

CARTOON ACTION HOUR

Season Two

PLAYSET

Welcome to the **Cartoon Action Hour: Season 2 Playset**. Within these pages, you'll find all the material necessary to take the game out for a spin! So, buckle up and get ready to revisit the cartoons of the 1980s!

ABOUT THE GAME

Cartoon Action Hour is a roleplaying game that seeks to emulate the wham-bang exuberance of the half-hour action-adventure cartoons of the 1980s... or as we like to call them, "retro-toons".

Unlike many RPGs, **Cartoon Action Hour** isn't tied to one specific setting. It's quite the opposite, actually. This game is intended for use with virtually any cartoon-like setting imaginable.

This may lead you to wonder if **Cartoon Action Hour** is a "universal" or "generic" game. The answer to

this is a resounding "no". While the game is adaptable to numerous different styles of series, the rules were designed specifically to accommodate the style of action found in the retro-toons. If you try to use the rules for anything else, you're going to have your work cut out for you. **Cartoon Action Hour** was built from the ground up using "cartoon logic" and every aspect of gameplay supports that. In other words, it's not just a universal RPG gussied up with retro-toon art; every rule was created with retro-toons in mind.

WHAT YOU NEED

In order to play, you're going to need a few things. First and foremost, you should get your hands on a few 12-sided dice (referred to as "d12s" or simply "dice"). About 3-5 of them should suffice. You can purchase d12s at most game or hobby stores.

You should also get some scratch paper, and something to write with, as well as something to use as tokens (beads, poker chips, coins, hard candies, etc.). These are used to keep track of certain things during the game.

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

Traits

All characters in the game have Traits. Traits represent a combination of several things, such as skills, knowledge, raw abilities, and talents. They can also represent less mundane aspects of a character, such as powers, weapons, spells, armor, gadgets, and alien abilities.

There is no list of set-in-stone Traits. Rather, you get to create them yourself.

Of course, having the Traits and knowing how good the character is at them are two different things altogether. A Trait is measured by something called a rating. Most Traits have ratings between 0 (average) and 8 (high-level superhuman), but higher ratings are certainly possible. The lower end of the spectrum (i.e., Traits that the character isn't very good at) are reflected by Detrimental Trait ratings, of which there are two: 1X (mediocre) and 2X (poor).

If a character doesn't have a Trait that covers a particular area, the rating defaults to 0.

Some Traits are given Bonuses and Restrictions that affect how they work. You'll find a few of them on page 8 of this booklet.

Checks

Whenever the GM feels that the outcome of an action or situation would be made more interesting by adding a random element, he can require a check. In most cases, a check tests one of the character's Traits.

Making a check is about as simple as could be. Roll a die and add an appropriate Trait rating to the result. If the Trait has a Detrimental rating

or the character doesn't have an appropriate Trait, don't add anything to the roll; instead, you roll one or more Detriment Dice (see below).

The GM compares the result to a Difficulty Number (plus the roll of a die) that he selected to reflect the trickiness of the task. If the total equals or exceeds the DN result, the character is successful. Most regular checks have a DN of 0. Anything higher reflects more difficult tasks.

Opposed Checks

Sometimes, a character's actions are directly contested by another character. In such cases, both participants in the struggle make a check. Whoever gets the highest result wins.

Benefit/Detriment Dice

Characters are sometimes allowed to roll one or more Benefit Dice in addition to the initial die normally rolled for a check, taking the highest result.

Other times, characters are forced to roll one or more Detriment Dice in addition to the initial die normally rolled for a check, taking the lowest rolling die.

If a Trait is rated 1X, roll 1 Detriment Die. If it's 2X, roll 2 Detriment Dice.



SAMPLE TRAITS

Abilities and Skills

- "Actor"
- "Agile"
- "Amazing Endurance"
- "Animal Wrangler"
- "Archer"
- "Athletics"
- "Born to the Saddle"
- "Bruiser"
- "Businessman"
- "Charming"
- "Clever"
- "Computer Expert"
- "Cool Under Fire"
- "Crack Shot"
- "Detective"
- "Eagle Eyes"
- "Fast Runner"
- "Good Judge of Character"
- "Great with Swords"
- "Intimidating"
- "Inventor"
- "Martial Artist"
- "Master of Disguise"
- "Medic"
- "Ninja"
- "Perceptive"
- "Rugged"
- "Scientist"
- "Scout"
- "Tough as Nails"
- "Tough"
- "Tracker"

Accessories and Gear

- "Arm-Mounted Cannon"
- "Chest Plate"
- "Clad in Iron"
- "Cybernetic Arm"
- "Enchanted Ring"
- "Grenades"
- "Magic Amulet"
- "Massive Club"
- "Mystic Helmet"
- "Pistol"
- "Power Armor"
- "Rifle"
- "Rocket Pack"
- "Shield"
- "Sword"
- "Throwing Stars"

Beyond Human

- "Become Incorporeal"
- "Blends Into Surroundings"
- "Energy Blast"
- "Fire Breath"
- "Flight"
- "Force Field"
- "Invisibility"
- "Move Objects With Mind"
- "Scaly Skin"
- "Shield Spell"
- "Spell-Slinger"
- "Super Vision"
- "Superhuman Dexterity"
- "Super-Strong"
- "Teleport"
- "Thunder Punch"
- "Transform into Sports Car"
- "Wizard"



Initiative

When a fight breaks out, it's important to know what order everyone acts in. Generally, the GM can use common sense to determine the order. For example, if the villains sneak attack the heroes, the villains are likely to go first. Of course, if it's ambiguous or the GM wants to insert a little randomness, he can call for an initiative roll. It's important to note that initiative rolls are not considered checks.

The player whose character has the highest base Oomph (see below) rolls the die and adds that number to the result. The GM does the same, but adds 1 to the roll for most NPCs and 3 to the roll for the episode's master villain. The highest rolling side or team acts first, followed by the next highest rolling team, and so on. This order is maintained for the rest of combat.

What Happens in a Turn?

During a turn, each character involved in the scene can move and then take an action or take an action and then move. Once all the characters have done so, the turn is over and a new one begins.

In most cases, it doesn't matter exactly how far a character moves during a turn. The GM uses common sense as his guide.

Attack Procedure

If an attack action is made, a combat check is necessary. The player controlling the attacker describes what he wants the character to do and selects his most appropriate Trait to use. The player controlling the defender describes how he wants to avoid the attack and selects his most appropriate Trait.

The Combat Check

The combat check functions almost identically

to any other opposed check. The differences lie in the potential repercussions should the attacker succeed. For purposes of reference and clarity in later text, the combat check consists of two components: the attack check and the defense check.

The Attack Check: *Cartoon Action Hour* doesn't have a list of ready-made combat Traits, thus making it impossible for us to tell you exactly what Traits to use when attacking. Instead, we instruct you to select a Trait that could feasibly be used to defeat an enemy.

The attacker makes a check as normal, using the chosen Trait. This is called the attack check. The GM may object to the Trait you choose if he doesn't feel that it's appropriate.

The Defense Check: Just as with Traits used for attacks, there is no authoritative list of set-in-stone Traits usable for avoiding defeat. It's simply a matter of selecting a Trait that could be construed as being defensive in some way.

After the attacker makes the attack check, the defender makes his check as normal, using the chosen Trait. This is called the defense check. The GM may object to the Trait you choose if he doesn't feel that it's appropriate.

COMBAT TERMS

Combat Check: The opposed check made by both the attacker(s) and defender(s) to determine if the attack is successful. It is comprised of the attack check and the defense check.

Attack Check: The check made by the attacker using a Trait that could be used to defeat an enemy.

Defense Check: The check made by the defender using a Trait that could help him avoid being defeated by the attacker.



CREATIVE USE OF TRAITS IN COMBAT

Despite the fact that there was never a shortage of combat sequences, you'd be hard-pressed to find much in the way of actual violence in the retro-toons. In most cases, a punch to the kisser is the most violent act demonstrated. A lot of the maneuvers used in these scenes involved the combatants using their heads (e.g., tricking a foe into stepping onto a net trap). Since this is the case, **Cartoon Action Hour** was designed to accommodate a less radical style of combat by allowing virtually any Trait to be used in fight scenes. If the character has a Trait called "Tricky", there's no reason why he can't use it to sucker an opponent into walking right off a cliff (and safely into the water down below). On the defensive end of the spectrum, it would be perfectly acceptable to use "Resourceful" to snatch up a nearby object and use it to block an incoming attack.

The point is that combat in **Cartoon Action Hour** isn't like traditional RPG combat. It's not necessarily about exchanging punches or shots until someone gets hit. It's much more abstract than that.

The Aftermath

To see what the effects of the attack are (if any), you'll need to determine who won the combat check. You'll see a reference to "Threshold." This is a stat each character possesses that dictates how hard he or she is to defeat in one hit.

- **No Effect:** If the attack check was lower than the defense check, the attack has no effect whatsoever. The defender remains in the battle.
- **Hit:** If the attack check was equal to or more than the defense check by an amount equal to or less than the defender's Threshold score, the defender receives a Setback Token (see below). If this is the character's fourth Setback Token, the character is Defeated (see below).
- **Big Hit:** If the attack check was more than the defense check by an amount higher than the defender's Threshold score, the defender is instantly Defeated (see below). Being Defeated in this manner is sometimes referred to as "Insta-Defeat".

Setback Tokens

During a combat sequence, characters acquire Setback Tokens. Setback Tokens don't necessarily represent damage that the character has suffered (although that can certainly be the case as well). Rather, they can represent any type of impediment imaginable, from a character becoming subdued by vines to a character getting so flustered that he can't even see straight. Anything that sets a character back is worthy of resulting in a Setback Token; hence the name.

Whatever the case may be, each Setback Token gained by a character brings him one step

closer to failure.

Individual Setback Tokens have no actual effect on the character. However, when the character gains his fourth Setback Token, he is Defeated (see below).

Defeat

Heroes always win, right? Well, not always. In fact, it was quite common for the heroes to come up short during confrontations with the villains. They often found themselves captured, trapped, or otherwise disposed of in a temporary fashion. That's what kept viewers on their toes, after all. In **Cartoon Action Hour**, these situations are referred to simply as Defeat.

A Defeated character no longer participates in the scene. The person controlling the character who caused the Defeat can describe the Defeat however he wishes (within reason and the boundaries of good taste). If that participant is a player, he can opt to leave it up to the GM instead.

Upon being Defeated, the character is unable to do anything at all until the scene is over. At that point, he can get back up; remove all Setback Tokens the character has accumulated. This is true even if the character has been captured and is now in enemy hands.

DEFEAT EXAMPLES

- The attack targets loose boulders, which roll onto the character, trapping him.
- The attack knocks the character unconscious.
- The attack flings the character into a wall, which crumbles on top of him.
- The attack cuts down a tree, which topples over onto the character.
- The attackers dog-pile the character, capturing him.
- The attack's impact causes the character to be sent back into vine-laden trees and he gets tangled up in them.
- The attack forces the character to flee (villains only!).
- The attack sends the character over the edge of a cliff, delaying him long enough for the villain to get away.
- The attacker goads the character into moving onto a trap door that leads to a secret prison cell by way of a grav-tunnel.

What is Oomph?

Every Player Character in the game has an Oomph score. Characters begin the game with a certain amount of Oomph. In the full version of **Cartoon Action Hour**, characters can gain additional Oomph, but that's beyond the scope of this demo.

Oomph acts as currency that can be spent to help your character out when the going gets tough. It represents that certain "something" that sets heroes apart from the rest of the world. They aren't average Joes... they're larger than life heroes!

Spending Oomph

Below is a list of ways to spend your character's Oomph.

Re-rolls

After your character fails a check (or just doesn't get as high a result as you'd like), you may spend 1 Oomph to re-roll the die, taking the better of the two rolls. Boons count as normal. A check can only be re-rolled once and cannot be re-rolled if it rolled a 1.

If the check had Benefit Dice and (or) Detriment Dice, those dice are also re-rolled when Oomph is spent this way.

Extra Effort

By spending 2 Oomph after a check is made, you can roll an additional die and add it to the result.

This may only be done once per check and cannot be done at all if the original die rolled a 1. If you spend an extra Oomph on the re-roll option, you must choose to either re-roll the original die or this bonus die, but not both. Extra Effort cannot be used for attack checks or defense checks.

Recover

You may spend 2 Oomph to remove a Setback Token at any time during your action (or at any time at all if the scene isn't scene-based). This doesn't use up your character's action.

This is cumulative, so you can spend 4 Oomph to remove 2 Setback Tokens.

Avoid Insta-Defeat

You may spend 3 Oomph when your character is the recipient of a "big hit" and would become Insta-Defeated. As a result, the character receives a Setback Token instead. If, however, the character already had 3 Setback Tokens, he would still become Insta-Defeated.

Creative Control

The retro-toons were laden with plot devices, unlikely coincidences, odd uses of character powers/devices, and other such strangeness. This is represented in **Cartoon Action Hour** by allowing the players to change "reality" a bit. You may spend 1-4 Oomph to use creative control. The GM sets the exact cost according to how major the alteration is. He can also refuse to allow an alteration if he feels it will ruin the scene. There are numerous ways to utilize creative control during the game. Below, we'll discuss the two most common ways.

- **Scenic Alterations:** You can make a convenient change to the character's environment. Need to make a quick escape? Declare that there's a manhole right beside your character. Is your character being pursued through labyrinthine corridors? Make a blast door slam down in between the character and the pursuing foes.
- **Trait Alterations:** You can make an existing Trait do something that it normally couldn't do. For example, if your character (who has "Quarter-Staff 2") is in a deep pit and you can't seem to find a way out, you can declare that one end of his staff shoots out energy and flies him out. This can be taken a step further by giving the character a one-shot Trait that he doesn't normally have ("Mastero leaps across the ravine by way of a super-leaping Trait"). This is chalked up as being a continuity error or an editing glitch.

NPCs and Oomph

You'll no doubt have noticed by now that NPCs have no Oomph listed in their write-ups. Your first thought was probably something along the lines of, "Wow, what kind of idiots would leave out something so important?"

Well, the fact of the matter is, it was no mistake. NPCs have no Oomph. You read it correctly. They are sans Oomph. Just because they are Oomphless, however, doesn't mean they're up the creek without a paddle. They definitely have access to Oomph.

At the beginning of each episode, the Game

Master receives a pool of Oomph that he can spend throughout the course of that episode. The exact amount is equal to 6 plus the number of players participating in the episode.

Spending Oomph

The Oomph can be spent to help out any NPC. The GM may spend Oomph the same way PCs do, except that the "Creative Control" option cannot be used.

SCENE-BASED COMBAT

About Scene-Based Combat

Fight sequences don't always need to be fully detailed. Sometimes, it's best to wrap combat scenes up quickly in order to keep the story moving. Scene-based combat allows you to play out an entire fight sequence with but a single opposed check.

The Battle Check

When scene-based combat begins, both combatants make an opposed Battle Rating check. Whoever rolls the highest wins the combat. The winner briefly describes how he dispatched his adversary.

The heroes always win ties.

Multiple Combatants

Combat isn't always a one on one affair. Sometimes, there are lots of people on each side. When this is the case, all the characters on each side make their own checks and then add them altogether. This gives each side a total result. Compare the results as per the method for carrying out one on one battles. The higher rolling side wins the battle, with the heroes always winning ties.

What Happens to the Losers?

If the bad guys lose the battle, they flee or get captured or, in the case of multiple villains, any combination thereof (GM's choice). If the good guys lose the battle, they are forced to retreat if possible.

If they lose by a margin of 6 or more, the enemies capture them.

Goons

Goons are expendable grunt troops that attack in groups. Each such group is known as a *Goon squad*. A Goon squad attacks as a single character. That is, if there are three Goon squads in a battle, the GM would roll for each one individually, adding their Battle Ratings as normal. If the PCs are fighting alongside a Goon squad, one of the players should roll for it.

Goons don't pose as much of a threat as normal characters. This means that when the GM rolls for a Goon squad, he rolls a Detriment Die along with the normal die.

Goons are incapable of participating in anything except scene-based combat. So, if a battle involves them, it automatically becomes scene-based.

Spending Oomph

Oomph can be spent during scene-based combat, but only for the Re-Roll option. Since so much rides on that single die roll, however, re-rolling a character's check costs 2 Oomph instead of the usual 1. Otherwise, all the rules are identical.

GMs may not spend Oomph on Goons. They're just not important enough.

WARRIORS OF THE COSMOS

What is This?

"Warriors of the Cosmos" is a ready-to-play series that you can use to start playing **Cartoon Action Hour** with right away. It features info on the series, pre-made characters, and even a fast-and-dirty episode to run.

About the Series

Iconia was once a utopia; a world full of prosperity and splendor... of unspoiled beauty and ever-present peace. But that was before the coming of Nekrottus, an evil sorcerer with a mind more evil and unfathomable than any before him. He founded the Blackskull Empire and brought with him a foul corruption that quickly begin to spread like wildfire. With the empire at his command, he proceeded to methodically conquer most of the world. Now, the only major kingdom that remains free is Haven, the crown jewel of civilization. It has become the last bastion of freedom in Iconia, but Nekrottus will not rest until it, too, has fallen under his control.

The king of Haven, a just and noble man named Rastor, has seen the devastation caused by

Nekrottus and has set about assembling Iconia's mightiest warriors into a group with the single goal of taking the realm back and restoring order to it.

They are the Guardians of Iconia!



The Genre

Warriors of the Cosmos can best be described as science-fantasy. High technology exists side by side with all the tropes of classic sword-and-sorcery fantasy. Lasers and swords. Airships and dragons. Cybernetics and castles. All these elements (and much more) are perfectly suitable for the series.

Technology

The technology featured in Warriors of the Cosmos varies wildly from location to location. In the more remote regions of Iconia, technology is primitive to the extreme, harkening back to medieval times; some areas even bring to mind prehistoric technology. The heavily (or even moderately) populated areas, however, possess futuristic technology to one degree or another.

USING CARTOON LOGIC IN THE GAME

Logic in the retro-toons was drastically different than the logic in our own, more mundane, world. You'll need to throw real world logic out the window when running **Cartoon Action Hour**, as it has no place in the game.

A hero leaping from the top of one airship to another goes against everything we know about physics, but in the retro-toons, it happened on a regular basis. Ditto for pulling the rug out from under the bad guy's feet, sending him flying through the air and onto his butt. Or one hero dispatching a horde of Goons.

The point is, cartoon logic is far more dramatic than real world logic and thus should be used whenever possible. If a player devises a creative but implausible maneuver or plan, by all means let him give it a try. There are limits to this, obviously. A paramilitary commando shouldn't be allowed to pick up the earth and move it out of the way of an incoming asteroid, no matter how cool it may seem.

MODIFIERS

Bonuses

Bonuses are factors that can increase a Trait's efficiency.

Advantage: An Advantage is a minor miscellaneous benefit that improves the Trait's effectiveness. Some examples include: "Can bounce the attack off of objects," "Effects are not visible," or "Can affect incorporeal targets."

Enhancer: The Trait with this Bonus still has its own rating, but its primary use is to increase the rating of another Trait under appropriate circumstances. To determine how much of an increase this Trait provides, divide its rating by 2, rounding fractions up. A Trait may only benefit from the "Enhancer" Bonus of one other Trait at a time.

Situational Boost: The Trait's rating is increased by 2 under certain circumstances. Some examples include: "In total darkness," "When using it against Scale 3+ targets," "When using it against robots," "When flying," "When underwater" or "When angry."

Specialty: When making a check with this Trait, roll 2 dice and take the most favorable result. This is done before applying any effects, increases, or decreases to the result.

Trait Zap (Target): This targets a specific type of Trait. The targeted character suffers a penalty to that Trait while affected by this Trait.

Restrictions

Restrictions are factors that can decrease a Trait's efficiency.

Accessory: This Trait is derived from some kind of item that can theoretically be taken away from the character temporarily (dropped, stolen, lost, etc.). Think of the Trait as representing an accessory that comes with an action figure. If it would logically be an attachable accessory, then it could very well have this Restriction.

Disadvantage: A Disadvantage is a miscellaneous flaw that impedes the Trait's effectiveness in some way. Some examples include: "Cannot affect red targets," "Only works at night," "Will not work if the character is wet," "Can only affect vampires" or "Must use wild hand gestures"

One-Shot: This Trait can only voluntarily be used once per episode.

Situational Setback: The Trait's rating is decreased by 2 under certain circumstances. Some examples include: "When in sunlight," "While stressed out," "When using it against metal," "When near red objects," "When not wearing armor," or "While possessing one or more Setback Tokens."

"Has a Duration"

Traits that represent powers, spells, or other supernatural/superhuman abilities are often considered to have a duration. Whenever the duration of a Trait isn't obvious, you can assume that the effects last until the end of the current scene. Giving it the "Extra Duration" Bonus can alter this.

A few examples of Traits that are considered to have a duration: "Paralysis," "Gas Cloud," "Transform Enemy," "Sleep," "Invisibility," "Mind Control," and "Increase Trait". In almost every case, any Trait with the "Trait Boost" or "Trait Zap" Modifiers will have a duration.

The Heroes

Presented here are five heroes that the players can choose from. You'll notice some text in brackets near certain Traits. The rules for them can be found in the sidebar to the left.

Bouldarr

"Rock-Skinned Warrior"

Traits: Rocky Body 7, Massive Strength 7, Throwing Stuff 2, Childlike Charm 2, Clumsy 2X, Not Very Stealthy 2X, Gullible 1X, Emergency Strength Boost 4 [Enhancer +2, One-Shot], Climbing 2

Stats: Oomph 3, Threshold 11, Battle Rating 7

Combato

"Robot Bodyguard"

Traits: More Agile Than He Looks 2, Robot Body 6, Logic 4, Arm-Mounted Mini-Gun 4 [Enhancer +2], Targeting System 4, Piloting 1, Observation Sensors 2, Retractable Roller Skates 4

Stats: Oomph 2, Threshold 10, Battle Rating 6

Falcor

"King of the Sky Realm"

Traits: Winged Flight 5, Quasar Pistol 2 [Enhancer +1, Accessory], Falcon Shield 4 [Enhancer +2, Accessory], Athletics 3, Vicious Combatant 4, Politics 2, Command 4, Good Aim 3, Willpower 2

Stats: Oomph 2, Threshold 10, Battle Rating 4

Kazgull

"Barbarian Warrior"

Traits: Athletics 2, Savage Strength 4, Rugged 4, Riding Steppe Animals 1, Wilderness Survival 3, Willful 2, Fierce Fighter 4 [Specialty], Battle Axe 7 [Enhancer +4, Accessory]

Stats: Oomph 2, Threshold 10, Battle Rating 7

Sure-Shot

"Gunslingin' Adventuress"

Traits: Twin Laser Pistols 4 [Enhancer +2, Accessory, Situational Setback -2 (when she's only able to use one pistol)], Gunslinger 4 [Specialty], Brawlin' 3, Purty 1, Explorin' 4, Outdoorswoman 4, Ridin' Animals 2, Stubborn as a Mule 2, Athletics 3, Sneakin' 1

Stats: Oomph 2, Threshold 10, Battle Rating 4

The Villains

Presented here are the villains that appear in the episode entitled "The Mystic Gem of Markosa."

Nekrottus

"Evil Overlord of the Blackskull Empire"

Traits: Dark Sorcerer 10, Staff of G'hotak 8 [Enhancer +4, Situational Boost (+2 versus metal), Accessory, Disadvantage (Fragile and can't be used in close combat)], Infernal Sword 6 [Enhancer +3, Trait Zap (Target; -2 to strength-based and athletics-based Traits if the target suffers a Setback Token; this effect has a duration), Advantage (Can only be wielded by Nekrottus), Accessory], Onyx Orb 4 [A huge crystal ball that allows Nekrottus to see anywhere in Iconia; One-Shot, Disadvantage (Cannot be moved from the Fortress of Gloom)], Magic Armor 6 [Enhancer +3, Accessory], Floating 3 [Disadvantage (Cannot float higher than a few feet off the ground/surface he would normally be standing on)], Athletics 4, Piloting 3, Aiming 5, Melee Combat 5, Hard to Damage 4, Dark Charisma 6, Strategy & Tactics 4, Indomitable Will 8, Strength 2

Stats: Threshold 12, Battle Rating 10

Chillout

"Frosty Minion of the Blackskull Empire"

Traits: Ice Sword 5 [Enhancer +3, Advantage (When this weapon causes a Setback Token, roll a die. If you roll an 11 or 12, it causes two Setback Tokens instead), Accessory], Armor 3 [Enhancer +2, Advantage (Has several ice-blades jutting from the shoulders and forearms), Accessory] Masterful Combatant 4, Athletics 3, Physical Power 2, Hardened Toughness 4, Sharp Mind 2, Arctic Survival 4

Stats: Threshold 10, Battle Rating 5

Eye-Catcher

"Three-Eyed Bounty Hunter"

Traits: Man-Catcher 3 [Enhancer +2, Accessory], Armor 3 [Enhancer +2, Accessory], Enhanced Vision 5 [Advantage (Can see through objects that are less than a foot thick)], Skilled Fighter 4 [Specialty], Tracking 4, Rugged 3, Willpower 1, Athletics 2

Stats: Threshold 10, Battle Rating 4

"THE MYSTIC GEM"

This is a short and loose episode designed to give new players a taste of the game. Feel free to flesh it out if you want a longer session.

The basic premise is that Nekrottus has recently acquired the Mystic Gem of Markosa, which allows him to control the minds of those who are in close proximity to it. He has begun trying it out on small villages while building a device that amplifies its effects and its range. Nekrottus' ultimate goal: to make King Rastor loyal to him and thus conquering all of Iconia's major kingdoms.

Prologue Scene

The episode should begin with a cut-scene. That is, the players experience it, but their characters are not a part of it. Simply narrate the events as described.

The setting is a tiny but peaceful farming village called Gardra. You should play up how idyllic and serene it is. The people smile and greet each other warmly as they pass each other in the street.

There's an open-air market where villagers exchange goods. Throw in everything you can to paint a picture of a great place filled with nice, simple folk. Suddenly, they all drop what they're doing and adopt distant, far-away stares. That's when Nekrottus hits the scene, with Chillout and Eye-Catcher on either side of him.

Nekrottus tells his two minions that the Mystic Gem of Markosa has turned the once-peace-loving villagers into war-mongering hostiles who are loyal only to him. Soon, he brags, the rest of Iconia will be under his control as well.

First Scene

King Rastor has assembled the PCs to the Palace of Justice in the capital city of Haven. Once there, he informs them that the villagers of Gardra have attacked the village of Marda. He explains that this is extremely uncharacteristic of them and that it's likely that something more sinister is afoot. He wants the PCs to get to the bottom of things by visiting the citizens of Marda.

Give the players a chance to let their characters interact with Rastor or each other before moving things along.

Visiting Marda

Marda is a slightly more modern village than Gardra. Rather than horses and the like, the Mardans zip around in slightly crude wheeled vehicles. Even the buildings look to be less primitive here. A lot of property damage should be evident, as well as injured townsfolk.

The players can learn the following information from the kind folk here in Marda:

- The Gardrans seemed to be in a trance, but attacked relentlessly.
- One person saw Nekrottus skulking in the background, watching the onslaught.
- The old hermit named Zogark came into town shortly after the attack and spread word that he overheard two henchmen of the Blackskull Empire in the woods discussing some infernal gadget that Nekrottus has his people working on.
- Eventually, the Gardrans inexplicably stopped attacking and left. No one has tried to make contact with them since then.

After hearing all this info, the players will have some possibilities for their next course of action. The first is to go to Gardra to speak to the villagers there. The second is to seek out Zogark. The players might even decide to do something entirely different. In that case, you may have to do some ad-libbing.

Talking to Zogark

If the PCs want to talk to the old hermit known as Zogark, the villagers will tell them that he lives up on Skull Hill, located deep in the woods. Feel free to spice up the journey by tossing in some interesting encounters if you think things are moving too quickly.

Zogark's hut is at the top of the hill and appears to be your run-of-the-mill hut. There's

nothing terribly distinctive about it. Zogark himself is outside, chopping wood. He's a stocky fellow with flowing gray hair and a scruffy beard, who is clad in brown leather clothes.

Zogark will seem uncomfortable talking to the PCs, but he's certainly not unfriendly. He's just a loner who distrusts others. He's perfectly willing to give them any information that he has, which isn't much. If asked about



the conversation he overheard, he tells the PCs that Eye-Catcher and Chillout were conversing about Nekrottus utilizing the Mystic Gem of Markosa to control people's minds, though it could only affect subjects who were in close proximity to it. Nekrottus wants to use it to mind control King Rastor, but there was no feasible way to do so, since the range was too short. To these ends, he had his minions begin work on a device that will intensify the gem's effects and its range.

Later in the episode, certain information will be obtained by the PCs. Some of this info duplicates what Zogark tells them. If they visit Zogark first, you can choose to eliminate giving them redundant information. There's no need to repeat yourself.

Before the players leave, Zogark tells the PCs that he has something that might help them out. With that, he hands them an oddly proportioned laser pistol. He says that it's built for disrupting electrical gadgets and the like.

Visiting Gardra

PCs going to Gardra will find the villagers standing idle in the town square with that blank look on their faces. They are being watched over by Eye-Catcher and Chillout, who are standing on a balcony overlooking the square. The PCs will also see a young boy sneaking around in the nearby alleyways. It's imperative that the PCs interact with him, either by their own effort or by his (i.e., if the PCs ignore him, he will make contact with them himself). See "The Kid" below.

Stealthy Approach

If the PCs want to take the stealthy approach, they're going to have their work cut out for them due to Eye-Catcher's "Enhanced Vision 5" Trait, especially since it allows her to see through objects that are less than a foot thick. You'll need to have them make opposed checks using their stealth-based Traits versus the aforementioned "Enhanced Vision 5" Trait as well as against Chillout's "Sharp Mind 2". If the PCs are discovered, go to "Confrontational Approach" below.

Confrontational Approach

If the PCs are seeking a more confrontational approach, Eye-Catcher will order the villagers to attack. The villagers are treated as Goons with a Battle Rating of 1. There should be one Goon squad per PC present. Encourage the PCs to be gentle with

the villagers, as they aren't bad people but are simply in the thrall of Nekrottus. Once they have been dealt with, Eye-Catcher and Chillout will leap down from the balcony and attack.

Should the PCs be captured (unlikely, to be honest), move on to the section entitled "Captured". If the PCs defeat the villains, they can try to get info from them, though they won't reveal much. Let them make opposed checks using their charisma-based Traits versus Eye-Catcher's "Willpower 1". Chillout has no applicable Trait, so roll a die and add 0 to it for his attempt to resist.

The most info the PCs can get from them is that Nekrottus is using the Mystic Gem of Markosa to control the villagers' minds.

Captured

Should the PCs be captured by the villains, they will be stripped of their possessions and taken to the village holding cell where Nekrottus comes to taunt them. He will unveil his master plan to them (in true cartoon villain tradition). He even tells them that he's building a device that will allow him to amplify the gem's effects so that he can brainwash King Rastor himself. In fact, that device has been completed and will be delivered to him within the hour. The players need to know that they don't have all day to thwart Nekrottus' foul scheme.

The PCs must then come up with a means of escape. Any creative (or entertaining) plan should suffice. Be lenient, as the PCs really need to get out of the cell.

The Kid

The kid lurking in the shadows knows a lot. Here's the lowdown:

- The kid is actually the only villager to escape having his mind controlled. He was playing in the woods when the ordeal transpired and has been trying to find a way to destroy the gem ever since.
- He found out about the gem from hearing the villains speak of it.
- He knows that the gem can control the minds of others, but has a severely limited range.

WANT CHEESE WITH THAT?

Hey, we all love the retro-toons, but there's no way to deny that they were laden with cheese. Certain series were lighter on it than others, but it was present in nearly every one of them. At first, this may sound like an insult to the genre, though that's not the case at all. The cheesiness is a big part of the appeal! It's one of the factors that sets these brilliant shows apart from those that came later.

As the Game Master, you can have great fun by adding cheesy elements. Here are some ways to do exactly that.

- If there's a trap door in the PCs' immediate area, mention that it is of a slightly different coloration than the surrounding terrain (which was often the case in the retro-toons).
- For some reason, the animation for walking characters often looked stiff. So don't fail to describe it that way... or better yet, imitate it!
- If the characters are using firearms, you can bet that they are emitting laser blasts, even if the guns are supposed to be machine guns or shotguns. Since this is the case, why not bring that up?
- The retro-toons were notorious for using stock footage. You can use it too, by mentioning that a particular scene or background is stock footage. Using it repeatedly throughout the series can be quite fun.
- Use hokey sound effects whenever possible.

- He is wise to the gem's location. It's in a subterranean cave beneath the village and, luckily, there's a hidden entrance to it nearby (in an abandoned lot).

- Nekrottus ordered his goons to construct a device that will amplify the gem's effects, including its range. He plans to use this range to control the mind of King Rastor so that he'll willingly join the Blackskull Empire.
- The device is supposed to be delivered within the hour.

It's crucial for the kid to interact with the PCs. Here's how you can make sure it happens:

- **If the PCs talk to the kid of their own accord**, he tells them all the info he knows (see above).
- **If the PCs ignore the kid**, he will stealthily seek them out.
- **If the PCs are captured**, he sneaks in and waits for Nekrottus to finish talking to them. Once alone with them, he tells them the information (unless they already found it out from him earlier). Since Nekrottus will have already told the PCs of his plans, you can skip having the kid explain that to them. Either way, he will try to help the PCs escape via stealing the keys from one of the Turg guards.

The Subterranean Cave

It's likely that the PCs will want to go to the cave upon learning of its existence. The kid will happily show them where the secret entrance is (i.e., the empty lot). The trip down into the cave is uneventful and rapid. You can have as much fun as you want with the cave. If you want to add some meat to the game, feel free to have them sneak around a bunch of corridors, evading Turg guards. On the other hand, if you'd prefer to jump right into the thick of things, let them go directly to the main chamber.

The main chamber (see the map) is where the Mystic Gem of Markosa rests. It's

THE BOY'S GAME STATS

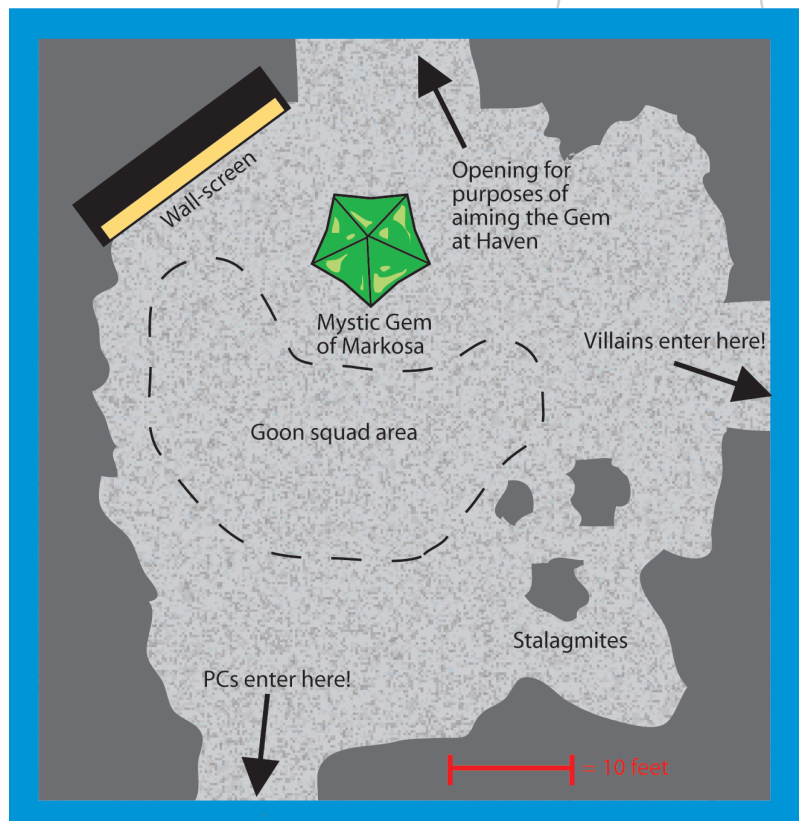
Traits: Plucky Kid 2, Fast Runner 2, Sneaking Around 2, Resourceful 1, Athletics 2, Hit-N-Run Combat 1, Strength 2X, Toughness 1X

Stats: Threshold 8, Battle Rating 1

also guarded by Turgs (treated as Goons with a Battle Rating of 2). There should be one Goon squad per PC present. The

Turgs will attack upon seeing the PCs.

- **If the Turgs defeat the PCs (fat chance!),** they will be held at sword-point while Nekrottus comes in, amplification device in hand. With him is Chillout and Eye-Catcher, who will guard the PCs as well. Nekrottus will attach it to the gem after giving a very brief "looks like you were too late" speech to the PCs. He also states that once the device powers up, it will immediately send a beam to Haven, thus taking full control of King Rastor's mind.
- **If the PCs thrash the Goons,** Nekrottus shows up with Chillout and Eye-Catcher (who will have recovered from defeat earlier, if indeed they were defeated at all). Nekrottus has the amplification device in hand. He will order his two minions to attack the PCs while he attaches the device to the gem. He also states that once the device powers up, it will immediately send a beam to Haven, thus taking full control of King Rastor's mind.



The Amplification Device

The amplification device is about the size of a remote control and has a suction cup on the bottom of it. It can be destroyed or snagged by a character, though appropriate checks will be in order. Don't make it too easy for the PCs or else the scene will feel anti-climactic.

Once attached to the gem, the device will start making a strange humming noise and the gem will begin to glow slightly. It doesn't have an immediate effect on the gem, as it takes awhile to power it up. The progress is displayed on a huge wall-screen in terms of a percentage (e.g., "25% complete," etc.). The exact amount of time it takes is up to you, though you should ideally just eyeball it for dramatic effect. Make the players think that time is quickly running out. Keep the action as tense as possible.



The PCs can stop the plot in any of the following ways:

- **Destroying the gem.** The Gem has "Diamond-Hard Structure 5" and a Threshold of 6. It is destroyed when it receives its fourth Setback Token.
- **Destroying the device.** The device has "Hard to Hit 6", but is destroyed upon receiving a Setback Token.
- **Detaching the device.** This requires a strength-based or electronics-based check versus a DN of 3.
- **Disabling the device** with the disruptor pistol given to them by Zogark (if they went to speak

with him earlier). This requires a shooting-based check versus a DN of 0.

- **If the PCs develop a truly creative and clever plan to stop the scheme,** you should consider letting it work... or at least giving them a chance to make it work.

Nekrottus' Actions

Nekrottus is a very powerful villain and would require a lot of teamwork (and luck) for the PCs to defeat. Fortunately for them, he isn't out to engage in combat himself. That's what he has lackeys for, after all. He will defend himself if attacked and even return the favor a bit, but ultimately, he will attempt to escape rather than engage in a full-on battle. He can escape by any means you can devise, from a secret door to a hidden pod.

End Results

What happens in the end?

Failure

If the PCs fail to neutralize the Mystic Gem of Markosa or the amplification device, you're going to have to make a judgment call. On one hand, you could end the episode on an unhappy note and leave it at that. This isn't terribly true to the retro-toons however. A better option would be to allow the gem to take possession of King Rastor's mind and whip out the tried and true "to be continued" routine, fashioning a second adventure in which the PCs must find a way to reverse its effects.

If you don't want the episode to end on a negative note but don't wish to create a second episode, perhaps you could have the kid save the day. This may seem kind of cheesy, but such things were common in the cartoons of yore.

Success

If the PCs halt Nekrottus' vile plans, cut to the next scene. The wrap-up scene takes place "some time later" in Gardra, where the Gardrans, the Mardans and the PCs are present. The two village leaders shake hands and make peace in light of the fact that the Gardrans didn't willingly attack Marda. Give the PCs an opportunity to interact briefly. You might consider having something funny happen, thus ending the episode proper with a great big belly laugh from everyone in Gardra. Perhaps they all see the shadow of Nekrottus looming over them, but upon closer inspection realize that it's actually just the shadow of a tree. As long as it's funny, it should work.

After-Show Message

Many of the retro-toons were formatted so that each episode concluded with a 30-second vignette. The contents of these vignettes varied from series to series, though they typically fell into one of two types:

Safety Tips: Safety tip segments typically featured kids doing something dangerous until one or two heroes inevitably came along and set them straight. Knowing is, as they say, half the battle.

Moral of the Story: Moral of the Story segments tied directly into one or more of the events that transpired during the episode. It usually consisted of one of the heroes pointing out what the often heavy-handed moral was (“Truth is always the best option”).

You should whip up a quick After-Show Message in order to capture that retro-toon vibe.

As GM, your job is a simple one in this case – set the scene and let the PCs do the rest. If you’re going for a Safety Tip, describe what the kids are doing and then tell the volunteering player(s) that their heroes see this going on. If you’re aiming for a Moral of the Story bit, tell the participating player what the moral is and allow him to run with it by means of narration.

Be aware, however, that few players are likely to play it straight. Brace yourself for some major wackiness, including some off color humor. While that may not be authentic to the After-Show Messages from the retro-toons, it’ll probably end the game with a big laugh from all the players, which is always a good thing. Besides, it’s always fun to watch the players exercise their wit and satirical abilities.

WANT MORE CARTOON ACTION HOUR?

What you’ve experienced here is only the tip of the iceberg. There’s a lot more retro-toon excitement in the **Cartoon Action Hour: Season 2** rulebook, soon to be available from Spectrum Games.

While you’re now familiar with all the basic rules of the game, the full rulebook adds a lot more depth. Here’s a small list of things that you’ll find there.

- A fast and fun system for creating your own heroes! Your character can be ready for adventure within 15 minutes!
- Rules for rolling Flubs and Boons! Rolling 1s and 12s will never be the same again!
- Rules for teamwork!
- A unique system for advancing your character at the end of each “season”, reflecting the nature of the retro-toons perfectly, since characters only changed when new versions

of their action figures were released!

- “Tricks” that master villains can pull off by the expenditure of Oomph, including “Villainous Escape”, “Big Speech”, and “Kaboom”!
- Rules for commercial breaks! This brings forth genre conventions such as continuity errors, action figure commercials, Schoolhouse Rock ‘N Roll segments, and more!
- A system for manufacturing Goons, complete with modifiers that can set them apart from the rest (“Specialists”, “Rugged”, “Dependent”, etc.)!
- Rules for designing your very own action-packed series... and if you don’t want to create your own, the book features three ready-to-play series: Warriors of the Cosmos, Strikeforce Freedom and Transbots!
- Loads of advice for players and Game Masters about recreating the retro-toon action!

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Illustrations: Kris Smith

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