

SURVIVE AND

THRIVE

#1

Interesting Times

september 2009

Cyberpunk 2009

Or how I learned to stop worrying
and love these Interesting Times

Betateesting life

RPG:s as a tool for
personal development

So you want my lifestyle

Professional poker player and
law school slacker in Sweden

Booze, blondes & blizzards

Why Americans should study in socialist Sweden

**You
want
this
spot?**

Contact interestingtimesmagazine@gmail.com for more information.

Index

34 Cyberpunk 2009: Or how I learned to stop worrying and love these Interesting Times

38 Booze, blondes & blizzards: Why Americans should study in socialist Sweden

12 Uppsala, the city of my dreams

14 Review of *The modern survival manual: How to survive the economic collapse* by Fernando "FerFAL" Aguirre

15 Review of *Emergency: This book will save your life* by Neill Strauss

16 So you want my lifestyle: Professional poker player and law school slacker in Sweden

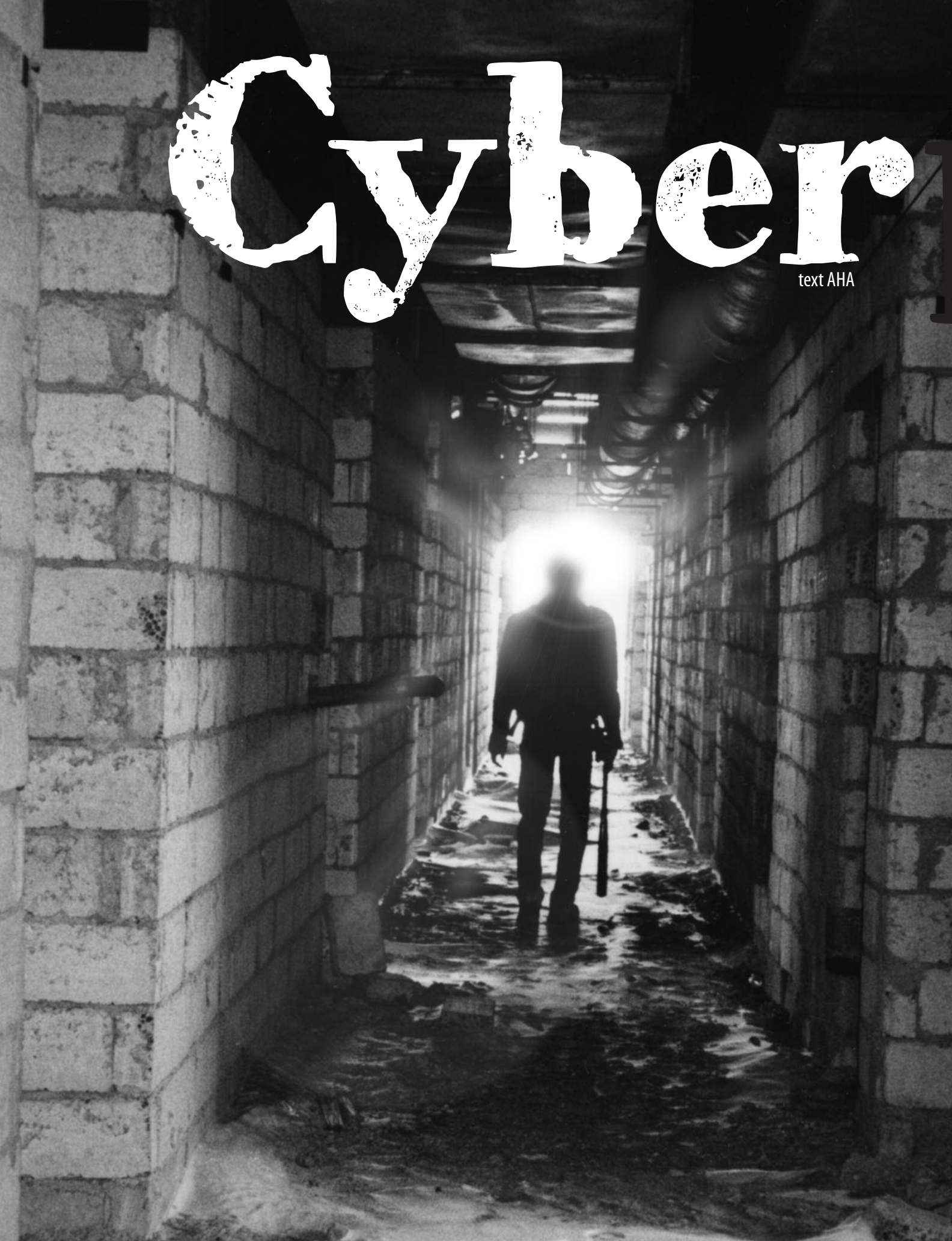
20 Betateesting Life: RPG:s as a tool for personal development

29 Review of *Becoming Batman: The possibility of a superhero* by Dr. E. Paul Zehr

30 So you want to write for *Interesting Times*?

Cyber

text AHA



punk 2009

Or how I learned to stop worrying and love these Interesting Times

Being a paranoid survivalist was way easier back in the Cold War. Back then it was all acute black and white scenarios like, say, global thermonuclear war. Cut and dried, simple and straightforward. You're either vaporized or you're Mad Max. As a kid, I always wanted the apocalypse to come, so my life could be like Fallout.

Today, not so much.

Today, the problems are fuzzy, poorly understood and chronic.

We're in the suckiest place: the drab reality that sits between the Good Times and the cool post-apocalyptic wastes with their supermutants, sawed-off shotguns and nifty leather jackets. It's the soul-crusher of a place and a time where everything is stacked against you.

Where everything is slowly going to Hell, but the government is still around to squeeze you for taxes.

The feces in the fan's a different color today, to be sure. Sure, we still worry about the world-ending scenarios to some extent, but there's just so much more variety these days. All those dystopic cyberpunk novels of the 80s?

Bah. Child's play. Today is probably what you'd call neo-post-cyberpunk or something like that.

We got Taser shrapnel artillery shells, mini-helicopters with full auto shotguns, frikkin' pain rays mounted on bomber planes. There's cyborg insects buzzing around your hive. Psych meds in the water. Economic melt-down. Brainscanners probing your inner soul for unpermitted thoughts. People with artificial limbs barred from the Olympics 'cause they're too *good*. Chinese Internet addiction camps beating kids to death. Rumbblings of a coming world government. Mind-boosting drugs popped like candy by college students. Wars being fought and won by coldhearted kill-bots. Covert cyberfronts opening up between countries, agencies, corporations, and who-knows-what. Elections and revolutions being twitized in real-time. Shadowy mercenary armies running amok in conflict theaters foreign and domestic. Massive virtual realities with millions of junkies in participation and economies that rival those of medium countries. Scientists lifting up the skirts of God's creation and redefining what it means to be human (and finding out that it's all a dirty Perl hack anyway).

Go ahead, convince me this is not Cyberpunk!

In short, there's plenty of stuff around to mess us up good, without outright offing us.

You may not have thought of it this way before, but I am absolutely convinced that the numero uno survival problem we face today is psycho-

logical in nature. As in, keeping from going absolutely batshit insane. The constant overload of information that we find it harder and harder to make sense of ensures that there's no shortage of pins jabbing at our souls. We get no release either, that equalizing rain of ICBMs never comes.

There's just taxes, crime, making love to your right hand, chems in your

"Like the m specializa is for insects"



man said, ation

precious bodily fluids, and one more season of American Idol to watch. We're frogs and the water is slowly getting warmer.

A lot of people believe we live in the interregnum, that an old order is about to be toppled and we are living in an age of strife.

Whether you choose to believe Wallerstein's theory about the end of the 500 year capitalist cycle, Kurzweil's prophecies of eternal life and technological Singularity just around the corner, or Panarin's talk of imminent civil war in America, I guess we can all agree that something is in the air, brewing up, building up in the calm before the storm.

Some unplug and try to get away from the modern world. That kind of works, but if you want to do more than just survive, if you want to thrive, you have to find a way to navigate the straits of cyberpunk in a reasonable manner. That's where we come in. After all, why is it that we want to survive? What's it all *for*?

The answer is basically what it always was: to live the good life. The bad news is that there is no one telling us what that means anymore. People have stopped believing in God. Politicians have turned into uninspiring bean-counters. The media is a hysteric joke. And the school system indoctrinates you to be a good little fit in the lifestyle of semi-skilled white collar slavery. Faced with this, people try to drown out the void with idle consumerism and approval-seeking conformity. Like Tyler Durden foretold: our Great Depression is our lives.

The good news is that the capable individual has more options than ever before. The paradoxical thing is that while this is eminently true, the effect on the masses has been one of increasing conformity and group-think.

So, the top end of the game is even more accessible these days. It takes an open mind and a wide array of skills, however. This is why you're going to see us run all kinds of materials, including modern survivalism, entrepreneurship, productivity

and time management, various forms of hacking not limited to the digital realm, tactical ops, superhuman buffness and strength through optimum training & nutrition, the latest in IQ-boosting and life-extending research chems, how to make true friends and get hot chicks to fawn over you, the art of chilling out amid the constant worries and stress and info overload, and all kinds of other useful skills and tricks that you will be able to put to good use to get through the coming times, interesting as they will prove to be. Like the man said, specialization is for insects.

(Incidentally, we'll be covering power armor as well as how to find time enough for love...)

We are aiming to give you what Tim Ferriss calls eustress, the good kind of stress where you constantly have exciting stuff on your plate and get full enjoyment out of your life. Think of it as Tony Robbins meets Burn Notice meets Arnold meets Neoromancer meets your typical greasy confidence artist. And they all have a glorious lovechild that gets raised by Swedish superbabes and diapered with polar bear furs.

Or something like that.

For the man who knows his path, our modern world is ripe with opportunity, a gold mine waiting to be exploited. You can have everything you want, despite what you have been told.

All it takes is the right manual...

Booze, blondes and blizzards

why Americans should study in socialist Sweden

text AHA

Ever heard of Sweden? You know, the land of IKEA furniture, blonde supermodel nymphomaniacs, ancient Viking vampires, and polar bears in the streets. Ah yes, good old Sweden. Known to neighboring Denmark as "Forbudslandet" ("prohibition country"). The place to be if you lust for safety-approved adventure, hot chicks and a socialist cornucopia of free stuff.

Come to Sweden and have the sixth best time of your life, or something like that.

The objective is pure Pareto Principle: to get the Swedish experience with as few cash outlays as possible while maximizing fun and games. The most reliable attack vector is obviously to become a student, getting your share of the plunder as well as a decent education.

Why is this directed at Americans?

For the following reasons:

- 1) They really like going to college.
- 2) They have some very odd pre-conceptions about Europe, that can readily be exploited.
- 3) To make them feel special.

I know y'all are busy people so here's the powerpointized sales pitch:

1 Free education. You can't beat this really. Paying tuition is an unknown concept in Sweden. The government takes care of everything. You still have living expenses, though. Swedish students get something called CSN, which is 25% free money and 75% discount student loan. You don't get it, however, so you will have to rely on scholarships, personal savings or working. But hey, if you're reading this magazine you are probably a resourceful individual. You always hear about the exchange student n00bs who camp out in the city park and eat the ducks and stuff like that...

There are, to my knowledge, two ways to get into Swedish uni: as an exchange student or as a free mover. The advantage of the former is that you are more likely to have cash and living arrangements taken care of. There is fierce competition for some courses like medicine and law, but most are quite lax with admittance. Any way you slice it, you are pretty much guaranteed to get admitted to *something*. And it's free, so why the hell not?

2 Quality of education. There's no equivalent of Yale or Harvard, but Swedish tertiary education is generally very good. You will have to be smart about this. Some courses are junk, and others aren't applicable to your career when you go back. You can't go wrong with hard stuff like medicine or engineering. If you're just looking to put some college stuff on your CV, liberal arts in Sweden is surely more exotic than the same in Bumfuck, Montana.



3 Nature. Here's everything you need to know. No polar bears or penguins to be found, but plenty of green goodness. A love of nature is one of those Swedish cultural quirks that pops up all the time (another one would be the pagan midsummer ritual of going out into the boondocks, frog-dancing around gigantic phallic symbols and getting shot to hell on strong alcohol). Swedish cities are full of parks, trees and mountains. There are lots of skiing resorts. Swedes spend more time with their pets than they do with other people. The German national sport is collecting Swedish "beware of the moose" road signs. The weather is like your psycho ex. She was all nice and warm for 6 months while she lulled you into a false sense of security, then she went insane and tried to kill you by pummeling you with large chunks of ice.

4 Culture. Sweden is not exactly a huge warehouse of ancient culture. If you want to max out on castles, paintings, museums, and the cool grace of the Occident then go to Italy or something. Sometimes you're in the mood for your supermodel girlfriend's homely cousin from the country, know what I'm saying?

The most interesting part of Swedish culture isn't castles, the royal family or native food (mostly rotted fish and Absolut Vodka)

but rather the people themselves, their mannerisms and ways of thinking. This is something unique that you won't find anywhere else. Even other Scandinavians consider Swedes to be... special.

5 Close to Denmark. If you are in the mood for a bender, Denmark has all those things that you can't easily acquire in Sweden: cheap and legal hookers, anarchist communes, buying booze in regular stores, decriminalized weed, smoking in bars, biker gangs upholding the public order, etc. And where do you think Danish pastries were invented? Tim Ferriss, our patron deity and all-round sexy beast, has of course written about this, just google "tim ferriss happiest country denmark".

6 College subculture. And a huge one, at that, seeing as how some cities are 50% college students. Swedish fraternities ("studentnationer") have managed to circumvent the usual byzantine rules about serving alcohol by pretending to be a members-only society dedicated to protecting students' rights.

In reality, their main activity is to arrange parties and night clubs, and to provide a complex hierarchy of cool staff titles so nerds can get laid. If you want to drink for free and look cool, contact the head of the Nation and volunteer to be a bartender.

"The weather is like
your psycho ex"



Some more of that

Swedish delight

7 English compatibility. A lot of college courses are given in English. And you can always charm some girl in class into translating the materials for you anyway. Swedish people have seen more episodes of *Sex and the City* and *American Idol* than you have. They will effortlessly switch to English and no one will expect you to learn the local language.

Swedes love Americans, just make sure you voted for Obama.

Also, be prepared to discuss the works of a brilliant documentary maker called Michael Moore.

8 Very (socially) liberal. Obviously, hookers and drugs are the exception here (see point 4) but other than that, Sweden is exactly like the decadent euro stereotype. If you like your abortions, legal 15 year olds, unabashedly promiscuous women, gay parades, stem cell labs, free government-issue contraceptives, tolerance towards minorities, free health care, etc, then Sweden is your place. Beware, however: libertine does not mean libertarian. Think *Brave New World*, not *Declaration of Independence*. Swedes are basically to PC what Batman is to crimefighting, and they sure do love their taxes.



9 Expat-friendly. Sweden gives out citizenships like candy, and you will get paid by the government to learn the language. You can't fall back on teaching kids basic English like you can in Asia, however.

10 Girls. Swedish girls are definitely what you would call very attractive. Not everyone is a blonde movie star, of course, but you will find that the baseline quality is really good. Swedish girls generally have pleasant and non-manipulative personalities, albeit a bit on the feminist side. As a bonus, Swedish men are too timid and drunk to be serious competition in the field. Basically, you can have your pick of an unlimited babestream of blondes if you so desire. Bonus: all Swedish girls are bisexuals.

11 Cyberpunk country. Origin of the first Pirate Party. High-speed broadband for everyone. Some of the most advanced government cybersurveillance measures in the world. Monolithic faceless bureaucracies and state-subsidised corporations ruling your life. The combination of ubiquitous high technology and a natural tendency towards social reclusion has not been kind to the Swedish male. You may find yourself wishing Swedes would do less WoW raids and more IRL Viking ones, just to spice things up a bit.

Further reading:

<http://www.studyinsweden.se>

<http://www.swedenintouch.se>

<http://www.visitsweden.com>

<http://www.sweden.se>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Sweden

Where to meet Swedes online:

Flashback.info - This infamous and huge Swedish forum is total freedom of speech mixed with Swedish discipline to make sure it doesn't devolve into 4chan.

Spray Date - Swedish dating site.

E-kontakt - More dating, mainly MILFs.

Mötesplatsen - See above.

Lunarstorm - Swedish Myspace.

Facebook - Yes, 99% of Sweden is on Facebook.

IRC - Swedish channels are usually appended with "-se" on Freenode.org, like #ubuntu-se for instance.



Uppsala, the city

text DUSTY

The city of my dreams, the oasis of knowledge in the sea of ignorance that otherwise is Sweden, and the town in which I've spent most of the last three years.

Let me tell you one thing about this city: unless you're a student it sucks. We're not talking "not fun", "boring" or "somewhat annoying", it truly sucks. However, if you come here as a student you're in for a good time.

First of all living is really cheap for students. You might end up in a crappy room, but they're not too far from anything and not too expensive or hard to get.

There are two or three non-student clubs that are open a lot but they're overcrowded, expensive and the people in them vary between

under-aged, over-aged, and ugly. Sure, sometimes you can have some fun there and since it's more expensive there's a higher % of girls who are good-looking enough not to ever have to buy drinks, but we're not looking for that kind of girls, are we? And if you're looking for that kind of action, just go to Stockholm instead.

The "Nations", basically bars/clubs made by students for students, are obviously frequented by students. There are eleven of them, of different sizes and styles. Some of them are most known as a

place you can grab some cheap beer and a decent burger for a low price, and others are known for their clubs, but they're all full of people who have recently moved away from their parents, feel a bit lost, and could be in need of someone who looks like he knows what he's doing.

So, bring a friend that can dance. Also, never try to order a drink that you don't think you could learn to mix yourself within ten seconds.

The mostly unpaid or hilariously low-paid personnel in those places are mostly random students with too much free time who want to get to know new people or whatever by standing around in a bar

without drinking all night. Tip the ones who look extra lost and they'll serve you stuff real fast, and who

knows, if you order the same stuff all night maybe they'll learn how to mix it correctly.

Wouldn't count on it, though.

There's also something to be said for hanging out with exchange students from weird countries.

Swedish people are as a rule of thumb anti-social fags who won't talk to people they don't know so the foreigners from, in our unconscious mind, non-civilized countries (anything but West Europe and North America) will be thrilled to meet

new people WHO ACTUALLY SPEAK TO THEM. My sister is really good at this, and except

getting a boyfriend out of it, she also made sure that a lot of insecure girls from different countries hung out and had pre-parties at our place all the time.

And this is a good thing. Two of them have done dishes on multiple occasions, we've been served really great weird food that I have no idea what it was called and yeah, it also had other perks.

Yes, that kind.

And yes, I used protection.

As far as other living expenses goes, you'll need a bike, which you can get a decent one for maybe 30 USD or so, and you'll need some food and booze.

Booze is expensive in Sweden but there are ways, both legal and illegal, to get your hands on some cheaper stuff if you're on a tight budget.

Food varies from expensive to really cheap, depending on which store you go to. Keep your eyes out for things like "Lidl" or "Willy's" if you don't want to spend too much money. Just check out the fruits and other stuff that needs to be fresh once or twice extra just in case if you shop there.

Also, learn to cook for yourself, and if you suck at it just invest in a book or something.

It's really worth it.

**"Swedish people are
as a rule of thumb
anti-social fags"**

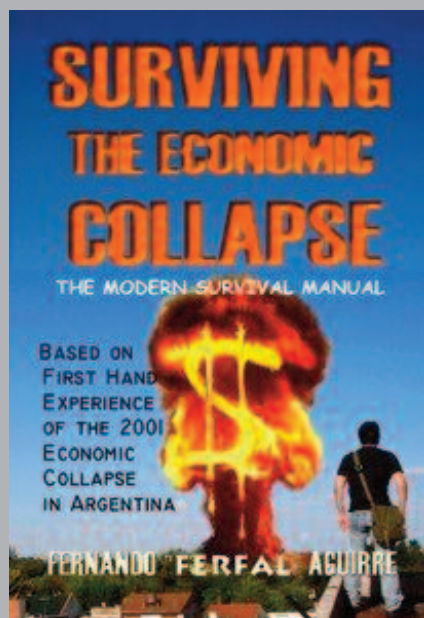
*of my
dreams*



REVIEWS

The modern survival manual: Surviving the economic collapse

text AHA



Author: **Fernando "FerFAL" Aguirre**

Year: **2009**

Pages: **258**

This book has a style very different from that of Strauss' book, but they go together really well. This is basically a long, detailed and unsexy laundry list of what to do to get prepared in various domains of modern survivalism, along with some of the author's musings and reasonings. This should not be construed as negative criticism: it's a great resource to have for reference, but it is not something you will be reading for entertainment. If you've been active in the survival community online, you'll know that FerFAL has been stirring up some mud for quite a while. He basically challenges what he sees as unrealistic "Cold War survivalists" who focus too much on rural retreats and wildlife skills, when they should be focusing on the nexus of modern survival: civilisation. Not taking stuff like taxes into account is just poor preparedness.

FerFAL sees crime and personal finances as the main issues to handle for the modern survivalists. This is why he advocates living in

the city: you have access to the police, services, and jobs. The book is very heavy on street-smarts and being pragmatic.

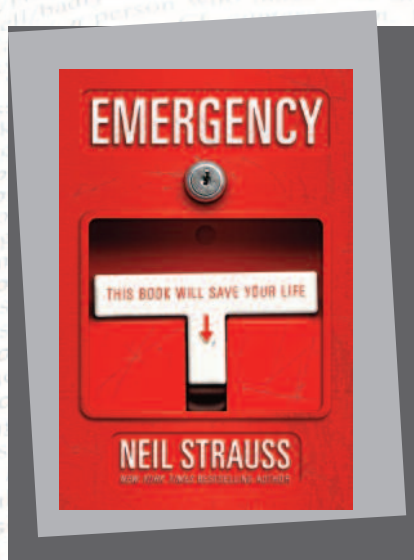
One advantage that FerFAL has visavi the American survivalists is that he has lived through SHTF. The book gives us a lot of info on how it all went down in Argentina, and how the country basically descended into thirdworldness after the economic meltdown in 2001. It's the kind of Shit-Hit-The-Fan where the government works against you but still wants your money. I have no way of verifying if FerFAL's doom & gloom sentiment toward his country's situation is actually accurate, but I still find his perspective very useful. It's not likely that we're facing a sudden catapult into Mad Max territory. A gradual decline into quite-shitty is far more likely, and in any case we want to live a good life, not just sit around in a dank bunker and eat petrified crackers and talk to rats. This brand of ferfalian survivalism is gaining popularity, with Jack Spirko of The Survival Podcast being the other prominent example that I know of.

The book includes a lot of the usual content, like how to stockpile food, fight hand-to-hand, and put together a Bug Out Bag, but it also has some novel stuff, like evasive driving, networking with useful people, making money, bartering for goods on the black market, and legal advice for various situations. There's lots of typos and odd grammar in the book as well as some weird stuff like how to eat cats, but I find that it actually adds to the atmosphere. This is a good buy if you're heavy into preparedness and want a nice collection of skills and best practices from someone who has lived through some very rough times.

**"This is basically a long,
detailed and
unsexy laundry list"**

Emergency: This book will save your life

text AHA



Author: **Neill Strauss**

Year: **2009**

Pages: **432**

Neill Strauss is a dude I wouldn't mind having in my roster of friends. In case you didn't know, his 2005 bestseller *The Game: penetrating the secret society of pick-up artists*, was basically about learning the arcane "venusian arts", also known as seducing the panties off of women. Giacomo Casanova would be proud of that work. (Or maybe he would curse in his grave, now that such esoteric insight is widely available to any anti-social Warcraft nerd who by Nature oughta dutifully, properly, and celibatically weed himself out of the gene pool.) That the guy turns around and comes out with a tome on how to become a paranoid survivalist prepared for the end of world as we know it, the very antithesis to the club-hoppin' pink shirt-wearin' smooth-talkin' pick-up artist, is a testament to the guy's versatility and creative talent. As Mystery, Strauss' pick-up mentor, put it, there are two life objectives when you

boil it down, and they are Reproduction and Survival. The Game was about the former, this one is about the latter. Guy sure is thorough...

The book is structured as a log of Neill Strauss' activities over the span of a decade, from his first awakening to the nasty reality of the world, to his calm and confident demeanor in the final chapter. He goes from a lone wolf "Fliesian" (a reference to "Lord of the flies") who distrusts everyone to someone a bit more hopeful and cheery.

The author's survivalism starts out as therapy against his personal paranoia, and grows into a more mature lifestyle of self-reliance and helping of others. In selling the survivalist mindset to the general public, the book does a very good job. This is also the reason why it won't be a super-interesting read to someone who is already in the über-prepared trenches of the mall ninjas. A dry and info-packed manual this is not, and makes no pretensions of being one either.

The main arc of the book concerns Strauss' struggle to get admitted as a citizen of St Kitts, a Caribbean mini-nation bordering on micro. A brilliant strategy by the way, if too expensive for most. Over the 60 or so chapters are spread a bunch of side projects and undertakings: he learns wildlife survival and tracking, lock-picking, hand-to-hand combat, urban escape and evasion, permaculture gardening, raising goats, hiding

your assets, tactical shooting, and how to fly a plane. He joins a disaster response team, becomes an emergency medical technician, gets licensed to be an armed security guard, and bags a concealed carry permit (which I'm told is some feat in California). I like his method of taking classes and getting certifications and permits. Far too often we're too stingy and try to do things on our own, when we should just fork over some cash and get professional training and coaching.

It's in the inspiration department that this book really shines. I had never really thought about stuff like applying for second citizenships before I read this book. It's also very motivating to consider the sheer list of stuff he does in the book. Makes you excited. Porno for paranoids, you might call it. On a meta-level, Strauss' modus operandi in itself is something you should definitely take away from this book. When he wants to learn something, he doesn't just read a book or browse some forums. He networks aggressively. He builds a circle of allies, which includes billionaires, elite special ops trainers, and the father of survivalism, Kurt Saxon himself.

So, to summarize: not exactly a manual, but great entertainment and inspiration value. Buy it for your skeptical friends. Oh, and the mini-comics in the book are awesome.

**"Porno for paranoids,
you might call it"**

So you want professional poker player and

I am 22 years old. I've studied at one of Sweden's best universities full time the last 3 years. I'm not a top student, not more social than the next guy and I have no real connections. I can't sing, I'm not especially good looking and when I do sports I mostly do them with great enthusiasm but relatively low skill. I'm decent at math. I don't have any special talents. I've done OK with girls, but my fattie to hottie ratio isn't anything to be proud of. Last year I made about 150k USD. Give or take 10k, can't be bothered to count it. The last month I've been in a rush and made like 100k more. Sitting on my ass, mostly in my underwear and drinking Red Bull (light).

No, I don't sell drugs or kill people for a living. I play cards on the internet. No, I'm

not an idiot savant, and my pokerface isn't that good. I don't know the odds of an ace falling on the flop or the exact percentage someone has to throw his cards away for each of my bluffs to be correct. I have a decent idea about it, but any math student worthy of his trade would probably be better than me at it if he knew all the rules in poker and had a couple of hours to think about it.

Overall, I'm not special. I've got decent emotional control, I can think logically and I'm somewhat talented in figuring out what my opponent is thinking.

You could probably get these skills too, if you really tried to improve for a few months.

I regularly lose 10k or 20k during a week or two, so my side job is not free of

variance and risks, but in the long run I've always ended up ahead. I got home from school two weeks ago, I was up like 15k the first 3-4 days, then I lost it all and maybe 10k more in a couple of days. I've played poker for close to 3 years and I've had 4 or 5 losing months. When I watch sports on TV I need to have a bet of maybe 500 or 1k on the game to really be interested in the game, but since I don't like to gamble without an edge I mostly just watch it with friends for fun.

So basically, the bad thing about my living is that when I'm angry at work and do a lousy job I don't piss my boss off but rather I lose a lot of money. I can also lose a shitload of money when I play really good just because Lady Luck sometimes wants



my lifestyle:

text DUSTY

law school slacker in Sweden

to put on a strap-on and do me really viciously in the ass. This tend to affect my emotions a bit, and even if you learn to live with it, it's often annoying to stand around listening to some senile old lady haggling about the price of potatoes in the local store when you've just lost a couple of K's to some retard who seemed about as talented with gambling as said old lady.

Also, it's obviously an uncertain job since you don't have a steady paycheck every month, and it's hard to convince banks and such to give you loans. Overall, you don't get much cred from the "real

world", so if you're putting together a CV because you've gotten tired of gambling, maybe you'll have to be a bit creative to

**"No, I don't
sell drugs or
kill people
for a living"**

after maybe a year of gambling if you've got any talent at all. My target winnings for each month are much higher than that, but

make it seem as if you've actually done anything besides sitting on your ass playing cards for the last few years.

Enough with the bad things though. The best thing about being a gambler is obviously that you can easily make 5k a month

sometimes things don't work out as they should, heh. For people with more talent, the sky is pretty much the limit. I don't think THAT many people will make more than maybe 500k/year from poker and such over an extended period of time, but 100k should be easily reachable within 2 or 3 years from when you start if you're somewhat decent at it and take it really seriously.

Also, remember that most gamblers consciously (if you're a hot girl) or unconsciously (mostly, if I had to guess) make it seem as if they've got more money than they really have. If it's an old dude at a casino playing mid stakes, you can be pretty sure that if he claims to be a professional gambler he's probably far poorer than you.





Also, it's even odds that he doesn't know WTF deodorant is, so be careful with that. What makes it seem as if we have more money is that we win and lose a lot all the time, which makes us care less about it.

I also feel that most of us might be slightly addicted to gambling. We play "credit card roulette" over dinners (everyone puts his CC in a hat or something, cutest waitress you can get picks one), we flip coins for decent sums of money, we make bets on stupid shit and overall at

least young gamblers who actually make money tend to be a bit geeky. And if you're a bit geeky, need an excuse to hang out, your common interest is gambling, and you can't dance, then bets and alcohol seems to work very well.

In fact, last spring I lived in a hotel in central Stockholm with a friend for four or five days, mostly playing poker in the casino all the time during the day (ie from when we woke up at 2 pm until we went to sleep at 5 am). We really had a great time

and everything, despite it being only the second time we actually hung out together, but I'm quite sure we weren't sober enough to drive a car for most of the time we were there.

Other fun accidents happen too. Once I got a message on Facebook from some girl who apparently knew someone I knew or something similarly random. She told me that I must be loaded. I wrote back and told her that I didn't discuss financial matters with strangers. She wrote that we had

met. I wrote that she seemed decently nice so I hope I wasn't rude and inquired how I could know her because I was fairly sure I'd remember her if we had actually done something. She told me that I had put 40 USD in her cleavage on my way from the bar with some drinks in my hands. At this point she had friended me and I had done some research and seen that her boobies were in fact huge. A pity my sober self isn't as charming.

Last month the poker site I'm playing on invited me to a big tournament in London. They paid for the trip, the buy-in (£2750) and 3 nights at a 5 star hotel.

While I was playing, a girl from the company came by once an hour and asked me if I wanted anything. When I was cold they got me a hoodie, when I was thirsty they

brought me some drinks. While there, I played poker with last year's Miss Belgium (hottest girl I've ever seen live, I think), hung out with a Swedish sports legend with medals from the Olympics, and tried to challenge some dude who was probably around 25 kg heavier than me to an MMA-fight for €5k.

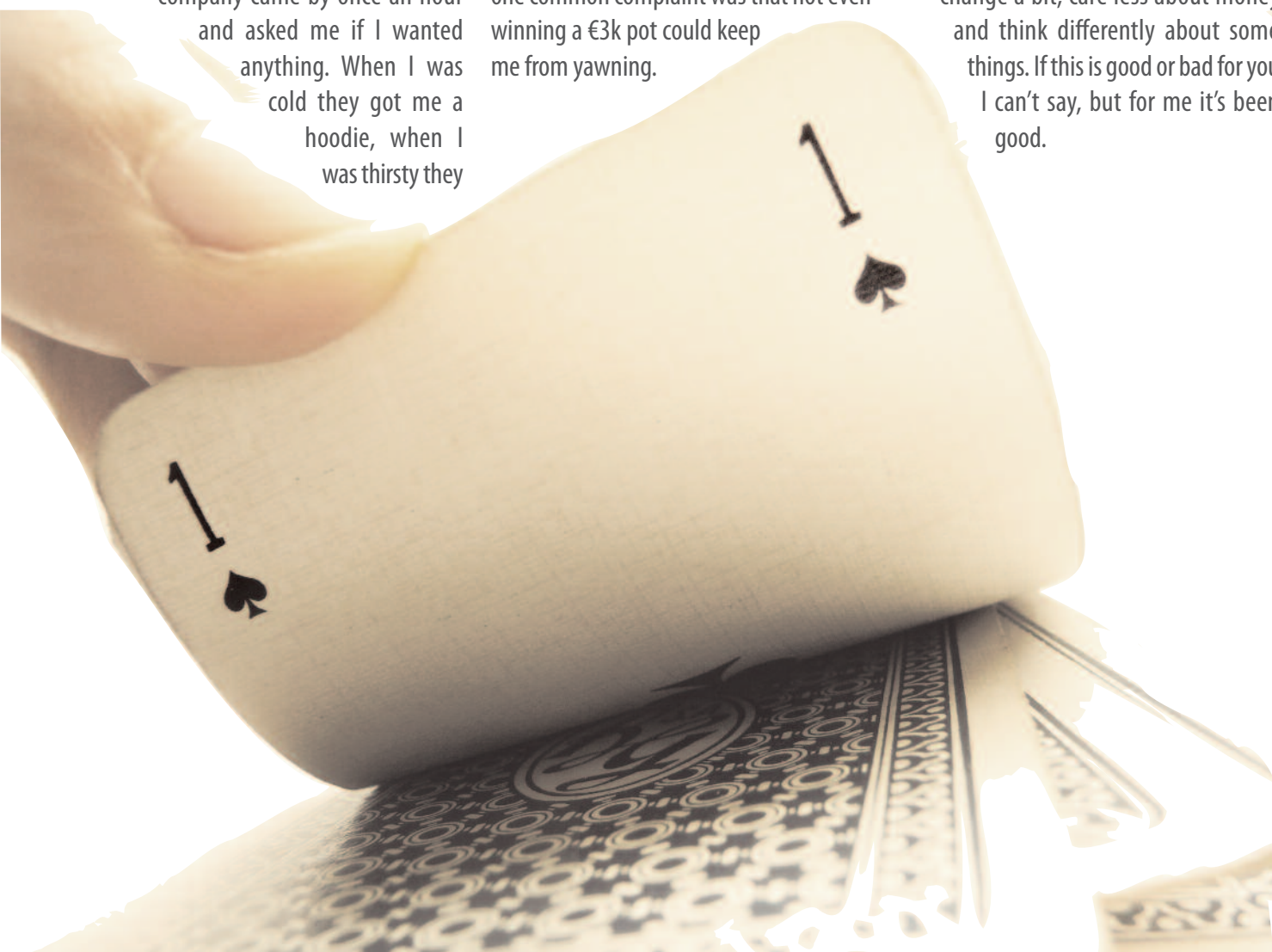
I recently made a video of me playing some online poker and posted it on some forums. It got mostly good reviews, but one common complaint was that not even winning a €3k pot could keep me from yawning.

So, time to sum this little text up. Being a poker player for one's living or just to pay for one's studies is really nice. It takes up some time, but probably not that much more than a normal job. You can make a lot of money and you don't have to listen to some stupid boss (unless

you live with your mom).

However, it's sometimes stressful and when you fuck up you lose money. You may change a bit, care less about money and think differently about some things. If this is good or bad for you I can't say, but for me it's been good.

"Lady Luck sometimes wants to put on a strap-on and do me really viciously in the ass"



Bet



**atesting
life:**

 **s as a tool
for personal
development**



Betcha found that article title interesting? If you want some tips on how to advance your self-growth using rocket-propelled grenades, I'm sure we'll write about that at some point. Today's text is about role-playing games, however.

How can a bunch of Dungeons & Dragons crap help anyone? Isn't that stuff for fat pasty virgins? Sure, it is. But, as I am about to demonstrate, it can also be a tool for elite people like us. (Fact: Vin Diesel has been a hardcore D&D player for 20+ years.) Look at it this way: Real Life has orgasms

and beer. RPG-land is (barring holodecks and AIs) the most potent arena for interactive fiction and open-ended exploration at our disposal. If you could find a way to combine the two, wouldn't that be something?

The metaphor of life as RPG: Even clerks can be barbarians

Take your typical RPG character sheet. Depending on the game system, you'll have your hitpoints, various strength/agi-

lity/intelligence/charisma/etc attributes, skill percentages, possessions, list of spells you know, and so on and so forth. Would you agree that this summarizing and quantifying of your character adds to the enjoyment of the game? One glance at your sheet and you know your exact progress. This is a big part of why people become roleplaying nerds: you get addicted to experience points, exotic loot, skill increases, superhuman cyborg implants, and all that good stuff. The virtual world is highly responsive and rewarding. Whereas in Real Life, results tend to be a lot more

"Real life has orgasms and beer"

vague, open-ended and anti-climactic. For most people, fiction simply pwns reality in the fun department. How can we take that addictive grinding and leveling-up quality and certainty and transfer it to Real Life?

Exercise: create a character sheet for yourself. Be realistic here, you're not Hercules.

Exercise: determine your current level on a scale from 1-20. Try to see what you would need to do to get to the next level. I'm probably a level 14. I personally feel that levels are somewhat logarithmic, so you need more and more experience points to level up, but then again you also get better at scoring experience points.

Exercise: get into the RPG headspace while keeping your Real Life avatar and situation in working memory. Looking at the character sheet, what patterns can you see? What would you like to improve? What kind of adventurer party would you like to run with? Where would you fit in with one?

10 000 ways to fail: Making lemonade, eating crap and talking smooth

Ever watched that Burn Notice show? The one with the MacGyver spy and Ash from Evil Dead? If not, shame on you. Anyway, did you ever wish you could have that kind of think-on-your-feet, talk-my-way-

out-of-anything, shit-eating-grin kind of smoothness? To always have a plan, to always see opportunity where others see adversity, to make lemonade when you all you have is explosive pineapples, to always take charge, leaving everyone wondering how someone can be so kick-ass.

If you wish to do that, you first have to deconstruct what it means. And once you do that, you can devise exercises employing gradual progressive overload until you get where you want to be. The role-playing game is not a bad medium for this, seeing as its basic structure is so malleable and expandable.

When you play a computer RPG, even a relatively free-form one like Fallout or GTA, you still get most of the path laid down for you. There are a few different routes to the goal and a few different dialog trees, but the situation is always one of choosing between rigid alternatives. With a pen & paper RPG, there is no such choice. You have to CREATE. The GM may have some idea of how to get to the goal, but he sure as hell ain't gonna tell you. You have to take charge and solve the problems. You have to trust in your own ability. You have to convince your party comrades to see it your way. If you choose the manipulative

route, you have to talk smooth and outwit the GM. If you choose the ninja route you have to make a plan and make it all come together. If you choose violence, well... then you just roll the dice.

Exercise: smooth talking. Pick a random word from the dictionary and just riff off of it. Write down awkward situations in TV shows where the protagonist has to talk his way out of trouble, try to identify general patterns. Do improv theater stuff with your friends. Read books on social engineering. Keep a notebook and test out the stuff in-game.

Exercise: problem solving. Any time you see some problem to be solved, whether it's a plot development on TV, a political issue in the newspaper or something in your personal life, take stock of the facts and develop a plan. Always be doing this. Make backup plans for contingencies. Time yourself, try to think faster. Get your adrenalin up and observe effects on cognition. Practice calming yourself down and getting clear in the head. Convince your GM to give you lots of tricky problems.

**Some bugs may be features:
Performance-enhanced
daydreamin', debuggin'
& dice-rollin'**

What would it be like to be a highly trained special ops soldier with access to the latest in experimental military hardware? To have elite social wits, charisma like Casanova, and super models chasing you around as par for the course? To be a demi-god among men, whether due to magics, cybertech or unlife? To be insanely rich and well-connected, and have legions of minions doing your bidding?

Role-playing provides an intermediary level between your paltry imagination and the one-shot, irreversible nature of Real Life. Think of RPGs as a hybrid between a novel and a daydream. (Or Buffy and a wet-dream). The GM sets the basic structure, but you get to do whatever you want. If you're familiar with personal development techniques, this is basically like visualization on steroids.

Exercise: come up with a list of long-term heroic goals you would like to test-drive. It should be stuff that's quite out of your reach at the moment.

If you're already a billionaire with a schwarzeneggerian physique, weekly movie-grade adventures, a private army

and personal harem, then I guess you can skip this exercise.

When you find yourself being extra motivated in the game, try to get a description on paper so you can recall the experience for motivation later. Aim for vivid images and inspiring descriptions.

Exercise: come up with a list of things you are pondering doing right now. Stuff like asking out that waitress, starting that exercise program, quitting your job, etc.

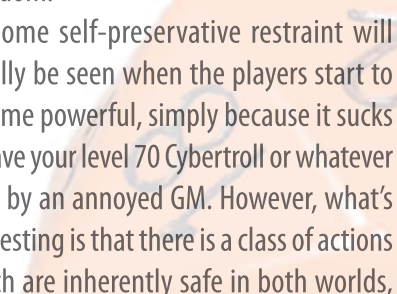
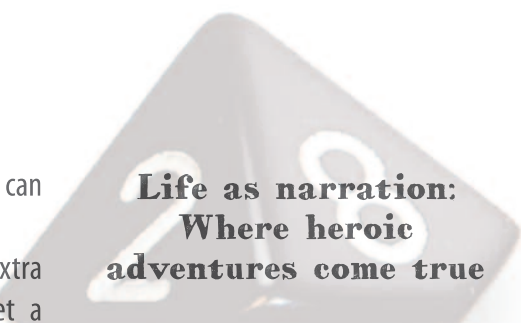
Try different branches of what-ifs.

Write down any "aha!" moments. Most of us don't have very good prediction models. By enlisting the aid of others, we can avoid having our decision trees derailed by unexamined heuristics and biases.

**Life as narration:
Where heroic
adventures come true**

When roleplaying, it's quite common for players to be a lot more bold and careless than they would be in Real Life. A common trope of RPGs is that players will tend to solve every problem with violence, even starting fights with random NPCs out of boredom.

Some self-preservative restraint will usually be seen when the players start to become powerful, simply because it sucks to have your level 70 Cybertroll or whatever slain by an annoyed GM. However, what's interesting is that there is a class of actions which are inherently safe in both worlds,



yet we hesitate to do them in Real Life but have no fears in RPG-land. The PC chatting up every female the party comes across would be the classic example.

Exercise: make a list of all the relatively safe things you do in RPG-land but hesitate to do in Real Life for fear of embarrassment or whatever. List pros and cons of doing the activity in Real Life.

Trying to steal everyone's stuff would be an example of something with a lot of disadvantages, but how about talking to and trying to befriend every interesting person you see? How about incessantly haggling over prices?

Exploration is at the heart of role-playing. The dungeon-crawl, with its endless supply of cobwebbed doors and treasure chests, seemingly strewn about at random, is probably the most abused RPG trope ever.

But how can you be an explorative adventurer in Real Life? Here's a list of suggestions of fun stuff to do:

• **The Military.** You get weapons training, cash, and interesting adventure leads.

You can zone out for long stretches of time while your skill points increase.

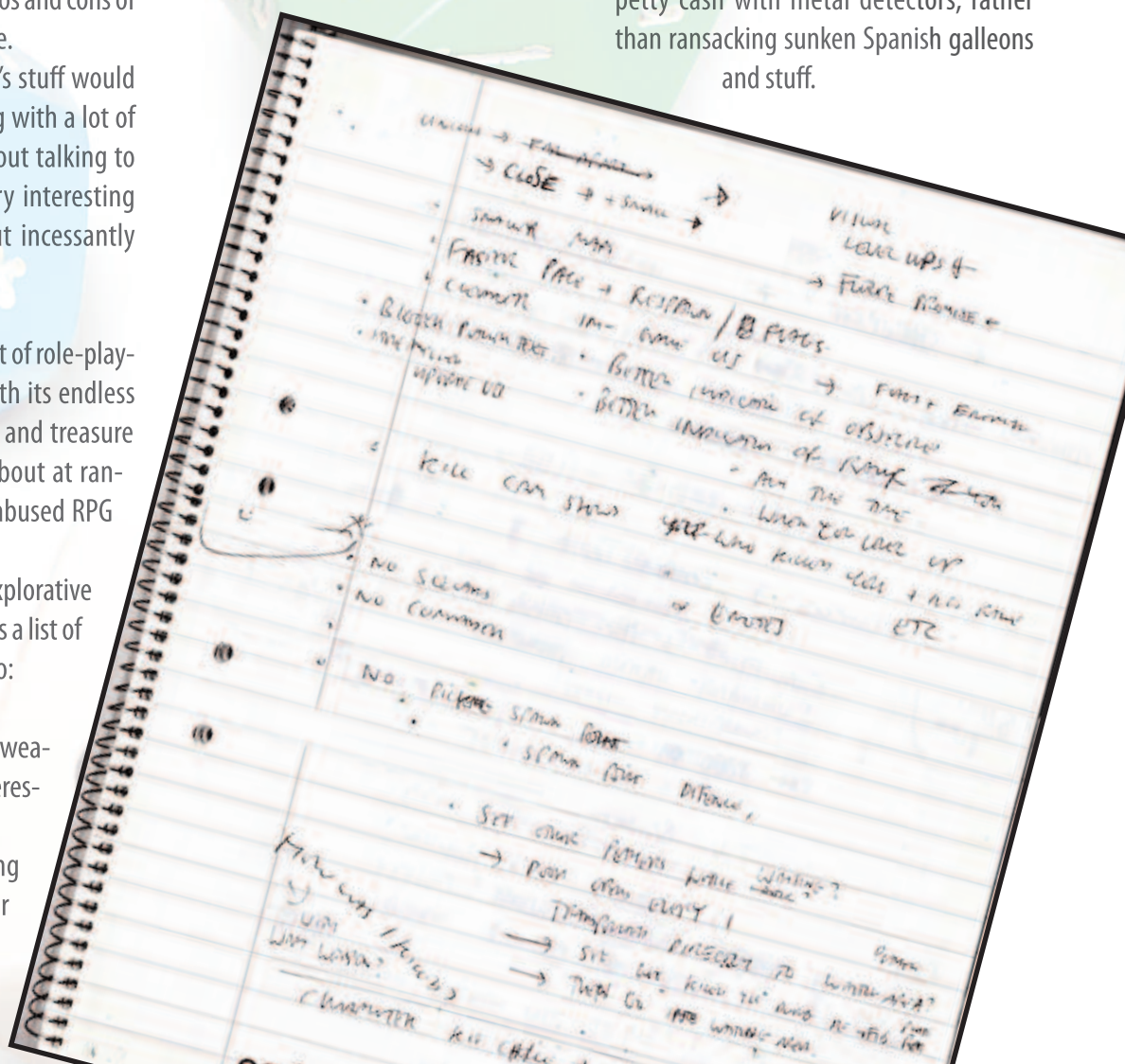
• **Urban Exploration.** IRL dungeon-crawling. Combine with parkour for that added cyberpunk flair.

• **Pick-Up.** An esoteric rogue art with its own secret guild lairs, arcane terminology and huge range of spellbooks to study. And the reward for leveling up comes in the form of increasingly hot

women. When you get good enough, those ComicCon booth babes with the Elf ears and chainmail bikinis will be yours!

• **Treasure hunting.** Your chance to be Indiana Jones. And a pretty decent excuse to study archaeology.

You may want to start out with something easy like trolling public parks for petty cash with metal detectors, rather than ransacking sunken Spanish galleons and stuff.



"If you're familiar with personal development techniques, this is basically like visualization on steroids"

Exercise: make a list of things you can do to increase the adventure in your life. You're going to need a troupe of minions, so write a convincing sales pitch for each activity.

Alternate reality: Live-action drills & frills guaranteed to make you eccentric

Alternate Reality Games and Live-Action Role-Play are what you get when

you do a postmodern take on RPGs and try to crossbreed them with Real Life. Here are a few ideas that fit into the genre:

- **"Bang! You're dead!"** A drill where you're constantly trying to virtu-kill your friends by pointing sticks at them and making shooting noises, or placing shoe-boxes in their rooms with notes saying "Boom! You just triggered a simulated bomb!" Promotes situational awareness and healthy paranoia.

- **Gold farmer.** Pick up every damn

coin and refundable Coke can you find in the streets. Put the money in a jar and buy a sword or something.

- **Urban escape and evasion.** A bunch of megacorp gunslingers (or vampire hunters) are hunting you down. The main mission is to lay low and avoid capture, but to make it challenging you have objectives you need to achieve. Some good ones would be objects you must retrieve, places you must visit at certain times, NPCs you must interact with, stuff like that. Neill Strauss did this drill in his latest book (see the review in this issue) and he actually did some very RPG-y outside-the-box things such as recruiting minions on Myspace, pre-planting caches all over the city, and getting creative with lockpicks.

- **Boot camp.** You're a fresh-faced grunt in some elite black ops force or paramilitary vampire slayer's association, doesn't really matter. You're going to be spending a few days simulating a few months worth of physical exercise, weapons training and camaraderie-building. As a bonus, your GM will get to roleplay the quintessential sadistic DI.

- **Megacorp infiltration.** Use all your social engineering savvy to explore the



Leviathan from inside. Don't do anything malicious of course, but if you're at a conference or something then you might as well stock up on corporate catering and Cyberdyne t-shirts...

• **Saving throw.** When I need to avoid binging out on dirty cheezburgers or whatever, I do an imaginary dice roll against my Willpower stat.

We'd like to run an article just on this topic, so send in more ideas for drills!

The social aspect: Running a guild is way more fun in real life

Once people get to a high enough level in online RPGs, it's the social dynamics that keeps them hooked. And I totally understand why: in Real Life, you're a down-trodden clerk, a cog in the Machine. A modern peon, really, an office serf with little to no say in anything. In the game, you're a high-ranking guild leader, you have hundreds of people taking orders from you, you're always hustling for alliances and organizing raids. You matter. People miss you when you're AFK (Away From Keyboard). Shit yeah you can get addicted to that. Of course, running a Warcraft guild is going to be of limited long-term value, barring some increased leadership skills and new acquaintances. What you need to do is build your own guild in Real Life. Much harder, but ultimately a hell of a lot more rewarding.



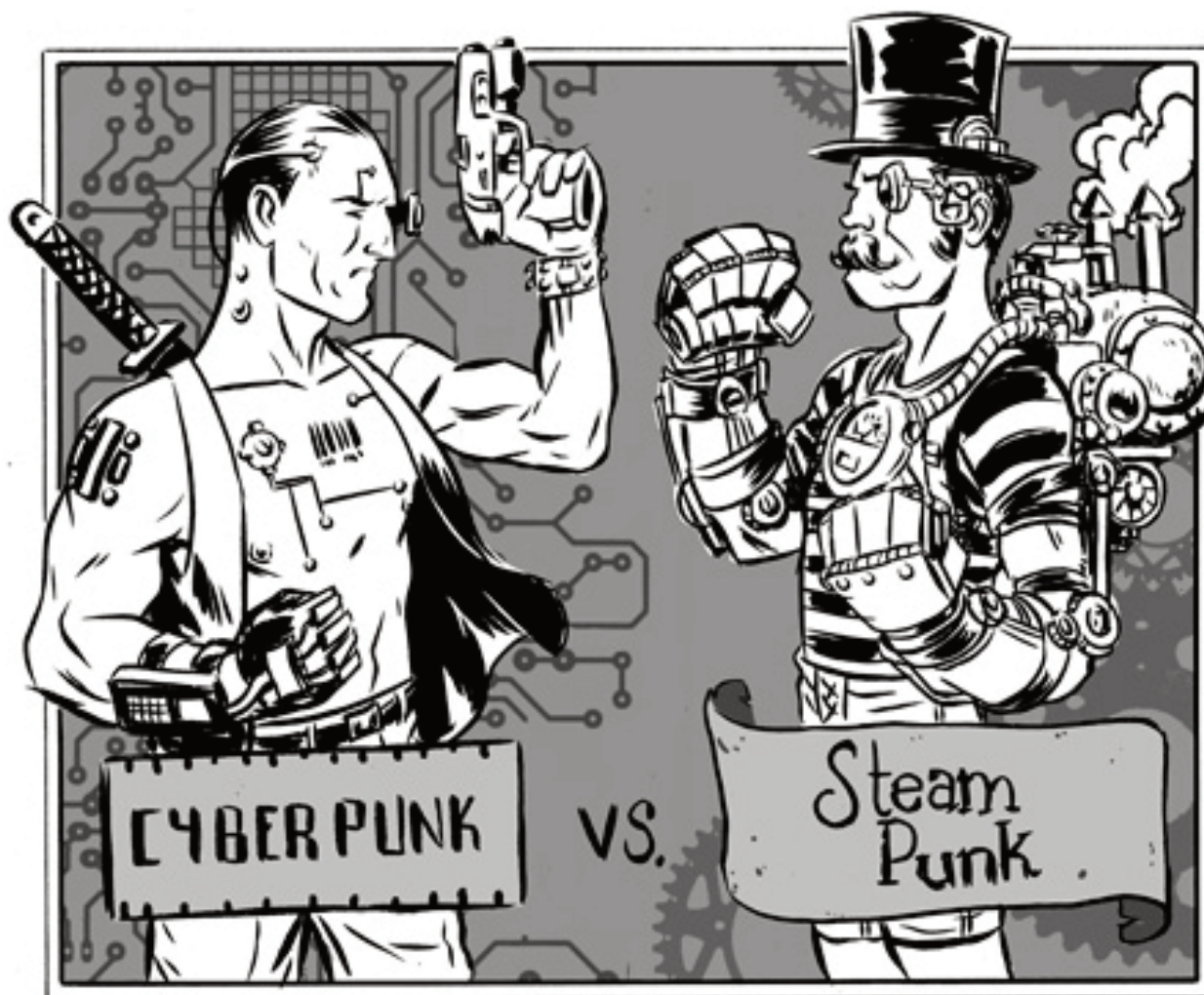
Unfortunately, I can't be Mr Wise-Ass about this particular project, since it's still a work-in-progress for me. But rest assured that I will keep you updated with more articles on the fine art of building a fanatically loyal private army. In the meantime, here's some general tips:

• **Develop a routine** for assessing new acquaintances and for transmitting your interests and stuff. You can literally write a question sheet for new friends, and a CV for them to read. Also, look up Tim Ferris' ideas on this, just google "tim ferriss test drive friends".

• **Practice social networking.** There are books on this, and you're bound to see

me write on this if you stick around long enough, seeing as how it's an obsession of mine. The basics are just about being proactive, always being on the hunt for interesting people, actively engaging and helping people, introducing different friends to each other, staying in touch with your network, stuff like that. Not exactly rocket science, just a lot of work.

• **Develop a repertoire** of activities that you can easily enroll new friends into. Examples could be going to the gym, picking up chicks, role-playing games (crazy, I know) and doing survival/tactical preps. It should be stuff where you take a natural leadership role and enhance the lives of your new recruits, so just going out and



getting randomly drunk doesn't work so well.

- **Create a mission** statement for your new militia/army/guild/party/whatever. Just pandering to your personal narcissism and powerlust ain't gonna fly, people need something bigger to believe in. You want to be seen as "first among equals".

Tying it all together: of grotesque grinding and grumpy GameMasters

Some closing notes:

- **Finding a decent group** is not going to be easy. Most players will probably want to just slay Orcs and level up

the way it's always been done. Hell, most people are pretty hostile toward crazy stuff like self-improvement, so you'll have to stay persistent. It helps if you come across as somewhat sane, and not totally crazed out on Tony Robbins or whatever (not that there's anything wrong with that).

- **Finding a really good GM** is essential. You need someone who encourages creative players, not the type who punishes you for thinking outside the box.

- **What with hi-tech and all**, you can probably find someone online to get your fix on with. Doesn't beat face to face, but it's something at least.

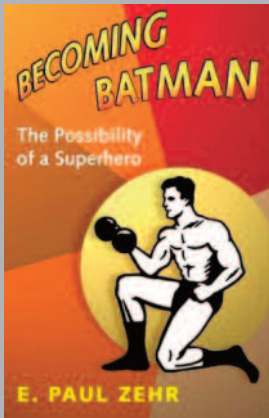
- **The idea** of using RPGs for personal development was something I came up with during a brainstorming session. As far

as I know, I am the first to really flesh out the concept. What fields can YOU combine to make something fresh that gives you an edge in life? And will you let me in on your secret?

I hope I gave you all some food for thought. The field of personal development can be a bit trite and stale at time, and we need to keep innovating and coming up with new and exciting techniques. Just as it is in RPG-land, leveling up as people and raiding increasingly powerful booty ought to be the main mission of Real Life.

We want your feedback! Send in your RPG stories to allhailarnold@gmail.com

Becoming Batman: The possibility of a superhero



Author: **Dr. E. Paul Zehr**

Year: **2008**

Pages: **328**

"Until a man is twenty-five, he still thinks, every so often, that under the right circumstances he could be the baddest motherfucker in the world. If I moved to a martial-arts monastery in China and studied real hard for ten years. If my family was wiped out by Colombian drug dealers and I swore myself to revenge. If I got a fatal disease, had one year to live, and devoted it to wiping out street crime. If I just dropped out and devoted my life to being bad."

— Neal Stephenson

I never liked most superhero comics. Guess I couldn't relate to those guys. Freaks in tight spandex? No problem, I'm a heavy metal fan. Innate powers of flight, superhuman strength, and fire spewing out of your ass? Not so much. Give me Batman and The Punisher any day, if you please. It's a hard toss-up between those

two: Batman has more soul and personality, Mr Castle has military hardware and a lack of inhibitions. If you're training to be the latter, then you need to supplement this book with a few IDPA vids and some books on industrial-grade demolition, I suppose.

The author is a man to my liking: he is a comic book fanatic, neuroscientist, kinesiologist, and expert martial artist. This certainly makes for an interesting mix! If you know my training philosophy, you know that I'm all about being a nerdy athlete and using your overdeveloped brain to give you an edge in the brawn department. And nerdy is just what this book is. It's packed with scientific explanations of anabolic hormones, bone density, REM sleep, genetics, neurotransmitters and all kinds of athlety shop talk.

Good stuff. The attention to detail is impeccable: for instance, how does Batman keep from getting sleep deprived what with his dismal working hours? And does he use anabolic steroids to retain his impressive muscle mass and strength under less than stellar lifestyle conditions? How many calories a day does he need to chow down? Exactly how good at martial arts do you need to be to defeat multiple assailants without killing them? And how exactly strong is he likely to be?

These questions, and many others, are given thorough and satisfying an-

swers. Considering that the source materials for Batman's physical abilities are works of fiction aimed at teenage boys, the author does a heroic job of making sense of it all and looking at hard science to determine what's plausible. You get the sense that this guy could probably quote verbatim from any Batman storyline ever published. Not that that's a bad thing...

So, what's the author's verdict? Can you be Batman? Possibly. But you have to do nothing but train for 10-12 years and damn near have the genetics of an Olympian. Even then, you probably can't stay on the throne for more than a few years before you succumb to injuries and the stresses of such a harsh lifestyle. But I guess the point is that you shouldn't necessarily strive to BE Batman, you should see him as a signpost of ultimate success and do your best anyway, knowing that most humans can go much, much farther than they believe. The book doesn't offer a lot of actual info on how to train and stuff like that, but that's okay seeing as how you can easily find such materials elsewhere. I bought this because I have a passion for self-improvement in the athletic department, love "regular Joe" superheroes, and like nerdy treatises on training, nutrition and recovery. If you're like me, you'll enjoy this book.

"I'm all about being a nerdy athlete and using your overdeveloped brain to give you an edge in the brawn department"

So you want to write for Interesting Times?

Want to be part of the gang? Want to tap into our social network and gain access to our resources?

One way to do that is to start writing articles for us.

We won't lie: it's definitely not for everyone.

You have to have talent, insight, smarts and good writing chops.

And we don't pay you anything (with rare exceptions).

Still want to join us?

Alright, what can you do? What do you know? Do you instantly "get" what we are about as a magazine? Do you have anything that you can contribute? Write down a list of stuff you know and could write about. Only contact us when you've thought long and hard about this. Compare your stuff to articles we've written and

figure out whether your stuff gels well with ours. As a general rule, we are fairly flexible about what we accept as long as it's quality material.

One more thing.

We're not just pumping out raw information here, people. We're selling a certain life-

style. So you need to be focusing on inspiring the readers to take action. An article that fails to do that may be interesting as hell, but without some kind of actual response at the individual level it is just an academic exercise. We are not idle entertainment for the hordes who just want to while away their work day. There's already Digg and 4chan for that kind of thing ;)



So, what does it take to get an article into our magazine? Well, it has to at least fulfill one of the following criteria:

Unique.

Something you can't google in 5 minutes.

A new combination.

Take 2 or more old topics and combine in a fresh manner.

Sexy.

Take something mundane and make it exciting and inspiring.

Cutting edge.

Something that's very new and hasn't been explored a lot yet.

Don't worry if your first draft doesn't make the cut. We will send you back a list of things you can fix.

Don't have any ideas for articles? Drop us a line and tell us what you know, and we will give you something to write.

Ready to write? Great!

When you're done, send your stuff to interestingtimesmagazine@gmail.com

vvAddress Label