CONTEST: YOUR CHARACTER DRAWN

OUTLAND SYSTEM

Excavator Monthly™

Official magazine for The Mutant Epoch™ milieu

TME Role Playing Game • Fiction • Art

In this issue...

PC GENERATION VAT:
BONUS OFFER SYSTEM

RELICS RECOVERED:
• GRENADE MAT
• LASER TIPPED BULLET

SIGHTINGS:
A LONG AGO MEETING WITH THE REAL ROAD WARRIOR: MEL GIBSON

CAUSES OF FACTIONAL WARFARE

PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE:
AGREED UPON RENDEZVOUS

NEW SKILL: ACROBATICS

INHABITANTS:
• COLONEL BAJINK
• VELOCIA CLAWHANDS

50 PC GOALS, DRIVES & OBSESSIONS

GM'S BUNKER:
• ADVERSARIES ENCOUNTERED
• PLAYER HANDOUTS
• KEEP THEM DICE ROLLIN'

EVOLUTIONS:
• WASTE GRAZER
• PUS WORM
• HACKOID

William McAusland

Outland Arts.com

www.mutantepoch.com

Excavator Monthly

Official magazine for The Mutant Epoch milieu
TME Role Playing Game • Fiction • Art

Issue 4

Looking to Advertise in Excavator Monthly? Email us at info@outlandarts.com for prices and details.

In This Issue

Last Round

Issue 3 took a look at Character Type Similarity and Rotation, which talked about switching up the characters in a newly crafted adventure team, as well as urging players to try different character types instead of playing within their comfort zone. Similarity looked at reasons why all the characters would instead start game play as the same type, often to suit the needs of a GM's adventure. PC generation vat showcased the Fixed Value Allotment style of character generation, followed by an extensive players perspective article which answers the question of just how did the characters meet each other?

Our third installment of the magazine also had three new creatures, the Devil spider, shown on the cover, as well as the jaw crawler and mutant perch. The bounty Hunter Karrel Bedsworth and wanted wild-man cannibal Pegleg Pete were the NPC inhabitants, while new relics included the always popular landmine detection coil and advanced grenade launcher.

Concluding the magazine took a look at both silver coins and old world currency and the armaments of regular post-apocalyptic forces. We closed with the last of our treasure table series, although we plan to add more in upcoming issues.

Cover of EM issue 3

Next Round

Issue 5 covers plenty of gritty post-apocalyptic gaming goodness, such as three GM's bunker articles: The Price of a bullet, Using name tags and tent cards, and turn time limits for players. PC generation Vat is a biggie this time around, covering the generic excavator as a pre-game caste, bypassing the traditional caste backgrounds for characters and implying that your character was born into the digger trade, just as a farmer's son or daughter might be expected to become a farmer, too.

Player's Perspective discusses camping in the ruins, and whether or not it's suicidal or tactically prudent for your dig team to do so. Evolutions in issue five bring us the Pony Sapien, Botamorto and dreaded Gaswing while in the non player character department we bring Lillabi the Blue and Tyrone the Ruthless. Lillabi is a for-hire airship captain, and Tryone, as his name implies, is the ruthless mercenary captain of the Dust Devils Brigade, quite the opposite sort of mercenary from the lovely Velocia Clawhand, featured in this issue as an NPC and gracing our cover.

Next issue's relics recovered are the energy shield and potent Medusa stun staff, while an adventure bound article entitled Terrorize Them discusses horror in at post-apocalyptic setting.

To close out the issue, we announce the The Post-Apocalyptic photo contest, have a write up on Ruin ecology, and much more.

Cover of EM issue 5

From HQ

We are pleased to let you know that we now have a Facebook page dedicated solely to The Mutant Epoch at **http://www.facebook.com/The-MutantEpoch** We've been late to the Facebook scene on account of not quite being sure how to incorporate it with our twitter feed, blog and website. I've heard facebook is popular so assumed many of our fans are already using it, so... why not make it easier for those of you employing the social media giant to stay con-

nected to the latest from The Mutant Epoch milieu. By the way, my twitter handle is @mutantlord and our blog can be found at http://themutantepoch.blogspot.com/

Regards, Will McAusland
    Creator

Media Chatter
Blogs & Websites

While we list the following blog on our website, we want to draw more attention to it since it is excellent: **The Apocalyptic Post http://www.apocalypticpost.com/** They cover a lot of great stuff, although there is some overlap with what we have presented in our newsletter Outland Arts Insider. For an example of their great content, check out the radiation dose chart from July 2011, PA dioramas by Jason Van Horne (August 2009) post apocalyptic fashion and more.

Another interesting blog is the **Solo Nexus**, described as a **A solo Tabletop Gaming Appreciation Blog** found at **http://solonexus.blogspot.com/**. This may have been a better addition to issue 2, where we had an article called regarding solo play gaming. At any rate, a fellow called Ricardo there has rolled up a The Mutant Epoch character called Zendar and I'm looking forward to see how he uses him in a campaign. A question then, gentle reader, have you tried solo tabletop RPG gaming beyond just testing rules or encounters, new creatures and whatnot? If you have, we'd like to hear about how it went.

In Case of Survival: http://incaseofsurvival.com A blog that is 'obsessed with the apocalypse in all its trivial detail' . We've just discovered this site, which has some interesting polls, reflections on the Occupy Wall Street movement as the possible start of a slow decline toward the apocalypse, discussions on some PA games and other media, as well as very real concerns like losing loved ones and threats you may not have considered. Of course, like so much out there concerning the apocalypse, it is very near future and doesn't cover cyborgs, mutants, psionics or synthetic humans. Still, its a great blog and we highly recommended you stopping by.

We also showcase other websites, youtube videos and online content in our newsletter, so make sure you're signed up at **http://www.outlandarts.com/TME-OA-outlandarts-insider-newsletter.htm**

GM's Bunker

Adversaries Encountered

By Alexander Waby
Illustrated by W. McAusland

How does a GM decide how many foes to throw against the player characters? In every pre-packaged or home made adventure a certain number of encountered adversaries, either fixed or random, is mentioned, but depending on the PC's strengths, numbers or existing injuries, and desired flow of the story, the number of attackers might be too many or too few. When writing an adventure, a handy way to allot the number is by stating the amount per character. For example, the GM could assign one adversary per character if they are not terribly challenging foes, such as poorly armed raiders or skullocks. If the opponents are tougher than the characters, the GM may want to divide the number present by deciding to unleash one monster per two or three PCs, ensuring that the fight is still perilous, but allows most of the characters to survive. When numerous but weak attackers approach a dig team, the number per PC is increased, and could be presented as a die number such as d3 , d4 or d6 against each character, or a set number such as 2 gutter rats per character, or 3 skal birds per PC, etc.

Another obvious consideration is the whether the adventure is designed for a low, mid and high rank excavators. The adventure rank is not the rank of each character, but the set difficulty of the adventure itself, since an excavation team might have a mix of green and veteran characters. For example it is common to have established 7th or higher ranking characters exploring alongside new, replacement 1st, 2nd, or 3rd rankers along as well, who clearly gain ranks faster by tagging along with better armed and skilled diggers, yet at the cost of facing off with more numerous or terrible antagonists.

An example of how to write up an encounter so that PCs of any rank will always be challenged is to establish something like this: The PCs turn a corner in the rubble strewn street, and step into the husk of a collapsed shopping mall area. Suddenly, from both sides, they spot cave scorpions that are busy feeding on several dead excavators they have recently killed. GM note: Their will be 1 cave scorpion for every 3 low rank PCs, 1 per PC for mid rank characters, and 2 advancing for each high rank PC*.

Alternatively, especially for street encounters in towns and villages, the GM can list an encounter as thus: Local thugs, who have been watching the characters for awhile, have decided to accost the group at the first opportunity. They make their move in a secluded street, emerging from alleys, around crates, old oil drums, and a broken wagon. There will be 2 thugs (treat as raiders using clubs) for each PC plus d6, with half coming from behind, the other half ahead, their leader, treat as a raider leader, smiles and demands the PC's relics and coins... or else.

In the second example above, the street encounter, the goal of the conflict is not to present the final epic battle between the PCs and their nemesis, but rather to stress the dangers of street life in the new era, and regardless of PC rank, the attackers think they have the upper hand and vastly outnumber the characters. An encounter like this is to challenge the characters, get the blood flowing for the players, and test the PC's mettle. For a small, low rank character group, they will likely get the stuffing kicked out of them by the bandits and robbed of any loot they had, while a high rank group would annihilate the thugs and earn a reputation around town as a team to give respect, and possible assignments.

Establishing encounter strength is somewhat intuitive. Creatures and robots in The Mutant Epoch do not have a difficulty rating in their stats, but probably should. Game masters who are new to The Mutant Epoch and outland system, but not new to the tabletop RPG hobby, will of course be a pretty good judge of how potent certain adversaries are based on their size, endurance, number of attacks and how much damage they deal out, along with mutations, implants, the use of poison or other special defenses and attacks they may possess.

Published TME adventures offer up creatures based on the suggested PC number and ranks for that adventure and can serve as a guideline for a GM's own adventure modules. On the other hand, without the guidance of a published adventure, the GM can consult the encounter tables in the Hub Rules on pages 129 to 134 to get an idea of how many of each beast, human band or robotic unit should be thrown at the PCs. Failing that, the actual statistics of a creature can be reviewed to discern the challenge of the entity. In short, any creature with an endurance score of 25 or less should be easily dealt with by a low rank character, so have an equal number of these critters, plus a handful extra, thrown at the PCs. Creatures of between 26 and 40 endurance might present a more serious threat, so insert a few less than the number of characters in the adventure team. Larger, tougher beings may need to arrive one or two at a time for the GM to gauge the strength of the party, and then only after previously testing the character's strengths, their player's rpg skill, and how well the PC's work as a team.

Of course, the above endurance based measurement system doesn't take into account small creatures which may use poison, man sized foes with powerful relic weapons or mutations, or even enormous creatures and robots encrusted in cybernetic implants or other potent offensive and defensive capabilities. For example, sending 6+d4 tiny venomous bats up against 6 first rank characters will probably leave one or more of the PCs unconscious for several minutes, which in the ruins, could be fatal.

For a game master new to The Mutant Epoch RPG, it is probably a good idea to test the characters with a few minor combat events prior to having the PCs tackle the main villain and his henchmen. As already mentioned, these warm-ups are just to see if the players are able to work together, employ long range weapons, use cover if fired upon, remember to utilize any mutations or implants, or better yet, take some action which allows them to avoid the fight altogether. Conflict avoidance

*Low ranks 1st to 4th, mid ranks 5th to 9th, and high ranks 10 th and up.

can sometimes be the smartest thing to do for the characters, particularly where the fight doesn't involve any intended targets or seems unprofitable. Eliminating, dissuading or eluding foes before a fight even starts can be done by diplomacy, deception, evasion, or by making use of traps and natural hazards in the environment to do the dirty work for a team.

Finally, the GM is encouraged to always test play a few combats between GM created player characters against the creatures in the hub Rules book, adversaries in published TME adventures, or home created foes. Of course, the death of player characters can only be expected, but frequent deaths encounter after encounter, or even total party kills every session is going too far for most scenarios. Players whose characters die regularly will not enjoy the game and seek other entertainment.

Determining the difficulty of an encounter is walking a fine line. If the engagements are too easy, the PCs will become overconfident or bored, while a fight that is too dangerous will either drive off the adventurers, or wipe them out.

To summarize, how then does a GM ultimately make sure he or she isn't sending too many adversaries at the PCs? The answer is in test playing. When designing one's own adventure, it is particularly important to do a quick test battle between newly crafted beasts or robots, as well as at key encounter points in the module to ensure they aren't too powerful for the characters. If the scrap is a random encounter with few ties to the plot of the adventure, make sure it leaves the PCs fit enough to continue on to the objective. On the other hand, a fight involving the climatic end battle should leave the characters bloodied, with a few unconscious or possibly even dead characters lying on the battlefield.

AW

Keep them dice Rollin'

A GM's Bunker Article *by A. Waby*

Keeping the pace of the game going is essential to a lively tabletop RPG session. One area of the game which can be sped up is random result resolution... or dice rolling.

There are three main ways to keep the dice tumbling. First, make sure each player has their own set of polyhedron dice and that they can quickly identify one dice from the next. Secondly, the GM to can assign players with the task of rolling a dice, even on the GM's behalf with the results likely never known to the player. Finally, make use of the same dice in repeated rolls in quick secession. These three methods are described below.

It is important for players to each have their own set of polyhedron dice, at least by the second session. Of course, it is likely that avid gamers will have more than one set, and if a GM knows that new players will be attending a session, to ask the experienced players to bring along their extra dice in the event that newbies may need them. Many dice sets come as one color, which is handy for telling your dice form those of the person next to you, but often make it hard for a new gamer to differentiate one dice from another, especially the d8 and d10, or d10 and d12. It might be agreeable to all for regular players to switch up their dice so that each set contains a variety of colors, so that one player or the GM can tell a novice to use the green dice, instead of pointing to a pile and saying, "the twelve sided one, no, the other twelve sided one, not the ten sided." You get the picture.

As for keeping the pace of the game moving that much faster by calling for the same dice to be used during a certain task or encounter, here are some examples: The premise here is that whatever dice is first called upon to make a roll, is usually picked up immediately after.

GM: "Roll d6, please."

Brad shakes the dice and rolls it for everybody to see. He doesn't touch it until its stopped moving and everybody can observe the result. "Five." Declares Brad.

GM reads something from behind the GM's screen. "Yikes, five skullocks step out of the tall grass; their machete's glinting in the fire light. Roll d6 again."

Brad: "oh, a three, is that good?"

GM, reading from the prepared adventure again. "One tries to speak English. 'Gimme you water and your food and we go. Just water and food, or die,' now, Brad, what do you say or do?"

Brad: "I thrust my flame unit in their direction and say 'No way, you ugly friggin' freaks, without that water, I'll never make it home."

GM, reading fast: "The skullocks give each other nervous glances, Brad, roll d6 yet again,"

Brad, rolls, everybody sees a 6 go face up.

GM: "The Skullocks lower their weapons and begin to pace backwards, their leader says 'no troubles, human, not tonight,' and they vanish into the dead grass."

A second way of speeding up game play is for the game master to ask players to roll dice on his or her behalf. There are two reasons to do this. The first is merely to keep the players involved and contribute in-game results, even unknowingly, based on what they roll. This can be quite fun because the other players will watch and be witnesses to the die results, knowing that the GM is consulting a table someplace and not arbitrarily picking results. By a player's roll being used to determine adventure details, it ensures truly random and unknown encounters, circumstances, rewards or other in-game outcomes, keeping things lively and unpredictable for everybody at the table, including the game master.

Besides keeping the players involved when asked to roll the dice for the GM, there are practical speed of play benefits to having the players make referee rolls. Often, a GM is faced with a loot table, random rumor or encounter table, etc. and while holding the book with one hand, and scrolling along the random list with his other hand, he has no free hand to grab and roll a dice. By asking a specific player to roll, the GM doesn't have to set the book or his notes down and can continue getting dice results from players. It is best to ask different players each time to roll, keeping everybody involved and contributing to in-game outcomes, albeit passively at this point.

Another more typical use of the repeated dice is when writing one's home brew adventures, for example, making an encounter list for an area might involve a d8 roll, and the creatures on it appear either as solitary opponents or d8 in number or d8 +3 or 2d8, etc, and in one special case, say with more skullocks, there is a 1 in 8 chance that each is carrying a survival rifle.

Here is another example: Result 6 (from a d6 roll) Wagon People, 3d6+4 families (man, woman, d3 teens, d3 children) each wagon has d6 cows, d3 calves and a 2 in 6 chance of a bull. Also, each wagon has d3 (d6 divided by 2) militia soldiers armed with muskets walking along beside it.

To sum up, in a well described, challenging tabletop game, rolling dice should be smooth and rapid fire, getting to the results of the roll quickly and moving the adventure along to the next scene. At the very least, keeping dice in players hands will ensure that they don't have time to pull out a smart phone.
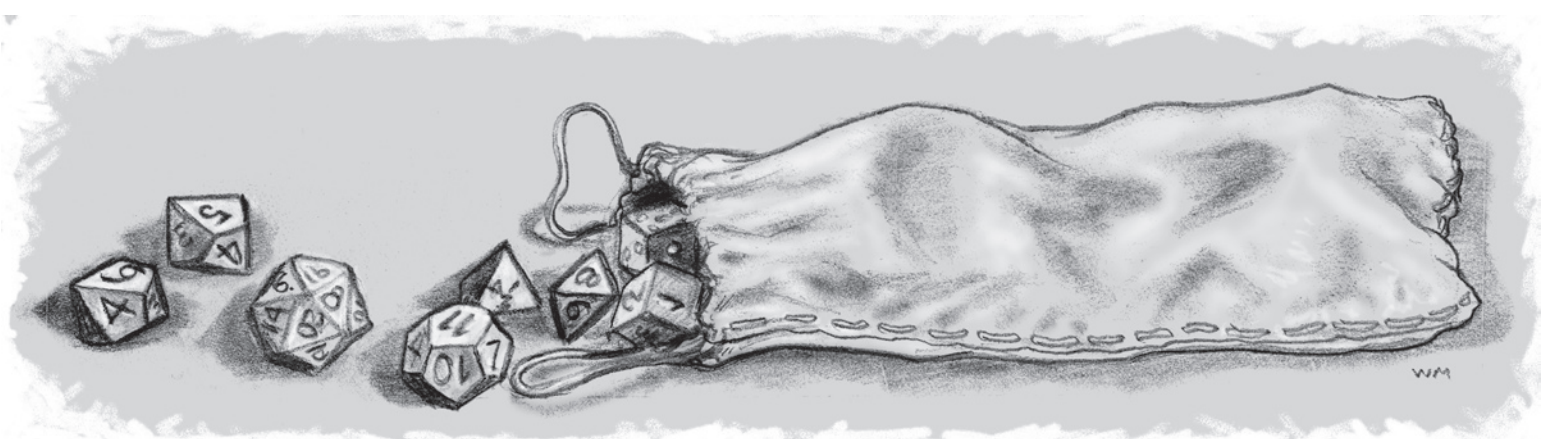
Creating Intriguing Handouts

A GM's Bunker Article *By Alexander Waby*

Illustrations and Maps by William McAusland

It is important for a game master to put as much of the role-playing game experience into the players hands as possible, literally.

The key difference between computer games and dice chucking, paper and pencil games are both the obvious social aspects as well as the tactile factors. Beyond the dice and actual papers, pens and books, there are the all-important handouts. Giving a player a tattered, torn and blood stained map is perhaps among the best tools to immerse players into an adventure and the setting. Perhaps the map is also ripped into a dozen bits and the players must physically assemble it as their characters do, possibly gaining new bits of the map throughout their quest. Besides using a map to a location, a handout could be an encoded sheet, and the characters somehow come by another document later, which is the decoding index. Any decoding should be done outside of gaming session time by one or more players who can report their findings to each other by phone or email, or at the start of the next session to remind fellow players of what happened last time.

Maybe part of the code index has a bullet hole through it, making it more challenging, furthermore, what if the decoded message relates to a message on a strange ancient map they found in an earlier quest, which has numbers on it which correspond to some sort of entrance way or stashed loot pile, or, has no hint of what is at that numbered location. If your campaign is set in what was once the a southwestern Untied States or in what is left of the Los Angeles area, there will be a lot of Spanish speaking inhabitants. In these areas English and Spanish have probably evolved into a local language. If the GM had a Spanish phrase book, he could make a map that had Spanish notes written on it. Again, players would have to go away and research the clues to properly read the map, or at least understand the warnings written in blood, in Spanish, with an arrow pointing to a suspicious area of the map.

Of course, any decoding or looking up phrases in Spanish should not be done during the precious hours of an actual gaming session, instead, for best effect and progressive game pace, the timing of a hand-out should coincide with the completion of a phase in the ongoing adventure. A game master may wish to reveal information slowly, over many sessions, as a sort of side story to the main action, with these codes and maps somehow involving the inclusion of their arch-enemy. Such a villain may not have thus far appeared in the game, and may only turn up because he or she or it, is also after the map and codes to uncover the loot stockpile or ancient military bunker. Likewise, the bad guy could find out that the

characters are trying to uncover the his evil plot, locate his base, or otherwise use the documents, rumors and maps to mess up his plans, and so, must eliminate the PCs.

Mixing actual documents with in-game clue hunting is enjoyable, and is also a great way to get players behind their character and do a little acting. For example, say a letter is given to the characters and refers to a contact at a local leather works shop, saying something like, "My man, Grethrat, will know more about the doings of the local slaver. Go ask for him at the leather work mill in the lower part of town. You will know him by his scaled skin and bald, ruby red head. Identify yourselves as the help sent by me, Corporal Daviths and mention the password you uncovered in the coded message I sent earlier. By the way, he hates pure stocks since they killed his wife, so only a visible mutant should talk to him as he has the temper of a narkanna."

Above, at the top of this article, the term tactile was used to describe the use of physical props used in game play. This differs of course from wearing costumes to a game session, which many people find too weird and often freaks out potential new players; however, there are a great many other items that can be extraordinarily helpful to a GM. Prop items might include a deck of playing cards, cut outs from magazines showing an item of hardware that the group has found, or, if nobody can draw, even clipping out people from magazines and newspapers can help to provide an image of a NPC the character's meet. These photos can be cropped and glued to an NPC character sheet, and, possibly used for the illustration of a player character.

Being a paper and pen game, however, most handouts will be some form of printed text or image. There is a long tradition in the RPG industry of player handouts being included within a published adventure or module. The Mutant Epoch adventures also rely on handouts as well as internal artwork. Some of the artwork is meant merely to illustrate the text, text which is only intended for the GM to read so unwise to hold up and show the players. In such cases, and if time is permitting, a GM might want to go to an office supply store or copy centre and throw the illustrated page on a photocopier and enlarge the images, cut away excess type and use that as a player handout to show what or who they meet. In other cases, a player handout is a separate page in the product, used to pass around, but still limited to the size of the printer paper or book. Again, time and money permitting, the game master could take all handouts and maps to the copy center and enlarge them on 11x17 sheets. Outland Arts has no problem with their customers photocopying material for personal use, so there is no copyright problems there.

These copies, or original hand-crafted player handouts, need not be copied on stark white paper, and instead could be printed on tan or green paper or something, and then, once at home, made more interesting to the players by 'antiquing' the documents. Many methods exist to make a plain paper into a well-used, torn, stained 'treasure map' or lost letter, but for a quick and effective method, simply lay it out flat, use an old toothbrush and spatter it with red wine or cherry juice for blood stains, maybe dab your fingers or palm into the stains and leave gory fingerprints of the guy who died writing the map, possibly leave droplets on the upper edge of the map then hold the sheet up and let the blood run down the surface, making it both interesting and harder to read. Finally, when dry, step on it with some work boots, use a lighter to burn a hole through a non-essential area, or burn the edges (NOT recommended for minors! Please be careful here, do this in a safe area, such as over a sink filed with water or the bathtub, as you don't want to light your house on fire!). Finally, stab the document with a pencil (bullet holes), rip it in places, then, fold it, unfold it, then crumple and un-crumple it. If you are handy with watercolors, you could stain it with assorted browns and yellows, but dipping, sponging, spattering and soaking the document with well-steeped tea or black coffee can also make for a remarkable wear-and-tear and aging effects.

Player handouts may occasionally include photographic evidence or images sent to the characters by a robotic scout, possibly transmissions sent by a friendly NPC or family member to one of the characters. Often, digital pictures become distorted in transmission; files are grainy or pixilated, blurry and unclear, adding to the mystery. A GM with a image manipulation program could alter drawings of his or her own, or those shamelessly stolen from other sources. To create an over-pixilated, on-the-ground, frontline image, such as one taken from a helmet camera on a scout just before whatever he was observing crushes him flat. Simply make an image at very low resolution, such as 10 dpi, then, zoom in until it fills the screen. The pixels should appear as squares, or at least very grainy. Then, take a screen picture (print screen), copy paste it into a new blank image area at the same resolution but so it will print out on your inkjet, and there you have it, a handout of some facility, creature, person or object, all that could be acquired from the transmission, all the players have to go on either to identify who, where or what they are looking for. An example of this sort of handout is of a hoverwolf from a helmet cam, which for SOE members can be used in conjunction with the freely downloadable robot in the member's area's Downloads section under Relic Repository.

In closing, using physical objects other than the usual dice, papers, pens and pencils are an excellent way to bring a sense of discovery and focus to your game sessions. Its as though part of The Mutant Epoch world has fallen into your player's hands, something they can pass around, interpret, speculate upon, and give their eyes and hands something to grasp, some evidence of this other, alternate, more dangerous future age.

The following player handouts are just a few of the examples of what is possible using the techniques described above.

Publisher's note: For Society of Excavator members, a collection of generic maps, are also available for free download within the member's area at www.mutantepoch.com. The handouts shown in this article are also available full size for free download, as well as blank versions of these sheets without writing or map elements on them, ready for you to fill in yourself. Go to **http://www.outlandarts.com/ TME-Excavator-Monthly-Magazine-issue4-handouts.htm**