

Issue 6

ARTICLE: SCAVENGERS AND EXCAVATORS... WHAT'S THE DIF?

Excavator Monthly™

Official magazine for **The Mutant Epoch™** milieu

TME Role Playing Game • Fiction • Art

INHABITANTS:

- GRAYDON THE MAD
- ZAKO THE DEALER

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- SURVIVAL PISTOL
- OVER-ARMOR-TAC-HARNES

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M. Ausland
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Excavator Monthly ²

Official magazine for **The Mutant Epoch** milieu

TME Role Playing Game • Fiction • Art

Issue 6

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From HQ

This is the last Excavator Monthly magazine for the foreseeable future. We are planning to switch to a larger quarterly magazine for issue 7. What will it be called? Well, we're thinking Excavator Quarterly issue 1, although the debate goes on. What we do know is that each issue will be at least 88 pages, and be large enough to contain full adventures, more robust and in-depth coverage of various post-apocalyptic game content, more

treasure tables, relics, critters, character creation styles and options, bigger art, player handouts and more. Imagine a freakish horror version Excavator Monthly, something that is more worthwhile to buy as a print version instead of just a pdf, although all the player hand out and GM resource content in each magazine will be available to Society of Excavator members on our site.

We are very excited about the new up-armored TME periodical, although it is a bit sad to see Excavator Monthly see its final issue.

Many of our loyal readers may want to know why end the monthly magazine, although those of you on the SOE members forum may already know the answer. In short, Excavator Monthly took an entire month to create, even with much of the art and writing already created months if not years in advance. Doing the magazine each month took all our time and effort and left almost nothing for work on the upcoming source books, adventures, fiction, SOE free content, forum posting, blog updates, and related TME content.

Worse, the magazine was cutting into our gaming time. Test playing The Mutant Epoch adventures and supplements is essential to the creation of great gaming publications, plus, we like to try other games, as well as paint miniatures and work on other Outland Arts products such as the Fantasy Clip inks and our fantasy RPG using the Outland System. In short, if Excavator Monthly were to continue, it would mean an unacceptable delay to the release of such books as Pitford: Gateway to the Ruins, The Crossroads Region Gazetteer, Mutant Bestiary One, Blood Road, Nuke Tower, The Flesh Weavers, and the Mutant Epoch Expansion Rules book.

We suspect that TME gamers will appreciate the changes to come, and be thankful for the forthcoming releases.

Sincerely

William McAusland

Creator of The Mutant Epoch

Last Round

Issue 5 of Excavator Monthly added a lot of new content to The Mutant Epoch game library, with the popular Generic Excavator character generation system, Treasure Table EM-4, plus articles on ruin ecology, camping in the ruins, turn time limits and using tent cards and name tags at the game table. For the game master there was an article

on how to use horror in your post apocalyptic campaigns while new creatures included the unpredictable Pony Sapien, the horrid Botamoto and a foul, floating jellyfish-like monster called the Gaswing. Under new relics we introduced the Energy Shield, Medusa Stun Staff, Tactical Knife and potent Recon Carbine. Under non-player characters readers were introduced to a freelance airship captain called Lillabi the Blue, and her nemesis and former lover, Tyrone the Ruthless.

Next Round

As of the completion of issue 6, Excavator Monthly is mutating drastically, with Issue 7 morphing into issue 1 of larger format Excavator Quarterly Magazine. To learn more about Excavator Quarterly, or whatever we end up calling the new publication, read the from HQ section on the previous page. EQ1 will contain a hoard of new TME content, including the solo adventure Devil Dogs. The cover is a collaborative effort by penciled Fraser Hallett, and painted by Larry Mako showing a three armed mutant-



Cover of EM issue 5



Cover line art for Excavator Quarterly issue 1 by Fraser Hallett

cyborg woman who will be a featured NPC in the issue. Danny Seedhouse will also present us with a very useful article on medical prosthetics... very similar to cybernetic implants in many respects, yet your character doesn't need to be a cyborg PC to employ these relic wonders... just an amputee.

Media Chatter

WIZARDS: In March 2012 Ralph Bakshi's cult classic WIZARDS will be released on Blue-Ray. This 20th Century Fox film from 1977 is described as a blend of science fiction and fantasy, Wizards takes place on a post-apocalyptic Earth and follows the tale of Avatar, a wizard striving to protect his realm from his evil brother Blackwolf and hordes of mutants created by nuclear fallout. Here is a youtube link to take a look: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fm1dsnTuBkM&feature=related>

Role-Playing Tips: You may have seen this link on our website or are already a subscriber, but if not, we highly recommend you check out role-playing tips at <http://www.roleplayingtips.com/subscribe/> Johnn Four, the owner and publisher, has been sending out this newsletter for 11 years, and best of all , its free! All you need to do is follow the link and sign up with your name and email and you're done!

Wastelander Panda: Here's one to watch: Wastelander Panda by Epic Films. So far they just have the prologue up and are looking at a whole TV series shot in Australia. Looks pretty good so far, if not weird. You don't often see bestial human in live action, except of course people dressed as furies at conventions. <http://vimeo.com/35546493> Best to let the whole clip load before clicking play.

Doomsday Preppers (National Geographic Channel) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUMOTOkNALg> Again, this is probably more of a near future survivalist themed resource, but nonetheless very interesting. Perhaps game masters could get ideas on setting up prepper stockpiles for the characters to come across. If nothing else, I hope you are inspired to go buy a few cans of food, some water bottles, bags of rice and a baseball bat for a potential economic collapse.





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GM's Bunker

Player Controlled NPCs

By Alexander Waby

Illustrated by William McAusland

Here is the situation, one of your players has had his character killed off and the game session is in mid-action; certainly not the time to stop the adventure and have the player roll up a new character. What to do? Instead of having the mourning player sit on the sidelines and watch the rest of the session, maybe he can salvage the evening by handling one or more NPCs on behalf of the game master. Of course, if the adventure is occurring half a kilometer below the earth in an ancient industrial complex, it is unlikely that the team will come across many humans, as would be the case in a city or along a well used trade road. Depending on the GM's willingness to change the session scenario, he or she might still be able to come up with a friendly or at least approachable NPC that the players can interact with, and another player can control.

The task here is to quickly introduce the player to the NPC he or she is about to conduct. An explanation of why

the non-player character is present, what side he or she is on, and what objectives this person might have need some clarification. Oftentimes, it is easier to play a totally self directed PC than a GM 'loaned' non-player character that requires motivations, personality and a history, but at the same time it can be a role playing challenge, an opportunity to get behind a character that the player would never have consciously decided to create or control. Furthermore, a NPC must make sense to the environment and circumstances of the adventure, to fit into the story, and of course, be noticeably different than the recently deceased PC the player was presenting. In this case, when a player who has no regular character and is instead urged to control an NPC, the GM and Player should have a time out away from the other players to have a quick discussion about who the NPC is and what he is up to. If during game play the player who controls the NPC needs help, information or direction, the GM can fill in the blanks with additional NPC stated dialogue or, slip the player a note.

Besides assigning NPCs for players to control when their own PC is either killed or immobilized, it is also entertaining to hand over these secondary or temporary roles when a player's main character is 'off-camera' such as when the adventure focuses on the deeds of just one gamer's character. Normally if the team splits,



those PCs not in the scene are inactive, which for their players could be boring. By giving those players relevant NPCs to conduct, it not only keeps their attention on the game, but keeps them playing in an entertaining capacity. Many times, a gamer will conduct an NPC in an altogether new way from his or her own PC, and will portray the in-game person as being unaware of the deeds and events which the non-player character would have no knowledge of. Having your players control other people in the game world can quickly cure players of meta gaming, which is playing as if the in-game persona knows what the players know, such as if an NPC who has never met the main characters knows that they are really spies, or ghost mutants. It might be an idea to get each player familiar with picking up a role now and then by playing the street urchin in the back alley, a scav met on a cliff side trail, or a cruel slaver who has captured one of the adventurers.

Another excellent use for player controlled NPCs is to introduce new gamers or curious observers to the hobby by just handing them an NPCs sheet and notes. Give the loiterer a minute to read it over and then immerse them into the story. For a person who isn't sure if tabletop RPGs are for them, this could be a handy way to give them an inside glimpse at the story telling aspect of the game and how dice work. This NPC based demo may allow them to quickly determine if it is an activity they want to explore further, perhaps by rolling up a full fledged character and joining the gaming group. Of course, if the idea of playing a fictional role is not their thing, the NPCs they handled for awhile can be returned to the GM's control with little loss of time or story flow.

The best result of a player controlled NPC 'extra' is whereby the NPC is adopted by the player and either becomes a secondary or main player character for that gamer. For this reason, the less game master input into the NPC's history, identity and motivations, the better. If a GM has time, he or she could generate a collection of non-player characters, rolled up as regular characters and ready to go if an NPC is needed on the fly. Just roll randomly or select the most appropriate typical human from table TME-4-10 in the Hub Rules, page 137, and if he or she turns out to be worthy of being a player character, roll up the individual's traits should he or she survive to the end of the session. The following are just a few examples of NPCs that a player could control, perhaps even adopt. The random rolls for each area location are simply a suggestion for GMs who might want to generate an NPC who fits into a terrain or vicinity.

Table EM-6-1 NPCs Discovery Areas

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NPCs Found In Ruins Roll d6

1. Slave: This NPC has been kept by local humanoids, Mecha, savages, or cultists as a servant. He will have nothing but rags and quite possibly be in chains, severely malnourished and disfigured. Although possessing information on the local baddies, such as who they are, general numbers, escape routes, and other prisoners, he might not have much useful intel on the details of his masters as far as command centers, relic stockpiles, treasury location, traps and other defenses. This individual will be well motivated to join an adventure team to either flee the area or seek revenge upon former masters.

2. Human Sacrifice: This prisoner has been purchased as a slave or captured from a far off caravan, farm or community and brought to the ruins by humanoids, savages or human cultists to either be sacrificed to their god or fed to some great beast to appease its appetite. A rescued human sacrifice could be of any caste, including a captured player character, and might be discovered in a cell, on the blood stained altar of some cult, or met wandering alone in the ruins still tied and covered in painted occult symbols. The NPC would be able to warn the PCs of the terror that awaits them ahead in the tunnels or ruined streets and might be motivated to join forces with the characters to defeat former captives or encourage the PCs to flee the area.

3. Food Human: Similar to a slave and a human sacrifice, and perhaps used for both purposes if necessary, the main horrid purpose for this prisoner's presence in the ruins however, is that she was either bought or captured by the baddies and held captive as livestock. Many humanoids eat humans, either as part of a special sacrifice or on a regular basis. This NPC will either be found in a pen or met during the NPC's escape. She will be able to warn the PCs and be willing to join in freeing other prisoners or seeking vengeance upon her captors.

4. Lost Excavator: Often times, a digger is separated from her team, usually by accidents such as falling into a pit, being divided by a cave-in or bridge collapse, or, by being the sole survivor of an obliterated dig team. Sometimes, by luck, skill or prowess, such a NPC might have been surviving alone for up to a week, lying low in some crevice or secure area to heal and evade pursuers, recover from a toxin or barely coping with the recent loss of her companions. This sort of NPC will be exceedingly happy to see fellow diggers and almost always join them, at least as far as the nearest friendly trade town. These individuals will often be armed and armored, but will most likely be low on food, nearly out of ammo or illumination supplies, and have 67% chance of being wounded and at half their base endurance value. Being lost, they may not have any idea where they are or what hazards lay nearby.

5,6. Scavenger: Typically, dig teams are spotted by scavengers far before they themselves are detected, and given the reclusive, stealthy ways of most scavengers, they never

allow themselves to be seen at all and merely watch in silence as the larger, more assertive fellow explorers go by. On rare occasions, scavengers do approach excavation groups to either trade for water, food or booze, warn them about a particularly dangerous foe, or guide dig teams to promising spots into skyscrapers or underground sites. Since scavs tend to keep to the periphery of ruins, or at least stick to street level, they will rarely be found below ground or high above it in the twisted metal and concrete of high rises; however, some do end up in those areas by accident, being captured, seeking shelter or retreat, or even after being part of a large group of loose knit, abnormally brave scavs seeking a profitable junk littered area. Scav NPCs tend not to make for good player characters, but a few can be convinced to work in a team, and go deeper or higher than their good sense tells them to. As a player controlled NPC, however, they can offer useful advice about local creatures, underground entrance points, perils, traps, predators and mysterious sites, and tend to add color to a campaign.

NPCs Found In Wilderness Areas Roll d6

1. Nomad: A lone wanderer doesn't survive long in the dangerous world of The Mutant Epoch, and so most nomads one meets will be part of a much larger mobile community of goat herders, wagon people, or boat people. When meeting a solitary nomad, he or she is often a scout, sent out to converse with the group to gather information about the local area, discern the PC's intentions or warn fellow humans of a great peril which they might defeat if they could join forces. Occasionally, nomads will welcome the extra protection that a well armed, diverse group of excavators can bring to their camp or journey, and may encourage the PCs to either travel with them or at least spend a night in comfort among their kin. In rare instances, a impetuous NPC nomad may wish to leave his or her people to join the excavators and learn the craft of ruin exploration, thus opening the way for the individual to become a player character.

2. Nomadic Trader: These cautious small-time merchants tend to travel with 2 or three hardened militia soldiers, and are focused on reaching their destination. They will not join adventure teams on any quest other than reaching the same communi-

ty together, or at the least, camping together to enjoy companionship, local news and all-essential protection. They are often from other lands and will ask the PCs about the local area, which presents an excellent opportunity for the players to interact with an NPC and recount what they know about the vicinity; a useful exercise in immersing the players deeper into the story and setting.

3. Savage: In remote areas, adventurers may come into contact with primitive humans, especially in foggy swamps, remote islands, deserts, or vast stretches of woodlands. These people rely on low tech arms and armor, and typically live as hunter-gathers with little interest in the growing human cities and towns. Sometimes, they shun technology or anything to do with the ancient ones and will be hostile to cyborgs, robotics or those who employ ancient knowledge and devices. Most savage NPCs who approach player characters will do so either by accidental encounters, to warn the PCs away from their territory, or to make some sort of offer with the PCs. Savages might even seek the help of the PCs to defeat a powerful enemy, sharing the booty after any victory. Likewise, these low tech wild men may come to the aide of humans and mildly mutated humans if the characters are in trouble, showing up in the nick of time or leading the team through a safe passage. A player controlled NPC savage could also serve as the chief of a local tribe, or a guide, interpreter, or even be a curious youth seeking to leave the simple ways of his or her people and join the excavation team in order to seek glory, riches and understanding of ancient technology.

4. Slave: Often, lone slaves are found wandering the wilds in search of freedom and assistance. They are usually unarmed, wounded and up against very bad odds, as most predators will devour a lone human at any opportunity. NPC slaves are among the most gracious individuals the PCs could meet and will beg to join them, or at least tag along until the characters reach the nearest tradetown. An NPC slave can easily fit into the adventure team as a player character as long as the PCs outfit the desperate



soul; however, they will have a strong motivation to seek revenge on whoever initially enslaved them. Additionally, any slave may not have entered slavery alone, and he may still have loved ones or comrades held by whoever first captured him.

5. Hunter: While savages are assumed to be hunters, this NPC is considered to have come from a nearby community, perhaps even a large trade centre. He will be out looking for game, possibly even tracking a great predator that has been terrorizing the local farms and trade routes, and thus he may approach a team of excavators and encourage them to join in the hunt. More often, however, a lone hunter, or small group of them, will meet up with excavators and happily suggest they camp together for mutual protection, trade and the exchange of news. Hunters can serve as guides, sources of information, back up fighters, and ultimately replacement PCs if given the arms and armor of a digger. Keep in mind that hunters are skilled archers and rugged individuals, with guts and brawn which make them ideal for ruin exploring, or bad enemies.

6. Scavenger: As noted above under NPCs found in the ruins, scavengers are loners who scour the surface ruins looking for anything of value, but are not known to be brave enough to venture underground or into skyscrapers. They will avoid combat at all cost. While they may not make for remarkable excavators, they are among the best sources of information, and can be great fun for a player to control. The GM will have to work closely with the NPC controlling player to present useful knowledge.

NPCs Found in Human Cities and Towns Roll d10

Note: Since new PCs can readily be recruited and added to the excavation team while in a town, it is assumed that the need for a player controlled NPC is due to a lack of time for the player of a deceased character to generate a new PC. Likewise, the pace of the game session is too intense to allow for an illogical stop to the action.

1. Mercenary: A soldier for hire is usually part of a group, but, in rare circumstances she may either be temporarily alone or have had a disagreement with an employer or boss, and seek freelance work. While many will offer to join a dig team for pay, at about 50sp per day, others are motivated by a career change. Having had some measure of success in battle, and now feeling confident enough to try their luck at a new profession, a merc may approach an excavation team seeking recruitment as a full fledged new-era archeologist.

2. Whore: While most new era hookers have no interest in leaving the security of a town's wall, some are of quite the opposite mind, and may have come by the oldest profession by reasons other than freewill. Some might have been blackmailed into the caste, others owe enormous debts, or have siblings, parents or even children held hostage by cruel pimp-masters. In other circumstances, an NPC prostitute may seek to merely help the PCs with informa-

tion, directions, warnings or gossip, which would make for entertaining dialogue for the session. A very few whores might be tempted to join an excavation team if they were able to be set free from their employer, bond holder or other master figure, and fulfill a life long dream to explore the uncharted ruins and mysterious lands beyond town.

3. Street Urchin: Many excavators started out as street punks just trying to survive, growing up tough, learning to brawl and dodge, hide from the authorities, and steal to eat day after day. While most street urchins are little more than petty criminals and destined to grow up to be marauders or mercenaries, others see the caste of excavator as a way out, and an appealing, heroic profession. Given this, scores of urchins will be eager to help diggers when meeting them in a city or town, showing them the best lodging, the finest place to get a meal, what areas of town to circumvent, and who rules which street or district. Many are very stealthy and gutsy, and would make first-rate excavators if they could overcome their terror of the wilds and bizarre creatures. A player controlling an NPC street urchin could be pre-informed by the GM on what the local town is all about, and assist the characters in avoiding trouble, locating organized crime bosses, revealing important rumors, underground bars, mysterious events, or even local rebels and cults.

4. Town Watchman: A player who controls an NPC town guard, militiaman, gate keeper or other military or police officer must have local area familiarity, or at least have close assistance by the GM to access this information. As NPCs, these individuals can be an enormous source of entertainment and information for the players, and even a serious threat if the characters are on the wrong side of the local laws. Player characters may need to bribe the watchman, or somehow enlist his or her help in achieving some goal. It is not uncommon for a local soldier to be unhappy with his or her position in the local military or police force, and leap at the chance to join an adventure squad and get the hell out of town, possibly even desert his or her unit during times of war, especially if the NPC disagrees with the reasons or objectives for the conflict.

5. Worker: Many workers spend their days doing repetitive, poor paying, dangerous and inglorious tasks, and dream of living the life of an adventurer or explorer. Given this, one who is controlled by a player is often very eager to help an excavation team with whatever they need, especially cheap or concealed lodging, safe passage aboard a wagon or water craft, or serve the diggers as a guide, pack handler, oarsman, or camp cook; anything to get away from his or her day job. Many commoners don't realize what they are getting into and may flee at the first sign of some mutant horror charging toward the group.

6. Thug: Some criminals are not truly evil at heart, but rather forced into the caste by tragic circumstances, including debts to a local gang boss, having family members kidnapped and held as 'insurance' to keep the NPC in line, or simply by starvation. A great many are competent fighters

with sufficient guts to join an adventure team, and if given the opportunity, can be quite helpful to excavators, especially if the PCs help him or her leave the local community and set out on a new life as a digger. As a strict NPC, thugs can be bribed, threatened or recruited quite easily, and have a wealth of local knowledge about the street scene, corrupt officials and current events.

7. Caravan Master or Ship's Captain: Most often used strictly as an NPC instead of a potential player character, these men and women are either the owners of a vehicle or vessel or hired to run the craft. They can be player controlled while aboard ship and underway, when met in a saloon or dock area, or if met along the way in the wilds or open sea. Given their travels and necessary intelligence, they are remarkable resources of knowledge, gossip and tall tales, making for lively and useful NPCs. If given sufficient motivations, such as a relic, bag of silver coins or plastic trinkets, perhaps even a gun pressed to the belly, they will divulge useful information to most anybody; however, many of these travelers welcome the added protection an excavation team can bring to their wagon train, cargo barge, or hot air balloon, and will freely answer any questions, perhaps even offer free passage in return for the PCs serving as guards during the journey.

8. Local Official: While detailed knowledge of the local community and area would be required for a player to control a high ranking NPC official, they are an excellent choice. Examples include bureaucrats, tax collectors, inspectors, priests, scribes, money lenders, merchants, motel clerks and others in various degrees of authority. Characters can meet officials either inside a community or during their travels.

Sometimes, these officials are military officers, others might be private business owners or employees, however all tend to be self important, high caste, well off and mindful of their position in the local society. Encouraging one to assist the PCs, especially doing something against the rules such as letting them speak to a prisoner, enter town after dark, look the other way when the PCs are breaking the rules, falsify documents or leak information, all require giving the official gifts or money, relic devices, favors, vital information, or by way of a very serious threat. Without

such motivation, no NPC official will be of much help, particularly when bending the rules is involved.

As far as an NPC official becoming a player character, it is unlikely, unless the official's position is at an end, he or she has done something very wrong and must flee the community, or else, all along the official was forced into the role by birth, debt, or captivity, and has instead always wanted to be a digger.

9. Beggar: In larger communities, there are the blind and broken, the men of past wars who have lost limbs and are unable to fend for themselves in an uncaring society. While they may be unable to exist without the hand outs of the kind, or by stealing, their existence at street level exposes them to an incredible amount of local knowledge and gossip. They will also know the locations of places of refuge where PCs can hide from the authorities, or possibly find missing people, stolen goods, illegal markets and underground bars and brothels. For a noble excavator to approach and seek the advice and wisdom of a mere beggar, is viewed as a great honor by the vagrant in question, and more often than not, he or she is very helpful and informative, all for the price of a few coins, a hot meal or a bottle of wine. As player characters, a beggar's ailments and injuries make them unsuitable for most adventures, however if augmented with cybernetics implants, armed

and armored and given medical attention, even a down trodden beggar can become a promising digger. GM: Use a street urchin's stats for a beggar, however moving only 4m per round. If fixed up, fed for a week and outfitted, a beggar could be considered a raider for stats.

10. Malcontent: Basically, a malcontent is anybody from any caste who has been forced into their current place in life by any number of circumstances, including birth, poverty, wealth, race, religion, location, injury, misinformation, or family pressure. Using the typical humans table from the hub rules, and taking the current location of the PCs into consideration, the GM should present an NPC for the player to control who is dissatisfied with his or her lot in life and is eager to accompany the PCs in whatever role he or she can perform, perhaps even as an excavator. Examples: barber, butcher, maid, fruit seller, tax collector; all whom hate their job and want out.

