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Challenges for Bricks by David Rakonitz

The author of *The Ultimate Brick* gives us a look at plot hooks for bricks by examining the story of the most famous brick of all time.

The Labors of Hercules

The tale of the twelve labors of Hercules is one of the most recognized stories from Greek mythology. As atonement for certain crimes, Hercules performs twelve tasks set for him by King Eurystheus. This article discusses how elements of that mythical saga can be used to assist GMs in designing more interesting plots and sub-plots for brick characters in any genre. It first examines the kinds of opponents that make particularly interesting foes for bricks and then discusses other kinds of challenges that are particularly appropriate for bricks. When designing plots for archetypes other than bricks, GMs can apply the same principles to those archetypes.

This article uses the same definition of a brick as *The Ultimate Brick*. "A brick is any character whose strength (and usually resistance to injury as well) is greater than the average character in the campaign, and who is defined to some degree by these attributes."

The Nature of the Plot

When developing a plot line for a brick, give some consideration to what kind of challenges the character is likely to face. Since the GM is developing a plot line with a brick in mind, the plot should provide opportunities to highlight various aspects of the brick's Skills, Powers, and personality. Many of Hercules's tasks involved acts of strength.

Hercules had to perform in order each task or die trying. In a roleplaying game, GMs often avoid this heavy-handed approach, as it reduces a player's ability to choose his character's path. Still, Player Characters often have to react to events set in motion by others or face the consequences of their inaction. A self-motivated character, however, can set in motion a plot line without the help of an instigator. An alien brick who is stranded on Earth might try to discover information about his race and whether they had previously visited Earth. This is a different kind of plot than having to stop Dr. Destroyer from taking over the world.

Archenemies for Bricks

We often judge heroes by the challenges that they face. These challenges can be a recurring foe, the brick's own inner demons, or a meteor heading towards a planet. In the case of Hercules, one of the main antagonists throughout his life was the goddess Hera. She did not really confront the hero directly, but she set numerous obstacles in his path. During Hercules' labors, the cowardly Eurystheus played the role of an untouchable taskmaster and recurring villain. When a brick has a foe that reappears periodically and particularly hates the brick, it can make both victories and defeats more meaningful because the brick and his nemesis have established some history together. The archenemy might be responsible for grand campaign-altering plots, or his goal might be limited to proving that he is a better fighter than the brick. In either case, the contrast between the brick and the archenemy should enrich the campaign.

When selecting an archenemy for a brick, a GM should remember that certain archetypes create an interesting contrast between a brick's style and their own. This helps make the conflict more interesting. One can separate classic opponents for bricks into a few broad categories: foes who rely primarily on intelligence or wits to win a conflict, opponents who rely upon speed and agility, opponents who rely upon skill, and other bricks. These categories can overlap. Martial Artists, for example, often rely upon both skill and speed to win a fight. The nature of the campaign will determine how these generalizations apply.

Listed by genre are the descriptions of archetypes that often find themselves in conflicts with bricks. Most of the descriptions are self-explanatory. The reference to Masterminds refers to opponents who prefer not to get into fights themselves but let their minions take care of it. This category includes corrupt corporations and other organizations that are hostile to the brick. In the Pulp genre, the Mastermind's fighting skills are usually minimal or non-existent. In other genres, the Mastermind might be a fierce combatant.

Not surprisingly, bricks often find themselves opposed by other bricks. For example, two super-strong brothers might have received their powers from the same source. Yet, fate and their choices in life have led them down different roads, and now, they are on opposite sides of a conflict. The nature of the conflict could be so intense that they become archenemies.

Rigellian Code-Talkers by Bob Greenwade

Almost since their first contact with Humans in the early 2200s, Rigellians (detailed on page 32 of *Alien Wars*) have possessed and exercised vocal gifts beyond – occasionally *well* beyond – the abilities of most other species.

While the Rigellians themselves readily, if casually, exploited these abilities for their own purposes, Humans were surprisingly reluctant to do so. This may have been because of a distrust of a species with abilities they did not possess, or simply a lack of creativity. In any event, for nearly a century and a half of contact only a handful of entrepreneurial Humans joined with the Rigellians in finding new applications for Rigellians' vocal talents.

That changed during the last half of the Xenovore War, shortly after Admiral Aleksandr Zhukov took over command of the United Earth military. Among his many other improvements over his predecessor's practices, Zhukov took a page from 20th Century Earth history and employed Rigellians as couriers of secret information. In recognition of the Navajo "Code-Talkers" of Earth's Second World War, he dubbed them Rigellian Code-Talkers.

Rigellian Code-Talkers

The main talent Zhukov sought to exploit was certain Rigellians' ability to "embed" a message for a specific individual into otherwise normal-sounding speech. By broadcasting from ship to ship with this method, communications could appear to say one thing when in fact they were saying something else entirely.

Eventually the Code-Talkers even developed a word-substitution code using animals, geographic locations, historical figures, and other features specific to Rigel V, in order to further confuse the enemy. For example, the Xenovores themselves were referred to as *lambritta*, after a small scorpion-like mammal living on Rigel V. (Like most codes, this qualifies as a Language, though its maximum level is 2 points.)

The success of the Code-Talkers was one instrumental factor (along with other significant Rigellian contributions to the Xenovore War) leading to the granting of a Senatorial seat to Rigel during the Terran Empire period. This, in turn, led to the continued use of Rigellian Code-Talkers during those three centuries. Rigellians were employed extensively as undercover police in both planetary and Imperial law enforcement (though more went to the ISP than the TSS), as couriers or undercover agents for the TIC, and as communications officers in the Imperial Navy. When the Terran Rebellion broke out in earnest during the 2670s, Rigellian Code-Talkers were instrumental in the efforts of both sides.

Shortly after the formation of the Galactic Federation, several Rigellians (and a few non-Rigellians who had learned the technique) formed the Society of Code-Talkers. With its headquarters in downtown Ngailith, Rigel's largest city, it's as much a guild for singers, speech therapists, and other voice-related professionals as it is a training ground and licensing society for the old Code-Talking practice. Society membership is a 1-point Perk; an actual Code-Talker could be a full member for 2 points. Neither is required to practice as a Code-Talker.

The Package Deal shown here is applicable to Code-Talkers during the Xenovore Wars period, starting with the formation of the service in 2356. Those during the Terran Empire period would take the Rigellian Substitution Code as an option (more likely early in the period), though otherwise it's valid into the Galactic Federation and beyond. It is taken *in addition to* any service Package Deals, such as the UE Navy (during the Xenovore Wars), intelligence services, or law enforcement (during the Terran Empire).

This Package may *only* be taken by Rigellians, unless the player can demonstrate an *extremely* good justification (though the justification requirement may be relaxed somewhat in the Galactic Federation era and later).

RIGELLIAN CODE-TALKER PACKAGE DEAL	
Cost	**Skill**
3	Cryptography
3	Ventriloquism
9	Advanced Rigellian Embedded Messaging (at the *High Secrecy* level or greater; see below)
2	Language: Rigellian Substitution Code
Total Package Cost: 17 points	
Options	
2	Membership: Society of Code-Talkers

artwork by Shawn Richter