

Steam Lords of the Ramtops

Background

A more advanced Discworld, approximately 100 years on from the events of the last novels. Technology has gone full steampunk, though progress has slowed down a little compared to the books; basically, things are up to Earth late 19th/early 20th century levels, with steam engines, airships, and electrical telegraphs. Ankh-Morpork is now run by an interlocking system of Councils, with the Patrician as mostly a figurehead. Apparently, Vetinari didn't trust anyone to follow his example competently... The PCs are agents of the First Council, who are in charge if anyone is. The Quirean League (Quirm and Pseudopolis, and some lesser towns) is basically France with a focus on sea power and colonial rivalry with Ankh-Morpork; Uberwald (dominated by dwarfs and humans) is Prussia with land ironclads; the not-very-unified Greater Kneek Economic League (Borogravia, Zlobenia, and Mouldavia) is approximately the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but Borogravia isn't strongly attached and is now being threatened by Uberwald; Klatch is the Ottoman Empire.

What's Going On (GM Only!)

The Uberwald Secret Service would like to work out who's really running things in Ankh-Morpork, so they can subvert or disrupt it. So they approached some of their more anti-Ankhian counterparts in the Quirean League and offered them a practical deal. Mounting an Uberwald-built mining drill on a Quirean pocket submarine, they had a way to infiltrate Ankh-Morpork's famously labyrinthine underground tunnel network from the river. First, they established a secret base under the Opera House, and sponsored a season of performances there by **The Pseudopolitan Touring Opera Company**, as a cover for lots of comings and goings by strange foreigners. (The number of Quirmians and Uberwaldeans involved really ought to have caused somebody to notice.) Then, they got into the sewers adjacent to the Patrician's Palace, with a view to doing some eavesdropping.

Once into those sewers, they dismounted the drill from the submarine and used it to gain access to the palace's cellars. This, though, earned them a bonus, as they stumbled across the *Emergency Planning Engine*, a mechanical computer created decades ago at the instructions of Vetinari and with an emulation of his personality installed to look after unforeseen emergencies. After taking an educated guess at what they'd found, the spies have decided to disconnect the engine and take it home in the submarine. So, when the First Council attempted to consult the "Emergency Planning Council" about what to do about Uberwaldean ambitions toward Borogravia ("ambitions" meaning "steam-powered land leviathans massing on the borders"), the system proved unresponsive. Which is why the PCs are called in to investigate.

However, they're not the only people who are getting onto this. The *Affaires Internes* section of the Quirean League *Service Secret* regard collaborating with Uberwald as off-limits – they trust Uberwald marginally less than they trust Ankh-Morpork – and have worked out that another department may have gone renegade and be up to something. They've noted that various people who they suspect of going renegade have been heading over to Ankh-Morpork, and sent one of their agents, **Mirabelle Chartreuse**, to investigate, under cover of running an audit on the embassy. She has picked up on the opera operation, or at least that something is going on there, but she needs more backup before she tackles things directly. She also regards it as her job to preserve the good name of the Quirean League, and will bargain to keep things as quiet as possible.

Session Start

Do the usual introductions, checking familiarity with Discworld and GURPS; explain about this Discworld version. It's using the new steampunk material in a Discworld setting.

Distribute character sheets; it's an *ad hoc* intelligence/investigation/troubleshooting team working for the First Council of Ankh-Morpork (see explanation above). The choices are:

- A socially competent dwarf team leader.
- A state-employed wizard (more into magical intelligence and information security than blowing stuff up).
- A hearty and hefty ex-public school doctor.
- A field testing engineer on loan to the Council from arms manufacturer Burleigh & Stronginthearm, primarily to try out their experimental steam power armour.
- A graduate of the Assassins' Guild school turned Dark Clerk.

They're based in the Patrician's Palace, which remains the centre of administration in Ankh-Morpork, and keep their kit there, including tools, weapons, and power armour. They also have use of steamcars in the Palace garage and a small official airship, should they need transport.

Go over the basics of GURPS as required.

Part One: Systems Failure

The PCs are called to an office in the Patrician's Palace. **Gregory Ullman**, secretary to the First Council and their supervisor, tells them that they have an urgent task which is perhaps even more confidential than usual.

It's not something which is widely known, but when faced with serious national or international problems with long-term implications, the First Council's rules of procedure require them to consult with the **Emergency Planning Council**, who provide excellent advice about long-term implications on the fly. However, in order to ensure objectivity and protect the Emergency Planning Council from external influences, its membership – and indeed its existence – is a state secret. In order to protect that secret, the two Councils don't actually meet in person; instead, the First Council enters questions for consideration by the Emergency Planners into a telegraphic device in the depths of the Palace, and the Emergency Planners respond shortly afterwards through the printing mechanism attached to that device.

(If anyone asks, this response is reliably instantaneous – which is a bit of a clue. The First Council members aren't stupid and do sometimes wonder about this, but, well, this is the Ankh-Morpork government system; it's *designed* to be mysterious.)

However, recently, when the First Council decided to consult with the Emergency Planners about current affairs on the Uberwald- Borogravia border, there was a problem; their queries produced no response. Ullman hastily called in a service engineer with sufficient security clearance, but he took one look at the machine and declared that it had no electrical connections whatsoever, but is some kind of old-fashioned mechanical device, which seems to be working fine so far as he can tell, but really it's not his subject. Going further than that was beyond his clearance or inclination, so the PCs, who have adequate clearance and a range of appropriate skills, are being called in. Their job is to find out what's happened to the Emergency Planning Council, get them back in communication with the First Council, and make sure that they're able to advise on current events.

The Terminal

This suggests that the first thing to look at is the "telegraphic device". Ullman leads them through the backrooms of the Palace to a small chamber which is empty except for a stool and a pair of big rivets-and-brass contraptions, one clearly a printer, the other resembling an old-style telex machine with a heavy-duty keyboard and a big crank handle on the side. Someone with Magery gets a

Per+Magery roll on entering the room to sense that there's some kind of enchantment on it; *Analyse Magic* can determine that this is a permanent anti-scrying ward, rather old-fashioned in style but quite powerful.

Ullman notes that standard procedure is to wind the handle up a few turns, then start typing, describing the current problem; whatever one types, *and* the Emergency Planners' replies, appear on the printer. The first part still works, but no replies now appear. Then he stands back and lets the PCs work.

Examining the machines can use Mechanic (Clockwork) skill – really they're a different specialty, but that's close enough. Getting inside them will need a full toolkit; they're old machines using non-standard and somewhat corroded fixings. A straight roll vs. the skill says that (a) they're fully mechanical and powered by a big, efficient clockwork spring wound up by that handle, (b) even without that hint, they're clever but *very* old technology (Ullman only knows that they were here well before he joined the palace staff, over twenty years ago), and (c) they're linked together, obviously, but they also have a mechanical, chain-based connection to something else, off under the floor of the room. There's no roll required to recognise that this sort of connection can only go so far; whatever the terminal is communicating with must be in the Palace or very close by.

Following this will require either three Mechanic+2 rolls, with a certain amount of levering wooden wall panels and floorboards away – failed attempts permit rerolls, but each such means more damage to the Palace décor – or use of Scrying magic at point blank range. This soon leads into the old, little-visited Palace cellars; the party will need to go fetch a couple of chemical lanterns. Ullman wanders off at this point.

The Crypt and Beyond

At the bottom of a dusty staircase, the party find themselves in what looks suspiciously like a crypt, with a number of dusty stone tombs. However, the first thing to hand is what's clearly a bell rope, with a sign next to it saying:

FOR EMERGENCY PLANNING ASSISTANCE, PLEASE PULL

Pulling on this causes a deep-toned bell to sound. A few seconds later, the lids on two of the plainer tombs slide back, and a figure emerges from each of them, with grey skin tight over withered flesh, disintegrating facial features, and burning yellow eyes that fix on the PCs. This is worth a fright check *unless* the players specifically anticipated something like this.

ZOMBIES

ST 14 DX 9 IQ 12 HT 11

DR 1 (Tough Skin), Fearlessness 3, High Pain Threshold, Night Vision 2, Repairable, Ugly, Vulnerable to Fire x2

Mechanic (Calculating Engines)-14, Computer Operation-14

Dave: HP 14

Steve: HP 14

The nearest zombie (Dave) raises a bony arm, points at the PC who pulled the rope, and slowly, croakingly demands...

"Have – you – tried – turning – it – off – and – turning – it – on – again?"

These two deceased techies have been left here to keep the Emergency Planning engines running as long as possible. Their continued existence is bound up with this task; they still have functioning personalities, but they have no interest in anything but that one job. Nor will they engage in combat; *"We – are – tech – support – not – security."* However, they'll happily trail around with the PCs until the problem is fixed. For now, they'll just say *"The – Emergency – Planning – System – is – next – door."* And with that, they indicate an arch leading to a short, dark passageway with a 90 degree bend so the PCs can't see what's next.

Anyone approaching the passageway gets a Smell Per roll; on a success, they pick up that the usual Ankh-Mopork smell is significantly stronger than usual here – it could be a waft coming off the River, it could be an open sewer. (Same thing, really.) It's also pitch dark down there. Anyone venturing down there will be entering a large, dark smelly room. But first, there's the tripwire in the entrance to worry about.

This is +2 to spot (it's improvised cord, not thin wire), but darkness penalties range from -2 for a single lantern at full strength to -6 for minimal light from the previous room; note that Night Vision can cancel these out. The roll is against Per (or Per-based Traps skill, but that's no better for anyone in this party). Alternatively, if someone feels forward with a stick, fingertips while on hands and knees, etc., it's a DX-based roll, or DX-based Traps skill at +2, not to trigger the thing. Most people will notice contact with it automatically, but someone in power armour needs a Per roll at -2.

If it's triggered, there's a fizzing noise – allow characters to hear that automatically, although rolling some dice in secret and looking thoughtful is permitted. It sounds a lot like a fuse, because that's what it is. Snap decision time. The character has five seconds to act; a Vision roll spots the small spark at the other side of the room. Shooting it out is possible – any missile weapon, at -6 for size/range, will do the job, though one might think it was a bit risky; equally, hurling oneself across the room (3 yards) and hitting it with a punch at -4 would do the job, at the cost of putting oneself a lot closer to the explosion. Or one can run away. Fortunately, the explosive is a small, improvised charge, designed mostly to sow confusion and collapse the exit tunnel. Being next to the blast is worth 6dx2 cr damage; being 3 yards away (in the entrance way) divides that by 9; being another couple of yards away, at the other end of the passage, divides it by 15. Characters in the other room are just deafened for a moment at hit by a waft of dust and a reek. However, the tunnel by which the enemy departed collapses, and the scattering of evidence they left behind will take a lot more reconstructing.

If the PCs detect the tripwire without tripping it, they can disarm the trap. It's crude and improvised; Traps at +2 will do it. Alternatively or additionally, a DX-based Mechanic (Clockwork) roll can jam the lighter mechanism, or Explosives (Demolition) will safely remove the fuse – but missing either of those rolls can lead to a moment or two of comedy. Explosives (EOD) would be great for this purpose, but none of the PCs have it.

Clues

Once that little excitement is over, the PCs can explore the room. Unfortunately, there's not very much to see; it's a dusty room. Except that there's a bunch of chains descending from the ceiling – clearly the other end of the linkage from the console and printer. There's also a simple shaft extending from the wall to the centre of the room, continually slowly turning; this is actually a power supply, driven by a corrosion-proof water wheel down at the river. And there are a large number of footprints in the dust (if the PCs charge in mob-handed, they may miss that). And there is a large rectangular area in the middle of the room which is mostly free of dust; something must have been

standing there. The tech support zombies will **not** be happy to see that. *“The – Emergency – Planning – System – should – be – there – Not – good.”*

If the PCs didn't trigger the explosives, though, or if they take the time to clear the rubble enough for someone to squeeze through (despite the creaking ceiling), or use Scrying and somehow get some light for the wizard to see by, they'll discover something interesting in the next room. It's an old storeroom, abandoned for centuries and empty – except for the rubble on the floor, where something tunnelled through the wall, dramatically enough to practically erupt inwards. The river/sewer waft from there is intense; following things further will find that the obvious explanation is correct.

Inspecting the trap mechanism will identify the lighter used as being of Quirmian manufacture; the packing marks on the explosives are Pseudopolitan. Scrying back in time by **three days** will show a bunch of people – humans and dwarfs – removing a big mechanical device with lots of cog wheels and a computer from the room; one of the dwarfs was wearing a distinctively Uberwaldean spiked helmet, but two of the humans were wearing what an IQ roll at -2, or -4 if from a second-hand verbal description, can identify as a Quirean League uniform.

The PCs should have enough clues to move forward when told in no uncertain terms that the Emergency Planning ... device ... needs to be recovered.

Part Two: Recovery

Tracking the intruders down that tunnel is a dead end; it just leads down to the river. The tunnelling device was evidently submersible. The PCs will have to get subtle. A couple of possibilities:

1. Divination magic might locate the device – it hasn't been warded (yet), and dust from the room it was in would create a sympathetic link of sorts. Equally, scanning for the submarine/tunnelling machine would locate another tunnel, leading from the river to the Opera House. This is an opportunity to show off the flexible magic system. The best bet may involve going up in an airship and using location magic, for added effect. Then, once the PCs start to move on that building, Mirabelle Chartreuse, who's keeping a watch on it, *will* notice and respond, coming in after the PCs.
2. Registering complaints with the Uberwaldean and Quirean League embassies might seem a bit pointless, and even if the former know anything, they won't react. However, making at sort of noise at the Quireans will mean word gets back to Mirabelle Chartreuse, who has some idea what's going on and knows that it involves the Opera House.

Mirabelle Chartreuse

The Quirean *Affaires Internes* agent plays the secret agent to perfection; glamorous (Attractive plus Fashion Sense), cynical, flirtatious for fun and profit but not distractible, and packs a pair of fancy automatic pistols (basically Mausers); 3d-1 pi-, Acc 2, Rof 3, Shots 10(3), Skill-14. She's entirely happy to work with the PCs, especially if they take the risks while she goes home with prisoners, but she's a Quirean patriot with a cynical view of Ankh-Morpork and its agents.

The Conspiracy

The Pseudopolitan Touring Opera Company are basically patsies in this scheme; all most of them know is that they were gathered together and sponsored by some rich person who presumably has excellent taste in opera. They are, however, mostly moderately patriotic Quireans, who won't respond well to heavy-handed questioning.

A couple of the Company managers do know that they've been receiving odd packages and buying extra supplies, and leaving them in a room in the basement of the opera house, from which they disappear. Obviously this is some kind of spy scheme, but they don't want to know more. They think it's quite exciting, but don't exactly have training in resisting questioning.

There are a dozen or so actual Quirean and Uberwaldean agents in the basement of the Opera House; two of the Uberwaldeans are dwarfs. Some of the group are basically mechanics, but several are trained agents. Also, the deepest levels of the building have a -6 ward against scrying.

Human Agents

ST: 11 DX: 11 IQ: 9 HT: 10

Speed 5, Move 5, Dodge 8

Gun: Skill 11, damage 2d pi+, Acc 2, Wt. 2.5, RoF 1, Shots 6(3i)

Large Knife: Skill 11, damage 1d-1 imp, Reach C, Parry 7

Agent 1: HP 11

Agent 2: HP 11

Agent 3: HP 11

Agent 4: HP 11

Dwarf Agents

ST: 12 DX 11 IQ: 10 HT: 11

Speed 5.5, Move 5, SM -1, Dodge 7

Gun: Skill 11, damage 2d pi+, Acc 2, Wt. 2.5, RoF 1, Shots 6(3i)

Axe: Skill 12, damage 1d+4 cut, Reach 1, Parry 9U

Agent 1: HP 14

Agent 2: HP 14

The Wrap-Up

The main thing here is of course to recover the Emergency Planning Device, which is currently stowed in a room deep under the Opera House. This might mean a quick raid by the PCs, but if they're a bit inefficient and there's time, the opposition might load their prize onto their submarine (powered by steam on the surface, a couple of golems underwater) and break for the open sea. It should be possible to track them magically, or by carefully following the trail of disturbances in the surface of the Ankh from the air; use the stats for Fulton's *Nautilus* for its HP, etc. If needs be, the PCs might even commandeer a torpedo ram from the base at the mouth of the river to complete the pursuit. Dissuading a gung-ho captain from ramming the submarine when it surfaces will be part of the deal then.

In any case, the tech support zombies will want to get to the machine ASAP, and will look after it with tender affection. If the PCs are around when it starts being told about current events, they will note its brisk analytical efficiency.

Mirabelle Chartreuse will want to take the Quirean agents home with her; she can reassure the PCs that they won't be getting off scot free. If the PCs try to demand too much from her, she'll point out that she – and whoever she *may* have told – now know some embarrassing stuff about Ankh-

Morpork government security. If she doesn't report in soon, it'll be all over the newspapers – but don't worry, she'd rather remain on friendly terms... And if she doesn't convince the PCs, she'll convince their supervisors.