*Arduin* (GRIMOIRE GAMES, 1977)  
*Traveller* (GDW, 1977)  
*RuneQuest* (1978)  
*The Fantasy Trip* (METAGAMING CONCEPTS, 1980)  
*Rolemaster* (IRON CROWN ENTERPRISES, 1980)  
*Space Opera* (FANTASY GAMES UNLIMITED, 1980)

*Call of Cthulhu* (1981)  
*Champions* (HERO GAMES, 1981)  
*Stormbringer* (1981)  
*Thieves’ World* (CHAOSIUM, 1981)  
*Star Trek* (FASA, 1982)  
*James Bond 007* (VICTORY GAMES, 1983)  
*The Palladium Role-Playing Game* (PALLADIUM GAMES, 1983)  
*Middle-Earth Role Playing* (IRON CROWN ENTERPRISES, 1984)  
*Twilight 2000* (GDW, 1984)  
*Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* (GAMES WORKSHOP, 1986)

## Beta Prime — second wave

By the 1990s role-playing games began to take a sudden turn in design. No longer did games remain faithful to the *D&D* design; new ideas began to take shape from those gamers and hobbyists who ventured away from Alpha Prime to expand and create their own games. The second wave followed a different philosophy from that which inspired them. In Beta Prime we begin to see an evolutionary step forward towards story and plot driven mechanics, leaving behind the wargaming legacy that formed the core of our home world Alpha Prime. This is not to say that games like *Call of Cthulhu* did not introduce these concepts ten years earlier, but the mechanics for these early pioneers still gave homage to *D&D* design fundamentals. The second wave gave us mechanics that lacked random charts, static resources such as gold-based economy systems, or rolling 3d6 for each attribute to generate numbers from 3–18. To give an example of such design and innovation, the core system for this galaxy will be White Wolf’s *Vampire the Masquerade*. To be fair, there are systems that came before it which began the snowballing effect, but it was White Wolf that really changed the tide. The Storyteller system brought much needed new design concepts such as point-based character generation (not that point-buy systems were anything new in game design, but they had









not been popular amongst the games in Alpha Prime), resources based on abstracts, and the much-needed unified die mechanic.

Games that followed in the second wave built on these concepts, broke away from wargame-based design, and introduced more and more abstract mechanics. A few examples would be *Deadlands*' poker-deck mechanic, *Fudge*'s "fudge die" and pyramid skill structure (which removed the idea of attributes altogether), or John Wick's innovative roll/keep system for *Legend of the Five Rings*.

### Beta-Prime core worlds

*Paranoia* (WEST END GAMES, 1984)  
*D6 system/Star Wars* (WEST END GAMES, 1986)  
*GURPS* (STEVE JACKSON GAMES, 1986)  
*Cyberpunk* (R. TALSORIAN GAMES, 1988)  
*Shadowrun* (FASA, 1989)  
*Amber* (PHAGE PRESS, 1991)  
*Vampire / Storyteller System* (WHITE WOLF, 1991)  
*Fudge* (GREY GHOST PRESS, 1992)  
*Deadlands* (PINNACLE ENTERTAINMENT, 1996)  
*Legend of the Five Rings* (AEG, 1997)

### Gamma Prime – third wave

The Gamma Prime galaxy gets difficult to explain without a huge nod to the rim worlds of Indie-Minor. This is not to say that the games that surround and populate Gamma Prime have their own evolutionary paths, but many of the games here have been heavily inspired by indie games whose design goals completely disconnected themselves from the previous two galaxies. To quickly try and define indie design is like trying to quickly give a lesson on quantum physics. While I am sure it can be done, it would eventually leave too many questions unanswered. The best way to categorize an indie game is to use the word "abstract"; indie design breaks all traditional molds and creates games that are custom-built around concept, instead of a mechanic with a setting placed on top. The founding fathers of the indie movement—Ron Edwards (*Sorcerer*, *Troll Babe*), Robin D. Laws (*Hero Quest*, *Feng Shui*, *Over the Edge*), and Jared Sorensen (*OctaNe*, *Inspectors*)—have influenced the way in which games of Gamma Prime were designed. This is not to say that traditional role-playing games are not part of this unique galaxy. Games such as Hero Games' *Fuzion* or Eden Studios' *Unisystem* have their loyal fan base, but in this third wave we were given games that not only challenged our gamist abilities, but challenged our inner narrativist in order to give us a role-playing experience that was outside the conventional boundaries. Gamma Prime does not have a true center (although one could argue for several games that could take this coveted spot); the worlds that make up this last galaxy are constantly changing orbit and evolving, some even forming newer worlds around the old.



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### Gamma-Prime core worlds

*Cortex / Cortex Plus* (MARGARET WEIS PRODUCTIONS, 2005 / 2010)  
*Unisystem* (EDEN STUDIOS, 2003)  
*Fate* (EVIL HAT, 2003)  
*Savage Worlds* (GREAT WHITE GAMES/PINNACLE ENTERTAINMENT, 2003)  
*PDQ* (ATOMIC SOCK MONKEY, 2003)  
*Gumshoe* (PELGRANE, 2012)  
*ORE* (ARC DREAM PUBLISHING, 2002)  
*Warhammer 40K* (FANTASY FLIGHT GAMES, 2008)  
*ICONS* (ADAMANT ENTERTAINMENT, 2010)

### Indie-Minor worlds

*Dogs in the Vineyard* (LUMPLEY GAMES, 2004)  
*Sorcerer* (ADEPT PRESS, 2002)  
*Kill Puppies for Satan* (LUMPLEY GAMES, 2002)  
*Apocalypse World* (LUMPLEY GAMES, 2010)  
*Breaking the Ice* (BLACK AND GREEN GAMES, 2005)  
*Dread* (THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM, 2006)  
*Burning Wheel* (2002)  
*octaNe* (MEMENTO MORI, 2003)

### Satellite worlds and moons

While not truly galaxies of their own accord, the following games deserve honorable mention to illustrate how game design eventually comes full circle. These systems are referred to as satellites and moons because they are offshoots of designs and concepts from all three major galaxies. By no means should it be implied that these games are not original or that they do not deserve recognition, but, in regards to design, they share more in common with their parent system of *Dungeons & Dragons*. The satellites sprang from the core of the Open Gaming License (OGL), derived from *D&D 3.0*. Wizards of the Coast (WotC) proposed that the core mechanics of *D&D* would become open source and allow for third-party publishers to create their own unique content. While this brought a lot of great supplements (and new games) to the shelves of the gaming public, it also brought into existence second-rate and badly-written drivel. As WotC tightened the reins on what could be published through the OGL, other companies (such as Green Ronin) took the development of *d20* to the next level by revamping the core mechanics and bringing about games such as *True 20* and *Mutants & Masterminds*. By 2008, when WotC dropped the OGL to focus more on the GSL (Gaming System License: an attempt to create an open license with more control over content) and *D&D 4th Edition*, Paizo publishing (former publishers of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines) continued to develop under the OGL and published *Pathfinder*, a streamlined version of the old 3.x *D&D* with a larger fan base than WotC might have anticipated.

### OGL Worlds

*Pathfinder* (PAIZO, 2009)  
*Mutants & Masterminds* (GREEN RONIN, 2002)  
*Spycraft / Fantasy Craft* (CRAFTY GAMES, 2005)  
*MicroLITE d20* (KOBOLD ENTERPRISES, 2008)

### *D&D Next* (WIZARDS OF THE COAST, 2012)

The OGL has, within the past five years, also sparked what is being called the "OSR" or Old School Renaissance. The OSR combines the resurging interest in the playing of older edition games and combining them with the open source licensing of the OGL. This freedom of the open content allows newer "retro-clones" such as *Swords & Wizardry*, *Labyrinth Lord*, and *Lamentations of the Flame Princess* to present the market with games that are compatible with out-of-print, older editions of *D&D* – games that can no longer be bought through commercial means, and may run a good price on Amazon or eBay. OSR games have recently gone beyond *D&D* emulation, inspiring role-playing games such as *Mutant Futures* and *Stars Without Number* that bring the play and feel of some of the older games (*Gamma World* and *Traveller*, in the example given) and use a familiar unified mechanic, *d20*. Where our journey began with *D&D*, it now returns.

### The moons of the OSR

*Dungeon Crawl Classics* (GOODMAN GAMES, 2012)  
*Swords & Wizardry* (MYTHMERE GAMES, 2008)  
*Labyrinth Lord* (GOBLINOID GAMES, 2007)  
*Castles & Crusades* (TROLL LORD GAMES, 2004)  
*Stars Without Number* (SINE NOMINE GAMES, 2010)  
*Astonishing Swordsmen & Sorcerers of Hyperborea* (NORTH WIND ADVENTURES, 2012)  
*Adventurer Conqueror King* (AUTARCH, 2011)

"What about my favorite game? Where does it fit?"

There are many great games that could be added to the lists (galaxies) above and it could be argued that those listed might be a better fit elsewhere. The examples shown here are meant to give the reader a guideline of RPG design history and a better understanding of how these games might relate to each other in mechanic design and theory.

By looking at the time frame in which a game was created it is easier to make that connection.

First wave: 1974–1989

Second wave: 1990–2002

Third wave: 2002–now

Granted, this cannot be the only factor to take into consideration. R. Talsorian's *Castle Falkenstein RPG* (published in 1991) easily fits into the third wave of design, and some would say that *CF* was one of the first true indie-style games on the market. Robin Laws' *Feng Shui* is another example of innovative game design, published years before the Forge philosophy made its way into the mainstream. The gaming cosmos is vast – amongst the planets and moons you can find new wonders and new experiences, ready to have you break out the dice bag. Be warned, brave explorers, the cosmos is not interminable – when you think you have found something new, you just might find that you have arrived back at the beginning. ■