FIRST ISSUE

Diary of the
Doctor Who Role-Playing Games

The fanzine devoted to Doctor Who Gaming

ISSUE # 1

“MATCHSTICK MEN” ADVENTURE MODULE - “SPARKLES IN THE SKY” ADVENTURE MODULE
GAME MASTER ADVICE ON CHARACTER DEATH - PRODUCT REVIEWS - and MORE...
Welcome to the first issue of Diary of the Doctor Who Role-Playing Games (DDWRPG) the fanzine devoted to Doctor Who role-playing games and related gaming information. We hope to bring to you information about the various Doctor Who RPGs, reviews of products (current and retro), adventure modules for you to use in your own campaigns, give you Game Master and player tips and information, as well as simply be a good resource for Doctor Who related gaming in general. There will be times that we also cover other games and RPGs but our focus is the world of Doctor Who.

The idea for the DDWRPG ‘zine came about in early 2010, when we were preparing for the 25th Anniversary game of our own Doctor Who RPG campaign. Started on 01 April 1985, we were doing a special game celebrating the campaign’s anniversary when someone asked how we would be able to play such a big module, with players from all eras of the game invited to play at the same table at the same time. Many of the players at the table had taken a turn game mastering during the campaign but not everyone knew how one could bring together such a large group, many who hadn’t gamed in years, for a special event like this. It was at that time that we realized that we had a lot of gaming experience between us. Not just with Doctor Who games, but with lots of systems such as Dungeons & Dragons, Vampire and the World of Darkness, Call of Cthulhu, Paranoia, Star Trek, and so many more role-playing games as well as board games, miniatures, historical, and live action RPGs as well. This was knowledge that we could share with other gamers and so the idea to do a Doctor Who RPG fanzine was born.

The fanzine is named for a number of reasons. Our own Doctor Who gaming campaign is called the Diversified Doctor Who Role-Playing Game (also DDWRPG), so I wanted to stick with those initials for the ‘zine. The original gaming fanzine that many of us read many years ago to get module ideas and information was called the Journal of the Traveler’s Aid Society, a fanzine written to support the Traveler role-playing game. Well, we also thought that the Doctor’s 500 Year Diary was exactly in the vein of the Traveler’s journal. So the name of our ‘zine was born from the Doctor’s diary, the initials of our game, and a tribute to the Traveler fanzine of years past that influenced us to do our own ‘zine many years later.

As with any RPG experience, it is the interaction between the players (and the GM) that make the story so great. This fanzine is the same way. We are here to share our ideas with you. But the best ideas are those that are shared freely and interactively that make everyone’s experiences better. We welcome your ideas and submissions as well. Send your articles, module adventure seeds, game tips, reviews and ideas to us at seidler@msoe.edu.

In the end, our 25th Anniversary game worked out great. We had 22 players at the table for an adventure featuring the Cybermen trying to kidnap Iron Drakín, the universe’s most famous rock star. Sounds sort of crazy doesn’t it. But then again, sometimes the crazy adventures are the best ones...

- Nick “Zepo” Seidler [Editor, DDWRPG]
In late November of 2009, Cubicle 7, a UK game company, released the newest Doctor Who role-playing game, the first Who related RPG released since Virgin publishing’s *Time Lord* game in 1991. But after an almost two decade wait have we gotten the game that we have hoped for?

It seems we have finally gotten an RPG that we can proudly embrace as both a good Doctor Who product and a good gaming product. The first thing that strikes you about the game is its packaging. The game comes in a cardboard box with great artwork and graphic design on it. Inside we find *The Player’s Guide, The Gamemaster’s Guide*, an *Adventures Book*, a *How To Play* quick-start guide, blank character sheets (x6), character sheet templates (x7), Tenth Doctor and new series companion character sheets (x8), gadget sheets (x3) that can be punched out including some blanks, a sheet of cardboard story points that can be punched out (1 sheet with 174 total), six dice (clear six-sided dice with blue pips), and a flier announcing upcoming supplements that are planned to be published (announcing a *Gamemaster’s Screen* and the *Monsters and Aliens* supplement). All of the items in the box are color printed on glossy paper, and the main two books have wrap around perfect binding covers. All of the artwork is brilliant and vibrant. This game is simply a beautiful product and something that you can look at for days and never get bored. The end result is the sort of product that you wish you would have as your starter into role-playing gaming.

It is as a bridge for new gamers that the product is positioned. The game assumes that the reader is unfamiliar with RPGs, and whereas this often slows down the read of a game for more experienced players, I found the reminder of the first time experience somewhat refreshing. In *The Player’s Guide*, the idea of Doctor Who and RPGs is covered as well as how to create characters, the standard game mechanic, the basics of game play, as well as tips for how to play an RPG. The text is simple but explanatory. Easy for players of all experience levels to understand. Little icons of psychic paper can be found that give reminders of important points through out the book. Red sidebar boxes give information on NPCs and monsters, while blue side bar boxes give examples and additional information. Particularly nice on the layout was the table of contents located on the back of the book, that made looking up rules or information very quick.

The crux of the whole game system is included here, in which players use a 2d6 roll in combination with skills and traits to beat a difficulty. In all it is a system that works for both beginners and experienced players and one that I found works fairly well. The system also includes the use of story points that allow the player to use them to make a roll or action go their way. It is a system that works in other games fairly well, and seems particularly appropriate in Doctor Who especially when trying to recreate the lucky or positive twists that seem to happen in the show for the Doctor of his companions.

The second book, *The Gamemaster’s Guide*, gives additional information on how to refereee the games. There is a more detailed description of the basic rule mechanic, a more in depth look at time travel and Time Lords, a simple overview of the standard Doctor Who monsters, as well as two fairly strong sections on Gamemastering hints and tips. This book was particularly useful for first time GMs and was also an entertaining read for a veteran, as different type of gaming styles and players were covered, as well as ideas and suggestions for creating memorable and smooth flowing games. If you’ve got a lot of gaming experience this book is still a great read as it reminds you of what different players are looking for in their gaming experiences.

The *Adventure’s Book* deserves some comments as well. Included in it are a couple of excellent modules,
such as a more complex one featuring the Autons, and a module of medium complexity featuring the Judoon. There are also about 20 other adventure seeds included. Unfortunately these adventure seeds only give the proposed situations characters might find themselves in, and not solutions for how player characters might solve the problem or defeat the threat. While this is not a problem for experienced GMs, first timers might struggle with telling a story in which the players have to stop the Master when he controls a super powerful gravitational space anomaly known as the “The Great Attractor” without any background on what it is, how it works, or what weaknesses it may have.

The game’s How to Play quick start guide is a solid addition in giving the players the basics without overly explaining RPGs and being able to get one into the game. Same with the character sheets of the 10th Doctor and his new series companions. These make playing for the first time a snap. However, it also leans players into the vein of playing Doctor and companion adventures rather than creating their own companions and having their own heroes to explore the universe. For many this is fine, but more adventurous gamers will want to be able to use characters that they themselves have developed. While templates are included for characters the players can roll up themselves, the game points to Doctor and companion adventures rather than other games within the Doctor Who universe. Passing suggestions are made for UNIT or Torchwood style spin-off campaigns or adventures (but with the Doctor being the last of the Time Lords in the current series this doesn’t leave room for other Time Lords in the game). Expanded campaigns and adventures are not explained as strongly as they could be. While blank character sheets are also included (and look really nice), they do not lend themselves to traditional (black and white) photocopying. I wish they would have included a black and white version of the character sheet for this purpose. The six blank sheets included in the game will probably only last one or two gaming sessions if you are gaming with a full table.

The skill points counters are nice, as are the gadget sheets (though once again there is no easily photocopyable version of these either). The dice, originally marketed as “special TARDIS dice” in some of the pre-release announcement materials were a disappointment as they were simply clear d6 dice with blue dots. You’d think that as Doctor Who dice they might have at least had a TARDIS on one of the sides. For licensing reasons the game concentrates only on the new series of Doctor Who, and does not include any information about Doctors, characters or monsters from the classic series. This is a bit of a shame, but also out of Cubicle 7’s control. The game explicitly points out that the game can be adapted for use with the classic series and in that bonus marks should be given.

Overall, Cubicle 7’s new Doctor Who - Adventures in Time and Space: The Roleplaying Game is an excellent addition to any Doctor Who collection, and is a great starter game for new gamers. Experienced role-players will also find the game beautifully packaged and versatile enough to create complex characters if they wish to do so. The game play and mechanics are solid. The game just misses perfect marks. Let’s hope that Cubicle 7 puts character and gadget sheets that can be photocopied on-line as free accessories that players can download. Hopefully future adventure seeds will also include solutions as well as the situations. Due to the rebranding of Doctor Who with the appearance of the 11th Doctor (Matt Smith), the Cubicle 7 Doctor Who game will be re-branded with the new version of the game planned for release in November 2010. Collectors should be sure to get the David Tennant version of the game now if they want it. Author and lead designer David F. Chapman should be proud of his new addition to the Doctor Who gaming universe. Our recommendation is to add this RPG to your collection if you plan to play it with its new system, or even if you simply plan to use it as a resource for your existing game system.

4 out of 5 TARDISes.

Supplements for the Doctor Who - Adventures in Space and Time: The Roleplaying Game include The Gamemaster’s Screen (pictured left) which is now available to purchase [USA SMRP $14.99, ISBN 978-1-907204-13-5] and which will be reviewed next issue. Also planned is the Aliens and Creatures supplement (pictured right) which is expected in print in August 2010 at a price of around $39.99. More supplements have been planned to include Defending the Earth (featuring UNIT) and The Time Traveller’s Companion.
CUSTOM DICE FOR DOCTOR WHO RPGs

For our group’s big 25th Anniversary Doctor Who role-playing game we wanted the event to be somewhat special so all players received commemorative Doctor Who dice that were made for the game. Photos of the dice are included here. The 6-sided dice were laser etched from black and white.jpg artwork that was forwarded to the Chessex company as part of their custom dice ordering service. Information on this can be found at www.chessex.com. Dice cost $.99 each with a minimum order of 10. Prices drop with larger orders, with price breaks happening when you order 50, 100, or more dice. Other colors, styles, and multi-sided dice are available as well, and designs can be made to replace various sides depending on availability. The dice, made with whatever custom design you like, are perfect for special events, graduation gifts, party favors to give away at a gamer’s wedding (perhaps etched with the name of the bride and groom and the date), or to commemorate other cool events. Custom dice are a great way to personalize a campaign or event. Even individual characters can get their own dice at this good price.

THE INTERNET - FULL OF HIDDEN RESOURCES

Every game needs those extras that make it more exciting, be it graphics, maps, or images that can bring life to your campaign. Searching for resources that one could use for Doctor Who role-playing on the internet, we came across the following photo of Nicola Bryant online. It is a photo that has rarely been published and comes from her 1984 casting call photo shoot when she was first made a companion in the series and introduced to the press. It’s a nice photo but it’s not just here to liven up the page with a pretty face. It is a reminder to many gamers that spending some extra time on-line searching sites off the beaten path comes up with some great resources that one can use for their games.

One item we came across on-line is included on the next page. It is a full map of a TARDIS interior, with a description for how the TARDIS might be staffed and used. The design was created by a graphics designer who was simply using his imagination to design a TARDIS and how an alternate version, other than the Doctor’s, might look. It turned out to be a great map, and one that any Doctor Who
Game Master could use for their own game. In turn we have included the map we found here so that some of you might use it in your own games if you wish. The map can currently be found as a pdf download on-line at:
“Matchstick Men” is a Doctor Who adventure module set at the Torchwood Hub located in Cardiff in 2008CE. The module takes place before the events depicted in the Torchwood mini-series “Children of Earth” so Torchwood Cardiff is working well and intact. This adventure presumes that the TARDIS travelers (whether using the Doctor and company or another group) are familiar with Torchwood and know of the existence of this Torchwood hidden base. The members of Torchwood are involved in investigating the strange and unexplained...

The TARDIS and its travelers land in Cardiff, Wales near the Torchwood Hub (either out of happenstance or to refuel the TARDIS by taking in energy from the time rift located nearby). The TARDIS discover that a photographer is nearby and has taken photos of the TARDIS’s landing. The photographer, Marcus Eberly, is a 25 year old freelancer who runs off as soon as the TARDIS crew discover that he has taken photos of the TARDIS and its materialization. If the crew give chase, they might be able to catch him. Otherwise, the crew may go to the Torchwood Hub where they will encounter CPT Jack Harkness and the rest of the Torchwood team (the GM should decide the lineup in accordance with when they want this adventure to take place). Jack and the Torchwood staff will be surprised to learn about the photographer and they will try to track down the photographer using closed Circuit TV footage of the area, and tracking down the young photographer and his home address. Whether the TARDIS crew catch Marcus, or if Torchwood are able to track him down at his home, the next discovery should be a surprise to all involved.

PICTURES OF MATCHSTICK MEN

Once the group catches up with photographer Marcus Eberly, they discover that he is scared and quite willing to talk about his background. Marcus reveals that as a freelance photographer he has gotten a number of photographs of unusual occurrences around the city of Cardiff, including strange humanoid creatures that seem to walk the streets at night. Marcus was initially unaware that what he had gotten photos of is the Weevil creatures that Torchwood have been trying to round up. Marcus explains he shopped the photos around to various news outlets but none were willing to buy his photos, claiming that they were a hoax. He then explains he was approached about a week later and hired by a mysterious man who paid him £1000 ($1750) for the photos and promised him more money if he could get more photos of the creatures as well as information from where they came from. Marcus then reveals he has been up late through the night in Cardiff and has been taking more photos of the Weevil creatures he has found, and has also gotten photos of the Torchwood land cruiser as well as the Torchwood team captur-
ing some of the Weevils. In time he has been able to trace the Torchwood team to the Hub. (If the crew have caught Marcus, they should return him to the Hub and inform Torchwood of his capture and photographs.) Wherever the group interrogate Marcus, he then agrees to take the group to his apartment’s second room. Marcus’s second room is used as his photo studio and is completely full of photos of Torchwood that are pasted up all around the room, and also organized into photo albums. The photos include pictures of various Weevils, the black Torchwood land cruiser, and photos of individual Torchwood team members (Jack, Gwen, Ianto, etc.). Marcus explains that he has made almost £120,000 ($200,000) selling photos to the mysterious man. When pressed, Marcus will reveal that he is simply trying to get enough money together so that he can choose to take whatever photos he wants rather than living hand to mouth as a freelancer. He will also reveal that his next meeting with the stranger is planned for the next evening.

A DARK MEETING

The group will set up a sting operation to see who comes to meet Marcus. Either someone can dress up as Marcus for the meeting, or he can be convinced to make the meeting so long as he is told that he can still exchange the photos for money. Any threats directed toward Marcus of either violence or arrest will scare Marcus too much to make him useful. He will try to leave and never return if given the chance, but will be too stressed to act naturally under the circumstances. Marcus will give the group the latest batch of photos that he plans to deliver (including photos of the TARDIS materializing at the Hub). He will also reveal that he plans to meet the man at the waterfront as a designated drop location.

The next evening the crew go to meet the mysterious man who has been buying the photographs. Players have a chance to make perception rolls to realize that the man is not alone, but that he is being watched from another car with people in it. If the team confront the man, the man will call for backup and three heavily armed men will exit the car and take the photos by force and evacuate the man from the area. If the Torchwood team are there or the TARDIS crew have characters that are willing to be confrontational, the situation will result in a standoff, until someone can talk the situation down. Though armed, the men in the car will only act in self defense. Otherwise the mysterious man will be prepared for the meeting and awaiting Marcus. If there is a substitute for Marcus the man will realize it but try to go through with the deal if given the opportunity. If the group move in on the man and capture him before he can call for backup, the car with his backup team will drive off - per their instructions.

THE MYSTERIOUS MAN

The man’s name is Terrance Schneider and he is a professional mercenary (ex-SAS) who has been hired to gather information. The crew will be able to trace Schneider to his base of operations which is an old airplane hanger at an abandoned airfield. They can do this if Schneider is captured and interrogated. Otherwise, if Schneider gets the photos and is allowed to leave he will be followed there.

If Schneider escapes from the TARDIS crew’s trap, with some help from the character’s or Torchwood team’s investigation skills, the group
will be able to discover that he has gone to the hanger. The men in the car will leave the hanger location after a short moment of camaraderie with Schneider and talk about how easy the job was. Schneider will soon be alone for the crew and Torchwood to move in and capture him. The crew will learn from Schneider that he himself was hired to get information by an unknown contact that seems to have unlimited money and resources. Schneider hired ex-Special Air Service friends of his to help him with this exchange and as backup on the deal.

Schneider reveals that he has been collecting photographs and information on Torchwood for the last month, having paid Marcus money for the photos. The contact has made Schneider scan all the photos and information and send them to an e-mail address belonging to a free on-line service. In turn large amounts of money have been deposited into Schneider’s account. Enough to pay Marcus and his ex-SAS friends (a total of £1.5 Million ($2.6 Million)). Schneider admits to having never actually met the contact he is collecting the information for. He was contacted via the internet via on-line advertisements for his personal security services, and went through with the deal as he was only asked to collect information that was in the public and never was asked to break the law. The unknown contact also deposited a third of the money into Schneider’s account before he even got the first photo and thus Schneider was willing to do the work. Schneider will take offense if anyone suggests that what he is doing is a threat to national security. He will defend himself by saying that he is ex-military and quite aware of the line between investigative and treasonous. Upon investigation Schneider’s computer will reveal that he has sent many of the images and information to an e-mail address labeled infodomain@freemail.com. Schneider is not as villainous as he may first appear, and a GM would do well to play up his mysterious and militaristic nature, but in reality he is simply doing an honest days work as a private investigator.

THE TRAIL RUNS COLD... OR DOES IT

The crew find that getting to this e-mail address is rather difficult. If hacked, the account is empty (even of spam messages) and data on when it was last accessed has been wiped clean. The e-mail account can only be traced when there is e-mail in the account. The crew need to figure out that they must send the account an e-mail. This can either be the next set of photos Marcus took, or even a standard “Hello” e-mail or a spam message. A player good at computer skills, or the Torchwood team if none of the characters are good at this skill, can trace the message as soon it is sent. It turns out that the e-mail account is immediately downloaded to another account - not actually connected to the Internet!

Using tracer technology, the crew should discover that the e-mail is being downloaded locally in Cardiff. If playing with the Doctor, he could use his sonic screwdriver to send a message to the account and discover that the message has been downloaded and that the message final destination is not far away. A character, or the Torchwood team, can also trace energy that resides from the off-line download. What is discovered is that the e-mail account is downloaded off the net in the nearby vicinity. A sonic screwdriver, or a Torchwood energy tracker, will lead the group to the location of the e-mail account’s download... the middle of Cardiff Bay.

DEEP COVER

The TARDIS crew and Torchwood team make their way to Cardiff Bay and trace the download location to the middle of the bay. Under the water, the group discover a spaceship has landed and has been hidden there. The group must use scuba gear to dive down to the ship. This allows Captain Jack to make many innuendo comments to people as they prepare to don wetsuits, such as eyeing members of the group in their swimwear and filling his conversation about opportunities to “go down”. Diving deep under the water of the bay, the group make their way onboard an alien spacecraft. They will be able to enter via an airlock system, that purges the water from the lock.

When first entering the ship it will appear to be built of a sort of hard crusted shell-like biological construction. There are computers on board the ship, and with increased difficulty for the alien technology, players, or the Torchwood team joining them, can discover that this is indeed where Schneider’s e-mail messages have arrived.

On board the ship are a group of four aliens of a race called the Sa-oul. The Sa-oul have dark red reptile-like skin and completely black eyes. Their heads have no hair and they wear dark purple spacesuits. The four Sa-oul carry energy pistol side arms. The players will get the jump on the Sa-oul inside their spaceship, as they have no particular expectations of anyone finding them in this location. The aliens are sitting back and planning their actions. If stealthily making their way from the airlock and through the secondary areas to the main deck of the ship, the crew will discover that the Sa-oul are planning to raid the Hub. They have no interest in exposing Torchwood or the loca-
tion of the Hub itself. Their plans are a bit more sinister, depending on who you are. It turns out that the Sa-oul want to take all of the Weevils from the Hub, butcher them and sell them on the intergalactic meat market as food. While the Weevils are a nuisance and can be overly aggressive, they are sentient enough that this should pose a moral dilemma for the characters. It may create a way to get rid of the Weevil problem, but also dooms all the Weevils to death. The Doctor will surely not accept this, and CPT Jack should have his own set of reservations about this as well.

The Sa-oul are gathering enough information about Torchwood and the Hub to try an assault to be able to take the Weevils by force. The Sa-oul, however, are also slow to make decisions, and they are literally caught up in a debate between trying to offer Torchwood money for the Weevils, or storming the Hub in an aggressive assault. (The Sa-oul have simply hacked banks to get money filtered into their own paypal account to move the funds) If the TARDIS crew and Torchwood team have not yet discovered that the Sa-oul have this purpose in mind for the Weevils, the Game Master may want to have the Sa-oul try to trick the group into allowing them to take care of the Weevil problem by removing them regularly for Torchwood, possibly promising to return them to a separate planet. As the Sa-oul are willing to pay money to do this the time travelers and Torchwood operatives should be suspicious about their motivations. Eventually the Sa-oul will accidentally reveal that they do not consider the Weevils sentient and that they are not “men” like the members of “matchstick” (Torchwood) or the TARDIS crew.

SA-oul Food

Discovering the issue at hand, the TARDIS travelers with the help of the Torchwood team will eventually need to confront the Sa-oul aliens. The Sa-oul are not willing to give up on this source of food and money without a fight. The characters have a number of solutions at their hands. They can threaten to flood or disable the alien craft unless they leave and never return (the players have Scuba gear, and the Sa-oul are not water breathers - only parking their craft underwater to stay hidden). It is possible that more aggressive characters are willing to fight the Sa-oul in a standup battle, but with energy weapons that Sa-oul are a strong match. It is also possible that players trick the Sa-oul into letting them get the Weevils, allowing the TARDIS crew or Torchwood members to get reinforcements (perhaps UNIT) or better technology to disable the Sa-oul spacecraft. If two or more Sa-oul are wounded or killed the others will give up. Likewise if their ship is threatened or they believe that their ability to leave Earth is at risk they will capitulate to any demands that are made of them.

Epilogue

Once the Sa-oul have been dealt with, either by negotiating with them to leave, disabling them and their ship, or by killing them, the TARDIS crew and their friends from Torchwood will be able to return to the Hub. The TARDIS will be prepared to leave. CPT Jack and the staff of Torchwood Cardiff may invite the TARDIS crew to the Hub for a social before everyone departs, but somehow either Torchwood or the TARDIS crew are usually pulled away from such a social. With the secret of Torchwood’s Hub and the Weevils safe, the time travelers can return to the TARDIS and continue their adventures.
War of the Daleks is one of those old board games that you look at and simply think to yourself, this must have the cheesiest game play ever and will be interesting for about 5 minutes. And your conclusions are correct. But then you end up playing for about an hour and a half longer, multiple games, laughing and taunting your friends as the night goes on, and you suddenly realize that the game is so simple and fun it is, in the words of the Ninth Doctor, fantastic!

In 1975 UK game company Denys Fisher released a simple board game based on the very popular Dalek creatures. The game is simple. Made for two to four players, each player gets a character (not the Doctor!) and begins on the start marker of their color on the outside edge of the board. The object of the game is simple, be the first to reach the Dalek control centre in the middle of the board, thus disabling and destroying the Daleks and becoming the winner of the game. It’s only once around the board as you spiral inward towards the control center. How fun is that? Actually non-stop fun. Little plastic Daleks are placed on the board on tracks, and every time you land on a spot that has a black dot on it, you can choose to turn the central Dalek Control Centre which makes the Daleks move, and spin on their tracks. You can only move in one direction though, so you have to choose wisely. If the Dalek’s plunger or gun touch a player’s piece, they are exterminated and sent back to the start (you must stop turning as soon as the first piece is touched or when you choose to stop). The same extermination happens if you land on another player in the inner track, where more than one player can move. Players also have gun tokens they can place in front of their path. If they land on the gun token, they are safe, and if another player moves a Dalek past the gun token, they destroy that Dalek for good. If a player passes the gun token they cannot move it farther up their path and be protected. The most fun part is that the game is full of exterminations! As players decide which way to patrol their Daleks, sometimes mistakes are made at predicting where the Daleks will go. Who to try to exterminate by rotating the control centre and how to do so is much harder to predict than one thinks it will be. Even when one gets to the end of the game at the control center, the game may not yet be over. One must lift the Dalek control center’s middle column and the panels fall down. If the panels fall and there is an explosion on the place that the character is on, you’ve exploded the control center and won, but if the “King Dalek” falls and touches your piece, you are exterminated and the game continues!

This game is hours worth of fun. Its simplicity, engaging game play, and replay value is what makes it so great. Howe’s Transdimensional Toybox, the price guide for Doctor Who collectables, has a near mint collectable price of £50 for this game and it is worth every cent in my book. This sort of fun may not be everyone’s cup of tea, but as the Fourth Doctor said, “What’s the point of being grown up if you can’t be childish?” If you don’t enjoy this game, you are not a true game fanatic.

5 out of 5 TARDISes.
“Sparkles in the Sky” is a Doctor Who adventure module set on Earth in Victorian Scotland and is a short adventure that can be played as a one-shot or as a one-session or diversionary adventure in an on-going campaign. This adventure module can be run with either a group featuring the Doctor or another group of time travelling players. The adventure was inspired by the song “Fireflies” by the alternative music group Owl City.

The players find themselves on Earth near the end of summer in 1880 CE. The characters are simply spending the day relaxing on the streets of a small town in the Scottish countryside (name and exact location are not critical to this plot, but we liked calling it “Owl City”). At the end of a day of shopping and enjoying themselves in the Victorian era, the group reunite and meet for dinner at an outdoor cafe. Enjoying each others company while explaining their day’s common adventures, the crew are eating outside and relaxing as dusk approaches and it starts getting dark outside, with the sky a wonderful color of dark red.

The restaurant has outdoor gaslights, but before they are lit, the dark red sky is filled with streaks and sparkles that seem to crackle as they fill the air. Characters failing awareness rolls will think that these are just cheap fireworks high in the sky. Characters making their rolls (or the Doctor) will immediately know that this is an unusual occurrence and has an extraterrestrial origin. The “sparkles” continue to fall, not burning out like fireworks would. Some of the sparkling lights seem to fall on some of the roofs of the town, and some fall all the way to the ground. The sparkles cover the ground like a shower of sparks.

Players may go to investigate these small glowing ember-like sparkles. They seem like small glowing insects or fireflies upon closer examination. They do not move but continue to glow like small white, and sometimes green, LED lights. Players with a magnifying glass, microscope, sonic screwdriver, tricorder, or advanced scanning device will learn that the small glowing objects are in fact a small living fairy-like creatures called Tinks. The same is true for all of the other glowing bits that are scattered through the town, laying in the streets and having landed on roofs and in the nearby fields. There are literally millions of these. Some people in the town are carrying around these small sparkles from the sky. In some cases children may be stepping on them or collecting them. In any case, the characters have to secure and help collect (and protect) as many of these sparkle creatures as they can. Convincing certain townspeople to help may be difficult.

The situation is that the small glowing firefly-like Tink creatures are extraterrestrials whose world-spacecraft (the size of a car) broke up when entering Earth’s atmosphere. Having been small and light enough to survive the fall, millions of them fell to Earth, and many of them have survived (and likewise many have perished). The Tinks are friendly and helpful, but are currently scared and worried, perceiving the monstrously sized humans (from their point of view) to be dangerous and hostile. This is because, as the humans are unaware what the sparkles are, they continue to step on (kill) and collect (capture) them. The Tinks have small wings and can fly, and would be mistaken for fireflies if their lights were to go out, which they generally do not unless they are killed (in which case the glow disappears over about 6 hours not unlike a fading chemical light stick).

The first Tink that players encounter, named Bah-ell, will be amazed that it can communicate with the crew, as no other humans seem to listen to their pleas for mercy. Bah-ell will explain that the Tink worldship was having problems and as they approached the planet, they decided to try to make planet fall, but as the ship has been travelling for months, the
They were not as well trained as they hoped and their approach into the Earth atmosphere was at too sharp an angle, and as they entered the atmosphere their ship came apart. Bah-ell begs the characters to help them save her species as much as they can.

Once the characters realize that the Tinks are friendly aliens, they will hopefully try to save as many of the Tinks as possible. Despite what the characters wish, it will not be possible to save all the Tinks. This is not the character’s fault, after all the Tink worldship had a catastrophic reentry. Bah-ell is happy if any Tinks can be saved, as there is no hope otherwise. To collect and rescue the Tinks the players need to convince the townspeople to help. Things that can motivate them include the following: the promise of monetary reward, appealing to their goodwill, or simply telling them the truth (which will not shock them, surprisingly). One of the townspeople who is eager to help is a 20 year old man named James. If the players convince him to talk to the other townspeople, he will rally the village to help and collect up the stranded aliens. Conflict for the module can be found here, as some of the townspeople may not be willing to help, and the town’s preacher will think of the Tinks as little devils. The players with the aid of James can confront these townspeople, and if the players defeat the ringleader of the resisters in a standard stand up brawl the rest will relent and help. The honor won or lost in such a fist fight will be enough to sway opinion of the others. It will take the townspeople a number of hours to help collect the Tinks, and returning them all to the café is the best course of action as a collection point.

Bah-ell, as the Tink’s voice, will inform the crew that they must recover their ship’s anti-gravity drive unit, so that they can try to rebuild their craft and continue their journey. Bah-ell will explain that the Tinks are migrating to their mating grounds and they must continue on. James will volunteer to help the players with this search, and Bah-ell will inform the players that the drive looks like a large cylinder (from the Tink’s perspective). The players using either advanced technology, or simply searching may find the tube. James will recommend using the children of the small city to look for it, as they have the keenest sense of perception for details. The anti-gravity drive cylinder has cracked open and some of the anti-gravity elements have spilled out in what looks like a fine powder. The players, children, or anyone else who touch the fine powder will find themselves becoming very light and floating into the air. One can control one’s movement by sort of jumping off things or swimming through the air, but the anti-gravity powder will make it seem as if people are floating or flying if they are exposed to the powder directly. People exposed will float back to the ground after a short period of time and the complete effect wears off after about one hour unless again exposed to the powder. The powder gives someone the effect of 1/20th of gravity, which makes a great anti-gravity drive for the Tinks. A cigar tube would be an adequate replacement for the broken drive unit, and the players or James can suggest this as a replacement as the powder is collected for the Tinks.

If all is collected and the Tinks are saved, a new worldship can be constructed out of almost anything. The Tinks do not breathe as humans do, and their interstellar travel only requires their anti-gravity powder engine and an enclosure for them to be inside so they can continue their journey. The players can create or convert almost any large sized object into a new worldship. When this is done the Tinks will want to show their gratitude and will perform some of their ritual dances for the humans who have helped them and saved the day. The adventure should end with the Tinks celebrating with the humans and Bah-ell thanking James, the characters, and the other humans as the other fairy-like aliens fly and dance and welcome the townspeople to join them. After the celebration the Tinks leave in their ship and as the sun comes up, the people disperse and return home to catch up on sleep. James thanks the crew and bids them farewell, as the TARDIS travelers return to their own spacecraft. James keeps some Tinks that can no longer travel in an open jar and is willing to nurse them back to health. These Tinks will happily live with him until they soon naturally die.

Players that are astute, or on return to the TARDIS, will discover that James was in fact Sir James Matthew Barrie (picture right), better known as “J.M. Barrie” the author of the play “Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up.” Clearly his story was influenced by this experience and includes the character of the Tink Bah-ell (Tinkerbelle) and powder that can make children fly. This should be a happy reveal at the end of the adventure.

*At the end of this adventure, we suggest giving the players a copy of the song “Fireflies” by Owl City as a reminder of the story, and few will see ‘Peter Pan’ the same again.*
GAME MASTERING TIPS:
LET GOD SORT THEM OUT — A LOOK AT CHARACTER DEATH

Every Game Master has that moment when they need to make that most difficult decisions for the first time — deciding to let the death of a character stand or not. Whether it is a first for the GM in any game, or for the new campaign that you are currently playing it is always a moment that sometimes stuns the GM into wondering if they are playing right. Well, this article is here to reassure GMs that character deaths are not only acceptable, but sometimes even necessary.

The fear that a Game Master feels when a characters death comes up during the game is only natural for many reasons. It is the moment that the GM wonders if the players are considering them a fair and proper interpreter of the rules. It is the moment when some may wonder if they are a good storyteller, and for some GMs the moment that they wonder if the player will still be continuing to play with the group after this particular game. It is also the time when the GM wonders if the players are actually having fun in the game. Just as with real death, it is the moment when others wonder if it is all really worth it, and what is the purpose of life (in the game at least).

GMs, and players, must remember that in order for a role-playing game campaign to be exciting, there needs to be the threat of danger and death for those involved. Our fear of death is what gives us the adrenaline rush of excitement when we see a good action movie, watch Doctor Who, or engage in a great role-playing game. Without consequence there is no fear or worry, which allows us to experience (in safety) those emotions that make us human. You don’t want your RPG to be so safe that the players can simply be emotionless Cybermen and walk their way through your plots without concern. Good games feature the excitement of overcoming a deadly situation and surviving.

One of the reasons that our game group stays away from playing games that feature the Doctor and companions is that this takes away the “danger” that the characters are in, as we know when almost all of the Doctors regenerate and the fates of their companions. If the characters are not in any mortal danger, then the game cannot create that immersive level of excitement and consequence that makes RPGs so involving. If in an adventure you are playing the Fourth Doctor and Sarah

GM TIPS ON FAIR PLAY
The following are some fair play tips that will help a Game Master ensure that a character death doesn’t become a problem for their group.

- **Tell your players deaths are permanent** when they first join the game and that the Doctor Who universe does not have resurrections or reincarnations for humans like games such as Dungeons & Dragons (except for Time Lord reincarnations of course). Tell players that a dead character is dead, like Adric.

- **Explain the game system’s rules for death** to all new players before the game starts, such as when explaining the hit point system. (Ex. “You have 60 hit points, at 6 points you are unconscious, at 0 you are dead, once you are at -31 no medical help in the universe can save you.”)

- **Announce the roll’s target number** and the resulting consequences before the roll happens. (Ex. “On a 7 or less the Dalek hits you with a laser blast, 8 or more it misses.”) This makes the dice and not the GM the villain.

- If there is more than one target that the enemies might shoot at, be sure to **make the target random** (roll a die to see who gets hit), unless there is a good reason for the enemy to make a choice. (ex. CPT Jack gets shot at by the Daleks, because he has shot at them with his laser rifle, and Rose is unarmored.”) Try to use the dice as a randomizer as often as possible.

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Be sure to **be fair** about situations. If a character has a good argument for why they should not have been targeted in a certain turn, hear them out—preferably before you make any dice rolls. Reason out the situation and let the dice decide the result as per the previous suggestions.

- **Apply your rules evenly and fairly.** If one player gets a bonus for hiding behind a box, be sure to give the same bonus to any others as well unless you first describe an action that changes that situation, and then be sure to explain the change with the context of the game. (ex. “CPT Jack is harder to hit because he is behind the box.” “The Daleks are now moving forward for a better angle.” “Rose joins CPT Jack behind the box.” The Daleks now fire at Rose or CPT Jack, but there is no bonus for being behind the box because the Daleks have moved up.”)

- **Make important rolls in your game “in the open”** and not behind a screen, especially when in high danger or combat situations that may result in a character death. **This is the single most important tip on this list!** This ensures that the players know that their character’s fate has been decided fairly and randomly. Their time was truly up, and it was not the Game Master’s fault.

- If tension is high, **have the players roll their own dice** to determine their fate (such as damage). It can’t be the GM’s fault if they rolled their own dice!

- As a GM, once you make the ruling that a character has died, **do NOT change your mind** or reconsider. Doing so makes players lose respect for you and allows them to believe that they can change fate in your campaign world. Only if a player has a truly compelling reason for why something was unfair should you consider a change.

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Jane, one can’t quite allow them to be killed as we all know that Sarah Jane survives to live at Bannerman Road and that the Fourth Doctor only meets his end falling from a radio telescope. The threat of character death in an RPG needs to not only be present but also real. This is what makes the players think out their actions rather than simply testing the waters to find solutions for the adventure at hand. In a great game, the players truly worry about their character’s mortality. For this reason we encourage games with originals characters in the Doctor Who universe.

Players become attached to their characters, and often a character is a manifestation of a player’s personality and sometimes even their hopes and dreams. It is important that a Game Master understand that the players often have a vested interest or attachment to their characters. RPGs place a part of you into that danger zone that we just talked about. This is also what makes RPGs exciting. Because of this player-to-character attachment a death will hit them a bit hard. This is especially true if the player has never experienced a character’s death before. Game Masters need to understand that while danger must be present for a good game, so must a character’s attachment to their character. A game would lack just as much excitement if the players did not care if their characters might meet their end or not. In order for a game to be exciting both danger and a desire for character self-preservation must be present.

With both these elements present, we have the elements of an exciting game or campaign, and with it, we also have the possibility that a character may not survive when the odds catch up to them or the player makes an error in judgment. This is part of the RPG experience. But just as there are laws of physics in the real world, the gaming world has some rules that should be followed to make sure that we don’t unjustly harm our players and their characters unjustly. The sidebar here (“GM Tips on Fair Play”) that started on the previous page, gives excellent advice for GMs to ensure that as they run the game they create a fair environment for all the players involved. Without this sense of justice, character deaths become the battle ground for many player/GM arguments. If the advice in the sidebar is taken and followed, and environment of understanding and justice is created that avoids most of these sorts of out-of-game arguments when a character
death happens. Fair play is the crux of avoiding arguments or problems at the gaming table, and a character death is usually the strongest and most direct catalyst that brings the issue to the forefront in an argument. Fair play avoids not only the out-of-game problems a character death can bring but also wins the GM and players a mutual respect for each other at the table and also an in-game feeling of reality.

Game Master’s should also treat a death as a genuine dramatic moment in the game. It will for sure be one for the player whose character is involved. When a GM plays up this drama (by having a villain gloat over the death, or the NPCs react in shock) it creates a memorable moment befitting the event. This creates a stronger game and a more understanding environment by the player, realizing that the death was not just a blip in the game’s radar, but a true defining moment. Sometimes characters die because of stupid mistakes or decisions, but treating the moment with dignity and dramatic effect, even if over a simple error, creates a level of suspense and interest in the game for all the players.

All players react to a character’s death differently. Some players take the death of their fictional persona in stride, while others take it particularly hard, some get angry at the GM or even other players, and some even cry at the table (I’ve seen it happen)! A GM should simply be prepared that a death is sometimes a personal and emotional moment for the players. Accept this and give the players their opportunity to

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● NEVER bring any personal grudges or arguments to the gaming table. Often this is much easier said then done. Following the previous tips will make it hard for any player to argue that the GM was trying to kill a character intentionally. But even with that said, a fair and respected GM will never try to intentionally kill a character, and will not bring any grudges to the game table. This is the second most important tip on this list!

● If your adventure module has a complicated plot, a boss with special abilities, or a particularly potentially deadly or dangerous element that might cause a character’s death, be sure to write down the dangerous elements and their consequences and how they must be overcome in your GM notebook before you begin the module. If players claim you made up the threat or that you singled one of them out, you can show them that the deadly encounter was planned and that there was in fact a solution at hand. With this written down it shows the GM had no malice.

● Be willing to let a player grieve about a character’s death. Players get attached to their characters and no one wants to lose their “imaginary friend”, so let those players remember their characters greatest moment as needed. This might be at the moment of death in the game or at the end of the game.

● Do not insult or taunt the player about their character’s death. The loss of a character can be a very personal moment. Being a jerk about it, laughing, or trying to make someone feel even worse, isn’t cool. It also reduces the drama in the game itself and makes for a less dramatic or epic moment in-game. The GM may also need to keep other players in check, and as the leader at the table the GM should be prepared for this as well.

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- Give the character an in game memorial service or funeral. This lets the other characters remember the fallen character in their own way, and also creates a module that often brings out the best or funniest moments for the players—just like a real funeral. Sometimes a whole separate module for this is best.

- As the GM, if you ever truly feel like you should not have killed a character or allowed it to stand, you do have the power to create a story reason of why the character is not really dead (ex. The bullets that appeared to kill were actually stunning bullets, the dead character was actually a clone replaced earlier in the module, the apparent death was the villain's plot to capture a character, the module was all a dream, etc.)! 

grieve or vent if needed. This may also heighten in-game drama, but do not allow a player’s real world emotions to hijack the game. After a moment or two, refocus the players and say, “This death should not be in vain, what do your characters now do?...” and continue on with the adventure. Realize that this can sometimes be awkward, but life, and the game, goes on after death. Player emotions can be dealt with more fully after the game ends.

Character deaths sometimes interfere with plot arcs or storylines that the GM has created. And of course, sometimes such a story arc has been made to fit that specific character who just died. This loss of momentum of the story arc can happen, as sometimes a character has specific information or knowledge of events that have happened that the rest of the party do not have. The GM may have to rebuild this plot arc so that other characters can solve it. One recommendation in a campaign is to let the plot arc sit, and not to return to it, until the party has reintegrated with the new character. Then when returning to the plot, make it a bit larger and more ominous—after all a character’s death set back the ‘good guys’ plans a bit, and this can create an epic threat that has been building. A seasoned GM will replant the seeds of the story arc, so that others learn about what happened and the threat rears its head again.

The Doctor Who universe, is of course, special. If a character is a Time Lord they generally have the ability to regenerate. While the Doctor has occasionally said on-screen that he can die rather than regenerate, the best advice (and to give continuity to the game) is to simply allow the Time Lord character to regenerate. This advice is given because the Time Lord character, like the Doctor, is usually the common leader in each group (if playing a standard Doctor Who style campaign as opposed to a derivative campaign such as UNIT or Torchwood) and is generally the character that keeps the group together. Some Game Masters have suggested a roll should be made to see if the Time Lord survives and regenerates rather than this being an automatically successful event, but this author thinks that the regenera-
tion should be allowed without complication simply to create grand continuity to the epic campaign at hand. What would Doctor Who be without this defining trait of the Time Lords? Plus, nothing would bring a campaign to a faster halt that a group of companion characters standing around wondering how to leave now that the only pilot of their TARDIS has perished and with him or her the secret of how to operate the time machine...

This debate set aside, when a Time Lord character does regenerate it creates the opportunity for the game to be re-imagined. Each era of Doctor Who, and each new regeneration of the Doctor, has brought with it a new theme or feel to the program. Witness Petrwee’s UNIT years, the Fourth Doctor’s Key to Time arc, the Ninth Doctor’s Bad Wolf connections and so on. These different eras set a new tone for the series and so should a regeneration set a new tone or story arc for the Game Master’s campaign. No, don’t divert from your existing story arc just because the Time Lord regenerates, but use the regeneration as a catalyst to introduce a new feel to that era of the game.

Regenerations also mean that the Time Lord character may look different or act differently. Again a great way to renew player interest in the campaign. Romana’s regeneration in the story “Destiny of the Daleks” seems to imply that Time Lords can choose how they look. A GM may choose to have a regeneration riddled with complications such as in “Castrovalva” or “The Twin Dilemma,” but we have found that allowing the player to create the new persona for the Time Lord works best and allows some continuity in the Time Lord’s personality. Such regeneration complications are only interesting when they happen as an occasional occurrence rather than the norm, so most regenerations should just simply occur and transition to a new persona for the Time Lord.

Character deaths shouldn’t become common place. In my own Doctor Who campaign, we had an unfortunate string of deaths that occurred. 32 deaths occurred in 33 modules! In one adventure there was even a total party kill (TPK), in which all the characters died or regenerated! This era of our game has become known as “death row” and while the game play was generally fair at this time, there are still players who have bad feelings about this time in the game. Some players who lost many characters would stop putting as much effort into their character’s creation because they would lose them so fast. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, you need both danger and a desire for self-preservation to make the game exciting—and this was starting to slip in the campaign as the players started caring less about their characters. It created an environment in which the players became paranoid, did not trust the GM, and also distanced themselves from the very characters they created as a psychological defense mechanism. While most of the play in this era was fair, these rapid fire deaths threatened to break up the gaming group. Much of this had to do with the reactions players had at the table. Be sure to treat each character as important when you are the GM, and remember that it is alright to give new characters the benefit of the doubt and let them escape their first few deadly encounters even if the dice say otherwise.

An extended comment should be made about Total Party Kills. While TPKs do happen, they should be rare. The GM should be sure to point out the level of danger that the players are in when something such as this might occur. In one adventure we ran, the party was shooting weapons at electrical creatures in a spacecraft, and the walls of the ship were starting to buckle from laser fire damage. If the next player missed their shot, the spacecraft’s hull would be breached and the whole party would be blown into space and killed. It is important to give the players knowledge or intuition rolls of the danger at hand, so that when they make such decisions they at least know that the results were chosen by them. This is true of any deadly situation, but even more so when their actions may kill their entire group. Ensuring the players understand the gravity of their decisions takes the edge off any in-game death and also ramps up the drama.
In a role-playing game, especially a time travelling game, a dead character is not always “dead”. A GM can always run a ‘retro’ module and return to a certain era of the game and allow players to play a module with a party line up from the past. Likewise the Time Lord character can always return to a different time and encounter the previous character or party. Modules of “missing episodes” or reunion modules (like “The Five Doctors” or whatever Time Lord you have) are always a fun play. Giving players a chance to revisit some of their favorite characters always creates a great moment in a campaign. This is of course recommended only when you have at least a good history built around the campaign. These nostalgia stories really give players a chance to flesh out their characters and reveal hidden character points that were not developed due to their untimely death, and are usually great fun to play as well. Never rule out such a fun opportunity.

A Game Master should never fear a character’s death. Sometimes a death is even needed to invigorate a campaign. As long as the moment was created and played fairly, and treated with the melodrama and excitement such an important moment deserves, a character’s death will add to the excitement and the epic nature of the game. Players will understand and accept the moment as long as all was played fair, and the event will also allow a reinvention of the character party as a new character is introduced. Some of the most dramatic moments in the Doctor Who TV series have come at the expense of companions’ deaths, such as Katarina sacrificing herself to help the First Doctor and Steven in “The Dalek’s Master Plan” and Adric’s death trying to save the planet Earth from the Cybermen in “Earthshock”. The same is true for a role-playing campaign. Death can reinforce the players’ motivations and remind the players that travelling the world and saving the universe from destruction is not without danger or consequence. It makes the adventuring party’s victories even sweeter.
NEXT ISSUE:
MORE ADVENTURE MODULES - NEW CONTRIBUTORS - NEW PRODUCT REVIEWS
RETRO GAME REVIEW - ROLE-PLAYING PILGRAMAGE
ADAPTING OTHER GAME MODULES TO DOCTOR WHO RPGS
ON-LINE RESOURCES - and More....

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