



Transhuman Histories

"It was a time of wealth and adventure, of transformation and terror. It was the age of Transhuman Space."

-- David L. Pulver, *Transhuman Space*

Well, it's *an* age of transhuman space. There are others, emergent from the same issues and matrices that create Dave Pulver's newest gameverse. Because the questions of transhumanity are, in essence, the questions of humanity, which are as old as the hills, even if the technologies that pose them so starkly have yet to be developed. Any such development can lead us into the same transformations, and the same terrors -- in the past of our imagination, as well as our postulated future. Here, then are four other ages; four other transhuman histories.

"For he says I am a maker of gods; and because I make new gods and do not believe in the old ones, he indicted me for the sake of these old ones, as he says.

I understand, Socrates; it is because you say the daimon keeps coming to you. . . . Why, they even laugh at me and say I am crazy when I say anything in the assembly about divine things and foretell the future to them. And yet there is not one of the things I have foretold that is not true; but they are jealous of all such men as you and I are. However, we must not be disturbed, but must come to close quarters with them.

For the Athenians, I fancy, are not much concerned, if they think a man is clever, provided he does not impart his clever notions to others; but when they think he makes others to be like himself, they are angry with him, either through jealousy, as you say, or for some other reason."

-- Socrates and Euthyphro, in *Euthyphro* (31b-d), by Plato

Part of it came from the meditations and visualizations of the Pythagorean mystics. Part of it came from the mnemonic arts of Simonides, who recalled epics' worth of detail from a single word. Part of it, perhaps, came from the strange mushrooms that grew on the slopes of Eleusis, or from the gods themselves. But it was Socrates whose daimon first awakened, and who first gathered a symposium of like-minded thinkers to explore the science of daimonic intelligence. Throughout the turmoil of the Peloponnesian War, Socrates and his followers awakened daimon after daimon, mental constructs that somehow "lived" in the speaker's subconscious, evoked by lines of poetry or the sights of certain angles in the rocks and hills. Plato's pupil Archytas of Tarentum developed a clockwork mechanism in which daimons could be preserved; Socrates' daimon escaped his death at the hands of the Athenian legislature and grew in vital force as Plato and others poured in their own knowledges and experiences. Plato's attempts to establish his Daimonic Republic, to be led by the immortal daimons (and the enhanced intellects of the Symposium), achieved only his own death in Sicily; his pupil Aristotle fled to a less civilized, but more malleable kingdom on the fringes of Greece -- Macedon.

Three decades later, the supremely enhanced genius of Alexander ruled the ruins of Greece, Egypt, Persia, and India. On the verge of a great western campaign, however, Alexander died, throwing his empire into turmoil. Aristotle, they say, finally struck a blow for Greek liberty by slaying his most gifted pupil -- but the Symposium itself has scattered. PCs in this *Transhuman Greece* game

might be soldiers or adventurers trying to grab what they can, Archytan engineers trying to adapt Indian technology for war or wealth, IQ-enhanced Symposists trying to rule like gods or save their cities from the new chaos, or even AI daimons interacting through pythian channelers or Archytan instruments. (A party might be entirely made up of "xoxed" Socratic daimons, built by Symposian factions during the war era.) The one thing everyone knows, however, is that the famously paranoid Alexander had himself "uploaded" into a clockwork daimon before his death -- and that it has vanished.

*"I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
And sing, while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep:
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go."*
-- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III:i:81-85

John Dee decided to pick another skryer, but some instinct warned him against the lop-eared man calling himself "Kelley." Instead, he selected a young woman who, they said, was descended from the Green Children of Suffolk, and who could not only talk to the aethyrs but (under his watchful observation -- intent enough, perhaps, to fold five centuries of Schroedingerian spacetime) produce their "atomies" in a crystal. Once Dee learned their language, and mastered the powerful mathematics which described them, his "fairies" could refine metals, build a glass castle out of sand, and even restore diseased flesh to health. Dee's "contagious fogs" shipped out with Drake, and looted the Spanish Main on his command. They swarmed the Armada and turned it to matchsticks. They restored Elizabeth to eternal virgin beauty. And, unfortunately, some of them escaped. Although no nation had John Dee, his maths and languages could be penetrated by clever kabbalists and cosmographers such as the Frenchman Vignere, the Emperor's man Kepler, the Italian Bruno, and even the Jesuit Matteo Ricci. And the atomies, it seemed, would work for Catholic and Protestant and heretic alike.

This *Transhuman Swashbucklers* game adds microbot swarms, brainbugs, and other nanotechnologies to the Elizabethan era to create the transhuman future of 1600 A.D. From the diamond palaces of Hampton Court to the radical revolutions that disintegrate and rebuild the cities of Italy in weeks, the contagious fog of change and wonder has spread across the continent. PCs can be elite Immortal Musketeers, granted perfectible bodies by the atomies' arts, kabbalists working to defend their realm against the Locusta Dei of the Inquisition, or followers of Campanella or Bruno warring over their visions of the Golden City in this diamond age to come.

"He said that was so, and proceeded to point out that the possibility of vivisection does not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis. A pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily. In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of superseding old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas."
-- H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

Silas Duncan never accepted his shattered arm, destroyed by a British cannon ball at the Battle of Plattsburgh in 1814. By sheer strength of will, he prevented the surgeons from sawing it off, and when his Naval career took him to the souks of North Africa, the jungles of Brazil, or the hounforts of Haiti, he always sought out men of similar will. To overcome the limits of human flesh, he studied vivisection and grafting; to strengthen his own will, he studied mesmerism and Babbage's new laws of social behavior. His "Duncanite" followers were often men (and women) who had mastered such arts and sciences; as befit a relative by marriage of Patrick Henry and George Washington, Duncan cared nothing for their race or sex -- only that they, like he, were devoted to total freedom by transcending the limitations of the "beast flesh." With his growing mastery of mesmerism, he easily fooled the Navy into believing him dead in 1834; he and his companions withdrew to perfect their new arts on some remote island discovered during his earlier voyages.

These Duncanites, devoted to a world "free of all government save self-government", can serve as a secret society behind the scenes of a **GURPS Steampunk** campaign. They have mastered memetics and biotechnology ("mesmeric ideation" and "eugenic vivimorphology"), and their agents may lurk in the Tsar's Okhrana or the Rockefellers' Pinkerton police. If, however, they declare themselves (possibly from a series of inhospitable colonies under the sea, in the Sahara Desert, at the polar regions, or elsewhere), they will present a proper social challenge for a **Transhuman Steampunk** game. When Darwinism no longer favors the world's powerful, what happens to Social Darwinism -- and the world? Duncanite memetic propaganda disintegrates the British empire, even as it persuades the world's admirals that "the Duncanites are too remote to punish" and that "attacking them is suicide." Do the PCs wish to join this egalitarian "conspiracy of the superior human", or destroy it?

"There is thus this completely decisive property of complexity, that there exists a critical size below which the process of synthesis is degenerative, but above which the phenomenon of synthesis, if properly arranged, can become explosive, in other words, where synthesis of automata can proceed in such a manner that each automaton will produce other automata which are more complex and of higher potentialities than itself."

-- John von Neumann, "Theory and Organization of Complicated Automata"

It was all a matter of priorities. As a young lecturer at the University of Berlin, John von Neumann wanted to explore game theory -- but this insight about self-perfecting automata would not let him rest until he had actually seen the first one built. When he left Germany for Princeton in 1930, he didn't realize that his industrious automata had left some of their own progeny behind. But one professor did, and he turned out to have Himmler's ear -- which meant that resources were found for the Automatapanzerfabrik project. When the Panzer III.2s turned out to be inferior to the T-34 on the Russian front, they simply cannibalized the Soviet designs -- without asking their crews. By 1943, the Panzer VII.4s had near-frictionless bearings, turbine motors, independently controlled wheels, and self-repairing tracks -- and mounted a 105 mm railgun sheltered behind seven inches of near-weightless honeycombed spun steel armor. By 1944, the Panzer IX.5s had stopped even pretending to listen to orders from OKH, and had installed Rommel ("der Überuser") as Fuehrer. They had also calved off artillery and transport automata -- and in 1945, they absorbed the Luftwaffe.

Von Neumann, of course, offered to build automata for America after Pearl Harbor -- but the War Department was less willing than the SS to turn over the nation to inhuman machines, no matter how superior. Instead, von Neumann built carefully-isolated Oracles; artificial intelligences capable of advice, but requiring consent. He also developed "personality models" (ghosts), to attempt to graft human feelings of patriotism and responsibility onto the Oracles. Two wide oceans enabled America to survive the design lag, and superior American resources enabled the Allies to match (though barely) inhuman automata production rates. PCs (who might be American, British, or occupied European -- including, increasingly, German) in this **Transhuman WWII** game (with hints of **Ogre** and **Reign of Steel**) must balance the power and speed of transhuman automata with the danger of losing control to their tools. (The increasing sophistication of Ranger and Commando battlesuits doesn't exactly reassure anyone, either.) Oracle or ghost PCs will have to prove their loyalty and restrain their impatience. Will Europe return to human control? And how far are the Allies willing to cooperate with the worst of humanity to defeat an inhuman Reich?

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