

GURPS[®]

TIMELINE

From the Big Bang to the Bombing of Baghdad



By Chris W. McCubbin

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

TIME ON YOUR HANDS?

GURPS Timeline is the ultimate resource for the *Time Travel* GM. It presents *all* of human history – from the Big Bang to Operation Desert Storm – in a convenient, easy-to-use chronology. History is big, but *GURPS Timeline* makes it easy for the GM to find his way around.

GURPS Timeline also presents the GM with more than 50 historical “adventure seeds” describing particularly important, exciting or bizarre eras and settings for *Time Travel* adventures – with the spotlight on the stuff you *don't* get in history class.

With *GURPS Timeline*, time travelers can ride with El Cid, battle the merciless armies of Assyria, hunt for the treasure of the Lost Dutchman Mine, visit the mystical lost continent of Lemuria or unravel the secret of the *Mary Celeste*.

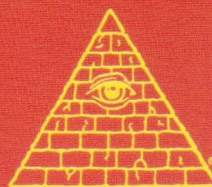
Time thieves can loot history for the spoils of Alexander's conquests, plunder Rome during a barbarian raid, or steal gold from the Aztecs with Cortez and the Spanish conquerors.

Also included are detailed descriptions of exotic ancient cultures like the Sumerians, the Olmecs, the Minoans, the Hohokam and the Persians.

From war to intrigue to technology to art to enigma, *GURPS Timeline* opens all of history to adventure and drama.



Written by Chris W. McCubbin
Edited by Jeff Koke
Cover by John Zeleznik
Illustrated by John Hartwell



STEVE JACKSON GAMES



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By Chris W. McCubbin

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Cover by John Zeleznik; Illustrated by John Hartwell

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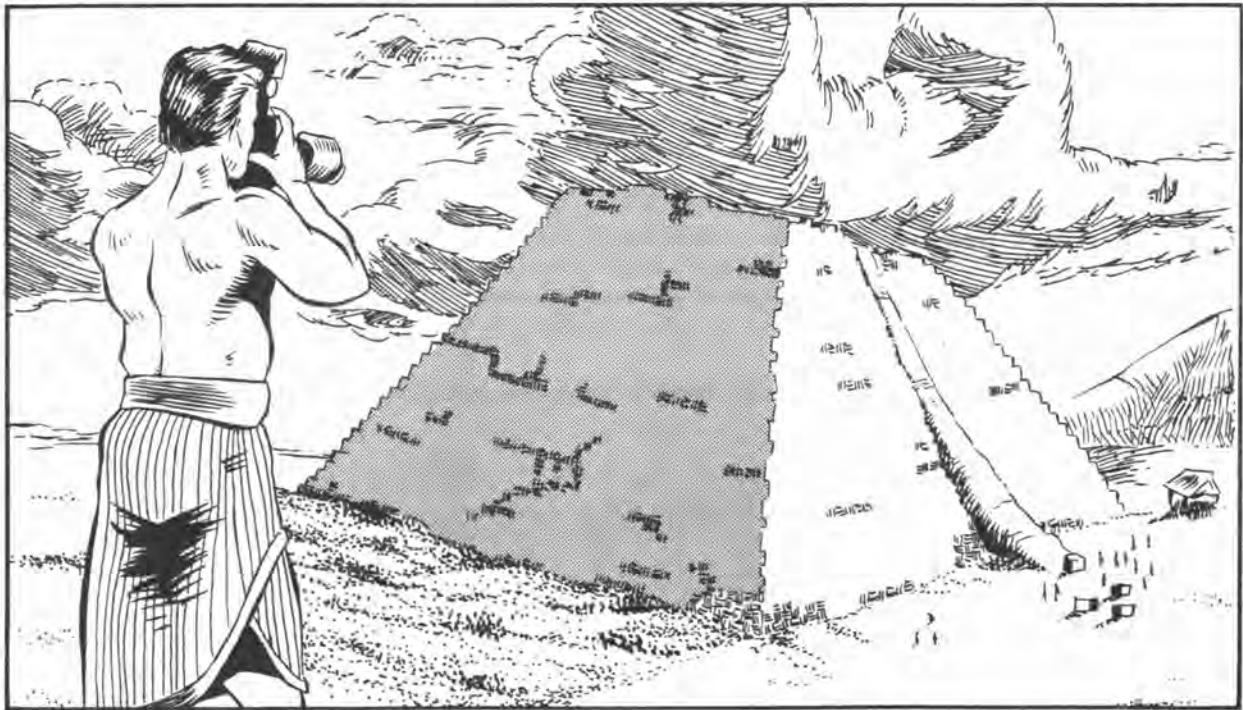
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INTRODUCTION

GURPS Timeline is a book in two parts. The three-column section that runs across the bottom of the pages is intended as a concise, comprehensive outline of human history from the Big Bang to Operation Desert Storm. It can be used by the *Time Travel* GM as a starting point for finding good plots and settings for adventures in the past.

The two-column section that runs across the top of the pages consists of more detailed "adventure seeds." Each gives an in-depth look at an event or setting of particular interest.



Time-Travel Scenarios

In literature, there are essentially three or four different time-travel plots.

The first can be called the "futuristic." In this sort of story, an observer from the present is projected into the future, and he provides a point of view which helps the reader understand the future society. Examples of this sort of tale include such varied classics as H.G. Wells' original *The Time Machine*, the comic-strip adventures of Buck Rogers, and Woody Allen's farcical movie *Sleeper*. The futuristic time-travel story is less common than it once was, however – as science fiction readers grew more sophisticated in their acceptance of the future, writers found they no longer needed anything so obvious as an observer from the present to explain what's going on.

An odd sub-genre of this type remains quite popular, though. This is the story where the modern-day protagonists do not, themselves, time travel, but they come in contact with time travelers – usually from the future – and must deal with them. Examples include Spider Robinson's *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon* stories, John Varley's *Millennium* and C.L. Moore's *The Vintage Season*.

A second type, by far the most common, can be called the "technological" time-travel story, where the emphasis is on the fact of time travel itself – the technology, or the physics, or the social or metaphysical implications of the ability to journey through time. Notable examples include Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity*, Robert A. Heinlein's *The Door Into Summer*, and Fritz Lieber's *The Big Time*.

The final type of story is perhaps the hardest to write. This is the "historical" time-travel story, which attempts to display the past through the eyes of a time traveler, and often to explore the changes in history which might result if modern technology or thought is introduced at a key moment. Examples include Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall*, and Poul Anderson's excellent stories of the Time Patrol. It is this sort of adventure to which this book is devoted.

While it's never easy to create a good time-travel story, all that's required for a futuristic or technological story is writing ability and an active imagination. A historical story takes *work* – historical details need to be researched, compiled and verified.

The purpose of *GURPS Timeline* is to make this work easier for the *GURPS* Game Master. The most intimidating thing about history is its *size*.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Roleplayer. This bimonthly magazine includes new rules, variants, new races, beasts, information on upcoming releases, scenario ideas and more. Ask your game retailer, or write for subscription information.

New supplements and adventures. We're always working on new material, and we'll be happy to let you know what's available. A current catalog is available for an SASE.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request.

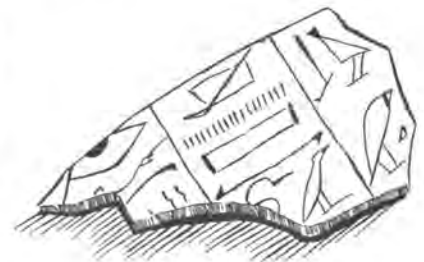
Q&A. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

BBS. For those of you who have computers, SJ Games operates a BBS with discussion areas for several games, including *GURPS*. Much of the playtest feedback for new products comes from the BBS. It's up 24 hours a day at 512-447-4449, at 300, 1200 or 2400 baud. Give us a call!

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*, Third Edition. Page references that begin with a TT refer to *GURPS Time Travel*.



About the Author

Chris McCubbin is a Nebraska native and a non-graduate of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, in English. He came to gaming by way of the comics industry, where he worked as an editor on Fantagraphics Books' two respected magazines, *The Comics Journal* and *Amazing Heroes*.

This book is McCubbin's fifth for SJ Games. His other books include *GURPS Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, based on the award-winning science fiction classics by Spider Robinson, and *GURPS Fantasy Folk*, winner of the 1991 Gamer's Choice Award for best roleplaying supplement. He's also contributed to *GURPS Fantasy Adventures* and *GURPS Supers Adventures*.

In addition to being SJ Games' staff writer, he's also the editor of *Autoduel Quarterly* and the company's Art Director.

He's into good movies, fun books, decent restaurants, alternative rock music and BBSing. He lives in Austin with his wife, Lynette Alcorn, and the stereotypical cats, Polychrome, Clipper and Oliver.

Other GURPS Books

Readers of *Timeline* will also find the following *GURPS* books useful.

GURPS Time Travel is the essential sourcebook for cross-chronal adventuring. *Time Travel* presents more than a half dozen time travel and alternate reality campaigns for the GM to choose from. Yet another time-traveling campaign is presented in *GURPS Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, based on the classic science fiction stories of Spider Robinson.

GURPS Camelot: In addition to covering the cinematic/legendary Middle Ages usually associated with King Arthur, this book also contains a detailed discussion of the historically correct Britain of the 4th century.

GURPS China: This historical world-book covers the Chinese empire from the "Yellow Emperor" to Tiananmen Square.

GURPS Cliffhangers: Edge-of-your-seat adventure between the world wars.

GURPS Conan: Based on the classic sword-and-sorcery tales of Robert E. Howard. Conan flourished in the Hyborian Age, a meticulously detailed era set in Europe, Africa and Asia 10,000 years before the dawn of current history.

GURPS High-Tech: An excellent companion to *GURPS Timeline*, *High-Tech* covers the development of technology from the 15th century to the present, with special emphasis on the evolution of firearms.

Continued on next page . . .

The Importance of the McGuffin

The term "McGuffin" was coined by the great suspense director Alfred Hitchcock. It means a plot element which exists only to allow the real action to happen.

For example, think of the familiar thriller plot, where the unwitting protagonist somehow comes into possession of a strategically vital, top-secret document. Immediately he becomes the target of one or more bloodthirsty groups who want that document at any cost. A series of narrow escapes, violent confrontations, romantic or mysterious meetings and remarkable coincidences ensue, until, at the end of the film, the hero finally manages to hand over the prodigal document to friendly authority figures and resume his normal life.

In the above case (which approximates several Hitchcock films, notably his early classic *The 39 Steps*), the document is a "McGuffin." The viewer probably has no idea, except in the vaguest possible terms, what the plans actually are *for*, and they may only be seen for a few seconds – at the film's beginning, its ending, and possibly at one or two crisis points, where they're almost lost or destroyed. They exist primarily as an abstract excuse for the exciting chases, fights and romantic encounters that are the real reason for the story to be told. Everybody remembers that in *North By Northwest*, Cary Grant had to fight for his life against a lethal cropduster in a corn field, and against gun-toting thugs on the face of Mount Rushmore, but how many viewers can remember *why* everybody was trying to kill him?

McGuffins can play a vital role in a time-travel adventure. Almost any assignment can serve as a McGuffin for an entertaining adventure. The most boring assignment imaginable ("Survey the industrial techniques and economic exchange patterns of the ceramics industry – if any – of indigenous agrarian settlements along the Dnieper river valley in the early 7th century BC," for example) can become a thrilling adventure if something goes wrong at a crucial moment. For perhaps the ultimate example of this principle in action, see Poul Anderson's "The Sorrows of Odin the Goth," one of his *Time Patrol* stories, and certainly one of the most brilliantly plotted historical time-travel stories ever written.

However, while almost anything in history can serve as a McGuffin, the best McGuffins are those which hold some sort of intrinsic interest beyond the complications they engender. "Interview and document the techniques of the architects and engineers of the granaries of Phrygia in the 10th century BC" is a perfectly valid assignment, with plenty of McGuffin potential, but "Interview and document the techniques of Imhotep, the first human scientist, later deified, the inventor of the Egyptian pyramid" – that's a mission with *cachet*.

So *GURPS Timeline* can be looked upon as a collection of particularly attractive McGuffins for the GM to choose from.

Crisis Points

In general, *GURPS Timeline* takes an elastic view of history. History is seen as a series of responses to irresistible forces that transcend the lives of mere individuals. If Lincoln had been prevented from freeing the slaves, someone else would have, just because it was slave freeing time.

Still, there are points where human history could have been forever changed in an instant. If a futuristic assassin, like the one on this book's cover, had been able to kill Hitler at the Nuremberg rallies, WWII would have gone very differently. Certainly the worst parts of the Holocaust would never have happened. Perhaps the whole Third Reich would have collapsed with the death of its leader, or perhaps saner heads than Hitler's would have taken up the reins of government and built up a solid base of German power that could have, in time, succeeded where Hitler failed in conquering all of Europe.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

The Genesis Bug

-1 Billion

Scientists can only guess at the form of the earliest earthly life. If a time machine had sufficient range, scientists would certainly want to send researchers back to dip a ladle or two into the primordial soup.

And what if some primeval bacterium were, through malice or incompetence, released into the modern environment? Probably it would simply expire in a few seconds . . . but suppose it flourished? Suppose it could feed freely off present organisms, and all the natural controls that held it in check in its own time were aeons past? If allowed to spread unchecked, it could take over everything, undoing a billion years of evolution in months, days or hours.

If the proto-bacteria is released by accident, the PCs could face the challenge of containing the contamination or perhaps returning in time to find a natural counteragent – and pray that the cure isn't worse than the plague. Matters could be complicated by having a specimen of The Genesis Bug fall into the hands of Stopwatch or some other terrorist organization, who use it as a threat to keep the PCs out of their affairs. More fanatic groups might attempt to use it to annihilate history sometime in the past, with only the PCs standing in their way.

Several variations on this theme are possible. If time travelers

were to unleash modern bacteria into the ecosystem at the dawn of time, it would certainly change evolution in fundamental and unpredictable ways – in fact, such an intervention would be very close to a time traveler's worst-case scenario.

Dinosaur Rustlers

-200 Million

In a time-traveling society, the return of the dinosaurs seems inevitable. However, the reintroduction of these creatures into the ecosystem – particularly an ecosystem as fragile as ours – poses serious problems.

It seems certain, therefore, that breeding and sale of dinosaurs would be strictly controlled. And not just the big monsters, either. Smaller dinosaurs are actually more likely to wreck the ecology by displacing some common and essential modern species (compare the consequences of introducing rabbits to Australia to the consequences of introducing camels to Florida).

The actual temporal importation of dinos is likely to be a strict government monopoly. If time travel itself is a government monopoly, then no problem. But if time travel is somewhat more accessible, a whole campaign could be built up with the PCs as Jurassic game wardens, assigned to locate and shut down wily time-traveling rustlers, in addition to facing the dramatic natural dangers of the age of reptiles.

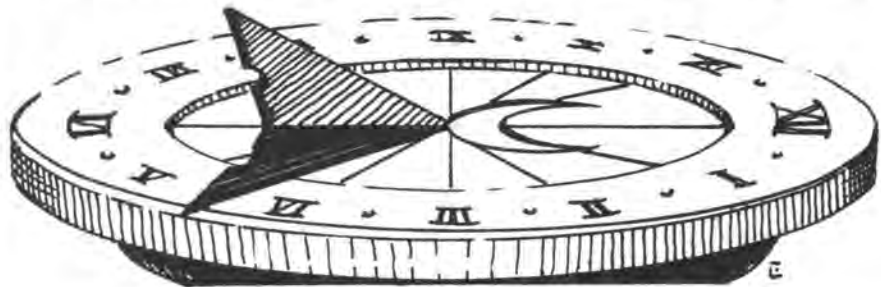
USING THE TIMELINE

Throughout *GURPS Timeline* this space will be devoted to a running chronology of the history of the world. Though a few "mythical" dates have been included, by and large the chronology is reserved for things that really happened . . . or, at least, historians' best guesses about what really happened.

While it is impossible for this chronology to give all the information the GM needs to run an adventure during any historical time period (though it can help with a short stop in any given period), GMs will find it useful in several ways.

First, the Chronology is intended to provide a sense of history. Many detailed references focus rather narrowly on their immediate subject. The timeline can help the GM with such cross-cultural calls as what a traveler from India would have on his mind during the Napoleonic era, or what direction a fugitive from the Egypt of the Middle Kingdom would have to flee to find something besides savages and wasteland.

Secondly, the chronology provides countless adventure seeds for the GM. It should be remembered that an adventure



does not have to have an exciting-sounding purpose in order to actually be exciting. If, for instance, the adventurers are escorting a professor of philosophy to the year 1770 to interview Scottish philosopher David Hume, they will find countless chances to run afoul of highwaymen, Highlanders or the intrigues of Georgian England. A long and exciting campaign could be built around a mathematical historian's quest for the origin of the mathematical concept zero – if the time travelers aren't very careful, they're liable to find that the ancients got the idea from the historian's questions! And, of course, the brief references in the Chronology can suggest topics worthy of detailed research.

Finally, the Chronology includes many interesting supplemental details and NPCs for the GM to add to the game. An encounter with the likes of Beau Brummell or John Belushi can do much to enliven an otherwise pedestrian gaming session, and a textbook on the Civil War is unlikely to mention popular composer Stephen Foster, the young Thomas Alva Edison, or the recent publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, any one of which could be used by an imaginative GM. The chronology can also come in handy if the GM needs to quickly determine whether the offended noble is more likely to pursue on foot or in chariots, or if the Emperor's guards will be armed with bows or guns.

The Inquisition

1483

As the Catholic church consolidated its political power over Europe, its view toward non-Christians changed. Formerly the unconverted had been merely benighted wretches, waiting to hear the gospel and save their immortal souls. Now they became enemies of the state, sent by Satan to undermine the mother church and her appointed kings and princes.

To combat this perceived danger, in 1231, Pope Gregory IX created the papal Inquisition for the apprehension and trial of heretics. Two widespread heresies of the time were the Cathari (radical aesthetes who preached that good and evil were coequal, and all matter was evil) and the Waldenses (who anticipated many of the doctrines that would later lead to the Protestant reformation). The Church chose the name "Inquisition," from the Latin term *inquirō* or "inquiry," to emphasize that the inquisitors would actively seek out heretics, rather than waiting to investigate complaints.

The Inquisition followed a set procedure. If a person was suspected of heresy, he was given time to confess and absolve himself. If he failed to do so, he would be brought before the Inquisition, interrogated and tried, with testimony from witnesses. If he admitted or was convicted on the charge, he could be sentenced to penalties ranging from simple prayer and fasting to confiscation of property and imprisonment for any amount of time – even life. If a condemned heretic still refused to recant, or if he repented and then relapsed, he could be turned over to the secular arm, which could prescribe the death penalty. The use of torture to obtain confessions was originally rejected, but was authorized in 1252 by Pope Innocent IV.

This first Inquisition was most active in northern Italy and southern France.

The infamous Spanish Inquisition emerged in the 15th century, after the Moslems had been expelled from Spain. This Inquisition was designed less to combat Christian heretics (although some were active in Spain at the time, and did come under persecution from the Inquisition) than to ferret out the remaining Moslems and the Jews, who had prospered culturally and financially under the more tolerant Moslem regime.

The first inquisitors in Spain were so harsh that Pope Sixtus IV tried to intervene, but the rulers of Spain did not want a more moderate Inquisition – they considered it a valuable weapon in their struggle to rebuild their power base and unify Spain as a Christian country. The Pope was forced to allow the rulers to pick their own Grand Inquisitor. They chose Torquemada.

Tomás de Torquemada was a Dominican priest who had served as Prior of a monastery in Segovia for over 20 years. Ironically, Torquemada was of Jewish descent. He was confessor and advisor to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

Torquemada was named Grand Inquisitor in 1483, and rapidly established the reputation that would make his name synonymous with intolerance and cruelty for the next 500 years. Torquemada's deeds have been exaggerated over time, but most historians agree he burned at least 2,000 accused heretics at the stake.

The Spanish Inquisition differed from the earlier medieval Inquisition mostly in the degree of its harshness, although it also turned the auto-da-fé, the ceremony at which sentences were pronounced, into a celebration of macabre elaboration.

In 1492, Torquemada persuaded Ferdinand and Isabella to

1516 to 1531

1516

Sir Thomas More writes *Utopia*.

1517

Martin Luther, in protest against the sale of indulgences, posts his 95 theses on the door of Palast Church in Wittenberg (Oct. 31), beginning the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

Turks take Cairo.

"Evil May Day" riots in London; 60 rioters hanged.

Coffee is first sold in Europe.

1519

Ferdinand Magellan, Portuguese navigator in the service of Spain, leaves Europe on Sept. 20 to circumnavigate the globe.

Cortes brings Arabian horses from Spain to North American continent.

1520

Christian II of Denmark defeats Swedes at Lake Asunden and is crowned King of Sweden in Stockholm; four days later, in spite of his grant of an amnesty, he massacres leading Swedish bishops and nobles.

Babar re-establishes Mongol empire in India.

Pope Leo X excommunicates Luther; Luther publicly burns the bull of excommunication.

Chocolate brought from Mexico to Spain.

Turkeys imported to Europe from America, oranges from south China and corn from West Indies.

1521

Hernando Cortes destroys Aztec state – demoralized by smallpox epidemic from Europe – and assumes control of Mexico.

Swedish resistance to Danish rule.

Sultan Suleiman I conquers Belgrade, begins to invade Hungary.

Luther imprisoned in Wartburg after Diet of Worms.

Magellan killed in the Philippines by natives; his expedition continues under Juan Sebastiano del Cano.

1522

Suleiman I takes Rhodes from Knights of St. John.

Spanish forces conquer Guatemala.

Pascuel de Andagoya leads land expedition from Panama to discover Peru.

1523

Town of Jamaica founded by the Spanish.

1524

French driven out of Italy.

Spanish hang last Aztec king.

1525

Germans and Spanish defeat French and Swiss at Pavia; first use of muskets by Spanish infantry.

Smallpox reaches Inca empire, killing the ruler, Huayna Capac.

William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament printed.

1526

Turks defeat Hungarians at Battle of Mohacs; Sultan Suleiman I takes Buda.

Persecution of Jews in Hungary.

1527 to 1535

Spaniards conquer the Maya.

1527

Sack of Rome; troops of the German Empire pillage the city, killing 4,000 inhabitants and looting art treasures. The Pope is imprisoned. This has been called the "End of the Renaissance."

1528

Severe outbreaks of plague in England.

Reformation begins in Scotland.

1529

Turks attack Austria and lay siege to Vienna, but are forced to abandon it.

At Second Diet of Speyer, Lutheran minority's protests against the Catholic majority gives rise to the term "Protestants."

1530

Portuguese colonize Brazil.

Spinning wheel and matches in general use in Europe.

1531

Henry VIII recognized as supreme head of the Church in England.

Halley's Comet appears, arousing a wave of superstition.

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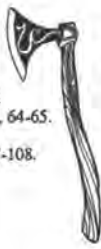
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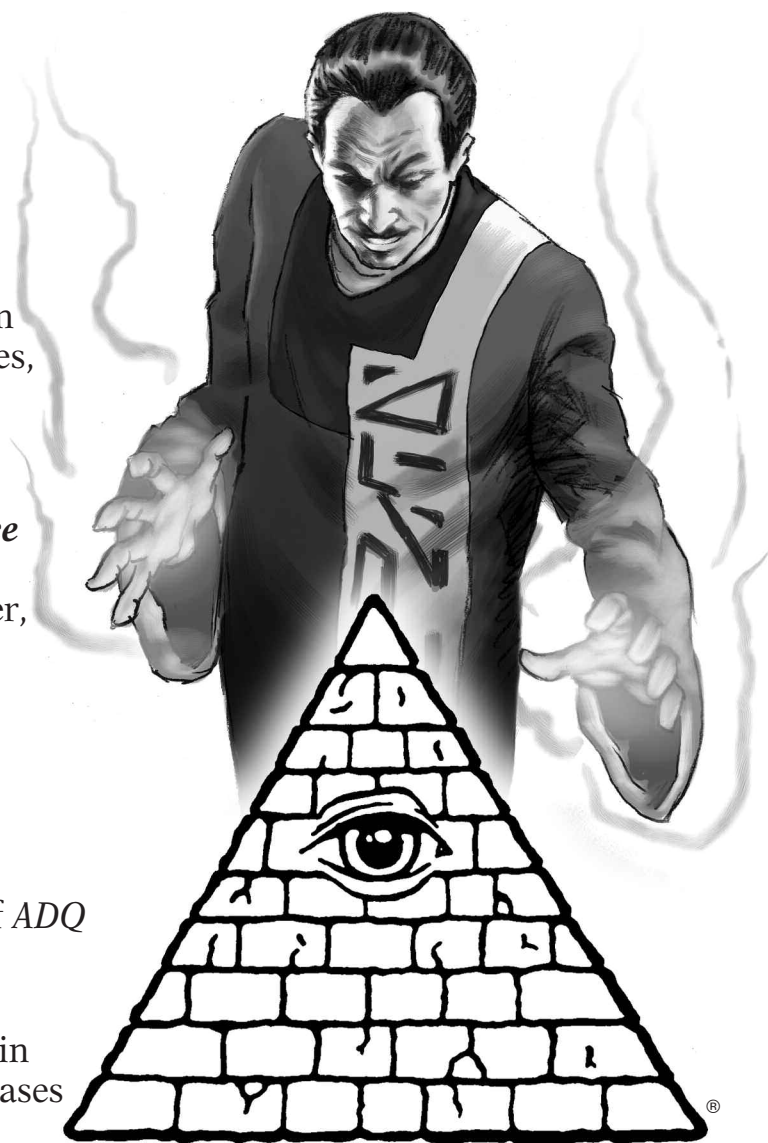
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