



MODERN

FAR

VOICES



By Rich Redman

Far Voices is a short adventure for 1st-level heroes using the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*.

INTRODUCTION

You must [STATIC] the Wee Bee Toys store [WHINE] Charles Street and acquire a BunBun electronic rabbit within [BUZZ] hour. You must go to that [WHINE] store. You must [STATIC] this task within the next hour. You may go with as many people [BUZZ]. You must not fail!

—The mysterious “radio” transmission that starts the adventure.

Far Voices is an adventure that finds the heroes. Garbled, static-filled transmissions in a foreign language coming from a car’s speakers tell a hero to acquire a hot electronic toy. This adventure outlines a task and its opposition, and it covers what happens if the hero does not undertake the task.

Links to Other Adventures

Far Voices is the first in the *Grim Frequencies* series of adventures; all started by similar bizarre transmissions. Each short adventure can be dropped into an existing campaign easily. While each adventure will be for increasingly higher-level heroes, none of them provide enough experience points to advance the heroes. Instead, the main action of the campaign should advance the heroes with these missions providing brief interludes.

Each adventure puts the heroes in increasingly complex moral conflicts, and ultimately asks whether the ends justify the means. I’m not promising that the series will be the next great work of American fiction, but it should be a fun ride. Jump on!

PREPARATION

You, the Game Master (GM), need a copy of the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* to run this adventure. To get started, print out this adventure and read it through. Any text in shaded boxes should be read aloud or paraphrased for the players.

Campaign Models

Far Voices is a basic, low- or no-FX modern adventure with eerie overtones. Adapting it to any of the campaign models presented in Chapter Nine: Campaign Models of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* is possible. Here are some recommendations:

Agents of PSI: There are no transmissions. What the hero “hears” is a psychic message. “Punishments” for not following the instructions come from a group such as PSI or the Knightly Order of St. Bartholomew.

Shadow Chasers: The transmissions use an ancient, dead language, such as Akkadian, Sanskrit, or Aramaic (see the Language Groups sidebar in Chapter Two: Skills of the core rulebook) understood by one of the heroes. “Punishments” for not following the instructions come from the Fellowship.

Urban Arcana: The radio transmissions are in a Shadow language understood by one of the heroes, such as Celestial, Elven, or Draconic (see Languages of Shadow in Chapter One: Characters of the *Urban Arcana Campaign Setting*). “Punishments” for not following the instructions come from the Knights of the Silver Dragon (if you’re using the full campaign setting and not just the material from the core rulebook, try the Fellowship, the Knightly Order of St. Bartholomew, or St. Cuthbert’s House instead).

BACKGROUND

The ultimate source of the transmissions is unimportant. As the GM, it’s up to you how supernatural or technological they are. Effectively, these transmissions activate a vehicle’s speakers directly, bypassing the car’s radio. That means that:

Department-7 in This Adventure

If you adapt this adventure to one of the standard campaign models, that model defines the role of Department-7. If you use the adventure as written, consider the following suggestions for that agency:

- Don’t use it. If Department-7 doesn’t figure prominently in your game, you don’t need it here.
- Make it a branch of Homeland Security (or the appropriate organization in your country). It could be investigating the transmissions, and the heroes’ involvement with them, while on the trail of a terrorist threat.
- Make it a branch of the Federal Communications Commission (or the appropriate organization in your country). The FCC routinely investigates pirate radio transmissions, and these are no different.

- Everyone in the vehicle hears them.
- No one outside the vehicle receives the broadcasts, even if their radio is tuned to the same station as that in the hero’s vehicle.
- The broadcasts occur even if the radio is turned off.
- The broadcasts interrupt any CD, tape, eight-track, or MP3 playing.
- Turning the radio on or off does not interrupt the broadcast.
- Changing the station does not interrupt the broadcast.
- The broadcast is one-way, to the heroes’ vehicle. Heroes who try to address the transmission get no response.

Everyone who understands the language understands them. The transmissions always address one hero who understands the language by name, so alter any read-aloud text of the broadcasts to include that hero’s name.

Synopsis

While traveling in a motor vehicle that belongs to one of the heroes, a hero hears a transmission that addresses him (or her) directly. The hero either follows the instructions in the transmission or not. If not, something bad happens and you move on to some other event in your campaign until the next transmission.

Character Hooks

The hook for *Far Voices* is simple: The heroes do what they’re told or bad things happen.

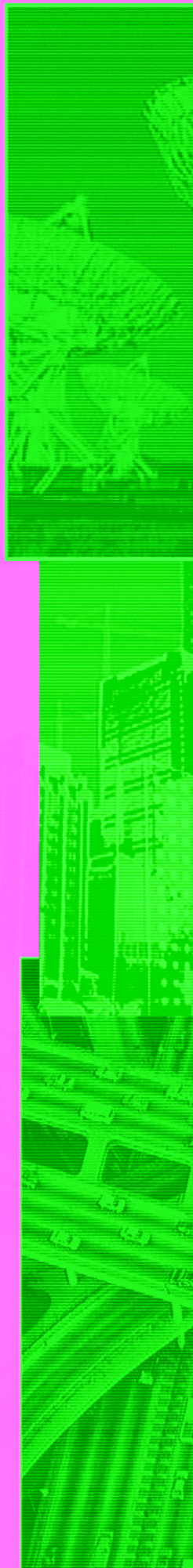
However, there are other reasons they might get involved. Examples include:

- They’re telecommunications engineers and want to know how the transmissions occur. They follow the instructions hoping to learn more about the source.
- They work for the FCC or Department-7 and are assigned to follow the instructions, hoping to learn more about the source.

Scaling the Adventure

Far Voices is intended for four to six 1st-level heroes. The encounters in the game are scaled to reflect the danger inherent in modern-era gunfights. If heroes find them too easy or if you have higher-level heroes, gradually add levels to all opponents in each encounter. Don’t simply add opponents. The additional foes will have just as much trouble successfully fighting your heroes as those already provided.

Special Note: Since these are 1st-level heroes, you might run this as a way to get them together. Have each one hear a slightly different transmission, each of which addresses that hero by name. In each transmission, they receive the same instructions and are told to expect allies at the scene. If you like, you may give each hero instructions on something to wear or carry (a specific colored item of clothing, a specific flower, a newspaper or magazine, an umbrella, etc.) in order to be recognizable to allies.



BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

Begin the adventure with the following:

It's a pleasant enough Saturday for the time of year. You're enjoying a drive, when static starts coming over the car's speakers. Shrill electronic whines and discordant buzzes pop from the speakers, interrupting an urgent voice.

At this point, take the heroes who understand the transmission aside and read them the text presented at the beginning of this adventure. Heroes who do not understand it should be told about static, strange electronic whines and buzzes, and a voice speaking urgently in a language they don't understand. They should be able to understand the name of the store and the name of the toy, because those will be spoken in the local language.

The Local Area

Far Voices requires no specific location. It can be played in urban or rural areas, as you wish. Choose a location appropriate for your campaign. Most places have Tourism or Chamber of Commerce sites on the Internet that can supply you with details about weather, local plants and animals, and other details to help you provide a sense of place.

You should also change the name of the toy store and its location to fit your campaign. For example, if your campaign is set in your hometown, pick a similar local store and use it and its location.

The Task

To clarify the text of the transmission: Heroes must go to a specific toy store and acquire a specific toy within a set time.

The Toy

BunBun the electronic Bunny is a completely fictional item. If heroes need information about it, tell them that it is a stuffed toy with a voice chip and motion sensors in the eyes. It can wave its arms, wiggle its ears, and "dance." It stores a child's name, and uses the name when playing stories or songs. Parents can plug it in to their computer via a USB port and download new stories and songs for a small fee.

The Location

Wee Bee Toys is a national toy store chain. Each location is a small warehouse full of toys, puzzles, and games. Wee Bee Toys uses a happy, child-friendly, little bee as its icon and spokesman. It is a legitimate business where people buy toys, so public spaces are bright, well lit, and cheerful; in contrast with the adventure that happens here.

The store is a large rectangle, approximately 200 feet by 120 feet, with the wide dimension facing a parking lot.

Security: Security cameras in the ceiling monitor the store. Mirrored hemispheres protrude from the ceiling and conceal the cameras.

1. **Entrance:** The entrance has double glass doors that swing outwards, and then automatic sliding doors just to the

right. The walls are glass, allowing customers their first glimpse of the wonders within.

2. **Customer Service:** The store handles returns at this counter.

3. **Supervisor Office:** This office holds monitors where a shift supervisor can keep an eye on employees, a desk for making up schedules, and serves as temporary storage for returned items.

4. **Check Out Counters:** Here are the registers and conveyors for people purchasing products. The counter by the rest rooms is reserved for large items, like swing sets and jungle gyms. The store ????

5. **Exit:** A sliding door opens into a space manned by an employee who checks receipts before customers leave through the double doors back out into the parking lot.

6. **Men's Room:** There is a water fountain on the wall between the restrooms.

7. **Women's Room**

8. **Order Pick-Up:** Wee Bee Toys allows customers to purchase items on their website for in-store pick up at this counter.

9. **Order Staging:** Items that are pre-ordered are stored in this room until customers arrive to pick them up.

10. **Seasonal Clearance:** These shelves hold seasonal items such as Easter bunnies, Halloween costumes, Santa Claus statues, and so on, on clearance after the season ends. You can also find beach toys here in the winter, and sleds and snow toys here in the summer. Depending on when you run the adventure and where you set it, there could be water pistols or ice skates.

11. **Small Item Storage:** This room holds stock of small items including video game systems, cartridges, and accessories; trading cards and other collectibles; and consumer electronics. "Small Item" is Wee Bee Toys' euphemism for "high value items that are easy to shoplift."

12. **Small Item Counter:** This counter sells trading cards and other collectibles, consumer electronics, and video game systems, games, and accessories.

13. **Shelves:** Shelves are roughly ten feet high, with display racks above them rising to the ceiling. These shelves hold toys, games, action figures, coloring books, art supplies, dolls, dollhouses, electric trains, plastic models, R/C vehicles, and all sorts of things that thrill children of all ages.

14. **Play set Display:** Prefabricated houses and forts, swing sets, sand boxes, and jungle gyms are displayed here.

15. **Warehouse Space:** This space contains a small forklift and pallets of toys ready to re-stock the shelves.

16. **Loading Dock:** A typical concrete loading dock.

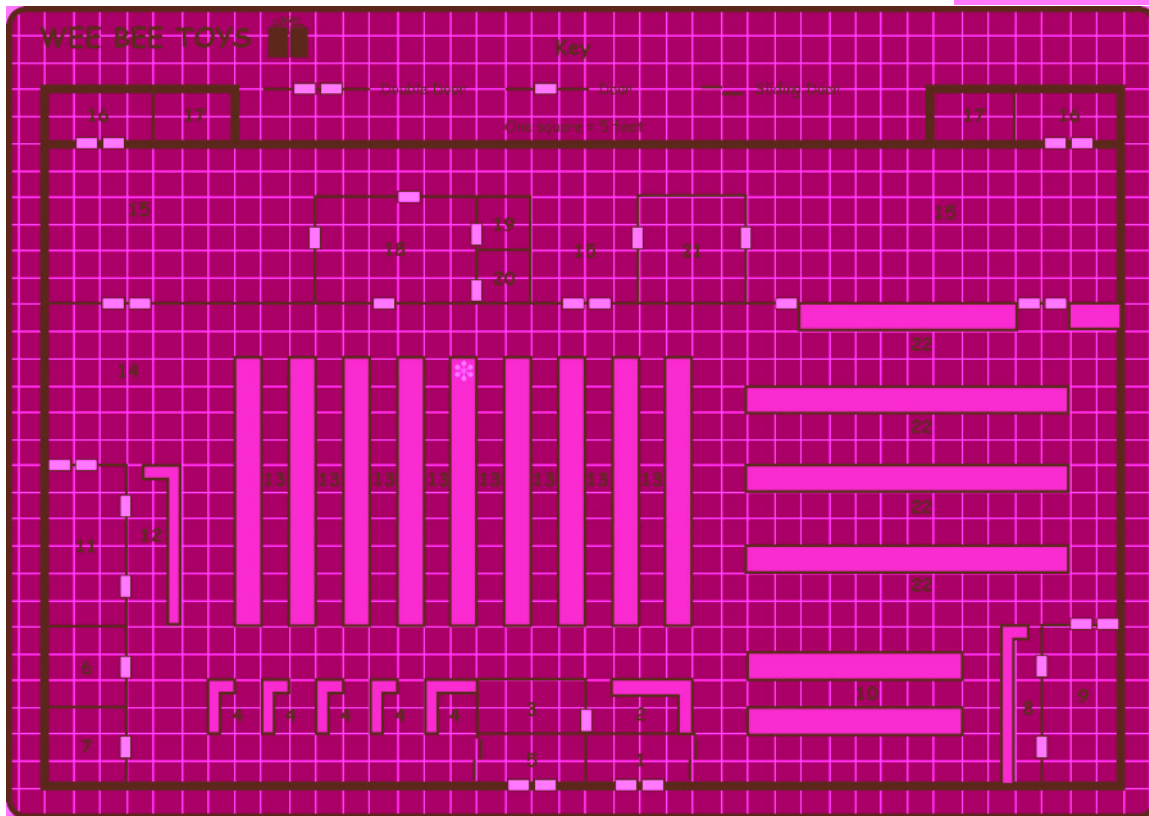
17. **Ramp:** This ramp leads up to the loading dock.

18. **Break Room:** Used by the employees on their breaks and lunches. It holds a soda machine, a snack machine, a sink, a coffee maker, a microwave, a refrigerator, a water fountain, and two circular tables with chairs. The employees' schedule is posted on the wall. One-way glass allows the employees to watch the store from this room.

19. **Men's Room:** Employee restroom

20. **Women's Room:** Employee restroom

21. **Manager's Office:** This is the main office for the store. It holds filing cabinets, a desk, two chairs, and the manager's computer. One-way glass lets the manager watch the store



from this room. He also has a rack of security monitors to watch employees and the store. The storage for the store security cameras is here as well.

22. Large Item Displays: These shelves hold larger items, like basketball backboards and nets, soccer goals, bicycles, and other sporting goods for kids.

*The last remaining BunBun is on the shelves here.

The Complication

BunBun the electronic Bunny represents a hot new toy that is flying off store shelves. The complication is that when the heroes arrive, there are only three left. While the heroes take stock of the situation, two are purchased. There's one left on the shelf, and the opposition wants it. Just as the heroes lay a hand on the last BunBun in the store, the opposition reaches for it.

The Opposition

Jamie Oberholtzer (see GM Characters, below) is a burly Caucasian male with blond hair in an unfashionable buzz cut. He has tattoos on his neck. A successful Knowledge (street-wise) check (DC 10) tells the hero who made it that they are prison tattoos. He wears khaki slacks, a denim shirt, and a baggy rain parka. You should make two Spot checks for each hero present as soon as they notice Jamie.

- Spot (DC 12) to notice that he is armed. A successful check results in a hero noticing that Jamie has something holstered under his left arm, most likely a bulky handgun.
- Spot (DC 30) to notice that wears body armor. A successful check results in a hero noticing that Jamie is wearing concealed body armor of some sort.

He works for a filmmaker named Darryl Brzezinski. If your campaign is not set in Southern California, then Darryl and his entourage are in your town scouting locations for his next horror film. He sent Jamie to purchase a BunBun toy for his favorite niece, who happens to live in this town.

Jamie has a criminal record, including charges of assault. This is actually a bonus in Darryl's eyes, as he is the son of a Russian mobster and involved with the *organizatsiya* himself. Darryl is also a little paranoid, so he hires tough, dangerous people as his assistants and security. Jamie is one of those people.

This is the sixth store Jamie has visited today. He is hot, tired, and frustrated by dealing with people he shouldn't simply shoot or pummel. He wants that BunBun, and won't take no for an answer.

Developments

Here are the attitudes and plans of those present in the store.

Jamie Oberholtzer: Jamie's priorities are to get BunBun, to not be arrested, and to not hurt anyone, in that order. His initial attitude is unfriendly, and could quickly become hostile. Jamie always tries to be within five feet of whichever hero is holding BunBun. If heroes aren't holding the toy, Jamie stands next to it.

He will first attempt to persuade the heroes with a story about his employer's nephew dying of cancer and this toy being a present for what may be his last birthday ever (Sense Motive [DC 30] to notice his lie). If necessary he will elaborate about how much effort he has put into finding this toy (all of which is true).

His next tactic is bribery. He will attempt to offer the heroes enough money to grant them a +1 bonus on their next Wealth check to purchase an object if they will let him buy the last BunBun.

If those things fail, Jamie gets tough. He pulls his can of pepper spray, and attacks whoever is holding BunBun. He then attempts to snatch BunBun from the hero (see the Disarm rules in Chapter Five: Combat of the core rulebook) and run out of the store. If no one is holding BunBun, he attacks the nearest hero using his pepper spray and then grabs BunBun for his run out of the store.

If heroes try to stop him from running, he attacks using his martial arts. If someone snatches the toy back from him, Jamie focuses on fighting that hero. Otherwise he goes for the nearest opponent. Jamie will not draw a firearm unless a hero draws one first, but he has no qualms about using weapons improvised from the toys and shelves around him.

The Staff: The staff of Wee Bee Toys has seen many hot toys, and they're accustomed to the frayed tempers of desperate parents fighting over the last one. Their initial attitude is indifferent. In general, they let discussions and arguments happen. If voices get raised, then the manager steps in and asks those involved to come to his office (he uses room #3 on the map, the supervisor's office) and to resolve the dispute in private. If violence breaks out, everyone takes cover and the manager calls the police.

The Police: If someone calls the police, they arrive in 2d6 minutes. Four low-level police officers (see Chapter Eight: Friends and Foes in the core rulebook) arrive and arrest anyone with a weapon or anyone fighting. Their initial attitude is hostile. If Jamie is still conscious when the police arrive, he attempts to snatch the toy from a hero and escape the store.

The Customers: By now, all the customers that wanted a BunBun have one. So the tired, frustrated, angry people have already left. The remaining shoppers are indifferent to the activities surrounding the last BunBun. If violence breaks out, they flee the scene. If you need to distract some heroes from overwhelming Jamie, then have some shelves fall over and pin one or more customers, or have someone trampled by customers fleeing the scene.

The Punishment

If the heroes announce that they have no intention of obeying the instructions, then little things start going wrong immediately. Lights turn red, busses and accidents block traffic, the bottom melts out of a coffee cup and spills hot coffee on the lap of the hero who understood the message, and so on. Nothing that costs money or does damage, but clear signs that the universe has turned against the heroes.

If the heroes fail in their assignment, either because Jamie Oberholtzer overcomes them or because they don't reach the store in time, then something significant and obviously bad happens to them. Pick something directly and obviously related to the hero that understood the message (if more than one hero understood it, then have the same thing happen to each of them). Possibilities include:

- Forgetting an important tool until a critical moment in a job.
- Having a car stolen (especially obvious if the car is very difficult to steal, if the heroes have never had anything stolen before, or if the car isn't worth stealing).
- Having a favorite tool or weapon malfunction in a way that it never has before, and at a critical moment.

- A contact refuses to speak to the hero ever again over something the hero recognizes as a mistake (mistaken identity, false accusation, etc.).

Regardless of what happens, there is no evidence left behind. There is no way to track down a responsible party. You, as the GM, determine who is responsible (see Campaign Models for suggestions).

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

There are several possible conclusions.

- **Success:** If heroes acquire a BunBun, they have diverted a chain of events that would have resulted in a terrible tragedy—though there's no way they could know that. It doesn't matter what they do with the BunBun, as long as they keep it from Jamie Oberholtzer.
- **Failure:** Consequences of failure include the punishments outlined above, and the world slowly drifting toward a more horrible fate...unless the heroes avert that in later adventures.

Developments

There are many questions purposely unanswered by this adventure. You may want to pursue them in your own campaign.

- If heroes acquire a BunBun (either in the course of the adventure or later), they may discover that not only does BunBun download information, but it uploads user information as well. It records times of activities, how it is activated (power switch or motion sensors), frequency of activities, most often requested songs and stories, and uploads them to the manufacturer's web host. If you wish to make such clandestine information gathering more sinister, replace the motion sensors with tiny fiber optic cameras and have BunBun upload still images as well. Who receives this information, and what are they doing with it? Is BunBun really just a toy? Who owns the company that makes it? Do BunBun's speakers play subsonic messages to sleeping children, and if so, what do they say?
- Depending on your campaign and the heroes' actions, they may face pursuit by law enforcement after the encounter in Wee Bee Toys. What do the heroes do to avoid pursuit, and what adventures occur during that?
- Heroes may wind up with some of Jamie Oberholtzer's belongings, including his cell phone. There is an unlisted number he calls quite a bit, and from which he receives calls. This is Darryl Brzezinski's phone number, and heroes may discover that through research. What does Darryl have to do with the mysterious transmission received by the heroes? Why does someone want to mess with Darryl's life? Why is it so important that his niece not receive the toy? How is Russian organized crime mixed up in this?
- Assuming heroes succeed, they have interfered with someone who is involved with Russian organized crime. How

upset is Darryl Brzezinski over the interference? Does he even notice? Or is he involved with some of the more sinister possibilities surrounding the toy?

Some of those questions will be answered in future installments of *Grim Frequencies*. Look for *Faint Transmissions* next month!

Credits

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
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This d20™ System game uses mechanics developed for the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, and Peter Adkison. This game also uses mechanics developed for the *Psionics Handbook* by Bruce R. Cordell, the *Call of Cthulhu® Roleplaying Game* by Monte Cook and John Tynes, and the *Star Wars® Roleplaying Game* by Bill Slavicsek, Andy Collins, and JD Wiker. d20 MODERN, D&D and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS are registered trademarks, and d20 and the d20 System logo are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Wizards characters, character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

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GM CHARACTERS

Jamie Oberholtzer: male Strong Ordinary 2/Tough Ordinary 2; CR 3; medium human; HD 2d8+4 plus 2d10+4; hp 28; Mas 14; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; Def 17, touch 15, flat-footed 16; BAB +3; Grp +5; Atk +5 melee (1d4+2, unarmed) or +4 ranged (2d8, Desert Eagle); Full Atk: +5 melee (1d4+2, unarmed) or +4 ranged (2d8, Desert Eagle), or +4 ranged touch (blinding*, pepper spray); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL Darryl Brzezinski; AP 0; Rep +0; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Starting Occupation: Criminal (Knowledge [streetwise] and Sleight of Hand are class skills).

Skills and Feats: Drive +3, Gamble +2, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (streetwise) +5, Sleight of Hand +6; Combat Martial Arts, Confident, Light Armor Proficiency, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Possessions: Light undercover shirt, Desert Eagle (.50 AE autoloader), spare magazine (loaded), concealed carry holster, pepper spray, cell phone, various personal belongings.

***Pepper Spray:** The target must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 15) or be blinded for 1d4 rounds. Pepper spray is limited to 5 range increments.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Before Rich Redman came to Wizards of the Coast RPG R&D department, he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast's Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer, having worked on the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**, the **Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game**, and **Dark*Matter**. When he's not working as vice president of The Game Mechanics, a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat. For more, check out www.richredman.ws and www.thegamemechanics.com.