

ATTENTION!

This section of Uchronia 1890 is intended for the use of the Chronicler.

As such it will inevitably discuss some of the Great Secrets of the game.

*If you are not the Chronicler **stop reading now**. If you continue you are only spoiling things for yourself.*

The FOUR DIMENSIONS of UCHRONIA 1890

Uchronia 1890 would obviously never have come to be without the works of Jules Verne, Herbert George Wells and the other harbingers of "modern" science fiction. (The term "Scientific Romances" is generally applied to these early works of science fiction.) One of the objectives of Uchronia 1890 is to capture the mood and charm of these period accounts while simultaneously providing the Players with epic and astounding adventures that are filled with strange and unexpected events. The game endeavors to take a historical tone and mix it with varied elements to create a game in the "steampunk" fashion. In essence, to open the doors on a world simultaneously surprising and familiar to the Players, to show them a world where history may diverge at anytime, a world where anything is possible...

To succeed in bringing this "impossible past" alive the Chronicler has a number of tools, references and formulas at his disposal. Soon we will look further at those devices, but first we shall take a look at the four "Dimensions" of the game, that is the four key points which differentiate Uchronia 1890 from other, more traditional, role-playing games.

The Serial Dimension

Uchronia 1890 is not only inspired by the *themes* found in the adventure tales of the late 19th century but also by their style, form and ambiance. This is why we use terms like Chronicler, Episode and Serial. We intend to lay the foundation from the very start that this is a game focusing on dynamic and lively narration favoring suspense and dramatic tension. The Serial Dimension is not only reflected in the tone created by the Chronicler but also in how the Players portray their Heroes, how the Episodes are constructed and how the Serial is developed. The Chronicler should not hesitate to make use of the same maxims and stratagems still employed by television and comic book scribes today: recurring adversaries, constant unexpected turns of events, blatantly theatrical flourishes, cliffhanger endings and other time-tested narrative elements. (These various "tricks" for setting scenes are examined in detail when we look at the Chronicler's roll as Director.)

Another characteristic typical of serialized story-telling is the spreading out of the Heroes' adventures over several years. This allows the Chronicler to bypass the mundane stretches of everyday life and focus on the occasions that are exciting or important to the story (with a little luck and work they will be both!). In the particular context of Uchronia 1890, where "end of the century" equals "end of the world", this aspect of the Serial Dimension makes it possible to progress steadily towards that fateful year of 1900 and the Great Invasion... The stories created for Uchronia 1890 will present accounts where terrible threats endanger the Earth and her inhabitants, as such the Heroes do not just fight against the servants and machinations of the Prometheans they also fight against time! The clock is their enemy as sure as an unseen assassin, each passing day brings humanity inexorably closer to the moment when the Earth's ultimate fate will be judged.

To ensure that the Serial Dimension of the game functions in the most optimal way the Chronicler must manage the dramatic crescendo of the story with care. As time progresses and the Serial gains momentum there will be a progressive rise in the level of danger and threats presented to the Heroes, correspondingly the repercussions of the Heroes' victories and failures will also be more consequential and farther reaching. Which naturally brings us to the second Dimension of Uchronia 1890: the Heroic Dimension.

The Heroic Dimension

The logical follow-up to the Serial Dimension, the Heroic Dimension can be summarized in one sentence: **The Player's characters are the Heroes of the story.**

What can, at first glance, seems a fairly obvious statement in fact implies a very particular approach to the game. An approach that is not always found in all role-playing games. Like their literary and cinematic prototypes the Heroes of Uchronia 1890 are exceptional individuals with capabilities markedly above average, the kind of people who often profit from providential strokes of luck in the most critical situations. This does not mean they cannot fail, nor even lose their life. What it means is that the Heroes are not there to die stupidly or inconsequentially at the beginning of an Episode or following an unlucky roll of the dice. The rules of Combat guarantee the Heroes fairly good chances of survival, but the rules certainly do not prevent the Heroes from being put Out of Combat and thus captured, imprisoned, perhaps even tortured by their enemies (all in the purest tradition of the action/adventure genre).

This status as a Hero is not intended to give the character "perpetual survival insurance".

And don't forget there's another side to being a Hero: these are people bound to be swept into the tumult of the Secret War. The Heroes need to be bigger than life if they expect to persevere against all the challenges the Secret War will throw at them.

Additionally, The Chronicler is completely free to make things more "realistic" and brutal for Cast Members who portray themselves as petty, mean or stupid. Thus, a character who quickly abandons his companions in a perilous situation in order to save his own skin is clearly not a *hero* any longer. He deserves to lose those benefits that true Heroes enjoy and may look forward to an ignominious death. This is clearly contrary to other role-playing games where cynical and materialistic attitudes are the norm. This survive-at-any-cost logic may be perfectly suited for other games and stories but is in utter opposition to the Heroic Dimension of Uchronia 1890.

Ideally this Dimension will also be illustrated by the destiny of the Heroes portrayed by the Players. As much as is

possible the Chronicler will have to place the Heroes into increasingly important roles not only within the Club but also in the history of the world at large. When the Heroes succeed in performing decisive acts, when they celebrate grand successes, when their discoveries and inventions have real impact on the course of world events, then the world of Uchronia 1890 clearly becomes a world different than our own. As discussed in the Uchronic Dimension.

The Uchronic Dimension

The universe of Uchronia 1890 is simultaneously "historical" (since the action takes place at the end of the 19th Century) and markedly fantastic. It is a world where Queen Victoria exists alongside Extraterrestrial Entities, Anachronistic Inventions and other bits of the bizarre. The game may start off resembling our history but the uchronic elements found in the story will seriously disrupt the normal course of "reality". This pseudo-historical aspect of Uchronia acts at the same time as *pretext* and as *façade* in game.

When play starts history in the game has not diverged significantly enough to be discernibly different from the past that we know. As such when the Heroes are created they based on the normal conventions of the late 1800s. The fact the the Unchronic Dimension of the game manifests itself only at the very instant the game commences offers several advantages to game play and story telling and opens a rather unusual perspective for a role-playing game.

The first advantage is that ease of introduction: a person playing Uchronia 1890 does not have to digest a background that is too unfamiliar or alien before building his Hero or starting the Serial. If the player has no familiarity with the era a brief review of online resources would bring them up to speed and to get the understand appropriate "feel" of the game reading some Jules Verne or Arthur Conan Doyle should prove sufficient. All the details will be discovered during play, in the course of the Episodes.

The second, not inconsiderable, advantage is that of surprise. If the game were truly historical the players would know that the actions of their Heroes would not be able to alter the course of history in any real, significant way. But in Uchronia 1890 anything can happen... Jack the Ripper *can* be identified and stopped, Paris *can* be destroyed by a rain of fireballs, Queen Victorian *can* be assassinated in front of Buckingham Palace! Consequently the Heroes will find themselves presented with situations where their actions will an actual effect on history (they will be the ones to save Paris or Queen Victoria... or they will be the ones who fail to do so!). Their success or failure will not be predestined based on the history of the real world. This means that the Heroes will have a chance to (re)make history, a privilege seldom granted to characters in role-playing games.

From the moment when the players realize that the world of Uchronia 1890 does not follow the same chronology as ours the impending Promethean Invasion takes on a very different, more real, dimension. The Invasion ceases to be a vague, far-off possibility and becomes a palpable threat with all of history at stake.

The Uchronic Dimension of the game can open possibilities unimaginable in other role-playing games. Let us suppose, for example, that the Heroes manage to convince a top member of the French Government of the existence of the Secret War and the Promethean Conspiracy and the threat they pose to the whole of humanity. In a more traditional game "logic" and "realism" would ensure that the schemes of the villains would chip away at the efforts made by the Heroes until the results were inconsequential. But in Uchronia 1890 nothing prevents the Chronicler from deciding that the authorities take the Heroes and their warnings completely seriously, placing the country into a state of alert *and* entrusting the Heroes with the direction of a secret ministry intended to deal with the Promethean problem.

This wild, feverish side of the world of Uchronia 1890 is not limited to possible historical divergences. Reality hides many other surprises... which is the concern of the fourth dimension of the game: Heterogeneous Dimension.

The Heterogeneous Dimension

The Heterogeneous Dimension is, both literally and figuratively, "Fourth Dimension" of Uchronia 1890. The tableau that is the universe of Uchronia 1890 integrates a variety of apparently disparate elements: Extraterrestrial Invasion, Alternate History, Extraordinary Inventions, Secret Societies... but that's just the beginning. There are also Paranormal Powers, Lost Civilizations, Micro-Universes and other bits of strangeness all wrapped up in Word-Spanning Adventure.

Carefully meted out these elements make it possible for the Chronicler to create a sense of surprise, mystery and wonder. This will help keep the players curious and excited about the world and provide the Chronicler the widest possible canvas to create the game on. The Chronicler must be careful, though. If handled poorly, or without thought to the story as a whole, these elements may contrarily give the impression of a free-for-all setting without true cohesion and coherence. A place where the actions of the Heroes are likely to be drown in the random strangeness of the world.

Of the Four Dimension of Uchronia 1890, the Heterogeneous Dimension is undoubtedly the most difficult to comprehend and implement on a practical level. The Chronicler should not regard the mysteries of the world of Uchronia as something the players must digest immediately so that the game may race on to the "big issues" (thwart the enemy plot, stop the invasion, save the world). On the contrary, the secrets of the setting must be carefully disseminated with in the thread of the Episodes *and only when their discovery brings something interesting to the story*.

It is perfectly possible to play a dozen or more Episodes before the existence of the Selkies is mentioned. It is completely acceptable to play several preliminary Episodes before introducing the Club or revealing to the Heroes the threat of the Prometheans.

As a Chronicler it is your responsibility to manage the flow of the story and to judge the interests of the players so that you know what elements to introduce and when to introduce them. You may choose to heavily stress certain aspects of the setting over others... you may even leave aside certain elements (provided they do not fit your game's style or don't help create an interesting story). Thus, if the Selkies and Lost Atlantis do not fit in with your style or the story you want to tell there is nothing preventing you from writing them out of the script... or simply ignoring them until you run Uchronia 1890 for a

different group of players. Similarly there is nothing preventing you from side stepping the Secret War and focusing your Serial on a more lyrical form of the game focusing instead on one of the "secondary" motifs like the magic of the Adepts or the search for Atlantean Artifacts. You may even want to add your own concepts and themes to the setting...