

The Tax Man Cometh

Running a Demo for *HeroQuest*

by Jeffrey A. Kyer

Preparations

One of the joys of being a narrator is teaching *HeroQuest* to new players. Though the ideas presented here may be old news, they bear repeating. Make the following preparations before demos:

- Bring extra pens/pencils.
- Bring copies of *HeroQuest* and the *Hero's Book*.
- *HeroQuest Voices*, a free PDF from the Issaries web site, brings Glorantha to life, especially if the players create their own heroes. Print a few copies of appropriate homelands' narratives.
- A handout of most used charts and explanations is a useful prop that reduces wear-and-tear on your books.
- Handouts from Issaries or SJ Games are useful but best kept low key. You are here to teach and have fun, not play *High-Pressure Sales: The RPG*.
- A map and props makes for an easier demo. *HeroQuest* is not map-dependent, being cinematic in nature, but maps help the players visualize the situation. If you do frequent demos, put the map in a plastic protector. Laminated maps look very classy. Dungeon tiles or cutouts for furniture and fixtures help.
- Miniatures representing "Our Heroes" add to the visual appeal but are not essential. Coloured beads or unused dice work well. Gloranthan miniatures are available through *Dark Ages Miniatures* and *Lance & Laser*. You can use candies to represent easily dispatched minions. If you kill it, you eat it.
- Paper Cutouts are more portable than miniatures. The Unspoken Word's *Paper Wars: Dragon Pass at War* is perfect for this. So is *Cardboard Heroes*. Both are available from SJG. Examples can be downloaded from http://www.btinternet.com/~Nick_Brooke/dario/index.htm for free.
- Bring extra character sheets.
- Pre-generated characters are a good idea, especially for late arrivals.
- Wear clean clothes, shower, and don't show up to the demo hungry. (These should go without saying.)

Setting up Shop

Call ahead to the store to remind them you are on your way. Stores forget about demos or don't inform the person on-shift. Put up posters advertising the demo to eliminate this problem.

Arrive early; half an hour is a good rule of thumb. You may need to set up tables or clear a space before you can start.

As the players arrive, introduce yourself. Hand out *HeroQuest* or *Hero's Book* rulebooks and *HeroQuest Voices*. Have both pre-generated heroes and blank character sheets. Some groups want to make their own characters; others prefer to get playing right away.

A word of advice—make sure any pre-generated characters have the proper augment and combat bonuses already. It will save you a lot of time.

Ask anyone who wanders by to join the fun! Never, ever turn anyone away!

A Delicate Subject: Former *RuneQuest* Players

It's certain that players of the other Gloranthan RPGs will attend your demos, particularly *RuneQuest* players. Many of them may be unhappy with the new Gloranthan game. *HeroQuest* is a completely different game than *RuneQuest* was, although it shares the same setting. *HeroQuest* takes a more cinematic approach to Glorantha than *RuneQuest*, which is a simulation more reliant on "crunchy bits."

Do not get into an argument about which game is better. Just inform them that *HeroQuest* is the game you are teaching it today. Would they like to play? Make sure they know they are welcome to join. It's surprising how many of them like *HeroQuest* once they've tried it.

Part One: *HeroQuest* Overview

Once the players have been settled in, describe *HeroQuest*. It's about Magic! Adventure! Romance! Changing the World! Use movie or book references to help the players make that mental leap: *HeroQuest* is about being a hero. The players should want to be heroes.

Glorantha—The Big Lozenge

Talk about the world using the map of Glorantha in *HeroQuest* or one of the maps from *Unspoken Word*. Glorantha is not like Earth. It's a big lozenge floating in an endless sea. Give a quick overview of the world (the seas and continents, the Whirlpool, the Glacier), but don't spend too much time dwelling on any one part. Always, always answer questions. It means you've caught their interest.

Homelands & Stranger Places

A picture is worth a thousand words! The pictures for each Homeland are priceless tools. Each one evokes that land's mood. Show each picture in turn. Quickly describe the Homelands before play so the players can get the gist of them. It will help them later when they create characters. Drawing parallels between the Homelands and similar earthly cultures can be helpful (Heortlings are like Vikings without boats, for example)—but it may cause misconceptions. Hint at what the lies in store for each land in the upcoming Hero Wars.

Magic Is Everything

Glorantha is filled with magic. It's in everything and everyone. When you talk about magic, make the players *taste* it. Each form of magic comes from a different place and has a different feel to it.

An animist dances and sings to call up spirits, befriending or compelling their aid. He bargains with and appeases these otherworldly beings to create charms and fetishes. Shamans writhe and dance in their ecstatic rituals to bring the Spirit World closer.

Theists channel the power of the God World through themselves, becoming their instrument. They gain affinities and feats that make them more like the god. A god-talker of the Storm would feel and breathe thunder and lightning. In exchange for this, theists offer up sacrifices. While most of these followers are initiates, the most reverent can become devotees.

Wizards use logic and knowledge to control the powers of sorcery, using blessings and spells learned in the Essence Planes to bend it their will. Wizardry is a cold and impersonal magic, very dangerous but exquisitely precise. The mightiest wizards are sworn to the service to the Invisible God and his Prophets and Saints. Even their worship is distant and restrained, consisting of prayers, sermons, and meditation.

There are also **talents**: magical abilities that come from within the hero. Anyone can have their own magical powers. Some can be as simple as knowing which berries are ripe but others are more powerful like being able to leap over trees, run up cliffs, or even fly. Since they come from the hero, they are *his*.

Everyone has magic. Every granny, uncle, and farmhand has something. These collections of magical tricks are called **Common Magic**. Some are spells, others are feats or charms, but many of them are just little tricks and talents passed along as 'things that work.' Most folks aren't concerned with where magic comes from as long as it helps them do their work and isn't expressly forbidden by their religion. Every town has its own patron god or spirit. Every profession has a saint or magical protector.

Take the time to talk about **hero bands** and **guardians**. From the smallest band of wanderers to the wyter protecting an entire kingdom, every organization has a guardian to look over it and provide special benefits. Even player characters can have their own guardian. Each band and guardian is unique—every group of heroes should make up one of their own. If your own *HeroQuest* group has a unique guardian, show it off to the players!

What is a Heroquest, Anyway?

Heroquests are a major part of the game (hence the name). You'd better be prepared to explain them! In its crudest form, heroes go into the Otherworld and encounter the timeless beings there (gods, spirits, and essences). Everyone seems to love the heroquesting angle—finding the truth that was already there. Successful heroquesters can bring back incredible powers. However, heroquesting is difficult and dangerous—you need the support of a community to hope to survive.

Clan, Crown and Community

Heroes never stand alone. Without family and friends, a hero would swiftly perish of starvation, disease, or misfortune. Be it a rowdy Heortling clan, stratified Dara Happan league, or wandering caravan of Kralori merchants, there's no place like home. Explain how important family and friends are, with examples from the homelands the players seemed most interested in. Relationships are one of *HeroQuest*'s great strengths. The heroes' community is the "beginning place." Before you go out to change the world, you have to know what the world was like.

What's a hero without retainers and sidekicks? Talk about the two types of followers. Sidekicks can be many things other than just helpers: lovers, kinfolk, wise friends, or clever animals. (Timmy is Lassie's sidekick, of course.)

Go with what interests the players—every demo will be different.

History

Warning: This may be an optional subject—some players are just not interested. If so, skip it! Glorantha is a rich world but there is no need to drown folks in unwanted information.

If you are going to talk about Glorantha's history, keep the information light. Discuss the highlights of the three Ages of Glorantha and the "God Time" that came before

The God Time ended with the first Dawn and the birth of Time. Previously, everything sort of happened at once. Different people share many myths but these stories have varying viewpoints. Sometimes they take place in different order for each participant. But the God Time ended with the horrific wars that left Glorantha a pile of drifting mythological rubble in a sea of chaos.

The Dawn Age was a time of peace and rebuilding. It ended in the Gbaji Wars, when foolish mortals tried to build the perfect being. And failed. The Imperial Age was a time of exploration and conquest. Great empires arose. The Age ended when the forces of nature rose up and destroyed them. The Third Age was a repressive time as the mortal races licked their wounds. They resettled the devastated lands. It has ended with the coming of the Hero Wars, as the Old Ways no longer worked.

Current Events

If the group seems interested in the Hero Wars, mention a few of the events that will push Glorantha down the path to the Fourth Age:

The Occupation of Sartar
The Voyages of Harrek
The Kingdom of War
The Elf Reforestation Project
The Return of Brithos

Touch on the elder races (non-humans). They are different from humans. Gloranthan non-humans are alien takes on common fantasy themes. Trolls are hungry. Elves are mobile plants. Dwarves are living machines. Ducks are... well, they are ducks. Talk about their evil (or noble) schemes to wrest the world back from the humans who have taken it from them.

Discuss what **YOU** find fascinating. If you are enthusiastic, then the players catch the fire from your words and descriptions. Talking about the parts of Glorantha you love is essential—even if it's Ducks.

Bring up the role of women in Glorantha. While many stay home and live an 'old fashioned life,' many societies allow a woman to abandon her family's protection and become "adventurers." And, of course, a magician makes her own rules. Emphasize again the community aspect of *HeroQuest* and the non-traditional heroes that can arise (match-makers, avengers, Beatpot Aelwrin the rebel cook).

Game Mechanics

All *HeroQuest* mechanics use a single 20-sided die (d20). Explain how the different forms of contests work. You may want to leave this explanation till we get into actually playing and build on the contests and increasing complexity. Use examples to show how a simple contest works: **ability rating** vs. **resistance** (the difficulty of the task). I use a sliding scale:

Swinging across a room on a rope is easy (resistance 14).

Swinging across the throne room, scooping up the girl, and landing on a balcony is more difficult (resistance 17 \mathbb{W}).

Swinging across the room, scooping up the girl, landing on a balcony as Duke Deskai's men fill the air with crossbow bolts, and looking Damn Good while doing so requires the skill of a true hero (resistance 17 \mathbb{W} 2).

Repartee is always free.

Explain masteries and bump ups. Talk about hero points. Show how they can avert disasters (Heroic Failure). Talk about how to get hero points (good role-play and meeting adventure goals).

Show how a contest works. Arm wrestling is a good example: one force is pitted against another. Mention augments and help from friends and followers. Players will also ask about abilities. They won't find Strength, Dexterity, or the other standards on their character sheets. Talk about **default ability ratings** and **improvisation penalties**.

If you want, talk about extended contests, but leave demonstrating them until later since it's a very complex topic to keep things moving.

Character Generation

Pre-Gen or Not Pre-Gen?

You may run with pre-generated or sample heroes, such as the ones that are available from the Issaries website (www.HeroQuest-rpg.com/support/sample-heroes.pdf). You can hand out pre-generated characters to 'walk-in' players. Everyone gets to play!

Many players want to build their own heroes. Customizing a sample character does this without spending too much time in character creation. Players "ready to go" should get pre-generated characters. Avoid allowing the creation of powerful magicians at start (wizard, priest, or shaman). The extra work involved delays the demo while you explain each magician's powers. You could let a seasoned player to play something unusual instead. It helps illustrate how varied Gloranthan characters can be—and these folks usually bring their own characters too! If you have players already familiar with *HeroQuest* or *Hero Wars*, use their experience. Ask them what they liked. Most of them are also willing to help during character creation.

If players want to design their own heroes, talk about the three methods of Character Creation—the 100 word narrative, the list, and the 'as we go along' method.

Important: *Do not turn the demo into an endless character creation session. It's just not as fun as letting the players actually play.*

Heroes Are Not Just Adventurers

Character generation is another useful tool for teaching *HeroQuest*. The homeland and occupation keywords tell much of the character creation story. By now, the players should have an idea of what Homeland appeals to them. Find out their occupation. Point out the non-warrior, non-standard hero possibilities in the *Sample Heroes*.

The next step is deciding what magic the heroes have. I usually start by describing the four types of magic and how each works. Getting the players to settle on one system can save a lot of time. Theism is the easiest magic system to start with. A *RuneQuest* solution is to create a group of initiates and devotees.

Hand out copies of the sample characters and let each player choose the hero they like best. Sometimes a player cannot decide what sort of hero to play—be patient and helpful. It may take coaxing before everyone has a character. Remember that the sample characters are 'off the shelf' and have not had their 20 points of modification yet. Let players customise their heroes, but show them how the changes affect their character.

Some players adapt to *HeroQuest* faster or have previous experience. Ask them to help the others keep up; it keeps everyone busy and helps you concentrate on those players having the most trouble.

Players should copy their new heroes to fresh character sheets. Talk about abilities, masteries, and flaws again so the players know how these are set up. It can save confusion later, especially when transferring them to a new sheet. Always offer to help, and be patient with those who are confused.

Make sure the players copy down any automatic augments to speed up contests.

Fiddly Bits

Talk about *Undefined Abilities*. Players can put a few abilities on the character sheet that are currently unknown (see examples in *HeroQuest*). These are defined to take advantage of new situations. Strong Stone String? Bison Brain Spirit? They are defined at the player's whim—but may be developed once defined. Demonstrate how a few of them work.

Flaws are another kind of ability usually used against the player. There really aren't any disadvantages. If you want to play a one legged, deaf albino midget with a homicidal streak and a craving for opium, that's just role-playing. You get no "points" for it, just flaws used at the narrator's discretion. One use of flaws might go like this:

You are running through the Red Emperor's Palace. Your friends are in the dungeon. Imperial soldiers search for you room by room. As you run down another endless corridor, a door opens and a slim, feminine hand beckons you into a darkened room. An enticing perfume tickles your senses. (I use the hero's Lustful or Reckless flaw to see if you stay...) You know, your friends aren't going to go anywhere what with being in a dungeon and all. And this might be a nice place to hide for a time...

Part Two: The Taxman Commeth! Or Death and Taxes—Inevitable Reality

When the players finish creating heroes and run out of questions, it's time to play. Set up the map of the Tin Inn (see page 8) or use something of your own devising. Add a few tables and chairs for the heroes to break. Award the initial three hero points each player gets at the start of the game. Heroes can keep track of them with dice or candy. Briefly remind the heroes just how useful hero points are.

Read Aloud:

The Heroes (that's you lot!) are enjoying a little quality time in the Tin Inn, a tavern in a quaint village called Apple Lane. Rain pours down outside and the wind is cold and damp. Inside it's warm and dry—well mostly dry, as part of the inn obviously burned down a few years ago and was hastily repaired, making the whole inn look a bit battered. But the beer is good and the tavern wench is comely. There are a few other people in the tavern with you, the usual mixed bag of travellers (indicate the other heroes) and a few locals who are getting out of the cold and damp.*

** Or pick any town in a country that most of the Heroes come from. Apple Lane was chosen for nostalgic reasons.*

Start with the player who has been most energetic so far. Ask him what his hero's name is and to tell the group a bit about himself. Then ask him where he is in the bar and what his hero is doing. Mark him with a figurine, die, or candy. The first player to speak in character or have a really good background gets a bonus hero point on the spot! Reward those folks who are getting into the game already. If any by-play starts to happen between the heroes, great!

Depending on the mood, show the players how contests work—have them arm-wrestle (*Arm Wrestling, Strong, Close Combat*) and demonstrate improvisation penalties. Perhaps there's a bar maid to be seduced or a trader with something to sell. For ease of play, assume all opponents to have a standard 15 resistance.

Once the heroes establish themselves, let the fun begin! If no obvious rivalries or enemies have become apparent during character creation, use the one below. It's always better to use something on the character sheets rather than coming up with something on the fly. It gives the players a feeling of importance. Barring that, Commander-Victualler Khaphros and his vile gang of Tax Farmers arrive with a crash.

Note: Tax Farming is the practice of contracting the collection of taxes. Companies bid for the right to collect taxes in a certain area. That amount of money must be paid to the government by a certain period. Anything they gain over and above the contract is kept. In theory, this means that taxes are collected cheaply and efficiently. In practice, these groups are no more than sanctioned bandits. Everyone hates Tax Farmers—even those who hire them.

Party Crashers

Read Aloud:

BANG! The door is kicked open and a dapper man in uniform steps through its remains. He looks like some sort of Lunar official (or whatever local oppressive government you fancy). Close on his heels are a gang of thuggish soldiers armed with clubs and carrying sheathed swords. Looming behind them is a huge mountain of a man. "Good evening. I am Commander-Victualler Khaphros. I am afraid you have not paid your taxes." It's the Tax Farmers! What are you going to do?

If necessary, explain that Tax Farmers are legally entitled to "tax" ordinary citizens. If the victim doesn't have proof of payment (and none of the heroes do), they get to pay again (and again, and again)! If they can't pay, the Tax Farmers can drag them off to a life of slavery. Worse, they spilled your drink!

Khaphros points to the quietest player and says, "Sergeant Thog: THAT man (woman, whatever) wants to pay his (or her or whatever) taxes." Should these tactics not get the player's attention, his men arrest people for not paying their taxes—and if they do not have the correct amount of money, he will sell them into slavery to pay for it. Legally, he is entitled to do this—which is why every-one *hates* Tax Farmers.

Tailor the threat to the number of heroes. Three soldiers for each hero is about right. Half come in the front door with the commander and his brutish assistant. The rest come in through the kitchen. The objective of this fight is to give the payers a quick workout of the combat system, so the battle should only last a few rounds.

Tactics

In the melee, Khaphros has no intention of being pounded into paste by bar-scum like the heroes. Ensure that the Commander has a line of escape. He will dodge or parry anything that comes his way and can swing a blade with the best of them. Wounding or disabling him should be difficult and thus greeted with cheers by the players. When all is lost (Thog is down and the rest of his goons are on the run), Khaphros dives out the window and runs off into the night swearing he'll have his revenge...

Note: The heroes might use magic in combat, do a simple challenge, then get back into the main battle. The game is fluid and freeform. Hand out bonuses and penalties for situations—standing on tables, having your back to the wall, or wielding a flaming log from the fireplace. Be free with improvisation and situational bonuses and penalties.

When the last enemy falls to the ground: "...and that's *HeroQuest*." Answer any further questions. Ask what they thought of the demo. Hand out *HeroQuest Voices* to any-one who seems interested. Point out *HeroQuest* and any of its supplements in the store. Award "end of game" hero points (about 2-3 each) and let them improve or buy some abilities. Take a bow; you've earned it. **Thank the players for playing.**

Clean up your area and put things away. Make sure it's at least as neat and tidy as you found it. Make sure the store owner or convention contact is happy with your work, thank him for allowing the demo, and offer to book another.

Have fun!

The Villains

Thuggish Soldiers

two or three per hero

Most of the enemies are out-of-work soldiers, thugs, and ex-gladiators hired by the commander to help with the tax "gathering." Nasty, brutish and greedy, they are well suited to the job. Since they get a share of the profits, they are more than eager to beat every last bit of money out of their victims.

Keyword: Soldier 17 or Thug 17.

Significant Abilities: Alert 18, Club or Sword Combat 17, Drink Alcohol 17, Evaluate Goods 17, Greedy 17.

Equipment: Scimitar or Club (+2), Leather armor (+1).

Magic: Initiate of Yanafal Tarnils (Combat 15, Soldier 15).

Augments: Affinities (Combat +2, Soldier +2).

AP Total: 17 (Club or Sword Combat) + 4 (augments) + 3 (equipment) = 24.

Notes: Make each of these thugs a little bit distinctive. One might have a scar. Another might wear red pants. A third might have a squeaky voice. Use candies to represent them to provide heroes with a quick reward.

"Sergeant" Thog

Brutish Henchman

*A large and extraordinarily ugly man, Thog has taken out his name on the world for the last twenty years. As a Tax Farmer, he has many, many opportunities to make people miserable! He doesn't worship the Soldier's God like the rest of band, being too uncontrollable to worship in a soldier's cult. He has his own tricks, concentrating his talents through Self-Rock teaching (*HeroQuest*, page 108).*

Keyword: Thug 3 \blacksquare .

Significant Abilities: Big 7 \blacksquare , Club Combat 11 \blacksquare , Evaluate Foe 17, Greedy 16, Stupid 18, Ugly 17, Smouldering Anger and Resentment 6 \blacksquare , Strong 3 \blacksquare , Wrestling 5 \blacksquare .

Magical Talents: Angry Strength 18, Crush Your Head 19, Fear Me 16, Now I'm Angry 3 \blacksquare , Pain-stick 3 \blacksquare , Sense Loot 18, Smashing Blow 6 \blacksquare , Stop Bleeding 16.

Equipment: Vinewood club +2, chainmail armor +2.

Augments: Big +2, Pain Stick +2, Smashing Blow +3, Strong +3, others as appropriate from talents.

Quotes: "We're gonna be great friends, purdee woman!"

Tactics: He takes one of the soldiers as a follower, using him to absorb damage as long as possible. He will gladly die to defend the 'boss.'

AP Total: 31 (Club Combat) + 10 (Augments) + 4 (Equipment) = 45.

Commander-Victualler Khaphros

Tax Farming Villain

Discharged from the army for peculation (stealing), Khaphros has spent the last few months as a Tax Farmer. It's fulfilled his wildest dreams of avarice. He hates the locals and they hate him. His blade gleams with a magical silver light and he is well dressed and impeccably groomed. Should any hero fancy himself a swordsman, Khaphros deigns to cross blades with him, sneering at his pathetic abilities and repartee.

Keywords: Soldier 4 \blacksquare , Dara Happan 17, Imperial Citizen 13.

Significant Abilities: Arrogant 17, Command Troops 6 \blacksquare , Contacts (Local Bureaucracy) 17, Evaluate Goods 7 \blacksquare , Greedy 15, Falsify Reports 15, Hate (Locals) 3 \blacksquare , Intimidate 6 \blacksquare , Know Tax Laws 8 \blacksquare , Ride 3 \blacksquare , Scimitar Combat 9 \blacksquare , Silver Scimitar (item) 18.

Magic: Initiate of Yanafal Tarnils 4 \blacksquare .

Affinities: Combat 5 \blacksquare , Soldier 8 \blacksquare , Warlord 18.

Common Magic: Fix Hurt, Good Grooming, Stare You Down, Start Fire (all at 17).

Equipment: Quality chainmail shirt +3, Silver Scimitar +3.

Augments: Affinities (Combat +3, Soldier +3, Warlord +2), Hate [Locals] +2, Silver Scimitar +2.

Quotes:

“Surely your elders taught you better than that, boy.”

“Pathetic. I know drunken stable boys who fight better than this.”

Tactics: He will have a follower or two with him to reduce or eliminate multiple attacked penalties. You have two hero points to ‘keep you going’ so remember to use them to keep the “good” Com-mander up as long as possible, even if he gets a little bit battered. He has to be there to make his dramatic exit!

AP Total: 29 (Scimitar Combat) + 12 (Augments) + 6 (Equipment) = 47.

Hero Points: 2.

Note: You can make Khaphros a devotee for a tougher fight. In that case, he knows all the common feats for his affinities:

Combat: Charge of the Ram, Empower [Weapon] with Death, Stand Against Many, Strike Ghost.

Soldier: March in Step, Many Strike As One, Hold the Line, Sturdy Spear.

Warlord: Battlefield Bellow, Co-ordinate Forces, Create Morale, Hear Command, Mask of Command, Perceive Friendly Strength, Perceive Enemy Weakness.

Options for the Enterprising Narrator

If you are planning to run this adventure several times over a convention, you might want to make a few changes to keep the adventure fresh from session to session. Here are a few simple changes:

- Make Thog a Shargash worshipper. (Information on Shargash can be found on page 25 of *Imperial Lunar Handbook*) His huge mace smashes in the door.
- Perhaps one of the heroes is in cahoots with the Tax Farmers.
- The Commander could be leading a press gang for the local navy instead.
- The Commander is actually a slaver, looking for fresh merchandise.
- The heroes are engaged in something criminal when the Commander arrives.
- Perhaps the commander has hired a wizard instead of the brutish Thog.
- Change the setting to a non-human locale. This takes a lot of extra work but is a lot of fun, especially if you have an experienced group of Gloranthan players.

The possibilities are endless.

The Tin Inn in Apple Lane

