



Harkness Autocrat Mercury-Zeitung

THE TECHNOLOGY HOUSE PERIODICAL INAUGURAL ISSUE

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Note From the Autocrat

Matthew Petersen

This issue marks the start of a new era for Technology House as we embark into the world of print media. We look forward to providing Tech House members, as well as the greater Brown community, with quality articles, art, and diversion. In this issue, we cover diverse topics ranging from ampersands

to Mesopotamian magical practices, from roleplaying game scenarios to the real numbers. So enjoy, and let us entertain you, educate you, and perhaps open a door you didn't even know was there.

Of course, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns about any topic in this issue, send us a letter! Contact us at the return address, if you are a postal subscriber, or contact us by email at *autocrat (at) tech-house (dot) org*.

As an aside, the last two words of the title will change with each issue! Perhaps next time you'll be reading the H.A. Tribune-Herald, or Post-Dispatch!

Unbiolievable

Mattea Berglund

Imagine flying reptiles the size of a small airplane (wingspan of 52 feet). If you could travel back in time 68 to 66 million years, you wouldn't have to imagine them! Quetzal-

coatlus is an extinct species in the taxon Pterosaur, and one of the largest flying organisms in Earth's history. Pterosaurs were the first vertebrates to evolve powered flight, and may have been the first endotherms (animals that metabolically regulate their body temperature, like us humans). Their wings were not feathered like a bird's, but constructed from membrane, like the wings of a modern bat. This membrane was stiffened by long fibers called "actinofibrils". On land, Quetzalcoatlus likely tucked its wings back and walked on four limbs, plucking up comparatively puny dinosaurs in its enormous beak.

Get Your Word's Worth

Ekaterina Kryuchkova

"Ampersand" is actually a contraction of 'and per se and,' which means '& by itself is and,' chanted as an aid to learning the sign.

You might know that "serendip-

¹Not real

ity” was coined by Horace Walpole, suggested by The Three Princes of Serendip, the title of a fairy tale in which the heroes ”were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.”

The opposite of serendipity is called ”zemblanity.” Still sounding like a neologism, it likely stems from Nabokov’s 1962 novel *Pale Fire*, which features the “distant northern land” of Zembla and a series of apparent coincidences that are actually a deliberate linkage of events. Nabokov’s reference is surely to *Novaya Zemlya* (Новая Земля), a group of Arctic islands owned by Russia, which were at one time commonly referred to in English as *Nova Zembla*. *Zemlya* means earth or land in Russian, and *Novaya* means new, so the phrase by itself is not quite *zemblane*. *Zemblacious*? *Zemblazing*? *Zemblasphemous*?..



ṭupšimātu

Matthew Petersen

This month, we’ll be looking at magical practices in Ancient Mesopotamia, specifically divination and its importance throughout Mesopotamian history. In short, the practice of divination was very important in Ancient Mesopotamia, and one of the most accu-

rately transmitted texts, *Enuma Anu Enlil*—transmitted scribally through over a millenium—dealt exclusively with omens. Some 6500-7000 omens were collected in this text, and it served as the basis for the interpretation of the world in political and physical terms. These omens would be used to advise the king, and ranged from astrology to extispicy² to everyday happenings. Differing from modern astrological practices, the Mesopotamians offered very specific ‘if-then’ constructs for their omens—in a combination of the theological and the mechanical, they proposed divine consequences which could nonetheless be dodged. Occasionally, if a king was warned of an omen that bode ill for his reign, he would vanish from the throne, be labeled as a “laborer,” and appoint a substitute king (a gardener or other staff member) to accumulate the inauspiciousness in his stead. The king would then later resume his post. I leave you with the comical note from the Sumerian King List that one king, having done this, died after consuming soup that was too hot, *before he could resume the throne*, and so his gardener ruled for a number of decades.

Dice Roles

Petersen and Crisanto

Today we present the first installment in a system- and

setting-agnostic tabletop RPG column. Conventions for these columns will be as follows:

- Three basic “stats” will be used: **Physical**, **Mental**, and **Constitution**. Think of these as analogues and proxies for the stats used in almost any system, and through them, the skills.
- Checks against stats or skills will be noted as **Easy**, **Normal**, and **Hard**. These could be DCs, degrees of success, or any other sort of gradated result.

Today, we present a plot hook we’re calling “The Telltale Cart.” Too often, adventures start by motivating the party solely through monetary means. In this hook, we grab the characters by affecting one of their own.

The party starts having already gotten to know each other through other means; whether you choose to explain this in backstory or in a previous adventure is up to the GM. They could be anything from your bog-standard D&D adventuring party to a group of Call of Cthulhu investigators.

The Telltale Cart

The party is walking along a street, minding their own business, when suddenly, a vehicle rushes by them, slows minutely, and the occupants of the vehicle throw out a body. The corpse lands at the feet of the party, optionally knocking one

²The examination of the innards of sacrificed animals, esp. the livers of sheep.

of them over on its trajectory downwards.

Key facts about the body:

- The body is that of a former party member, or perhaps a relation of a party member, one who had not been seen for several months.
- The body has all of its valuables and identifying items/marks.
- The body is tied up.
- An anguished expression distorts their face.
- An **Easy Mental** check, used to inspect the body, reveals defensive wounds. It can also show that up until very recently, the person was very much alive. They may even have time to gasp out one last word.

On the body, pinned to it by a knife that stabs into the heart, is a note. What this note says, and what the knife looks like, are entirely up to the GM. Is the knife a strange sacrificial dagger? Is the note a warning, telling the party that they could be next? The hook gives the GM a wide range of options to tie into a larger story of their choosing.

With this hook, it is recommended that the players make up a backstory for their party. Decide on some past adventures, establish some background ties, etc. As a GM, this is the perfect time to unobtrusively figure out which

of their loved ones/former colleagues/nemeses is going to be horribly murdered in the first session. Be careful to not telegraph your plans.

If you end up using this hook, let us know how it goes! Send us a letter, or send us an email at *autocrat (at) techhouse (dot) org*, with "Dice Roles" in the subject line.

Thinking, Poorly Thought

AJ Whitman

In this column, I will present cognitive science phenomena, badly. This issue:

Prosopagnosia

A thing where you can't see faces. Like, your brain just goes, No, I don't know what that is. Like, maybe it's a face, I guess there are face-like features or something, but who is it? I don't know man. Figure it out with, like, their hair or something. And then if you show them different faces, they'll take longer to tell if they're the same or different, or like won't remember which faces they've seen before. There was this one guy in New Zealand, and he could recognize his sheep, but he couldn't recognize faces, even of people he knew. But like it was only his own sheep, and then he was scary accurate. Faces, man.

Smash and Sundry

Samuel Angelo Crisanto

Technology House is pleased to announce the formation of a new Super Smash Bros.³ ladder, hosted on the Technology House wiki. Any house member is welcome to join. They will be placed at the bottom, and given three provisional matches to challenge anyone on the ladder. Rules are on the Wiki, but all members are encouraged to use at least one provisional match to challenge Paul Adonizio.

Real⁴ Facts About Real Numbers

Samuel Angelo Crisanto

Here are some real facts about real numbers.

1. Have you ever noticed that it is impossible to count higher than five (5) on one hand? This is because five (5) is the highest real number.
2. π is equal to 3, because as π is equal to $3 \pm 5\%$, $p < 0.5$, and so we cannot reject the hypothesis that they are equal.
3. If, when performing a back-of-the-envelope calculation, you find that your number is too small to be plausible, simply add an exclamation point to make it larger.

³4 Wii U

⁴Not real

4. On November 27, 2015, Caroline Kennedy, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, became the first person to count to infinity⁵. She was shocked to discover that it wraps around.
5. When deciding upon the value of π in Ancient Greece, Pythagoras (570 - 495 B.C.E.) made a calculation error, rendering it irrational.
5. i is a real number only on alternate Wednesdays.
5. There are infinitely many real numbers between any two real numbers, except for between 0.2 and 0.3.

Overheard At Technology House

Tech House Quotes Page

"Oh. My. God. We could add a cactus to a roomba!"
— *A Tech Houser, thinking of events for Bonding Season Covallence Period.*

"I have only expressed pain once w- OW! - I have only expressed pain *twice* within these walls."
— *A Tech Houser, on being fine.*

"No one's a big data master. It's just a phrase we use to get ooh's, ahh's, and funding."
— *A Tech House alum, on academia.*

How Dare You!

Nick Cunningham

Matthew Petersen, I am talking to you.

It is unpardonable that you expect "deadlines" to be a thing that are followed by the writers at large. Art cannot be directed; words cannot be forced; rants cannot be conjured from the æther at the slightest provocation. Your acts on the day of March 7th, when you sent an email proclaiming, "Submissions to the Harkness Autocrat are due on the 12th, now only 5 days away. Please email them to me as soon as possible," are ample evidence that you have no business being the editor-in-chief of such an august publication.

I demand your immediate resignation and a public apology.

Literature Today

Kavi Duvvoori

Excerpted from The Guide to Nonexistent Birds - An Ornithological Logic, edited by Kavi Duvvoori. Soon to be available in full, near you, anywhere algorithmic fictional birding guides are sold!

NOTE: We cannot yet guarantee that any birds described in this guide do not, in fact, exist. We deeply and sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this

causes and, pending venture capital funding, are working on developing a solution to this problem.

Coastal Guineafowl

The coastal guinea fowl is notable for its brown beak and its golden breast. Coastal guinea fowls can often be found around western beaches or at times in western undergrowth.

Crimson-Crested Guinea fowl

A relative of the coastal guinea fowl, the crimson-crested guinea fowl is somewhat larger than it, with a brown tail and brown breast. Crimson-crested guinea fowls can occasionally be found around northern conifers or at times in northern tundra. Their oversized shoulders are notable.

Yellow-Beaked Guinea fowl

The yellow-beaked guinea fowl is notable for its red shoulder and its golden head. They have narrow shoulders and speckled beaks. Yellow-beaked guinea fowls may occasionally be spotted in northern undergrowth or in beaches. Their diet consists primarily of seeds and driftwood-feeding insects.

⁵Infinity is a *hyperreal* number, as it is larger than 5.

Blue-Throated Hawk

The blue-throated hawk has a blue throat and a yellow beak. They can often be distinguished by their speckled wings and shoulders. Blue-throated hawks feed on rodents.

White-Beaked Hawk

The white-beaked hawk is larger than the blue-throated hawk and is notable for its yellow throat and black shoulder. One can be identified by its speckled throat and its' striped wing. White-beaked hawks may often be spotted in western estuaries or in beaches. Their diet consists primarily of shorebirds.

White-Breasted Guineafowl

The white-breasted guineafowl is somewhat larger than the yellow-beaked guineafowl with a crimson wing and white breast. White-breasted guineafowls can occasionally be found around western bushes or at times in western pine stands. They can often be distinguished by their speckled breasts and wings.

Gray-Crested Coot

The gray-crested coot has a yellow wing and a red breast. Its' speckled throat often lets you

identify one. Gray-crested coots feed on freshwater fish.

A Puzzling View

Gaurav Manek

Mirror, Mirror

You are standing in front of a mirror, and you raise your right hand up. Your mirror image raises their left hand up. Mirrors seem to invert right and left, but not up and down. Why?

Knights and Knaves

A country is inhabited by only knaves, knights, and civilians, who always lie, always tell the truth, and who randomly do either (respectively). In rank, Knaves are lowest, followed by civilians, then followed by knights, which are highest.

You meet two inhabitants of this country, Alice and Bob, who say:

- Alice: I am of lower rank than Daryl.
- Bob: That's not true.

Is Alice a knave, knight, or civilian? What about Bob?

Diplomatic Immunity

Technology House now has a resident game of *Diplomacy!*

Currently, the great nations of Europe are ruled by:

- England is governed by Prime Minister Wilson.
- France is governed by President Guillaume.
- Germany is ruled by Kaiser-Schore Kaiser Lory.
- Austria-Hungary is ruled by Empress Katharina.
- Italy is ruled by King Matteo Emanuelle III.
- Russia is ruled by Tsar Raz.
- The Ottoman Empire is ruled by Sultan Zagorski.

The game is mediated by Secretary-General Paul Adonizio.

WAR EXPLODES IN THE BALKANS! Ottoman attack on Serbia repelled. Austria takes Greece. Italy attempts to invade Trieste and gets repelled. France captures all of Iberia in 1 year. British armies have been sighted in Norway, and Belgium remains neutral after combined French and German assault.

As of Winter 1901, Austria-Hungary has plunged south into the Balkans, seizing Greece. Russia has reinforced its Northern front to address the growing threat of England and Germany. France has seized the Iberian Peninsula, and Germany has struck North into Scandinavia. England has conquered Norway, and has a fleet in each of the Norwegian and North Seas. Finally, Italy has taken Tunis, and controls the Ionian Sea.

Letters

Greetings from Australia!

I hope nobody is missing me too badly. Say something nice at my body double's funeral.

Glad you aren't here,
Kaiser Aiden Schore of
Germany the Koalas

Send us letters! Reach us at the return address, if you are a postal subscriber, or at *autocrat (at) techhouse (dot) org*. We look forward to hearing from you!



Masthead

Editor-Autocrat: Matthew Petersen

President: Kristen Michaelson

Contributors

Paul Addonizio

Mattea Berglund

Samuel Angelo Crisanto

Robert "Nick" Cunningham

Ekaterina Kryuchkova

Gaurav Manek

Matthew Petersen

AJ Whitman

