

## Beyond the Mountains of Madness

We are nearing the end of our Beyond the Mountains of Madness (BtMoM) campaign (we might be done by the time you read this), and it has turned me off playing CoC for a while.

The plot is driven by random events and NPCs that exist to screw over the PCs and make their plight miserable with no chance to avoid these problems. Many movies work like this—bad things happen and continue to happen in succession as a means of driving the action forward. I watched *Red Planet* recently and it reminded me very much of BtMoM. While this may be enjoyable to watch, it is no fun to play. I enjoy being screwed over if I know it is a result of the actions and choices of my character, but I should not have to be a masochist to enjoy CoC.

If you want to do something intelligent, you will be railroaded by NPCs or the fact that there will be no game if you do not go along with The Plot. There are many opportunities for PC creativity and freedom, but ultimately they do not matter. Often, they are just a lull between the Next Big Thing That Will Happen No Matter What You Do. Even worse than being railroaded, I felt at the end that I was being manipulated.

Our GM did a wonderful job trying to mitigate these factors and gave us more latitude than was prescribed. In one case, he allowed us to find a clue the book explicitly said the PCs could not find. More importantly, he brought the NPCs to life and roleplayed them very well so that while I knew they were directing our every action, I at least enjoyed the ride for a while.

Terri and I have been watching *Stargate SG-1* on DVD and the commentators have referred to the “threshold of disbelief.” You never want to present a situation which causes the viewer to not “buy into” what is happening on the screen. And this is the problem that I had with BtMoM. There were too many times when I did not buy into what was happening and instead could sense the scenario designer pulling the strings. To mitigate these problems, I have tried to shift my perspective on the game and accept it for what it is rather than try to make it what I want. Unfortunately, I do not enjoy what it is.

Note that I did not have an issue with the game mechanics (except when they were ignored for The Plot) or Call of Cthulhu itself. So it is unfair to extend my displeasure of BtMoM at CoC in general, but the thought of going through another published CoC scenario leaves me cold.

## Blueberry Valley, Part I

Blueberry Valley gets its name from the wild blueberry bushes that used to grow there. Over the years, the rabbits would feed on the young blueberry shoots and that led to the eventual decay of the plants. This season, there were precious few blueberries and none to trade with neighboring warrens. There are still healthy blueberry bushes to be found, but they are in a garden protected by a fence and a dog. The rabbits of Blueberry Valley have given up hopes of having their precious blueberries again.

Princess Holly is, by all accounts, a royal pain in the butt. Daughter of the previous king and sister to the queen, she believes that the world owes her everything. She is gluttonous and slothful, and prone to mood swings and flights of fancy. When she did not receive any of her cherished blueberries on her name day, she threw a fit and continued to nag the King until he “did something about it.” In response, he sent her to Blueberry Valley along with two Owsla to obtain blueberries. When they failed to return within a quarter moon, Queen Bonny mourned for the return of her sister and nagged King Black Paw in sending a group of heroic rabbits (the PCs) to bring her back.

When Princess Holly and her escorts, Oakbud and Racer, arrived at the valley, they were met with suspicion. The valley residents certainly did not need another three mouths to feed and met their inquires with gruff explanations of how the blueberries are gone. The Owsla decided to investigate and brought Princess Holly along to keep her from upsetting the locals.

Princess Holly got herself caught in a trap and captured by humans. Fortunately for her, they are Jewish and rabbits are not kosher. They wanted to keep her as a pet and so created a nice modest hutch for her and fed her very well. Princess Holly, in her royal naiveté, thinks she is finally getting the treatment she deserves and refuses to leave.

The two Owsla, Oakbud and Racer, attempted a rescue when she was first captured, but the family dog ended up killing Racer. Shamed and afraid to return to the warren, Oakbud became a maverick. He has been stealing radish greens from the Blueberry Valley rabbits, who blame the fabled Ghost of the Haunted Oak.

The haunted oak is occupied by an insane maverick by the name of Snaggletooth, who is a master at mimicry. He uses his talents to scare away other rabbits and guard the horde of truffles that he discovered. He has also created a complex warren to hide his trove.

**Myles Corcoran**

I think it was pointed out on the Green Ronin message boards that the Hero Point mechanism of M&M is not a tacked-on rule and that it must be there for the damage save system to work. A new OGL frpg, Blue Rose, from Green Ronin will use the same mechanism.

Public speaking skills are independent of being an introvert. Extroverts can be very poor public speakers and in fact be deathly afraid of it. I would much rather give a talk in front of an auditorium (something I have done many times) than chit-chat at a cocktail party. See "Caring for Your Introvert."<sup>1</sup>

**Lee Gold**

In some cases, "false theories" like ether are mentioned in the context of explaining the process that lead to their dismissal. In most cases, they are not even mentioned. For example, electromagnetism is often taught from a historical perspective. We start from simple concepts, like electrical charge, and move to more complex ones like current and Gauss's Law, taking a detour at the Michelson-Morley experiments, and ending with Maxwell's equations and Special relativity. All this basically follows the historical development.

**Spike Y Jones**

Another rationale for No-Saving-Throw Death Traps is "realism;" specifically, a belief that "there is no way the character could have survived." This rationale is used to have villains act intelligently and set up traps that invading PCs cannot avoid.

**Paul Mason**

Of course there are conflicting senses of awareness when playing. In fact, it is much more complicated than you have mentioned. As a player or GM, you not only have to be aware of your character and the collaborative story being created, but also you have to be aware of the other characters, the other players (and what they are getting out of the experience), the (often unspoken) social contract of the game and the group, the conventions of the genre, the implications of the game rules, and other factors that may have nothing to do with the game. As a player or GM, you have to balance all these factors and decide what happens both inside and outside the game.

Maintaining a single point of view, participant or audience, in-character or out-of-character, actor or auteur, gamer or roleplayer, is neither desirable nor possible. The human mind is perfectly capable of maintaining all these states simultaneously. Rather

than trying to compartmentalize these points of view, we should be embracing all of them and approaching the roleplaying experience holistically.

I dislike jargon for a variety of reasons. The vast majority of roleplaying analyses and theories simply restate the obvious. Adding jargon obscures the key issues. Once you introduce jargon into a debate, the debate often morphs to be about the jargon rather than the key issues. Terms like "immersion" and "narrative" are relative terms and have different meanings to different people. Rather than simplify an argument by creating a standardized term, jargon often makes the analysis more verbose. In the time and space it takes to define jargon, the key concept could have already been communicated. More often than not, I find that authors use jargon to *sound* intellectual in lieu actually *being* intellectual—using weighty words to support hollow ideas. Rather than being constructive, I find the use of jargon distracting, pretentious, and detrimental to the credibility of the author and the quality of the writing.

**Brian Misiaszek**

"Taking the safeties off" as you describe rewards lucky players and encourages an "if I die, it's just a game" mentality. This can be fun, but it can also suck the fun out of the game, especially if some of the players want to keep the safeties on.

I agree with your comments to Paul Mason. Roleplaying is about actively doing, not passively listening or simply following along with the GM's narrative plans. Playing should stop when the players and GM collectively want to stop.

Proper endings without dangling plot threads also make transitioning to the next game easier. You do not have to worry about missing players or people forgetting or losing track of the original thread.

**Marco Subias**

Tri-Stat dX is a generic, non-supers rpg based on SAS (Tri-Stat dX is to SAS as Hero is to Champions) and is available as a free download from RPGnow.

**Jonathan Woolley**

The physical ability modifiers seem awfully high. The average human baby would have a STR of 8 and a CON of 20! However, the concept looks sound.

"Too many words dilute and blur ideas.... If you have nothing to say and want badly to say it, then all the words in all the dictionaries will not suffice."  
Eric Hoffer, 1977.

1 <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2003/03/rauch.htm>