Queensland Wargamer

Issue 55   FEBRUARY 2003

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Here we see the gamers in a group formation in their natural habitat. Accustomed to long periods without natural light, the gamer can survive on nothing but sugary liquids, crispy treats and/or pizza, and calls of witty banter interspersed with game related argument can often be heard ringing throughout the neighbourhood.

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In this issue

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Format

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The last four issues of the Queensland Wargamer are currently available on the QUGS website (http://www.qugs.org.au), and so is the index of every article ever published. Individual articles from earlier issues are also available on request if the original author can be contacted to give their consent. Log on and take a look!

Content

What we want: The Queensland Wargamer is a forum for people to express their views and ideas about gaming. Any contributions that are in some way related to any form of gaming will be considered: reviews, rules clarifications or changes, fiction, discussions about games or gaming, articles on history, mythology and the like, artwork, etc.

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Triad: When One Opponent Just Isn't Enough
Boardgaming

Cameron Browne

Three-player games of pure skill introduce a fascinating dynamic not found in their two-player counterparts; two losing players often form temporary unspoken alliances to pull back the leader and keep the game alive. This phenomenon is described as the "tall poppy syndrome" in Australia.

Triad, a recently invented abstract board game for three players, explores interesting variations on these micro-alliances. It also introduces the concept of player-defined move order, another mechanism not found in two-player games. This is the abstract equivalent of playing Tag, where the next player to move is "it".

Red, Green and Blue are the three players in a game of Triad. The board is a hexagonal grid with five cells per side, tricoloured such that no two cells of the same colour touch.

Rules

Each player starts with nine pieces of their colour, set out as shown in Figure 1. Red moves first.

Movement: Each turn the current player must:

  (i)   Move,
  (ii) Capture, and
  (iii) Drop.

The current player **moves** one of their pieces in a straight line in any of the six hexagonal directions, so as to land on a vacant *foreign* cell (that is, a cell that is not their colour). Any intervening cells must be empty; a piece cannot jump over existing pieces. The opponent who owns the landing cell becomes the *candidate* and the other opponent becomes the *bunny*.

All opponents' pieces immediately adjacent to the landing cell are **captured** and removed from the board. The current player is obliged to make the move that captures the most pieces each turn, but may choose amongst equals. This is called the *max capture* rule.

The moving player must then **drop** a bunny piece on any empty cell, unless a player has just been eliminated.

The candidate becomes the next player to move.

If the current player to move has no legal move (theoretically possible but highly unlikely) then they are eliminated and their pieces removed from the board.
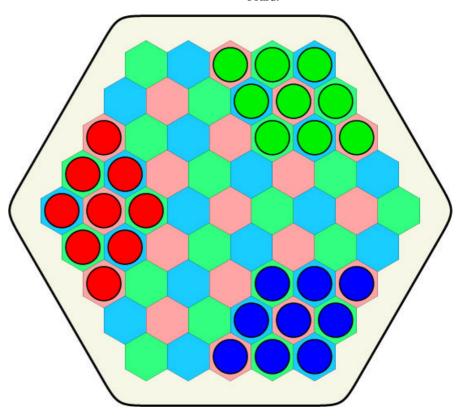

Figure 1. Red, Green and Blue in the starting position.

Goal: Play stops the moment any player is eliminated. The game is won by the player with the most pieces left, else is a tie between the two remaining players if they are both left with the same number of pieces.

Move Notation

The following move notation shows the coordinates moved from and to, the number of pieces captured, the coordinate at which the bunny piece is to be dropped, and the next player to move. The number of pieces captured and next player to move are shown for the convenience of players; these can be deduced from the board and are optional.

Example (Red to move): **E2-E7: 2 > D6 Blue.**

In this example Red moves from **E2** to **E7** capturing two pieces, and Blue automatically becomes the next player to move since destination cell **E7** is blue. Red drops a bunny Green piece at the empty cell of their choice (**D6** in this case, marked *b*) before passing control to Blue.

Instead of playing **E2-E7** in the leftmost diagram, Red could have made one other legal move that captures two pieces. Can you find it?

Cell locations are described by row (**A..I**) and right-leaning column (**1..9**). This alphanumeric notation is the standard used for hexagonal boards on Richard Rognlie's PBeM games server (http://www.gamerz.net/pbmserv/) and seems to work as well as any other system.
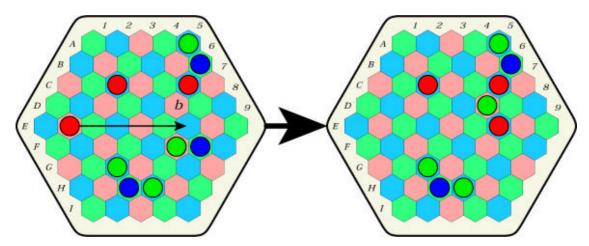

Figure 2. Red moves **E2** to **E7** and drops at **D6**.

Match Play

There are 4 points allocated per game. If a player wins outright by eliminating both opponents simultaneously then 4-0-0 points are awarded, else if a player wins by eliminating one opponent then 3-1-0 points are awarded where the losing player scores 0 points. If the game is drawn (or a player forfeits) then 2-2-0 points are awarded.

A match consists of three opponents playing successive games until one player reaches 7 points or more, with a margin of at least 1 point over the nearest rival. Handicaps can be introduced by awarding players bonus points at the start of each match.

Since an opponent will be placing the bunny piece on the previous move, then a 4-0-0 win should not happen unless there is collusion or a serious blunder has been made.

The weakest player (or loser of the previous game) should be Red. The strongest player (or winner of the previous game) should be Blue. Aiming for a draw can often be a good option given the reasonable number of points on offer.

History

Triad arose from discussions between Joao Neto, Bill Taylor and Cameron Browne regarding the development of new mechanisms specific to three-player games. Bill suggested the idea of symmetric move order, whereby the player to move next was determined by the state of the board rather than a pre-ordained move order.

Cameron invented Triad as a proof of concept in November 2002. The hexagonal grid tricolours nicely and was a logical choice, just as giving each player pieces that match

their tile colour seemed natural. Other possibilities include uniform board with coloured pieces, coloured board with uniform pieces, etc.

Joao made the excellent suggestion that players be forced to capture if possible, which was soon amended to the max capture rule. This tightened the game up and improved scope for strategic development.

After a bit of fine-tuning to the opening sequence (discussed in more detail next section) the rules were stable, and as far we can determine optimal for what we set out to achieve.

Features

The five-sided hexagonal board consists of 61 tiles, hence an equal distribution of tiles between the three players is not possible. It turns out that the owner of the central tile (Red) only has 19 tiles, while the other two players have 21 tiles each.

This theoretically reduces Red's mobility but does not appear be a serious handicap in practice. Games tend to be short and vicious rather than long and drawn out, where presumably the limitation would be more noticeable. However, Red is lumped with the smaller tile set in order to offset any first move advantage.

Another point to note about the geometry of the board is that Red is forced to pass control to Green with the first move. This can be seen in Figure 1 where Red's only legal moves are to green cells, since the current player must move to a foreign cell that captures the maximum number of pieces.

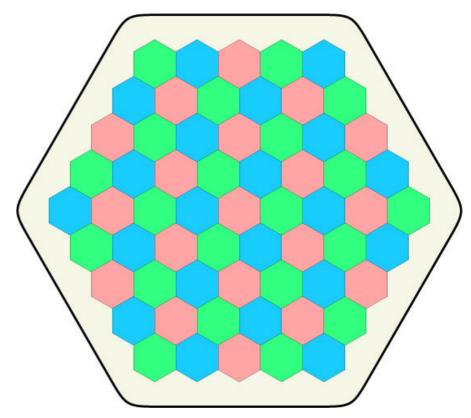Therefore Red always moves first, Green always moves second, and Blue is always the last to move – though not

Figure 3. Red has fewer tiles.

necessarily third! Thus some order is imposed on the first round of moves in each game and it makes sense to arrange the players from weakest to strongest.

Any multiplayer game with player-defined move order must address the problem of players ganging up to cut another player out of the game, ruining it for the odd man out. This tends not to happen in Triad for more than a few moves, since the bunny drop rule ensures that each player accumulates an extra piece for each turn they are excluded.

Strategy and Tactics

Strategic knowledge about the game is limited due to its recent invention. In addition, the volatile nature of Triad emphasises tactical aspects; it is often difficult to predict how play will unfold, and not

uncommon for a player to lose half their pieces in a single turn.

Probably the most important point to emerge has been the use of the bunny piece to force the next player to return the move, thereby keeping control of the game. Figure 4 demonstrates how this is achieved.

Red plays **E1-E4: 2 > D3** giving Blue the move (Figure 4.1). The bunny Green piece **D3** now forces Blue to play from **H8** to **D4** due to the max capture rule, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Blue's bunny piece **D5** could have been dropped elsewhere, but to no avail. To stop Green finishing the game next move Blue would have to either:

(i) Block both **D5** and **E5** (impossible); or
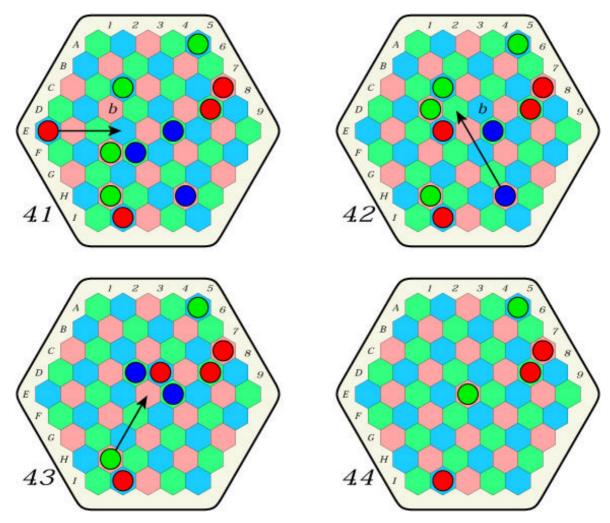(ii) Engineer a double capture somewhere else on the board to give Green another choice of move (also impossible).

Figure 4. Sample end game with Red to play.

Green is forced to play **H5** to **E5** (Figure 4.3) eliminating Blue and giving Red the win (Figure 4.4). Note that no bunny piece is dropped once Blue is eliminated.

Rather than win directly, Red was able to manipulate Blue and Green to finish the game on their behalf. The max capture rule is therefore a mechanism through which a clever player may exploit their opponents to control the game. However, opponents' bunny drops introduce a somewhat chaotic element that may turn the best laid plans upside down … this is where the true art of the game lies.

Note that pieces near the edge of the board or surrounded by other pieces are more difficult to capture, hence it is often good to drop the bunny piece next to existing pieces to form a shield. However if an opponent's piece is no use as a shield, then it's best to stay as far away from it as possible and preferably off its line. In fact having a number of pieces distributed around the board is good; they cannot all be captured in a single move.

Conclusion

Triad has proven to be an entertaining game for three players. It combines the novel aspect of player-defined move order with the intrigue of volatile micro-alliances. Games are usually won through the manipulation of opponents into forced exchanges to the death. Be warned: Triad can get as brutal as any other three-player game!

Acknowledgments
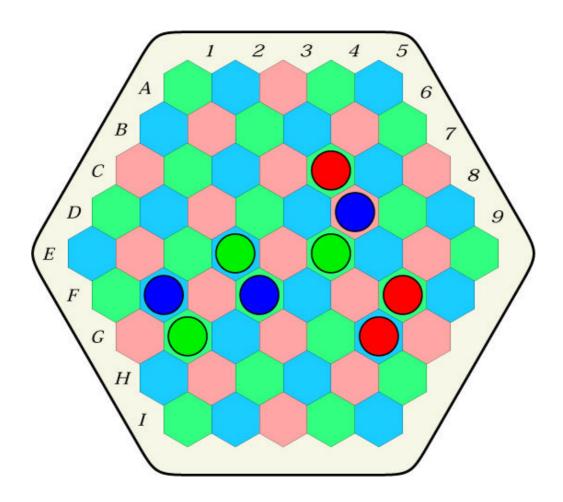
A Triad Puzzle

Cameron Browne

A match stands at Red 4 points, Green 5 points and Blue 6 points. Red must win this game and eliminate Blue to win the match..

Red to play and eliminate Blue in three moves.

Solution on last page

Gender and Gaming
Observations on players and their characters

Nicole Hoye (nhoye@uq.net.au)

In my final semester of my Bachelor of Arts last year, I took an anthropology subject that required me to do an observational study of a group or subculture.

Without hesitation, I realised I wanted to look, from an anthropological perspective, at the gaming world and the people in it – specifically through the D&D games I was playing at the time. After all, who can pass up the opportunity to game and call it research?

Although I've only been gaming since 1999, I've picked up (just through playing, and reading around on the internet) a number of noticeable things about gaming generally, and specifically the people who play roleplaying games. Most of them share common interests and hobbies, fields of work, and even interest in other RPGs. One thing I noticed most of all was the seeming imbalance of male and female players of many RPGs, D&D in particular.

While going over ideas for my research for Uni, something sparked in my head, and I decided to explore issues of gender both in the real world (ie. that of players) and within the game (ie. that of player characters – PCs – and non-player characters – NPCs).

My study required that I observe my chosen group for a certain amount of time each week, in which I would take notes on what went on, and my reactions to this. At the time, I was playing in two weekly games of D&D, one run by a male, and the other run by a female. To add to this observation time, I also spent some time braving flaming on the newsgroups rec.games.frp.dnd and rec.games.frp.advocacy where I asked the following questions:

"As a female gamer, I'm just curious to find out what everyone thinks about the balance of male/female players in gaming? Does there tend to be a wide-ranging support for it, or do males like to stick with males, and females with females? Also, is there much support for people playing the opposite gender with their characters?"

After collecting my data, I wrote up my study in light of relevant anthropological literature. I can see you all want to stop reading here, but fear not! I shall not bore you with the dry pages of academia. I just plan to talk a little about what I discovered in the time I was researching and collecting data, and also my general observations over the years I've been gaming.

I had constantly come across issues of gender as a player in the past, either through personal experience or observation of other players. When I first began playing, I was in a game run by a male, and with a majority of male players. I don't think I played in a game run by a female until a few years after this, although I did run a couple myself.

As I played in games over the years, I picked up on stereotypes. You know the ones: the guy who likes to play a half-orc barbarian; the woman who play beautiful wood elves; the men who play idealised female heroes, and the women who do the same of men.

Not only were there stereotypes of kinds of characters, but the players themselves. Single geekish boys, single geekish men, and those chicks dragged along by their significant others. So when I started this research, I was curious to see whether it was just my skewed view of the world, and what other people did, and what they thought about gender and gaming.

Within the games I was playing, gender issues varied. In the game run by a female, we had a reasonable gender balance of players. Some of these players did and still do play characters of the opposite gender with no problems. Within this game, too, females are given a wide role in society.

In the other game settings I played in, females tended to be given sideline roles in game worlds. As well as this, players tended to stick to their own gender, and the number of female players was in less proportion. Even when I poked about online in newsgroups, I tended to get most of my responses from male players.

So, what came up as the main issues during observation were the following: what people

did/thought about female players, what people did/thought about gender reversal, and the stereotypes that are apparent in both these situations.

As far as female gamers go, they certainly aren't an endangered species, and in fact have probably grown in number over the years. In discussion and observation with my groups, and online in newsgroups, many people of both genders said they had not really seen a problematic imbalance in the ratio of female to male players of RPGs.

Some females make their own way into the gaming world; however I came across quite a few instances of women being introduced to gaming via their significant other – myself included! I don't think this could be taken as the only avenue for a female to play RPGs, however.

As far as male players go, I played with a variety enough of men to quash any thoughts that all guys who play RPGs live for Tolkein, their pocket protectors and a night at home watching Star Trek.

Phew!

I found people's impressions and portrayals of gender within the games I was playing to be much more interesting than the players themselves. More often than not, Game Masters (GM) who were male would portray females as softer and kinder, with weaker roles within the game, while pushing males to the front in stronger, more important (and often more heroic) positions. My female DM, however (whether through conscious decision or not) tended to have a more appropriate balance of female and male roles to her setting.

I suppose what RPGs are all about is being something other than yourself. I mean, how often am I going to be a halfling ranger, hmm? These extraordinary factors taken into account, we also have the chance of playing the opposite gender. The GM has pretty much no choice but to portray both genders of the NPCs in the game world – bias towards one's own gender may explain the imbalances I've seen in some games.

However, the players have complete control over pretty much every aspect of their characters including gender, and it's ultimately up to each individual to decide whether or not they feel comfortable or capable of portraying something they've got no experience of. So whether or not some players might snigger at Jim from down the road wanting to play a pretty blonde gnome lass who likes to cast spells, most often it's the players themselves and their ideas of gender that will make the difference if they play the opposite gender.

Without meaning it, many players or DMs brought unrealistic and heavily stereotyped gender roles into the games. While one female NPC was portrayed as unintelligent and domestically bound by a male DM, a female player had her male character act tough and macho. Of course, there are many instances of people

playing an opposite gender quite to the best of their abilities, and some people merely having a different gender marked on their player sheet for flavour and not acting differently at all.

I suppose at the end of all this, I came to one realisation: it takes all kinds. There's never going to be any kind of balance between things in the gaming world. It depends on the people. Some people are more inclined to play roleplaying games, and if they are male, so be it. It's just the same as some people prefer to play elves, or some people really don't like playing a gender other than their own.

Nevertheless, it's interesting to see just how big a part of the RPG world gender can be, both inside the game and out. I've had a wonderful time up until now as a female gamer, playing both male and female characters. I'd like to think my fellow female gamers have had the same experiences, as well as my male counterparts.

RPGs remain for me a fun way to experience things I don't see or do in real life – whether I'm an elf or a half-orc, a cleric or a ranger, male or female, it doesn't matter. It's all fun, and it's all just a game. So game on, folks, and keep these issues at the back of your mind next time you game, as interesting observations to make.

Legend of the Five Rings
A Collectable Card Game

John Pope (mindrush@bigpond.net.au)

Legend of the Five Rings, or L5R as players more commonly referred to it, is a family of games.

Foremost among which is the Collectable Card Game (CCG), the other members are the Role-playing Game and the Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition version of the Role-playing Game.

L5R is set in a mythical Asian setting that is heavily inspired by Japanese history and folk tales, with a little bit of China and other Asian countries added. This setting, called Rokugan, is the official setting for the Oriental Adventures portion of the D&D product lines and now has a well-established history.

In fact it is that history and the ability of the players, particularly of the CCG, to influence that history as it develops that is one of the most existing parts of the L5R games. L5R's story is an ongoing and continually evolving thing told through short fictions, background material in the role-playing sourcebooks and one or two line bits of story text on the cards.

The story is also an important factor in playing the CCG, because the card game is divided up into factions, each of which is a part of the story and by playing your favourite faction you can help them have a more important role in the story. In the current story arc; called "The Four Winds", there are 10 factions to choose from. Each faction has its own unique story flavour and deck styles. From the honourable duelists of the Crane Clan to the assassins of the Scorpion Clan or the steadfast Crab Clan to the corruption and demons of the Shadowlands. L5R has something to offer everyone.

The CCG also has a lot to offer as a game, not only are the core rules of the game easy to learn but there is a great depth of strategy and tactics in the play of the game, and the cards look great!

For those interested in the CCG now is also an excellent time to start playing. The game is the most balanced it has ever been, and the newest expansions are the beginning of a new card pool for the next story arc. In addition to this as part of the official demonstrations of L5R CCG ran at various stores in Brisbane you receive a free starter pack worth $24 that forms the basis of a faction's card pool.

Finally, Brisbane has a number of experienced players who are happy to help new players out with basic cards, and a growing number of new players. Of the 30 odd tournament registered players in Brisbane about 6 are experienced players, so the playing field is pretty even.

For more information about the game or when Tournaments or Demonstrations are on, go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FieldsOfBlackSilk/ and join up!

Arcanacon 2003

A review of the Arcanacon gaming convention

David Astley (pryllin@yahoo.com.au)

The saga of a 4000km return journey across the wild lands of Australia, just to get a weekend fix of roleplaying.

It was Thursday 23rd of January, 5 am and I kissed my beloved goodbye and started the 2-day drive to Melbourne. Pity I only had a day and a half to get there. I made good time down the Pacific Highway and was feeling pleased that I was on time to drive through Sydney at 4pm that afternoon, a full hour before rush hour hit.

Sure enough, I hit Sydney at 4pm. Queensland time. Daylight savings in the southern states meant I trundled through Sydney in the midst of 1 million commuters desperately trying to get away from work. I weathered the disaster well, made it through the mayhem and hit the Hume Highway from Sydney to Melbourne.

In my attempt to escape the madness from Sydney, I didn't refuel the car while I was there. Surely I'd pass a service station on the Hume Highway. Having driven it before, I really should have known better. One servo I caught a glimpse of through the trees after I'd passed it, and the Hume isn't exactly the best place to throw a U-turn. Another sign indicated a servo at a nearby town off the highway but I continued on blithely, confident that the next servo was just up the road.

Having never run out of fuel before, I wasn't sure how far my tank would get me, but after a considerable time on empty I realised that I wouldn't be going much further. I pulled of at the next exit and drove to the nearest town, where some kindly locals informed me that the next servo was 15km up the highway. I almost made it back to the highway when I finally ran out of fuel.

Many thanks to the truckie who gave me a lift up to that servo and to the lovely couple who gave me a lift back. I figured I'd lost less time than if I'd called out the NRMA, and I continued my drive into the depths of the night.

I arrived in Melbourne on Friday at midday, their time, with 4 hours sleep and my usually clean car interior scattered with junk. Arcanacon didn't start for another 2 hours, so I trundled round the Victoria markets for a few hours, then returned to the con, collected my stuff (having registered the week before) and began gaming.

The Tale of Magnus was a systemless RPG set in the world of Harry Potter, about 20 years before the books. An excellent GM, interesting characters and good story more than made up for the linear plot.

The Little Court was a Ravenloft freeform which I felt had a lot of wasted potential. But despite my character being quite non-critical to the overarching storyline, I was still entertained.

After the first 2 sessions it was almost midnight, and I somehow managed to navigate a long dark drive through the suburbs of Melbourne to my friend's place where I was staying. I greeted her,

showered, slept, and awoke 6 hours later to return to the con.

Day 2 was the 3 session D&D game. I had been told it would be good and I wasn't disappointed. Coincidentally, I was thrown in with the only other 2 Brisbanites at the con, and we completed the epic tale of duty to our god, through many plot twists, turns and challenges.

The final session for the day involved only acting and improvisation as I joined with two other individuals for Theatre Games. Without a team, things had looked bleak for me until I met a girl in the same situation. Together we coerced a third, achieved minimum team size and went on to a hard fought victory.

Sunday morning, I slept in. As an individual at the convention, I had found myself the only player in many sessions. I spent my time prior to the first game swapping these sessions around until finally the majority of my sessions were large enough to run. Doing this had left me with two free sessions but the morning of rest was greatly welcomed.

I arrived for sessions 8 and 9, living Dragonstar. D&D meets Star Wars and laser rifle wielding elves and dwarves fly spaceships across a galactic empire ruled by an evil red dragon. As a 'living' world game, your character can be moved from one officially sanctioned game to another.

Having never heard of Dragonstar before, I took this

opportunity to try it out. While the games were mediocre at best, with linear and immutable plots and a minimum of character interaction, the setting has infinite scope and possibilities and it's only a matter of time before I add Dragonstar to my ever increasing role playing games collection.

My evening session had gone the way of the morning session, so I spent some of it reading the Dragonstar rulebooks, and the rest of the evening actually visiting my host.

Monday morning and the last day of the con, I arrived for Angel of Babylon freeform, the session I was most looking forward to. A 1920 archaeological team finds themselves trapped in a chamber with a giant statue of an angel and I expected some good role playing. Again I acquired a character somewhat secondary to the main plot, but I had a great game

nonetheless and a good time was had by all.

As a break from the constant roleplaying I finished the convention with two sessions of the Settlers of Catan boardgame tournament and was pleased to walk away in first place after a lot of good competition and a bit of good luck.

The prize giving went well and everyone had obviously had a great convention. After the ceremony and some cleaning up, it was off to the post con dinner at Chilli Kiss Mexican restaurant. I ate, drank and was merry, made some new friends, spent an hour or two saying goodbye to my old friends and headed back to remind my host I was still around.

I thanked her very profusely the next morning, packed my gear, and left at 8am to join the rush hour through Melbourne as everyone

eagerly returned to work after their Australia Day long weekend.

The return drive went a little better than the trip down there. A wrong turn near Newcastle put me on the New England Highway home, instead of the familiar Pacific Highway, and I found myself a little more fuel conscious knowing that service stations would be fewer and further between.

Still, I found myself rolling into Warwick on fumes having forgotten that the unleaded fuel I had been forced to fill up with previously wouldn't get me quite as far as my usual premium stuff. Despite this, I was back in Brisbane by Wednesday lunchtime and a couple of hours later I fell into my beloved's arms as she emerged from her work, wondering when I'd be back.

Some Suggestions on Skills

For 3rd edition Dungeons and Dragons

Gary Johnson (garyjohnson@uq.net.au)

Unlike many game systems, 3rd edition Dungeons and Dragons is experiencing constant change and development (whether or not this is improvement is for the discerning user to determine for themselves). As the Player's Handbook was the first published rulebook for the 3rd edition, there are some indicators in later d20 products of what the designers would have done differently if they'd thought of it at the time.

It's not clear whether any of the matters I'm going to cover in this article will appear in the Revised 3rd edition that's being released in July 2003. I hope that some of them do, particularly the list of skill synergies, but I expect the designers are concentrating on other areas of the system that produce significant game-balance issues. Tweaks to the skills system aren't going to fix the issues around the Polymorph spells, for example, and that's something that I expect comes up in many more games.

This article will cover two issues, namely feats that give bonuses to skills and fighting defensively with Tumble. I've also included a table with all the PHB synergies, which should be a boon to anyone who's trying to work out where to spend their skill points at 1st and 2nd level for maximal effectiveness.

Feats that Improve Skills

The Skill Focus feat gives a +2 bonus to one skill. Alertness gives a +2 bonus to two skills. The Splatbooks are full of feats that give a +2 bonus to two skills: for example, *Song and Silence* has six of them. What gives?

According to the designers, it was an unfortunate oversight. Skill Focus should give a +3 bonus, so that it's better than all those feats that give two skills a +2 bonus. To quote Sean Reynolds, "Skill Focus should be +3. The only reason Skill Emphasis exists as a +3 feat in other games is because the designers weren't allowed to make Skill Focus +3 in those games, which would require errata-ing the PH."

(http://www.seankreynolds.com/rpgfiles/misc/PH_opinions_feats.html)

I'd go a step further than this, however, and make all those "+2 to two skills" feats into a generic feat similar to Skill Focus. The new feat should also have the Skill Focus limitation of not stacking with itself. As it stands, there's nothing in *Song and Silence* stopping a character taking the Charlatan and Persuasive feats for a total of +4 to Bluff. You couldn't do that with Skill Focus, because it explicitly prohibits taking it twice for the same skill. In my opinion, you shouldn't be able to circumvent that limitation by taking a second feat that gives a bonus to the same skill.

The end result? A new feat.

Skill Synergy [General]

You have a particular aptitude or strength that enhances two of your skills.

Benefit: You get a +2 bonus on all skill checks with two related skills, such as Listen and Spot. If you wish, you can use a more descriptive name each time you take this feat, such as Alertness.

Special: You can gain this feat multiple times. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take the feat, it applies to two new skills. Also, this feat does not stack with Skill Focus.

Fighting Defensively and Tumble

This is more straightforward in my opinion, and something that may well make it into Revised 3rd edition.

The PHB states that 5 ranks in Tumble increases the bonus for fighting defensively from +2 to +3 and the bonus for total defence from +4 to +6.

The Epic Level Handbook states that 25 ranks in Tumble makes the fighting defensively bonus +5 and the total defence bonus +10, and that every ten ranks increases the bonuses by +1 and +2 respectively.

Logically, 15 ranks in Tumble should increase the fighting defensively bonus to +4 and the total defence bonus to +8.

Introducing this irons out the existing jump from standard to epic progression. It provides the "break even" point for fighting defensively (which confers a –4 to hit), plus it gives characters another reason to improve their Tumble once they can reliably get to DC 15 and Tumble safely around any opponent. To my way of thinking, it's all good.

Skill Synergies

The PHB does not list all the synergies for having 5 ranks in a skill in one place. Instead, there are scattered references throughout the skill descriptions. What's worse, sometimes the synergy is noted in one skill description but not the other. This is, in my opinion, not good.

Thus, for your convenience, here is a list of all skill synergies noted in the PHB. May those who seek optimal allocation of skill points find this a valuable tool in the quest for efficient character design.

5 ranks in	gives a synergy bonus to
Animal Empathy	Handle Animal
Bluff	Disguise (only when acting in character), Diplomacy, Innuendo (only to send a message), Intimidate, Pick Pockets
Decipher Script	Use Magic Device (only to use scrolls)
Escape Artist	Use Rope (only to tie someone up)
Handle Animal	Ride
Intuit Direction	Wilderness Lore (only to avoid getting lost)
Jump	Tumble
Profession – Herbalist	Heal
Sense Motive	Diplomacy, Innuendo (only to receive a message)
Tumble	Balance, Jump
Use Magic Device	Spellcraft (only to decipher spells on scrolls)
Use Rope	Climb (only when using a rope), Escape Artist (only when tied up with a rope)

Solution to A Triad Puzzle

Cameron Browne

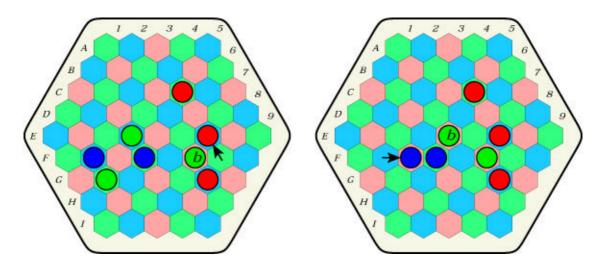Red's winning move is **F8-E7: 2 > F7 Blue** as shown below on the left.

Figure 6. Red forces Blue to capitulate.

F7 is Red's best bunny drop. The drop must be at either **F6** or **F7** to block immediate retaliation from Blue. However, **F6** would give Blue the opportunity to play to **E5** and force Red to eliminate Green instead, tying up the match.

Following Red's **F8-E7: 2 > F7**, Blue is then forced to play either **F3-F4** or **F5-F4**. The move shown on the right is **F3-F4: 2 > E5** but Blue is doomed whichever move is made; the dual threats from Red pieces at **E7** and **G8** cannot both be blocked with a single move.

Blue's only hope is to force or encourage Red to play elsewhere with their bunny drop. **E5** sets up Green as a sacrificial lamb, and if Green were ahead on match points then Red would probably eliminate them instead, earning Blue 1 point for second place (Blue could also have dropped the last bunny Green piece at one of **D5, D6, F6, G6, H7** or **H8** to achieve a similar set up). However this is not the case and Red eliminates Blue to win the game and the match next turn with **G8-G5**.

You can download a computer Triad player at
http://members.optusnet.com.au/cyberite/triad/triad-1.htm