Ubiquitous Obliquity

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Forewarned

The Persian Wars; 500-479 B.C.

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(Gratuitous Narcissism)

Forewarned

I am surprised, not only that I made this issue, but by the length of my submission. Things are uttlery nuts at work at the moment; we're attempting a very ambitious project to find nearby supernovae. If you think about the geometry of it, the closer in you look, a given fraction of a sphere covers a smaller physical volume of space. To survey enough galaxies to find a good number of nearby supernovae, you have to look at much more of the sky than is necessary in order to find distant supernovae. Consequently, one is faced with huge amounts of data. I've spent many an entire night at work dealing with data coming simultaneously from up to three different telescopes. Meanwhile, I've overcommitted myself on the drama front. Performances of a farce entitled "The Amorous Ambassodor" have just finished, and now I'm not only acting in but "producing" (which isn't as impressive as it sounds) the musical "Gypsy" at the local community theatre.

During all this, I managed to squeeze in a little research on the side, because I really wanted to do something for the History issue. I had several ideas, but eventually found myself in Ancient Greece. Once I'd settled there, my original plan was to write a Timepiece/Stopwatch adventure centered around the Battle of Thermopylae, but two things happened. First, I couldn't quite figure out what it was Stopwatch was doing that Timepiece had to stop. Second, as I started to research it, I found lots of other interesting things about the Persian war, and it wasn't clear to me that Thermopylae was really the right place to have Stopwatch intervene.

What I present is something of a slapdash tour of the Persian Wars between 500 and 479 BC. Keep in mind that I'm not writing scholarly history here, but I'm trying to create a summary from which one might be able to draw the background for a roleplaying game, and from which one might be able to draw the seeds of adventures, or in which one might find an idea that might warrant further investigation. Thus, I sometimes include things (such as the story of the message sent tatooed into a slave's scape) that may seem gratuitously detailed. That level of detail will not be consistent through my article. In some places, I point out the mysteries and turning points that time travellers might be interested in, and the political intrigues and machinations that can make for the interesting basis of a historical campaign. For the most part, however, I leave noticing the seeds and game-able ideas as an exercise for the alert leader.

For a good overview of the period and of Greece, of course the first place the members of AotA ought to look is *GURPS Greece*. It is quite good (as is to be expected from GURPS historicals), and has a good quick overview of the history of Classical Greece. This includes not only a two-page summary of the Persian Wars, but the context before and after them.

Zeus and the gang willing, in a forthcoming issue I will write that Timepiece/Stopwatch adventure set somewhere during the Persian Wars.

The Persian Wars:
500 - 479 B.C.

The Seed: a "Top" Secret Message Incites a Rebellion

Darius, the king of Persia, first became fully aware of Athens during the Ionian revolt in the beginning of the 5th century BC. After that, he had a servant remind him every day how much he hated the Athenians. The Ionian cities in question were Greek colonies on the eastern side of the Aegean Sea, which were under the rule of the Persians. Although there were Persian tyrants controlling these Greek states, in general the rule was not oppressive.

There were probably undercurrents of a Greek desire for independence that set the stage for the Ionian revolt. However, it was the scheme of two ambitious and self-interested tyrants, Histiaeus and Aristagoras, that precipitated the Ionian Revolt in 498. Histiaeus was the nominal tyrant of the city Miletus, but he was being held close at Darius' court while Aristagoras governed the city. Aristagoras had found himself in an awkward political position because of an embarrassingly aborted military operation against the island of Naxos in the Cyclades. When he received a secret message from Histiaeus asking him to revolt against Persian rule, he saw it as an opportunity to maintain his own personal power. Perversely, Herodotus reports that Histiaeus sent the secret message to Aristagoras tattooed into the head of a trusted slave. (Shave head, inscribe message, re-grow hair, send messenger; Hdt V:35) Histiaeus, for his part, hoped that he would be sent to quell the revolt, thereby raising his own position.

Aristagoras sailed across the Aegean Sea for mainland Greece, to seek military support for his rebellion. His first stop was Sparta, the city traditionally firm in its opposition of Persia. Cleomenes, the King of Sparta, wasn't hearing any of it. In Athens, Aristagoras had more luck, and the Athenians committed 20 ships to the revolt. Given that they were characteristically embroiled with Aegnia, this was not an insignificant contribution.

Why Did the Athenians Withdraw?

With Athenian support, the Ionian rebels landed at Ephesus, and attacked and burnt the Persian city of Sardis. Among the buildings burnt was the temple to the goddess Cybele, thereby providing the Persians a blanket excuse to later burn all the Greek temples they wanted. However, the Persian garrison, under command of the Persian satrap Artaphernes, drove off the invading Greek army. Later, in the summer of 498, the Persians severely defeated the Greek forces at Ephesus.

Sometime after this is one of the mysteries of the Persian War. Although

Timeline

ca. 500?
Aristagoras incites revolt of Ionian states against Persia.

499-8 Winter
Aristagoras sails to Greece to seek aid in the Ionian revolt, gets aid from Athens.

498
Sardis burnt. Ionians and Atheneans defeated at Ephesus.

498?
Athenians withdraw aid from Ionian revolt.

496
Aristagoras flees, is killed. Histiaeus sets up pirate operation in Hellespont.

495 midsummer
Persians defeat Ionians in naval Battle of Lade.

494
Miletus falls to Persia.

493
Persians finish crushing Ionian revolt. Histiaeus' head is sent to Darius.

493/2
Themistocles eponymous archon in Athens.

492
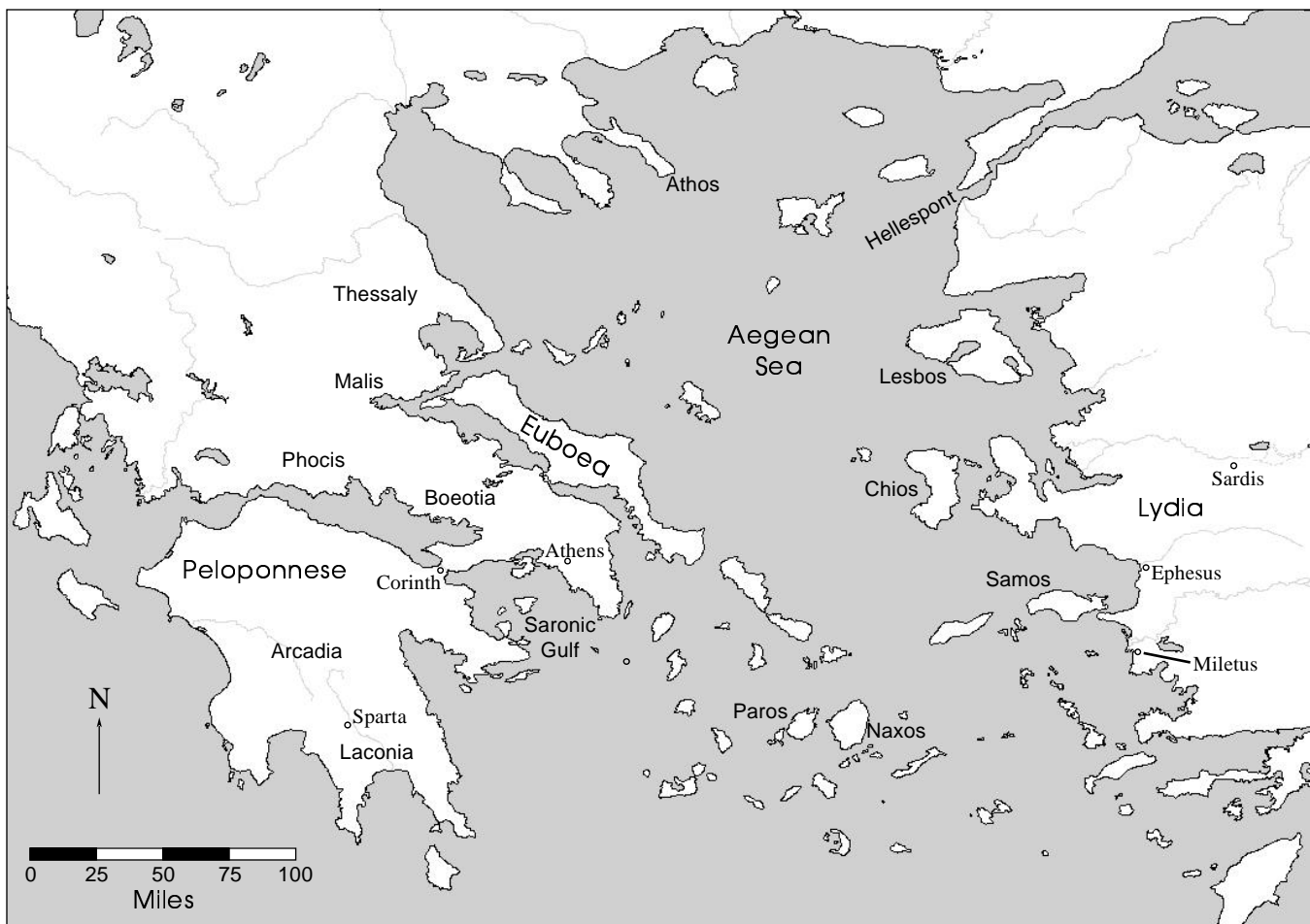Persian exepdition led by Mardonius has fleet destroyed by weather at Athos.

491
Darius assembles a fleet for a punitive invasion of Greece.
Aegina swears loyalty to Persia, withdraws from Spartan Alliance. Cleomenes arrests Aegian leaders.
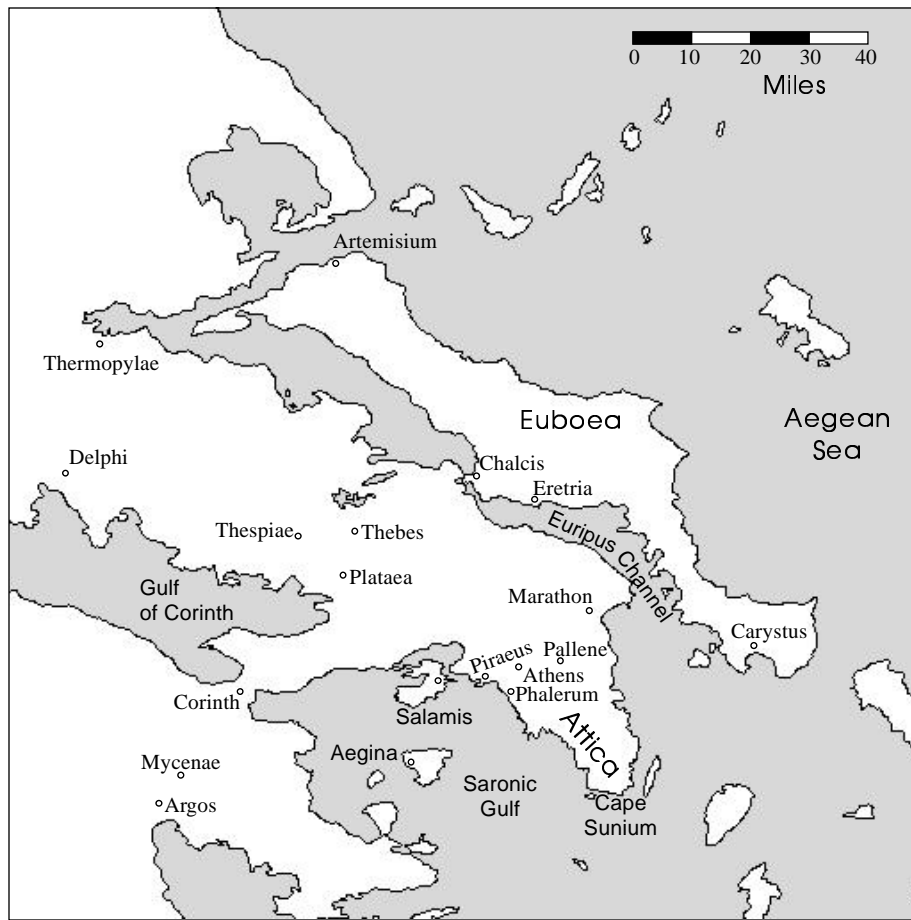Cleomenes' maddness and death; succeeded by Leonidas.

the Athenians had made a significant contribution to the revolt, they now pulled out and aided the rebels no further. Why? Was it second thoughts about the wisdom of the revolt following the defeat at Ephesus? Aristagoras had told the Athenians that the Persians were poor fighters and would be easy to defeat. Was it because at the time of the withdrawal the eponymous archon in Greece was one who had ties with a family in favor in Persia? Their withdrawal is perhaps more a mystery given that the Athenian people were severely dismayed at the news of the fall of Miletus in 494.

GURPS Greece/GURPS Swashbucklers

In 497, Darius accused Histiaeus of complicity with Aristagoras. Histiaeus, of course, was guilty, but professed not only innocence but also surprise that Miletus would revolt. He said that of course if he were sent back, everything would be brought back under control. And, so, Darius sent him. Artaphernes, however, saw right through Histiaeus, and told him as such: "Histiaeus, this shoe is your sticking; Aristagoras only put it on." (Hdt VI:1). Histiaeus went from place to place looking for people to take him in, but only got a wound in the thigh from a former subject in Miletus for his trouble. He ended up getting a few ships from the Lesbians, and setting up a

Who's Who

A selection of important and/or interesting people from the Persian Wars

Aristagoras: Son-in-law of Histiaeus, governing Miletus in the latter's absence. Ambitious and self-interested, if not a very good leader. His role in the Ionian revolt was probably meant to preserve his own power and further himself, not to support any Greek ideals of self-government.

Aristides: General at Marathon.

Artaphernes: Persian satrap of Sardis. Led Persian counter-assault against Ionians at Ephesus.

Artaphernes: (son of the other one). Persian general at the Battle of Marathon.

Callimachus: The War Archon in charge of the Athenian army at Marathon (assisted by ten generals, including Miltiades). Killed at Marathon.

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pirate operation in the Hellespont. Over time, he built up an army, but eventually found himself caught and beheaded by a Persian named Harpagus. For players interested in an amoral mercenary campaign, the "pirate years" of Histiaeus, set against the larger backdrop of the Ionian revolt, might make for an interesting setting. With his wounded thigh, it's perhaps only a small stretch to imagine Histiaeus with a pegleg... and an eyepatch... and a parrot on his shoulder.

Madness and Intrigue

The years between the Ionian revolt and the Battle of Marathon were key ones in the Persian wars, for here is where the groundwork was laid for the unity of the Greeks. Nonetheless, it was a period filled with intrigue, shifting alliances, double-dealing, and about-faces that seem to typify classical Greek history. With the threat of an impending invasion from Persia throwing all such political machinations among the Greeks into high relief, this would be a great era for political historical roleplaying. It might also be a great era for meddling time travelers to make sure pieces fall into place properly without having to mess around with the big obvious battles. It would not be un-reasonable for a GM (or players!) to add additional (fictional) machinations and turns of alliance on both small and grand scales, giving a gaming group

Who's Who (continued)

Cleombrotus: Commander of the Greek land forces at the Isthmus at the time of the Battle of Salamis.

Cleomenes: One of the two Kings of Sparta until the bruhaha and his madness in 491.

Darius: King of the Persians until 486 BC. Despite his legendary desire for revenge against the Athenians that (according to Herodotus) led to the Persian Wars, he seems to have been reasonably forgiving for a king of the times, allowing captured cities to live under their own customs, and captured prisoners to resettle and live (more or less) free.

Datis: Persian general at the Battle of Marathon.

Demaratus: co-King of Sparta with Cleomenes until 491. Disagreed with Cleomenes about resistance to Aegina and Persia, ended up being declared illegitimate and ousted.

Ephialtes: The Greek who told Xerxes about the mountain pass leading behind Thermopylae.

Eurybiates: Spartan commander of Greek navy at Artemisia and Salamis.

Histiaeus: The Persian tyrant of the Ionian city Miletus. (The Ionian cities were on the east coast of the Aegean Sea.) He was recalled to the court of Darius so that he wouldn't be in a position to challenge Darius' control of him. After being sent to put down the Ionian revolt, he spent the last few years of his life as a pirate. (These Greeks... wacky guys.)

Hippias: Son of Pisistratus. The Pisistrate were an Athenian family who had been tyrants in Athens prior to the reforms of Cleisthenes. Exiled from Athens, Hippias lived at Darius' court at Susa, urged the invasion of Athens.

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who enjoys political intrigue space for an entire campaign during the years 493-490.

Opposition to the Persians was not necessarily universal in Athens. It may have been oscillating sympathy for the Persians that caused them to withdraw their support from the Ionian revolt in 498. When the Athenian general Miltiades returned, he was put on trial for tyranny overseas. However, as a participant in the Ionian revolt, his opposition to Persia was just as much on trial. His acquittal was one indication that Athens as a whole was not willing to cooperate with or appease Persia.

During his year as eponymous archon in 493/2, Themistocles began his campaign (which would last for several years) to turn Athens into a naval power, fortifying the ports at Piraeus.

Athens' relations with the other Greek states was patchy at best. It had locked horns in minor ways with Sparta in recent years, and it was (as always) at war with Aegina. It was this latter conflict that gave Athens the opportunity to win the sympathy of the other Greek states. In summer 491, Aegina allied itself with Persia, withdrawing from the Spartan alliance. Prompted by Athens, the Spartan king Cleomenes arrested the leaders of the Aeginatan government and delivered them to Athens. This crystallized the conflict between Cleomenes and the other king of Sparta, Demaratus, who did not agree with Cleomenes on opposition to Persia and Aegina.

Cleomenes arranged for Demaratus to be replaced by Leotychidas. In so doing, he manipulated a priestess at Delphi to declare Demaratus to be illegitimate. When this later on became known, Cleomenes had to flee Sparta. This is the same Cleomenes who had been all but the ideal of the honorable Spartan. At the beginning of the Ionian revolt, when Aristagoras had asked for Spartan help, Cleomenes wisely didn't commit Spartan forces so far from home. When out and out bribed by Aristagoras, Cleomenes rebuffed the leader of the rebellion (though according to Herodotus, that was partly by the advice of his 9 year old daughter; Hdt V:51). Now, however, this same Cleomenes found himself in Arcadia (a mountainous land in the Peloponnese) trying to organize a coalition against Sparta. That didn't last long before Cleomenes was invited back to be king of Sparta again. Those wacky Greeks. Cleomenes, perhaps unsurprisingly, went mad after all of this, and knifed himself to death while imprisoned in the stocks. During all of this, however, Sparta remained firm against Persia (doubtless much to the relief of Athens). (It takes only a modicum of imagination to see the hand of meddling time travelers in these sundry events.)

In 490, during a festival for Poseidon at Cape Sunium (the tip of Attica), the Aeginetans kidnapped several important Athenians from a sacred vessel. This gave Athens an excuse to move overtly against Aeginetans, gambling that Sparta was peeved enough at Aegina by now that they wouldn't intervene. They hired some ships from Corinth to bolster their own, fielding a navy 70 strong, and followed with both naval and land action against Aegina

during the spring and summer of 490. Although the military effects of these actions may not have been overwhelming, the political effects were important. It bolstered the morale and self confidence of Athens, showed them the value of a strong navy, and helped to align Sparta and Corinth alongside Athens before Persia would begin its full scale invasions of Greece. Indeed, the foolish move of the Aeginetans during the festival of Poseidon seems perhaps a little bit too convenient. Was it really the Aeginetans, or was there more going on than meets the eye? Only you (and your gaming group) can find out.

The Battle of Marathon

In 490, Darius appointed Datis and Artaphernes (the son of the aforementioned satrap) as generals of the force to invade Greece, with instructions to attack Athens and Eretria and bring back prisoners. Exiled Athenian tyrant Hippias traveled with them. Sacking a few pesky rebellious islands on the way across the Aegean, they finally stopped over for a few days at Carystus and then Eretria in Euboea, to besiege and burn the towns and deport the population. They then proceeded to land unopposed at the bay of Marathon in Attica.

The Persian force consisted of infantry and cavalry, numbering up to 25,000 soldiers. They chose the plains near Marathon as a battlefield so that their cavalry would have room to maneuver and be effective. The location was also closer to their operational base in recently-subdued Euboean cities than Phalerum, the bay on the other side of Attica closer to the city of Athens.

The Athenians, meanwhile, dispatched the famous runner Philippides to Sparta to request their immediate aid. The response was that they were celebrating the festival of Apollo Carneius, and that it would sacrilegious to march before the full moon (six days hence). Consequently, Athens, assisted only by allies from the town of Plataea, marched without the aid of the Spartans to Marathon. The Persians were camped on the shores of the Bay of Marathon; the Athenians made their camp in the foothills of Mt. Pentelicus, where the Persian cavalry would not be able to effectively operate. The numbers of the Persian army are uncertain, but there is no doubt that the 10,000 soldiers of the Athenian infantry were sorely outnumbered.

What Happened to the Cavalry?

The ten Athenian generals (including Miltiades, as well as Aristides; p. GR14) argued over the best course of action. Five wanted not to attack the Persians, for the odds were surely hopeless. The other five, led by Miltiades, figured that fighting at Marathon was going to be their only hope. The decision fell to Callimachus, the war archon. Miltiades got to him first, and convinced him to side with those who wished to attack the Persians. There remained the issue of operational command; it was decided that the supreme command of the army would rotate, each of the ten generals being in charge

Who's Who (continued)

Hydarnes: The Persian commander who led the Immortals over the pass around to the back of the Greek position at Thermopylae.

Lacedaemonians: An alternate name for the Spartans.

Leonidas: Brother of and successor to Cleomenes. Spartan king killed defending the pass at Thermopylae.

Leotychidas: Co-King of Sparta starting in 491, succeeding Demaratus.

Mardonius: Son-in-law of Darius who led the ill-fated Persian expedition in 492, and who commanded the Persian forces at the Battle of Plataea.

Miltiades: The general who effective commanded the Athenian troops at the battle of Marathon.

Pausanias: Newphew of Leoniadas, regent to the Spartan king in 479; commander of Greek forces at Plataea.

Philippides: (Phidippides?) A messenger, who ran from Athens to Sparta with a request for aid at the Battle of Marathon. Also, according to legend, he ran from Marathon to Athens to report the victory of the Athenian forces, and died from exhaustion after delivering the message.

Themistocles: An Athenian statesman and general who led the expansion of the Athenian navy, and who maneuvered and manipulated the Athenian victory at Salamis in 480.

Xanthippes: Athenian general in 479.

Xerxes: Son of Darius, and the Persian King who led the Persians at the battles of Thermopylae and Salamis.

Nicodromus' Treachery

When Athens attaced Aegina in 490 (see page 7), they had an ally who was supposed to lead a group of traitors in Aegina to support the Athenian action. Nicodromus was the dissaffected Aeginetan who was supposed to bring some aid to Athens from within Aegina. However, the Athenians arrived to late (as it took time to get the ships from Corinth), and Nicodromus and some of his supporters fled the island. Some of his other supporters were executed by Aegina, including one clinging to a door of a temple of Demeter, thereby making his decapitation an act of sacrilege. Hdt. VI:88ff.)

About the Maps

I made the maps using the Xerox PARC map viewer on the web (see the References at the end of the article). This is an interactive website that uses information on coastal outlines over the whole world from the CIA factbook to plot maps of the world. You can zoom and center on different regions. From this site, I got the coastlines and the rivers. I used my image proceing program to color in the oceans, and then added labels and sites on the map, following after my references (most notably Hammond and the Perseus Project).

The map of Thermopylae I am rather less proud of. I drew it by eye, based on Figure 17 from Hammond, and added annotations based on his annotations. It doesn't look great, but I think it does help give a feel for the lay of the land during that battle.

for a day. The five generals who sided with Miltiades in favor of action gave their day to Miltiades, meaning that for half of the time Miltiades was in charge. At that point, the Athenians hunkered down and began to wait for the right moment.

When the moment came, the Athenians charged decisively. The Persians thought they were mad, for they were unsupported by archers or horsemen, running at a numerically superior force. Miltiades had spread out the Athenian line, reinforcing the flanks at the expense of the center of the line, and making the line as long as the (better manned) Persian line. Although the center of the line broke, the flanks were able to wrap around and attack the Persians from behind. They were able to drive the Persians back to their ships, where (excepting seven ships captured by Athenian forces) they sailed away.

In this battle is one of the mysteries of the Persian Wars. Specifically, where was the Persian cavalry? The Persians had chosen a location where their cavalry might be able to operate, and indeed had the calvary been there, the Athenian army would have had trouble successfully charging across the plain at the Persian army. When the battle came, the cavalry either wasn't there, or wasn't able to effectively do anything. One story (not reported by Herodotus) has it that some Ionian deserters from the Persian army came one night to inform the Athenian generals that the cavalry was away, and that it was the next dawn that the Athenians seized the moment and attacked the Persians. But the question remains, why were they away?

Treachery in Athens

As the Persians embarked on their ships after being defeated at the plain of Marathon, they saw a signal, the sunlight reflected off of a raised shield, from somewhere inland (possibly the Acropolis in Athens). This signal was supposed to have been a pre-arranged signal to the Persians, indicating that there were traitors in Athens ready to act. Accordingly, the Persians sailed around to the other side of Attica, intending to land at Phalerum. However, the Athenians also saw the signal, and recognizing it for what it was, performed a forced march across Attica so that they might be ready to receive the Persians at Phalerum. Seeing the Athenians ready for them, the Persians turned stern and sailed back to Asia.

The identity of the putative traitors in Athens remains a mystery. The Alcmaeonidae (the family of Cleisthenes) were accused of sending the signal, but Herodotus dismisses this, as the Alcmaeonidae were staunch in their resistance of tyrants and in their support of democracy in Athens (Hdt VI:121-124). Who were the actual traitors? How and when was the arrangement made with the Persians, so that they might understand the signal of the reflection from the shield?

Only after the Persians had set sail back for home did the Spartan army arrive. They paid their respects to the battlefield, told the Athenians they did

a good job, and marched back home.

Preparations for War, 490-480 BC

After the Persian fleet returned in defeat to Persia, Darius decided that a full scale invasion of Greece was in order. He spent a few years building the army, and then was distracted by a rebellion in Egypt. He never did get his second invasion of Greece before his death in 485. His son, Xerxes, continued preparations, putting together a truly massive army. Among other things, in order to avoid another disaster at Athos, he had dug (with forced labor) a canal across the narrow neck at the top of the peninsula.

The Athenian success at the Battle of Marathon saved Greece from Persian subjugation. It also raised the stature of Athens amongst the other Greek states, and bolstered the will of the Greeks to resist invasions from Persia.

In 489, Miltiades assumed command of the 70 ships of the Athenian Navy, and went to take back the islands of the Cyclades from Persian rule. According to Herodotus, he didn't actually state where he was going when he asked for command of all the ships, but merely that those who went with him would find great riches (Hdt VI:132). (This sounds like exactly the sort of thing adventuring groups are always promised in traditional high fantasy games.) He laid siege to Paros, who had sent a ship along with the Persian navy in the previous year. After the siege had been resisted for several days, an under-priestess named Timo from the Parian temple "infernal goddesses" came and talked Miltiades into the temple of Demeter, promising that in so doing he would then be able to capture Paros. After breaking in, Miltiades had second thoughts, and in breaking back out he wounded his leg. After 26 days of unsuccessful siege, Miltiades returned to Athens and found himself on trial. Gangrene had begun to set in on the wound in his leg, and he was inable to speak in his own defense. He was find 50 talents, but died from his wound before he could pay it.

Sundry machinations ensued in the resultant power vacuum in Athens, including numerous ostracisms (p. GR14). Various small reforms in the government system of the city raised the political importance of generals, meaning that now the most influential politicians were the generals rather than the archons. In 483 or 482, a windfall struck Athens in the form of a rich find of silver in state owned mines. Themistocles argued both that the best use of the windfall from the silver mines was to expand its navy. In the end, his arguments that the ships would be useful against Aegina were more persuasive than arguments about defense against the Persians, and Athens set about constructing the hardware necessary for being a naval power. In 481, Athens received two legendary prophecies from the oracle at Delphi. The first was all doom and gloom, but the second, while still gloomy, cautioned "safe shall the wooden wall continue for thee and thy children" (Hdt VII: 141). Themistocles argued that the prophecy indicated that Athens salvation lay in Naval action against Persia.
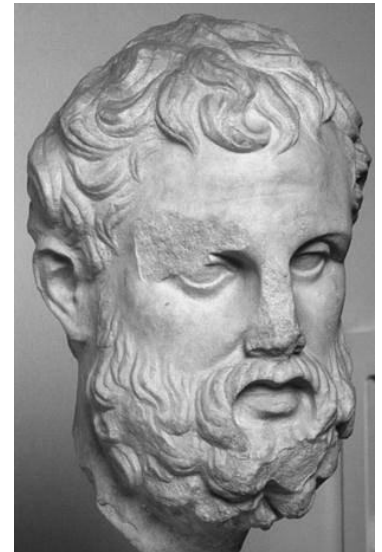
Where's Where

Aegina An island in the Saronic Gulf. The strongest naval power in the Aegian Sea up until the end of the 6th century BC. Commercial and military rivals of Athens. In "unheralded war" with Athens from ca. 500 to 481.

Arcadia A mountainous province in the Peloponnese.

Athos A mountain, and a peninsula on the north of the Aegean Sea, in Macedonia. A Persian fleet, led by Mardonius, was destroyed by weather here in 492. Xerxes dug a channel across the narrow north end of the peninsula for his forces to cross in 481.

Attica The northeastern portion of the Greek peninsula. Athens is the captial and dominant city. Of particular interest to the Persian wars is Marathon, on the opposite side of the Attica peninsula.

Mt. Cithaeron A mountain in Boeotia near Plataea.

Cocyra An island west of the Greek mainland (off the left of the map on p. 4).

By autumn of 481, it was blatantly apparent to the Greeks that there were Persians headed their way. In a meeting at Sparta, as much as possible they set aside quarrels amongst themselves, including the war between Athens and Aegina. The Greeks dispatched three spies to Sardis to take measure of the forces led by Xerxes. They were caught, but their lives were spared by the Persian king, who wanted them to go back and boast of the size of his army to the Greeks.

Although Greece was as unified as ever, there were a few dissenters who didn't join the coalition, including Argos, Crete, and Syracuse. The reasons varied, but in each case it was probably the cities expecting that Persia was going to win, and their not wanting to be on the losing side. Corcyra said they would support the Greeks, but used an excuse that its ships were delayed to avoid being present at any battles, so that they might easily claim to have been supporting side won. Meanwhile, several of the northern Greek states, including all of Boeotia but Plataea and Thespiae, submitted to Persia as represented envoys sent by Xerxes.

The Greek allies met again in the spring of 480, this time at Corinth. The coalition came to call itself "The League of the Greeks," and appointed a governing Congress. In order to avoid a mess such as the dissension between the Athenian generals at Marathon, the Congress appointed Sparta to be the leader of the coalition, and was given supreme military command of both the ground forces and the fleet (despite the fact that at this point Athens was contributing the greatest number of ships); a single commander would control each branch of the military.

The Battle of Thermopylae

There was a brief abortive attempt, at the request of Thessaly, to defend the pass of Tempe between Macedonia and Thessaly. However, this was determined to be strategically unwise, and Thessaly was forced to submit to the Persians. Instead, the Greeks decided to make try to hold the pass at Thermopylae. Themistocles, at least, saw this as merely a delaying action, and planned the evacuation of Athens ahead of time.

The Persian force, led by Xerxes, that came to Thermopylae was massive. Herodotus speaks of millions of soldiers in the whole Persian army, which is unlikely by a factor of ten, but nonetheless the Greeks were yet again outnumbered. The Greek force numbered approximately 6,000 soldiers, and was mostly from the Peloponnese, including the famous 300 Spartans. (Most of the Spartan army was, once again, back at home celebrating a religious festival.) The rest were Thespians and Thebans from Boetia. Joining the army were another thousand Locrians and Phocians. The Greek force was commanded by the Spartan king Leonidas. For inspirational purposes, he led the Spartans out to the front of the Greek force. A Persian spy observed the Spartans combing their hair and doing other Spartan warrior-type things preparing for battle, and brought the news back to an amused Xerxes. According to Herodotus, the exiled Spartan king Demaratus

warned Xerxes that these Spartans meant business; however, this tale is almost certainly apocryphal.

Four days passed, while Xerxes waited for his fleet, delayed by weather, to get into position at Artemisium. The Greeks, despite some fear on their part, failed to retreat. Finally Xerxes started throwing bits of his army their way. The Greeks proved to be the superior warriors, had longer spears, and had the advantage of the terrain. The position Leonidas held was a narrow pass, 50 feet wide, with an ancient stone wall (repaired by the Greek army) at its back. About a mile ahead of the wall, the pass between the mountains and the sea narrowed to a mere six feet. The whole area was small enough for the superior Greek warriors to hold the pass even against vastly greater numbers of Persians. The fighting continued for two days.

After the second day, a Greek from Malis named Ephialtes came to Xerxes and told him about a pass that led over the mountain and behind Leonidas' position at Thermopylae. Leonidas had been aware of this pass, and had sent the army of the Phocians to defend it. That night, Xerxes sent a detachment of the Persian Immortals (the elite of the Persian army) commanded by Hydarnes to be led by Ephialtes over the pass. The Phocians heard them coming and were able to prepare. They were only under fire from Persian archers briefly before fleeing to the nearest peak to make their last stand. The Persians, though, were really interested in going after the Greeks at Thermopylae, and went on their merry way.
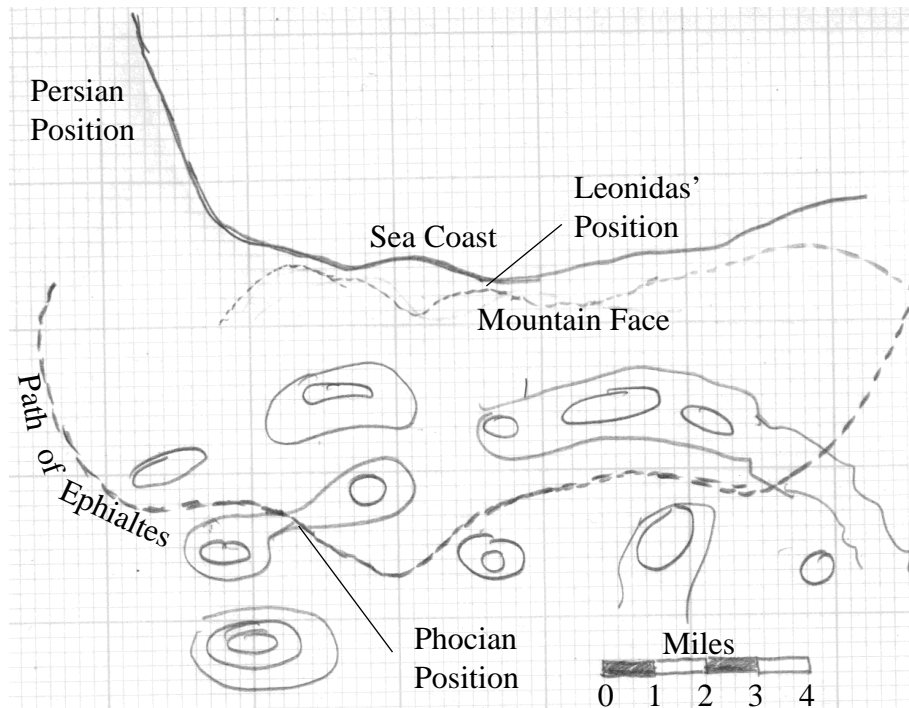
Thermopylae
(after Hammond, fig 17.)

Leonidas' Fate

Before Xerxes' invasion, the orcale at Delphi was full of predictions of doom and gloom. Indeed, the first prediction that the Athenians got was so bad that Timon, one of the Delphians, upon seeing how depressed the Athenian messengers were, invited them back in for a second opinion. This second opinion still wasn't exactly cheery, but it did have the bit about trusting in your wooden walls, and the reference to Holy Salamis that Themistocles took to heart (Hdt VII:140-143).

The Spartans received their own gloomy prophecy, being told that either Sparta would fall to the Persians, or the Spartans would have to morn the loss of a king, descended from Heracles (Hdt VII:220). King Leonidas was reputed to be of the line of Heracles. Herodotus suggests that this prohpecy is the reason that Leonidas sent the rest of the Greek army away, and stayed to die with the 300 Spartans.

In a campaign where the oracle at Delphi has working prophetic powers, Leonidas might be said to have a Fate. A historical fantasy/time travel game, then, might feature meddling time travellers who strive to have the Persians succesfully invade Greece by making sure that Leonidas *survives* the Battle of Thermopylae. For if Sparta does not mourn the loss of their king, then the city shall surely fall....

Despite the degree to which the last stand at Thermopylae captures the imagination and crystallizes the image of the Spartans as the honorable and noble warriors who fight to the last, the battle probably made very little actual military difference in the course of the war. Even if the Delphic prophecy is not taken to be true, one does have to wonder how things might have been different for Sparta and Greece if Leonidas and his Spartans had not stood so honorably.

Template: Athenian Statesman [150 pts]

ST: 10 [0]
DX: 11 [10]
IQ: 13 [30]
HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Status 5 [25], Wealthy [20], 15 points from Charisma and Reputation

Disadvantages: Proud [-1] *or* Chauvinistic [-1], -15 points chosen from Enemy, Fanaticism, Greed, Impulsiveness, Overconfidence, Selfish (*etc.*); -10 points chosen from Code of Honor, Vow, and Sense of Duty (freedom of Athens).

Primary Skills: Leadership (M/A) IQ+4 [10]-17, Fast Talk (M/A) IQ+2 [6]-15, Law (M/H) IQ+2 [8]-15, Diplomacy (M/H) IQ [4]-13, Politics (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14 *or* Bard (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14

Secondary Skills: Strategy (M/H) IQ+1 [6]-14, Tactics (M/H) IQ+1 [6]-14

Background Skills: Shortsword (P/A) DX+2 [8]-13, Spear (P/A) DX+2 [8]-13, Shield (P/A) DX+2 [4]-13, Theology (M/H) IQ [4]-13, 8 points in Artistic, Knowledge, and Scientific skills.

The secondary and background skills are based on Athenian generals being the dominant statesmen of Athens. After Themistocles' expansion of the Athenian navy, the Sea forms of Tactics and Strategy are preferred. (Probably I should have included boating and/or seamanship in the template as well.)

Mostly because of Status and Wealth, this is an expensive template. It is suitable for a minior but important statesman. If you want to play a *major* Athenian statesman (e.g. Aristides, or Themistocles himself), then you're going to have to bump the Status to 6, take more reputation, and in general end up with a more expensive template.

Some mental disadvantages such as Honesty and Truthfulnes would get in the way of the intrigue and machinations expected from a statesman during and in between the Persian wars.

Before the Persians arrived in the morning, the Greeks got a warning from Persian deserters that the Persians had found the pass and were going to be coming in behind their position. Leonidas sent most of the Greek army away, as at that point it was hopeless for the Greeks to be able to defend the position. However, the famous 300 Spartans stayed to make a last stand to allow the rest of the Greek army to get away. The Thebans and the Thespians stayed with the Spartans, but it seems to be the 300 Spartans that get all the fame. According to Herodotus, the Thebans were kept as hostages against their will by Leonidas, though this may be retroactive sour grapes on Herodotus' or his sources' part, as Thebes later surrendered to Persia. As the story goes, they gave themselves up as soon as the Persian Immortals arrived. The Thespians, on the other hand, stayed of their own will, refusing to desert the Spartans, and fought to the bitter end.

Naturally, Leonidas, the Spartans, and the Thespians died in the battle that morning. However, they fought well, and took with them a great number of Persians, including two brothers and a cousin of Xerxes.

The Battle of Artemisium

While the Greek land forces made their stand at Thermopylae, the Greek fleet, commanded by Eurybiades of Sparta and Themistocles of Athens, tried to hold the entrance to the Euboean channel at Artemisium. When three scout ships for the Greeks and ten scout ships for the Persians saw each other, a dramatic chase ensued, ending with the destruction of all three Greek ships, though the crew of one (Athenian) ship escaped to send smoke signals back to the rest of the fleet. The outnumbered Greek fleet retreated to the narrow channel at Chalcis. However, the weather again came to the aid of the Greeks, destroying several hundred Persian ships. When the news reached the Athenians, they returned to Artemisium to fight there. When the battle was joined, it was indecisive. The Greeks had held against the Persians, but many ships were put out of action in so doing. When news of the loss at Thermopylae reached the Greeks, they withdrew down the channel between Attica and Euboea, and around into the Saronic Gulf to make their stand at Salamis (which was probably Themistocles' plan all along).

The Battle of Salamis

After crushing the diminutive forces left at Thermopylae, the Persian army marched through Boetia (most of which was already allied with Persia), burnt Plataea and Thespiae, and finally (nine days after the battle at Artemisium) occupied the evacuated Attica. Only a few faithful had stayed behind at the Acropolis in Athens, defending the temples. They hastily constructed a wooden wall, but it didn't do them much good.

Meanwhile, the Greek land forces under the command of the Spartan Cleombrotus were building a wall across the Isthmus of Corinth, intending to hold that position. The Greek naval forces, under the command of Eurybiades, were at the narrow channel between the island of Salamis and

Attica. With Attica occupied by the Persians, the Athenians had made their naval base on Salamis.

Both the size of the Persian fleet (about 1,200 ships to the Greeks' 380) and the sight of smoke rising from the burning Acropolis in Athens were disheartening. Twice Eurybiades and most of the naval captains wanted to withdraw and support the ground forces at the Isthmus, abandoning Aegina and Salamis. The first time, Themistocles managed to convince them that Salamis was a better place for the Greeks to fight. The second time, Themistocles resorted to typical Greek behind the scenes double-dealing and machinations. He sent a slave Sicinnius to go tell the Persians that the Athenians were battle weary and ready to come over to their side. What's more, the slave was to tell them that the Greek generals were about to retreat around Salamis to the Isthmus, and that the conditions in the straights at Salamis would surely favor a Persian victory.

Xerxes bought it, and dispatched some ships around the island of Salamis to ward the northwest passage. This trapped the Greeks at Salamis, forcing them to make their stand there, as Themistocles desired. The Persians advanced, and a naval battle ensued. Superior tactics, ships constructed well for the conditions, and heavily armed Greek marines took the day. After that, Xerxes did not have the taste for further naval embroilments with the Greeks, and the weather and season did not favor his further battle plans. Consequently, the Persian fleet retreated back across the Aegean sea to Asia, while the Persian army retreated through Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace back to the Hellespont. Themistocles wanted to grasp the advantage they had and pursue the retreating Persian fleet, but he was overruled by Eurybiades and the Peloponnesian captains, who did not want to sail so far from home leaving the coasts of the Isthmus and the Peloponnese undefended.

The Battle of Plataea

Xerxes returned to Persia, and turned command of the army over to his brother in law Mardonius, who marched back through Thessaly down into the Grecian peninsula the next summer (479). Mardonius' force was smaller, but better, than that of Xerxes, consisting of a greater fraction of trained soldiers. Mardonius tried repeatedly to get the Athenians to come over to his side, but he was repeatedly rebuffed; Attica was again evacuated, the Athenian council sitting in Sardis. All the while, Sparta was resisting the thought of coming away from the Peloponnese to fight, preferring as always to defend the Isthmus. Finally, at the advice of Aristides (who, along with Xanthippus, had been chosen by the Athenians as their leader), the Athenians sent an envoy to Sparta explaining that if Sparta didn't come help them, the Athenians would have no choice but to ally themselves with Persia. This shook the Spartans out of their shell, although they delayed long enough to finish building the wall at the Isthmus.

While the Spartans were delaying, Mardonius burned Athens yet again,

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Template: Spartan Warrior [125 pts]

Among the Greeks, the Athenians and the Tegeans fought well; but the prowess shown by the Lacedaemonians was beyond either. (Hdt IX:71).

ST: 12 [20]
DX: 13 [30]
IQ: 10 [0]
HT: 12 [20]
Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Reputation (Truly Badass) [10], Charisma [5] *or* Attractive [5]
Disadvantages: Code of Honor (come back with your shield, or on it) [-10], Duty [-10], Vow (observe religious festivals) [-5]
Primary Skills: Tactics (M/H) IQ+3 [10]-13, Shortsword (P/A) DX+2 [8]-15, Spear (P/A) DX+3 [16]-16, Shield (P/E) DX+1 [2]-14
Secondary Skills: Boxing (P/A) DX+1 [4]-14
Background Skills: 10 points of Athletic skills

A somewhat romanticized version of the Spartan Warrior, such as Herodotus praises for their performances at the battles of Thermopylae and Plataea. This version emphasizes the noble and competent qualities of the Spartan warrior (but for that pesky Vow that makes them miss important battles). If you want the "arrogant and corrupt" qualities mentioned in *GURPS Greece*, add some suitable disadvantages (p. GR70).

Physical disadvantages are generally not appropriate, as such a baby would not have been allowed to live in Sparta. They may be possible if obtained as battle wounds, however. Most Spartan warriors will be lacking in the social and artistic skill department, as noted in *GURPS Greece*.

and then moved his army north to a position near Plataea, where the terrain was more favorable to his cavalry. The Greek army, commanded by Pausanias composed by now mostly of infantry from Spartans and elsewhere in Laconia, came to meet the Persians near Plataea. As at Marathon, the Greeks initially set up camp in foothills of (this time) Mt. Cithaeron, where they were not at immediate risk from the Spartan Cavalry. A standoff ensued for three weeks. Pausanias wanted to move early, when the Persian cavalry had cut the Greek supply lines (requiring suppliers to find less obvious routes). However, the Greeks could not safely advance across the plain so long as the Persian cavalry was active.

Eventually, after the Persian army cut the Spartans off from their main source of water, the Greeks moved overnight to a position closer to Plataea. The next morning, the Persians attacked. It seemed that the Greeks were outmatched, but the Greek infantry, in particular the Spartans, proved superior. They were well disciplined and fought with sound tactics; the were better armored; and they had longer spears. In the end, the army of Pausanias was victories. Mardonius was killed in the battle, and his army was forced to flee.

And So Forth...

That is where I shall stop, with the Battle of Plataea in 479 BC. The Persian Wars didn't quite end there, as the Greeks later gave some thought to the idea of trying to liberate northern Greece and the Ionian states. However, that was the end of the large Persian invasions into the Greek peninsula.

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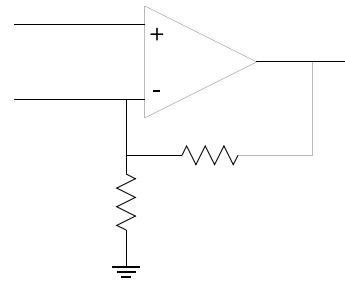
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Author's Notes

Page references to *GURPS Greece* are using the Compendium I standard, e.g. (p. GR14). References of the form (Hdt IX:71) refer to the work of Herodotus. The roman numeral is the book, the arabic number is the section or paragraph. I don't have any specific references into the other books, because I was too lazy and didn't wnat to turn the article into a wash of footnotes.

The two contemporary books were what seemed bets for my purposesof the selection available at the Berkeley Public Library when I was there. None of the books recommended in Zeigler's bibliography where available there at the time.

I'm very grateful that Herodotus numbered his paratraphs as he did. I didn't read all of "The Persian Wars" cover to cover. Rather, Hammond, one of the contemporary references, contained copies references into Herodotus. I used this as a guide to finding particularly interesting or relevant passages.

Feedback

Brett Slocum

Your Chinese Finger Puzzle Attributes: 40 Advantages: 60 Disadvantages: -25 Skills: 32+12+32 TOTAL: 150campaign sounds like a lot of fun. I like the idea of starting out players in an Illuminated campaign thinking that they are "normal" investigators. This adventure sounds like a great way to get somebody involved. You don't hit them too hard, too fast (thereby cheapening the potential impact of the weirdness), but the weirdness is definitely there.

Craig Roth

I tried to send this to you in E-mail shortly after receiving the issue, but all I got was several bounces. Your "drive cores" solve an unanswered mystery in my Phoenix Sector campaign. I am fond of throwing what I think of as "Schroedinger Objects" at my players. These are unexplained and potentially interesting objects, whose function even I haven't decided. I later on figure out for myself what they are, using them as plot hooks, explanations, or McGuffins. Sometimes I manage to make it look like I was planning way far ahead by planting this object with the players.

In my Phoenix campaign I have these objects called known as "marbles." They are Precursor artifacts, featureless spheres, and completely unexplained. Thanks to your article, I now know what they are. (I probably won't use your drive cores verbatim, but the general concept will stay intact.)

Andrew Dawson

The "Strange Days" writeup was a fun read. It sounds like a wacky campaign. I'm impressed that you can keep track of all those branching timelines and all those Petes.

RYCT me: The "physics" reason is really more a human comfort reason. Given a constant rotation rate, the effective centrifugal gravity in a rotating structure is higher as you are further from the axis of rotation. A ring structure gives you constant gravity everywhere on the floor (the outside wall of the ring). In the case of Tsiolkovsky High, I actually visualized several floors, all parallel to that outside wall of the ring, where gravity is approximately the same on all of them.

Re: Ulict hives, in the Phoenix Sector game only one Ulict has ever been met by any PC, so this is subject to change.... However, I see Ulict hives much like individuals or nations of non-hive species. They might work together if their goals coincide, or they might ignore each other, or they might be at war. Ulicts are only in a hive mind with the rest of their particular hive, not with the entire race.

Tom Cron

Enjoyed your alternate earths. Although Husain sounds like it might be a reasonable place to live, the other two were rather grim. What status has Infinity Unlimited assigned them?

Michael David Jr.

I enjoyed the further Tempest's Hand material. I had to laugh, because one of the collaborators in the astronomy project I'm working on right now is named Chris Smith.

Lisa J. Steele

Re: "Brawling and Berserk," I would go with option (2). I might give the berserk character doing an all-out attack a partial bonus because of the all-out nature, but it's probably fair to just say, hey, it's a

disadvantage, so suck it up.

I agree with your thoughts about what makes a good party. I would add that if individuals design characters which are going to be hard to get along with, then chaos will ensue, and after a while everybody will get bored with intra-party conflict.

RYCT me, all the vehicles combat I've done so far has been done the old-fashioned way... i.e. hand-waving, and presenting by GM fiat what intuitively seems like reasonable results. Soon I will try some the full way out using the Vehicles system, but I will do it in the privacy of my own home, so that I can get a feel for the system before making players sit through it.

Scott Paul Maykrantz

 I haven't tried them yet, but the sword design rules look great.

Your zines tend to be among the best illustrated. How many of those did you draw yourself? I liked the "Babe's Filthy Twin" cover.

As always, I found your Bits & Pieces to be excellent. The Maykrantz B&P has become one of the highlights of the last couple AotA issues for me. (Alas, I don't have any of the *Ravenloft* material you refer to; *Planescape* is the TSR world that I've gotten involved in, and I've even converted it to GURPS by now.) Random halflings was a hoot.

Re: worldbooks we really need, yes, I concur, especially WRT *Cloak and Dagger* and *Middle Ages 2*.

Robert Gilson

Congrats on the wedding!

I like your Furry Future. There's something narcissisitically pleasing about Humans being the Precursors. The way you've set this up, it sounds like with a little modification you could use the *Space Atlas* series as sourcebooks for this campaign.